



## Secondary Cities – The Urban Middle Ground

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At Kankan's petrol stations, women can push to the front.  
*C. Ammann, September 2011*

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# Foreword

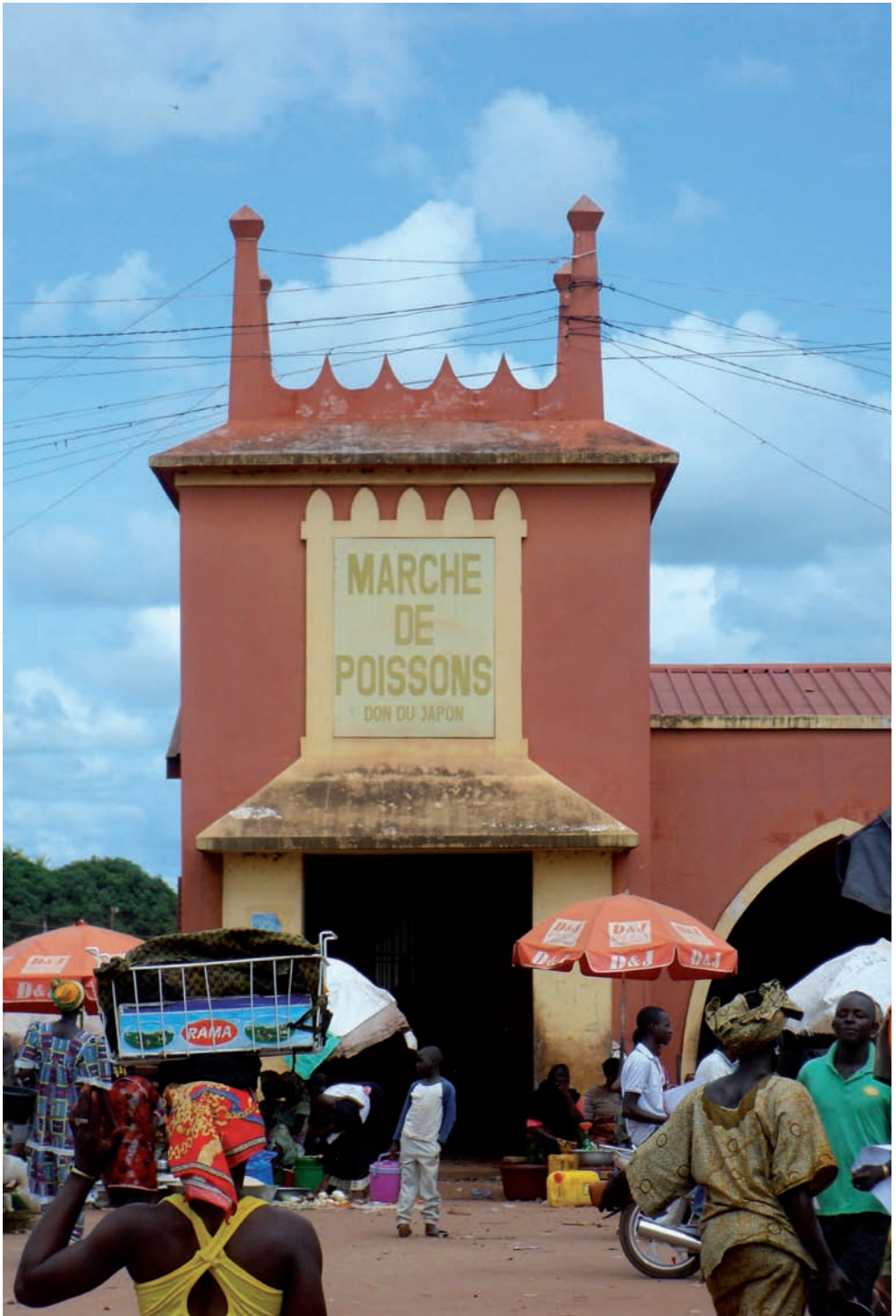
We are delighted to have two guest editors for this double issue of the Basel Papers on Political Transformations. Carole Ammann and Aïdas Sanogo, PhD candidates at the Institute of Anthropology, University of Basel, have initiated and convened a multi-pronged conversation on secondary cities around research undertaken by colleagues here at the Institute and beyond. Part of this conversation is published in this double issue, where some highly stimulating insights into experiences and findings are laid out.

The fieldwork was part of three different research projects, all funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation, that explore social, political and visual dimensions of urbanity in Africa. Even in those instances where urbanity was not the main research focus, the specificities and particular character of ‘secondary cities’ forcefully emerged through the perceptions, practices and aspirations of urban dwellers. Some of these insights are surprising and unexpected, others underpin emerging anthropological work on mid-sized cities. Secondary cities usually lack the ambitions of capital cities, but precisely because secondary cities do not need to make national, regional or even global claims, they permit deeper insights into ordinary urban life in Africa. In all instances the vignettes highlight intriguing facets of “the urban middle ground” that will whet the appetite of those readers who have not (yet) engaged with secondary cities and provide some nourishing food for thought for those who have.

Armed with the advantage of already knowing what lies in wait for you, we would like to thank Aïdas Sanogo and Carole Ammann for their initiative and hard work in bringing this double issue together, and hope that you enjoy “Secondary Cities – The Urban Middle Ground” as much as we do.

*Lucy Koechlin and Till Förster*

Outside Kankan's  
fish market.  
C. Ammann, October 2011



# Secondary Cities – The Urban Middle Ground

Carole Ammann  
Aïdas Sanogo

## An Introduction

Do African cities such as Sikasso, Sfax, Gulu, Port-Gentil and Gweru ring a bell? Do not worry; you are probably not alone in that respect. Four out of the five cities mentioned above are the second most populated cities in their respective countries. They all have played a crucial role in the history and have central economic and political functions in their countries and regions. Sfax, Tunisia, and Port-Gentil, Gabon, for instance, are considered as the backbones of their countries' economy. Sfax and Port-Gentil owe their economic power to the various industries and seaports that they host. Gweru, a city located halfway between Harare and Bulawayo, the first and the second most populated cities of Zimbabwe, plays a large role in the country's internal population movements (Grant 1995). Despite their significance on the national and regional level, these cities do not typically resonate and invoke distinct images as Cairo, Johannesburg, Lagos, Kinshasa and Addis Ababa do.

When in early 2016, we, Aïdas Sanogo and Carole Ammann, scanned the literature on African cities, we noticed the lack of research on our own researched sites, Bouaké in Côte d'Ivoire and Kankan in Guinea, and on secondary cities in general. This led us to set up a secondary cities' reading and discussion group at the Institute of Social Anthropology, Basel, in June 2016. After several meetings, we decided to further dwell into the subject and initiated two projects: Firstly, we planned to edit this special issue on secondary cities. The second project was to organise a workshop, during which junior and senior scholars gather and conceptually rethink secondary cities. We ultimately aim at creating and maintaining a dynamic network of scholars from various disciplinary backgrounds, who will continuously enhance the research on secondary cities, by focusing on their specific social, economic and political contexts.

Few authors have thoroughly conceptualised secondary cities – also referred to as mid-sized or intermediary cities (Haddis et al. 2014; Bolay 2016). Since the late 1930s, urban sociologists used three characteristics that defined the urban, namely population size, population density and heterogeneity (Wirth 1938). In such studies, cities are typically ranked in urban hierarchies – also based on other criteria such as their central functions or the presence of administrative services. Therefore, cities between 100 000 to 500 000 and even up to three million inhabitants are labelled as secondary cities. This illustrates that there is little consent where to draw lines on each end. Such a comparative dimension is also encapsulated in the designation 'secondary' and needs to be taken into account. One should then be careful as to which criteria are used to designate and what exactly gives secondary cities their character. The urban hierarchy logic underpinned in the adjective 'secondary' wrongly suggest that all the cities labelled as secondary bare the same attributes.

As Jennifer Robinson (2011) mentions, cities have prolific overlapping interconnections, but they remain distinctive in terms of outcomes. The diversity of features within and across cities then forces us not to limit ourselves in the structure of formal comparison tools, i.e. comparing cities of the same size or with the same political regime for instance (Robinson 2016). Beyond size and demography, the city's role and func-

tion within the wider cultural, economic, political and social landscapes are also highly relevant. When rejecting conceptualisations that focus solely on size, secondary cities are difficult to grasp. For this double issue of the *Basel Paper on Political Transformations*, the term ‘secondary city’ then refers to cities which might not be able to compete on the demographic, economic and infrastructural level with megacities within their national or regional territories. As the contributions will show, these ordinary urban centres nevertheless play a significant role within the network of cities in their countries and regions.

Most studies on urbanity in Africa focus on megacities whereas secondary cities, the unspectacular middle ground between metropolises and small towns, have largely been neglected (Bell and Jayne 2009; Hilgers 2012; Marais, Nel and Donaldson 2016). However, as the *World City Report* by the UN (2016) demonstrates, the number of secondary cities and the people living therein increase. Here in this double issue, we explore aspects of cities that are not considered as megacities in their respective countries: Kisumu in Kenya, Kankan in Guinea, and Korhogo and Bouaké in Côte d’Ivoire. The aim is to study secondary cities in their own right, that is, through various modes of interactions that take place among urban dwellers. Based on specific empirical data, we illustrate that everyday urban life in the four presented cities is as urban and probably even more ordinary than in larger urban centres because the former lack the national, regional or global ambitions metropolises usually embrace.

Secondary cities act as nodal points between the rural and the urban. They are often characterized by what they lack compared to megacities. Nevertheless, they are not mere copies of metropolises, but fully urban in the way that multiple forms of “encounter and distanciation” take place on a daily basis (Förster 2013). Their networks stretch far beyond their rural hinterlands, they cross borders and continents. Furthermore, due to decentralisation processes most African countries underwent since the 1990s, the political and financial independence of many secondary cities increased (Koechlin 2015, 5). There are countless differences among secondary cities regarding inhabitants, infrastructure, accessibility and their outreach; differences at the political, geographical, social and economic level. Still, one of the typical features of secondary cities in Africa – if they are not the capital – is their hierarchical and (most of the time also) geographical distance to the heart of the State, the highest administrative level.

Since the 2000s, the body of literature on African cities has grown (e.g. Howard 2003; Murray and Myers 2007; Myers 2011; Pieterse 2011; Pieterse and Parnell 2014). Studies have emphasized a variety of themes in and about metropolitan centres worldwide: Historical formation (Anderson and Rathbone 2000; Freund 2007), the various impacts of growing urban populations (Vertovec 2015), the causality effects between built environments and social changes (Krase 2012) and cities’ identities (Bell and De-Shalit 2011). Besides these general contributions, authors have written about specific African megacities such as Johannesburg or Kinshasa (cf. Simone 2004; Nuttall and Mbembe 2008; De Boeck 2012, 2015; De Boeck and Baloji 2016).

Secondary and smaller cities might be more accessible to ethnographic research than large urban centres (Koechlin and Förster forthcoming). Recent studies mostly look at secondary cities in South Africa: While the report by John (2012) uses an economic approach, the books by Marais, Nel and Donaldson (2016) and Roberts (2014) both focus on development. Among the relatively small number of studies looking at cities “beyond the metropolises” (Bell and Jayne 2006), few draw on ethnographic data to portray and analyse secondary cities, by adopting an urban dwellers oriented perspective. Theoretically, secondary cities have typically been approached through metaphors; for example by labelling them as “shadow cities” (De Boeck, Cassiman and Van Wolputte 2009) or, following the devastating effects of structural adjustment programs most African countries underwent in the 1990s, describing them as “disappearing into ruin and decay” (Murray and Myers 2007). Yet, we fully agree with Bell and Jayne (2009) who state that small and secondary cities are as urban as metropolises. If we overlook urban forms that emerge in secondary cities, the image of urbanity is incomplete.



Inhabitants of secondary cities constantly compare their place of residence with the country's metropolis, but also with other larger and smaller cities, both at the national and regional level. They incorporate and rearrange modes of living from the rural and the urban area. Thus, Matthieu Hilgers aptly notes that “life in a secondary city is, partially, determined by the exterior, but the external contribution and the transformations that it produces are always reappropriated, reconfigured, reinvested according to the logics of a pre-existing and locally constructed urbanity”<sup>1</sup> (Hilgers 2012, 37). By doing this, urban dwellers create and recreate a unique image of their city.

The four scrutinised cities in this special issue are all explored through different analytical angles. The contributors address secondary cities under the scope of claims made to the city, the use of public space, and the image of the city. The following questions are addressed all along the articles: How do urban rhythms and various forms of encounter and distancing in secondary cities look like? Which are the resulting sutures (De Boeck and Baloji 2016) and conjunctions in the social fabric, and how do city dwellers situate themselves in such constantly evolving social spaces?

Another issue which has been neglected in contemporary urban research is the creation process of artistic expression in African secondary cities. In arts, all attention is given to large urban centres; secondary cities are not even considered to be sites of arts. Frederik Unseld draws on empirical data collected in Kisumu, Kenya. He shows how secondary cities force us to reconsider our conceptualisations of arts and the formation of political spaces. Departing from an emic understanding of arts, Unseld focuses on runway modelling among other artistic expressions, and shows how it serves actors as a form of peer-education, but also as a way of addressing a general neglect by the state.

Carole Ammann analyses how Kankan's dwellers in Guinea relate, either simultaneously or alternatively, to conflicting images the imagery of their city contains, namely the ‘traditional’ and the ‘rebellious’ one. Thanks to the welcoming character of the city, Kankan's inhabitants not only portray their hometown as an open minded one, but they also legitimise to a certain extent, their city's efforts to remain true to itself, when comparing it to metropolises where the inhabitants have, according to this interpretation, lost their authenticity by embracing a ‘Westernised’ life style.

Based on data generated through “thick participation” (Spittler 2001), Till Förster examines the use of the Sacred Grove, a very popular public space in Korhogo, Côte d'Ivoire, where all the city's inhabitants intermingle. One of Förster's main arguments is that secondary cities do not merely copy the urbanity of capitals or other megacities but produce an independent urbanity; an urbanity, that is as ordinary as any but at the same time more modest than the urbanity of the metropolises like Abidjan.

Lastly, by first taking a closer look at its historical becoming, Aïdas Sanogo hints at the images that Bouaké dwellers, in Côte d'Ivoire, have of their city. These images differ according to the actors' past experiences, their future dreams, and their present life trajectories. Sanogo argues that taking a closer look at these images can inform us about how and why comparison is systematically engrained in the study of secondary cities.

As Förster (2017) notes, the making of the city as a cultural and social entity is noteworthy because it brings individual and collective creativity together. Such creativity is at the heart of the making of cities, large and small, and is experimental in character. In brief, we plea for more research that takes secondary and small cities as laboratories (De Boeck, Cassiman, and Van Wolputte 2009, ii) for dwelling into issues of gender, religion, nationality, ethnicity, age, education and locality.

1 “[...] la vie d'une ville moyenne est, en partie, déterminée par l'extérieur mais l'apport externe et les transformations qu'il engendre sont toujours réappropriés, reconfigurés, réinvestis en fonction des logiques qui leur préexistent et d'une urbanité construite localement.”

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Kankan's ancient airport: Today a space for learning to drive, tomorrow a wealthy neighbourhood?  
*C. Ammann, December 2011*

A stand-up comedian performs in the informal settlement of Manyatta (Kisumu, Kenya).  
*T. Förster, November 2016*



# Art in Cities off the Map – Perspectives from Kisumu, Kenya

Frederik Unseld

When compared to their metropolitan counterparts, secondary cities seem to be primarily characterised by what they lack in comparison. Such lacks and limitations of the city are central in my ongoing PhD-project, which enquires into expressive culture and arts in Kisumu, Kenya's third-largest city and the principal city in the West. In Kisumu, economic stagnation and a general lack of attention in national development efforts are perceived to be the effects of a longstanding, ethnically-motivated, clientele politics (Branch 2011, 295).

One frequently cited example for this economic stranglehold is the shift of the fish-processing industry from Kisumu to an industrial town near Nairobi, which causes fish, the region's pride and natural wealth, to be more expensive in Kisumu than in Nairobi. Even if life in Kisumu is generally cheaper than in the capital, 'getting by' is perceived to be much more difficult in Kisumu. One important strategy to keep one's aspirations high in Kisumu, in a way against all odds, is by making art.

In my overall study, I link ethnographies of artists in Kisumu to their works, to assess how young adults creatively address the many uncertainties entailed in growing up on Kenya's urban margins. In this article, I will dwell on the imaginary of a "creative industry", widely shared among the city's artists. I will show that, through their cultural production, artists in Kisumu articulate their peripherality within the city, and the peripherality of the city itself, on a Kenyan as well as a global scale. Studies on African urban culture tend to focus on major cities or so-called mega-cities (e.g. Diouf 2008; Mbembe and Nuttal 2008; Grabski 2009), ignoring the cultural production in small and mid-sized cities that in many cases are growing as quickly as the economic centres. This makes studies timely that look into cultural formations in such smaller cities and the ways in which they interrelate with social space. There is little secondary research on art practices in Kisumu that I can draw on, and I thus approach the topic with ethnographic research methods.

In this article, I argue that secondary cities force us to reconsider the very conceptions with which we attempt to describe African realities. As will become apparent in the discussion, looking for art in Kisumu with a Western 'modernistic' lens would leave the scholar disappointed. Approaching art in a conceptually open and empirically informed way, though, may open new understandings of how expressive culture shapes urban identities, and may unfold the many layers of what it means to become an artist in a given context. Before I delve into my material, however, I will briefly depict the state of arts in Kisumu against the backdrop of the capital Nairobi.

## In the Shadow of the Metropolis – or why Kisumu?

Nairobi is the East African centre and as Kenya's capital it features the institutional landscape of the central government and parastatal companies, media houses, as well as

a host of multinational banks and firms. The already heavy expatriate traffic is only increased by the many development agencies and international institutions, like the United Nations' headquarters in Africa. Similarly, Nairobi's artistic landscape is diverse and rich. Its varied gallery scene includes Kuona Trust and Go Down Art Centre, and has already attracted scholarly research (Gerschultz 2013; Vierke 2013). The growing importance and global connectedness of East Africa's fine arts is epitomised in the annual auctions by Circle Arts Gallery since 2013, and the Kenya Art Fair.

The foreign cultural institutions based in Nairobi also provide important platforms for rehearsals, dramatic plays and art exhibitions. Such platforms are complemented by private initiatives like the Michael Joseph Centre, a multi-use hall built by the country's telecommunication giant Safaricom, which, not least out of marketing considerations, is easily available for the up-and-coming of Nairobi's art scene. With Boniface Mwangi, Nairobi hosts a photojournalist and activist of international renown. Mwangi's bold, activist art, often conceived as performances involving elements of shock art, as well as his mastery of social media have earned him a great following and attention from the African continent and beyond.<sup>1</sup>

Kisumu, in contrast, seems like a blank spot on the map, at least when it comes to contemporary art. The few community halls that exist in the neighbourhoods are mainly used for school functions and drama plays, or by the church for similar functions. The British Council, which entertained a busy theatre scene in Kisumu, closed its doors in 2007, and the Alliance Française, which hosted a weekly spoken word and music event until June 2015, lost virtually every imprint on the local arts scene when they moved to a multi-storey house in the city centre. Upon my arrival in the city in August 2015, the seeming dearth of arts worried me and reminded me of the reserved reaction of some of my colleagues vis-à-vis my project, suggesting that I would quickly be bored looking for cultural life in a city like Kisumu. It took some time to see the great flexibility of the local artists' scene and their ability to sneak into diverse places, and to make-do with the few resources available. Interestingly, many of the local artists, whom I soon met in great numbers, also asked me why I had not gone to Nairobi in the first place.

The answer to this question has two sides. First, secondary cities grow faster than most capital cities, especially in the Global South. They are expected to be the urban hubs of tomorrow and are increasingly considered in development policies (e.g. UN-Habitat 2016). Considered apart from metropolises, they still make up the vast majority of the urban sphere around the world. Even if they do not have the cultural vibrancy of a metropole, secondary cities matter politically, if only for their specific forms of parochialism.<sup>2</sup> Their apparent 'ordinariness' makes secondary cities a less attractive object of study, yet their economic, political and cultural dynamics (bound to be accelerated in the years to come) may prove central to the African continent's becoming. This makes studies on the urban history and sociology of such places, and the ways in which art traditions and practices interact with the public all the more relevant.

Secondly, secondary cities are an intriguing terrain for the exploration of African arts. They are hubs between the local, mostly rural space and the national and international cultural spaces. If they have so far escaped much scholarly attention, this is probably due to what the disciplines concerned with African art were looking for.

1 <http://www.nation.co.ke/lifestyle/weekend/The-limits-of-Boniface-Mwangi-shock-art/1220-3296506-ypvmpjz/index.html> (accessed 20.11.2016)

2 David Bell and Mark Jayne made this point in their book "Small Cities" (2006). Their point was underscored by the course of history, when the English city Stoke-on-Trent, in which both authors worked and which they took as starting point for their argument, turned out to be the city with the highest pro-Brexit votes (close to 70%). Kisumu as one of Kenya's opposition strongholds is often perceived as voting *en bloc* along ethnic identification lines, though studies suggest a more nuanced behavior (see Elklit et al. 2014)

Anthropology has for a long time had a quasi-monopoly on African art, to be assisted by art historians mainly from the 1980s onwards. While anthropologists focused on art production with a long local or regional history, art historians were more inclined to study art embedded in and speaking to an international art world. In the 1980s, the ‘crisis of representation’ made the idea of ‘traditional’ art, presumed to translate a culturally and geographically bound cosmos, obsolete. A whole generation of young scholars thus turned to the more heterogeneous art practices in cities (Kasfir 2007, X). As stated above, such research tended to focus on major cities and only to a much lesser degree on secondary cities and small towns.

Looking at artists and how they perceive the city has become one of urban theory’s tropes (Amin and Thrift 2002; Grierson and Sharp 2011) and the potential for non-normative theory building has also been stressed in the African context (Malaquais 2012). ‘Non-normative’ here mainly amounts to the challenge not to rely on descriptive tools and heuristic concepts, which derive directly from Western processes of urbanisation (Förster 2013). But one challenge with this paradigm seems to be the definition of art at hand. It would be a fallacy to limit oneself to modernist, Western conceptions of art (i.e. painting, sculptures and theatre only), when trying to access local perceptions of the city.

Ridding ourselves of such modernist definitions would allow for an unbiased and encompassing understanding of cultural processes in African cities and the ways in which they shape urban social spaces. For example, from a Western academic point of view, ‘modelling’ would hardly be considered canonical to contemporary art practices. Yet, it is considered one of the pillars of Kisumu’s art scene. It is here that a secondary cities’ paradigm could help us discover the relevance of some of the less spectacular but all-the-more widespread artistic practices in East Africa. As long as the Western idea of the artist working autonomously for art’s sake prevails, metropolitan cities will logically remain at the centre of interest, as it is in the galleries and art fairs here that such conceptions prevail. Analysing practices and social discourse around art in a secondary city can help to overcome such conceptual shortcomings.

## Artistic Practices under the Radar

The artists in Kisumu whom I interviewed and followed, mostly young adults in their 20s, frequently spoke of the need to establish a “creative industry” in Kisumu, not unlike the one existing in Nairobi, where the demand for visual and performance art is such, that many artists are able to make a living off their art.<sup>3</sup> It was not hard to see how the idea of an income via making art, but also of glamour and a bit of a glittering showbiz life was exactly what lacked in the daily life of many, life marked by un(der)employment and dim future prospects. Only what do you do, when you have no instruments, no mirror to dance in front of, no public address system to amplify an instrument or voice, not even a rehearsal space to begin with?

In a lament, which I have heard over and over, artists deplore the lack of “platforms” and “exposure” for their “talent” in the city. In many instances, these notions seemed to refer to an idea of access to markets of cultural production. They also poin-

3 One of my interlocutors differentiated between “surviving” and “living” off one’s art, whereby “living” obviously refers to securing a more substantial and stable income, which allows to go beyond one’s own immediate needs (Gitonga Mukira, personal communication, 03.11.2015)

The spoken word event Poetic Hour taking place at the self-organised Tumsifu Arts Center. F. Unsel, December 2015



ted – more crucially – to the lack of available space from which to practice their art.<sup>4</sup> Of course there are public spaces in Kisumu’s city centre, like the Jomo Kenyatta Sportsground – a central and important rally ground. From my own experience, I could understand why youths would not meet and try out new forms of expression on the Sportsground’s open fields. There, the ‘heat’ of the street was easily felt: motorbike drivers grudgingly awaiting clients, sweating vendors hawking items, street children roaming, and people laying idly, awaiting a chance or a lucky encounter in the bustles of the city centre.

One of the momentary places where artists and their audience came together in Kisumu was at Hippo Point, on the ruins of a former restaurant at the lake shore. When in 2014 an artistic scene started to draw crowds on Sundays, even national TV found this curious enough for a story.<sup>5</sup> Next to the lake scenery, with loud music, youth put their dance choreographies on display with a live band playing, and poets giving their latest lines for consideration. The TV footage evokes a tranquil and safe environment, but also seems to provide a distinct aesthetic experience, not least offered for the city’s growing middle-class audience, as the documentary is keen to emphasise.

The precariousness of this small arrangement in the video is underscored by the way the event came to an end, though. When one of the organisers suffered a road accident and subsequently had to sell his equipment to pay for medical treatment, the event series was discontinued. When I visited Kisumu for the first time in 2015, the group of artists displayed in the video had remained pretty much intact as a group and was still at the centre of local efforts to establish a market for cultural production. Meanwhile, the loose formation had snuck into different places, like the Alliance Française, whose patronage they enjoyed over several months, to arrive at a generous property, called

4 Brad Weiss has helpfully observed how the Swahili noun *nafasi* conflates the ideas of “chance,” “opportunity” and “place” (Weiss 2002, 101)

5 “Kisumu’s Hippo Point attracts residents on the Eid Holiday”, KTN News Kenya, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rAEjF\\_cvOsM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rAEjF_cvOsM) (accessed 25.4.2017)



Tumsifu Center, in Kisumu’s posh Milimani neighbourhood. With the permission of the resident NGO, the group quickly made the idyllic garden their new “platform”. The old stone building with its scenic garden differed sharply from the usual public spaces in which young adults (overwhelmingly young men) would hang out. So-called shades, erected by mototaxi drivers or youth-groups, can be found along almost every street in town. Such shades are rudimentary structures, usually with an iron roofing, that protect members of the association from the “burning sun”.<sup>6</sup> As places associated with young male idleness they are usually met with either indifference or disapproval.

The Tumsifu Center however became a vibrant venue for many artists and art-interested youths and students and developed into a sort of self-organised youth centre. With peer-education in music, dance and poetry from morning hours, the property turned into a safe place for youths to intermingle freely. Spoken word as one of Kenya’s most vocal current art forms took the lead, to be celebrated by a crowd of 100-200 youths during the weekly Poetic Hour event. While some of the youths came for rehearsals, others sought entertainment. While some were on school leave, others waited for a financial opportunity to push their education, and while some waited for a new possibility to perform, others waited for the teacher’s strike to finish, or simply fled a cramped home and weary parents. Certainly, everybody eagerly awaited Poetic Hour.

Yet the pulsating centre also soon came to an end, when the owner of the property, the Catholic Church, evicted the place for no apparent reason in December 2015. The decision came as a surprise and as a huge blow to the local arts scene, and made rehearsing, meeting and organising much more complicated. Once again banned from the radar of social life, artists continued their quest for visibility and recognition through different channels and forms of cultural life. In the remainder of this text, I will explore modelling and the Kisumu Fashion Week as one practice and event through which local artists laid claim to the city.



Free of charge, the event Poetic Hour regularly gathered some 150 visitors on Friday afternoons.  
*F. Unseld, October 2015*

6 The term Jua Kali translates from Swahili as “burning sun” and is widely used to designate what is often – if imprecisely – referred to as ‘informal sector’.

## Modelling, or How to Prevail over Local Limitations

Initially, I had trouble grasping how modelling made for a dynamic art form. The trainings in the hall at the Tumsifu Center, young women constantly walking up and down, either bare footed or with high heels, seemed monotonous to me. And as commercial offers around modelling seemed scarce, I failed to understand what the activities were relating to. Surely my gender and cultural upbringing made me view modelling as something less compelling and almost reactionary in its principal intuition. Also, there were more captivating activities at the centre at the time, like a demonstration against the lack of safety in the city, and a peace march, which rallied a good number of the youth and artists from around. It took some time and trust before I was invited to some of the artists' households, away from the idyllic Milimani city centre, which helped me to start understanding the relevance of some of their practices. One such encounter took place at Hyral Matete's place, a regular visitor of the Tumsifu centre, who worked with a group of children at her family's compound in Manyatta, one of Kisumu's low-income settlements.

Matete (\*1993) had founded what she referred to as "a modelling agency for children and teenagers" called Angels of Sunset in 2013. Parallel to the trainings, she completed the teacher's certificate in 2014 and taught for one year in a public elementary school. Her motivation to create a mentorship programme through modelling came from her own difficulties with the Kenyan school system. Not exceptionally in Manyatta, Matete lost her father before becoming an adult herself. Subsequently, when she was 19, she dropped out of school unable to afford school fees. As was apparent from the conversations I had with her, she experienced feelings of purposelessness at that time and modelling provided her with a different form of social recognition. Dropping out of school is a frequent experience for children from neighbourhoods like Manyatta. Even though primary education in Kenya is supposed to be free of charge since the passing of a relevant legislation in 2002, practically all schools still require parents to pay supplements in one way or another. Not only is the quality of education often deplored, but teacher strikes regularly put a complete halt to instruction for several months, and in 2015, the grave situation was worsened by scandals around leaked exam papers, perceived to further narrow the dim chances for employment with a Kenyan secondary school certificate.

At the time of my encounter with Matete, the Ministry for Education had halted all courses for a whole two months for the passing of the yearly secondary school exams. This meant that the streets of estates were populated by groups of children, sometimes inventing toys and plays, but most of the time just sitting around idle and passing time. It also meant that on that very afternoon, many children curiously crowded the gate of Matete's compound. Inside the compound are two small concrete buildings, one of which Matete shares with her mother and her three brothers. From a tiny shop in the corner, a lady sold a few necessities by the street side. When a dozen girls and teenagers started to gather in one corner, the tension rose. A stereo chain was launched with high-energy house music, the kind typically played during fashion shows. It had quite a stunning effect.

The girls started their parade, barefoot on the dusty ground, and the compound was suddenly transformed into a catwalk. The girls took the imaginary runway one by one, walking a straight line with long strides. Stopping halfway, stemming their arms cheekily into their hips for posing, they firmly focused on a spot on the wall, above the compound's fireplace. Despite the modesty of the place, the illusion was perfect, and one could easily imagine the scene taking place on a big runway or fashion event. The



Hyral Matete prompting one of her trainees to walk with more self-confidence and ease.  
*F. Unsel, March 2017*

atmosphere struck me as disciplined and ordered. As if in front of a school class, Matete shouted corrections and orders, just loud enough to be heard despite the blaring music: “walk slower... come back straight... relax, enjoy the music...”.<sup>7</sup> Especially the older girls were criticised when their posture did not display the gracious and effortless attitude her trainer was aiming at: “relax your shoulders, you’re so crisp!”.

Bodily confidence was not the only lesson to be taught that afternoon. Commenting on one of her trainees, Matete said: “She was so shy, at least now her grammar is improving”. After a two-hour training, the girls had to articulate an assessment of the day’s training, which for some of the shyer girls proved to be quite a challenge, especially in the presence of a visitor. Many of the young people in the “slums”, as the inhabitants themselves refer to Manyatta, grow up using the vernacular Dholuo rather than the national languages English and Swahili. Tackling this first impediment to accessing the job market, the children have to speak the national languages. One of the girls, who did not dare to speak out aloud, was required to prepare a five-minute presentation in English for the following day on a current news topic. The idle school building next door had in fact been replaced by Matete’s work on her compound.

Matete trains “her kids”, as she refers to them, free of charge. The overall goal of her commitment is to help jumpstart artistic careers for the children, or, in another frequent expression, “to tap into their talent”: “I want them to have jobs... I want them to be on adverts, ushering people from the airport.<sup>8</sup> I want them to perform in East Africa and during national events like Moi Day and Madaraka Day, and I want them to perform in Kisumu”. Matete’s ambitions to use art to create a platform for children and youth, to reach local, national and possibly international audiences as a sort of shortcut to (more) secure employment, and as a way of connecting oneself with the economic opportunities in global cultural production, resonated with the conceptions of most artists at the Tumsifu centre. They would refer to their status as “freelancer” or “self-employed”, and they shared the conviction that the county government would not be of much help in their predicament.

7 This quote and all following quotes by Matete were recorded on 29.11.2016.

8 Despite its denomination as an international airport, Kisumu International Airport exclusively services flights to and from Nairobi.

The idea of relying on the government for help even became the subject of ridicule in Kenya, when in 2012, Jane Anyango Adika called upon the government to help her, after her home in Kano (Kisumu County) was flooded. Her bold request on TV “Serikali Saidia” (Swahili, “Government come help!”) in the face of extreme adversity amused many Kenyans and even entered the realm of popular culture, with DJs remixing her cry for help in songs. Ultimately, her plea “Serikali Saidia” was used by thousands of mobile phone users as a ringtone. In the case of education, the incapacity of the state to help its citizens in their plight became alarmingly visible in a series of arsons. In several hundred cases, students set fire to their schools and even their own dormitories,<sup>9</sup> exposing a desperate need for adequate institutions to educate and uplift the youth.

Matete was not alone in her bid to complement the ailing system of education and to try and create links between local talent and the economic opportunities outside of Kisumu. Stephen Okwanyi, the founder of a youth theatre group in Manyatta, vowed to bring down any billboard or advertisement displaying models from outside Kisumu. Seemingly frustrated by Kisumu’s dodged talent he condemns: “Any one of us can carry fish in a billboard and not someone from Coast or Western Kenya like we are seeing in most parts of Kisumu”.<sup>10</sup> The desire to overcome their peripheral status was shared by other artists as well. Painters who took their works to recently built hotels, reported that they were being rejected by the hotel managers, who had brought in decoration and art from Nairobi. Performance artists boycotted a number of events that had national and international icons perform, but failed to include local talent. I sensed a collective self-confidence in the way this cohort of youths related to the opportunities in the city and their own place therein, linking their personal growth to the becoming of the city.

## Kisumu Fashion Week and Kisumu’s Place-in-the-World

One of the events in which this interplay of art with the image of the city became very obvious was the Kisumu Fashion Week. Despite its name, Kisumu Fashion Week was basically a one-night event, which took place on September 5th, 2015. Hosted in a recently built mall, the runway show seemed like one of the moments where the much conjured “creative industry” finally came alive. It was the fourth instalment of the annual event, and the theme “The Rise” clearly bespoke collectively shared ambitions. From the top floor of the mall, the emerging skyline of the city could be consumed. Interspersed with poetry and dance performances, models presented local fashion designs on a black runway, draped with fairy lights and plants.

For myself, as a Western observer, the event struck me as what James Ferguson (2006) would call a “shadow” or “double” of Western modernity. I remember first feeling uneasy towards what seemed to me like an imitation of fashion shows in Berlin or

9 A burning question: why are Kenyan students setting fire to their schools?, Elizabeth Cooper, <https://theconversation.com/a-burning-question-why-are-kenyan-students-setting-fire-to-their-schools-69153> (accessed, 15.12.2016)

10 “Artists vow to pull down billboards with portraits of models not from their county,” Dennis Onyango, <http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2000121338/artistes-vow-to-pull-down-billboards-with-portraits-of-models-not-from-their-county> (accessed, 15.12.2016)

Paris, instead of being an adoption of such cultural practices in its own right. Ferguson puts this tension succinctly, when he writes that practices of cultural assimilation come with an “uncanny combination of likeness and difference, claim[ing] a connection, a relationship, and sometimes an aspirational equality” (Ferguson 2006, 22). I remember the feeling of anticipated joy by some of the visitors with whom I shared the mall’s elevator. We were entering a specific realm, of joy and détente as it were. Whatever my own feelings were in the midst of showy costumes, plastic flowers and camera flash-



The venue and decoration of Kisumu Fashion Week 2015 was praised by the audience and considered a breakthrough in local efforts to establish an entertainment and arts industry.  
*F. Unsel, September 2015*

lights; judging from the emotional display of the audience, the event marked a special juncture.

A video documentation of the event, accessible on Youtube,<sup>11</sup> gives clues as to how the event was perceived (or at least intended to be perceived) by the organisers. The documentary starts with the city’s bright lights and the vistas of the mall seen from outside at night. During the video, short clips of the event alternate with bits of interviews. Here, the organisers express their desire to “brand” the city, and to give it “an edge”, linking their event to the lacklustre reputation of Kisumu and their own place therein. Despite their casual attitude, the organisers show a great deal of excitement for the possibilities they sense around the event:

Kisumu Fashion Week continues to play a big role in terms of transforming this region into a fashion destination one day in the future... and also making Kenyan designs to be out there and to be known as a place where things can always happen.<sup>12</sup>

11 “Kisumu Fashion Week 2015;” Gemra Media, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e0cvZp2QhDo>, (accessed 11.12.2016)

12 “Kisumu Fashion Week 2015;” Gemra Media, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e0cvZp2QhDo>, (accessed 11.12.2016)

The statement, like the event in general, evoked the sense of a Kisumu yet-to-come, manoeuvring between global aspirations and an awareness of the local limitations. The event itself was perhaps less exclusive than its documentation wants to make the viewer believe. A beauty-competition between visitors was eagerly awaited: participants, who were all dressed most elegantly, danced on stage, hoping to win one of the smartphone prizes given out by one of the sponsors. The red carpet, an integral feature of many similar events in Kisumu, allowed models and visitors alike to be photographed in bright light, so as to nurture social media with shiny photos. It occurred to me that if the current metaphor of the “untapped talent” implied a sort of congested connection, as if a valve had been closed somewhere, taking pictures on a red carpet – on the contrary – visually connected people with the glaring lives of the more established cultural industries of Los Angeles or Lagos. As if taking selfies on a red carpet could – at least in one’s imagination – bridge the gap between a city left behind and the more utopian places on this planet.

The necessity of a creative industry in Kisumu was also discussed in more tangible terms, though. During the presentation of the dignitaries, the moderator asked the Director of Culture, who is responsible for cultural programming within the County, on stage. One guest then confronted the director with his recent experience of cultural weeks in Turkana (Northern Kenya) and Kwale County (Coastal Kenya). He asked: “Are we going to see any of this in Kisumu – we want answers – why don’t we have a

Kisumu Fashion Week brought elegance to Kisumu, according to plus-size model Victoria Adwet.  
*F. Unseld, September 2015*



cultural week in Kisumu, when we have all these talents?” provoking instant cheering and applause from the crowd. The director, overwhelmed, resorted to an evasive answer.

The event shows how a group of artists and their audience use art to make themselves visible as part of the urban landscape. The hiring of commercial venues like the mall is as much a response to a lack of suitable facilities, as it can be seen as a statement, which couples the demand for social recognition with spatial centrality. The event staged an image of the youth which defied its recurrent depiction in media and political discourse as a “problem”, as idlers, who are unemployed and cheaply hired by political leaders for their campaigns.

Apart from the event itself, the video documentation can be seen as a product of an alternative imagination of the city, where youths not only feature prominently, but where they are also part of a global sociocultural order. Youths in this image are not passive bystanders, but rather participants in an all-embracing event, which successfully merges the local (in form of participants and their genuine expressions) with aspects of ‘modernity’. Such ideas of global contemporariness were associated with the relative opulence of the venue, but also with more subtle aspects, like a notion of “elegance”, which according to one model in the documentation, the event had brought to Kisumu.

To resume, I suggest to understand modelling, as entailed in Matete’s classes and the Kisumu Fashion Week event as an artistic practice, which does several things at a time: it addresses acute needs, such as acquisition of language skills and ways of self-styling, but it also entails a more imaginative dimension. This imaginative quality has an individual side, in that it allows people to construct more appealing life-trajectories. It also has a collective side, of which the whole arrangement of the Kisumu Fashion Week and its representation in a video-documentation are an expression. Here, an image of “the youth” and its place in Kisumu (and indeed in the world) was successfully staged. In the remainder of this text, I want to point to how such shared images also translate into collective action.

## Art, Aspiration and Potentials for Mobilisation

In December 2015, the county government of Kisumu finally seemed to meet the demands of the cultural practitioners by opening up an artistic centre. Yet, the initiative was not welcomed by a majority. Most artists complained that the place was not in the city’s centre, but on its outskirts, and in “cultural wasteland”, as someone put it. Many were not even sure where exactly the centre was located. Commonly it was reasoned that the arts centre was a smokescreen for the corruption of county funds. When some months later, in April 2016, the numbers of the county budget surfaced, it appeared that four million out of ten million Kenyan Shillings [ca. 97 000 USD] had been used for the refurbishment of an arts centre in Nyakach, far away from the city, and unbeknownst even to my interlocutors from this sub-region of Nyanza Province.<sup>13</sup> The remaining six million Kenyan shillings were allocated to construct a simple perimeter wall around the city’s arts centre in Kisumu, which caused an outrage on social media. A widely shared image of a wall with a hole in it crystallised the anger of young artists vis-à-vis the state, with its numerous ways of delaying, circumventing and ultimately ignoring their real needs.

When some fifty artists took to the streets soon after, to demonstrate against the misallocation, the police quickly dispersed the procession with teargas. Observers

13 Brian Oundo, personal communication, 07.07.2016.

told me that the administration had also hired “goons”, dressed in civilian clothes, who hastened to take away the artists’ banner and physically assaulted some of the demonstrators, including models. Such local government strong-arm tactics show how fraught

Artists in Kisumu largely used images on social media in order to mobilize against a misallocation of the County government.

F. Unsel



the process of obtaining structures and a platform from which to operate and grow is in Kisumu. They also underpin differences of the discursive realm between the capital and the secondary city. When Boniface Mwangi stages vigorous anti-corruption protest in the capital, the public eye and international media attention guarantee a certain degree of freedom of speech. Meanwhile, in Kisumu, much humbler demands are met with repression. Arguably, secondary cities come with their own relations of force on the ground, and these critically inform the ways in which artists and activists can position themselves.

In Kisumu, the experienced symbolic and spatial exclusion, as expressed in the image of the wall, did not lead to recourse such as shock art or even fundamental criticism, in the kind of register that Kenya’s former chief justice Willy Mutunga used, castigating contemporary Kenya as a “bandit economy”.<sup>14</sup> In fact, the demand that was shared with the image of the wall on social media, quite reasonably stated: “Kisumu artists we don’t require a wall – we need that proposed budget reviewed”. The slogan was shared on Facebook in the days preceding the demonstration, notably with the hashtag #kisumuartsundersiege. The need for a more inclusive budgeting process was restated during a press conference after the dispersal of the demonstration.<sup>15</sup> Almost a year later, at the point of writing this, Kisumu’s artists are still waiting for their own space.

14 “Kenya has become a ‘bandit economy’, says Chief Justice Willy Mutunga,” Koert Lindijer, <http://africanarguments.org/2016/01/11/kenya-has-become-a-bandit-economy-says-chief-justice-willy-mutunga/> (accessed: 15.12.2016)

15 For local news-coverage of the demonstration see “Kisumu artists protest,” Samson Martin, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BoWMIxNk\\_VQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BoWMIxNk_VQ) (accessed 1.11.2016),



## Conclusion

In this article I have argued for the importance of ethnographic research on artistic practices in cities like Kisumu, which usually fall through the global urban cartography. Approaching artistic practices in a conceptually open way can make secondary cities as interesting a terrain for the study of urban culture as metropolises. More than a complement, secondary cities force us to reconsider the very conceptions with which we attempt to describe African cities, like in my case, art and the formation of political spaces.

A ‘modernistic’ conception of art would have failed to recognise the relevance of Matete’s modelling classes. A Western art critic would tend to dismiss modelling as something less compelling, yet, as I have showed, it is a deeply political practice, which addresses shortcomings and constitutes ways out of the restraining situation of growing up in Kisumu. Like other similar activities, Matete’s project can be described as a form of peer-education, which complements an ailing system of education, from which the path to employment remains uncertain. Making art under such circumstances, must also be understood as a strategy of coping, which allows to structure one’s days, construct personal life-trajectories and to envision a future, in a context where the future often remains ‘unimagined’ (cf. Honwana 2012).

The case of the Kisumu Fashion Week shows an example of an alternative imagination of the youth and its place within the urban landscape. In a city where there is virtually no support for the expressive culture of the younger generation, the event not only helped to address feelings of exclusion and provided a moment of collectively shared relief. It also staged an image of the youth as active forerunners of change, defying its negative depiction in media and political discourse. If there is such a thing as a right to the city, one could provocatively ask, looking at Kisumu Fashion Week, if there is also a right to be “world-famous for 15 minutes”, as Andy Warhol famously predicted everyone in the future to be. In other words, will the ability to achieve coequality with Western consumers, to own a smartphone from which to access social media, or to dress oneself elegantly, bear as much or greater a potential for political change than abstract and often suspiciously regarded notions like ‘democracy’?

In any case, the example of the artist demonstration shows that the aspirations of the youth in Kisumu bear potential for mobilisation. If regional hubs like Kisumu keep growing in importance – and this seems almost inevitable – they can inform us substantially about the needs that shape urban identities, associational life and ultimately politics. The example of the demonstration also shows that while studying the mechanisms of such smaller urban public spheres, it is worthwhile to attend to the relations of force on the ground, which may also differ from arrangements in the capital. Ideally, research in secondary cities will not only shed light on some of the emergent urbanism in Africa, but also make us return to the capital cities with fresh eyes.

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# Imagery of Kankan, a Secondary City in Guinea

Carole Ammann

## Introducing Kankan

Kankan, founded in the eighteenth century and Guinea's second largest city in terms of inhabitants, is the centre of the Upper Guinea Region, located some 650 kilometres northeast of the capital Conakry.<sup>1</sup> According to the newest census, 220 000 people are living in the city (Republique de Guinée 2014).<sup>2</sup> Kankan is a major trading centre for rice, rubber, corn, potato, cattle and sheep (Camara, O'Toole, and Baker 2014, 186). Five roads lead from Kankan, one of which crosses the Malian border and goes to Bamako, which is only 340 kilometres away. Due to this proximity and the common



Graffiti tag by male youth.  
C. Ammann, March 2012

- 1 I have changed all research participants' names to protect their privacy and to ensure anonymity. However, there are some exceptions to this rule: The two field assistants, Thierno Sow and Djénabou Dramé, had asked to be cited by their proper names. I have translated every statement into English myself, and the original (translated) French version can be found in the footnotes.
- 2 Here, I add up the numbers for Kankan centre and Karifamoriyah, a nearby village that is today considered as part of the city. According to Monique Bertrand (1997, 243) Kankan had around 70 000 inhabitants in 1987 and more than 100 000 in the mid 1990s. Generally, these figures must be handled with care: Thomas O'Toole and Janice E. Baker (2005: 121), for example, indicate the number of Kankan's inhabitants to 278 000 at the beginning of the 2000s.

Mande cultural background, Kankan's populace describe their hometown not only in comparison to Conakry, but also in contrast to Mali's capital Bamako. My aim in this contribution is to look at how Kankan's inhabitants imagine their city. Hereby, I focus on Kankan's imagery<sup>3</sup> that consists of two different images, namely the 'rebellious' and 'the traditional' city: Why has Kankan for a long time been regarded as a rebellious city and what consequences did this have for Kankan's infrastructure and inhabitants? What is behind the name *Nabaya* Kankan's inhabitants have given to their city?

Kankan is not a spectacular city. Architecturally there are no outstanding buildings like in West African metropolises; Kankan's highest construction, the Julius Nyé-réré University, consists of four floors. The city centre is marked by decaying colonial buildings and simple one or two floor houses. Additionally – and contrary to other cities in the interior of the country, especially the Fouta Djallon – some families still live in thatched huts (*cases rondes*). Therefore, Thierno Sow, one of my two research assistants, used to say that 'Kankan is not well constructed.'<sup>4</sup> I remember my first impression when arriving in Kankan in 2011: For me, it was a big village. Compared to Cotonou in Benin and Bamako in Mali, I perceived Kankan as boring, as a city without an interesting cultural life. In 2004, Guinea's Historical Dictionary described Kankan as following: "It is more a large cluster of Maninka villages around an administrative and commercial core than a truly urban area" (O'Toole and Baker 2005, 121). Today, the city is rapidly expanding in all directions; roads have been tarmacked, public electricity started working, and new stores and small restaurants are popping up in the city's centre. Additionally, in the course of the rotating independence celebrations, the government has made some investments in Kankan's infrastructure: One market has received a second floor and some administrative buildings, an artisanal centre, a youth centre and a bus station have newly been constructed. This change is also described in the newest edition of the Dictionary: "Lately Kankan has been growing and further modernizing as an increasing number of its natives invest in the region's development" (Camara, O'Toole and Baker 2014, 186).

Economically, Kankan is not very productive. The state is the main employer offering jobs in the administrative, security, educational and health sector. A small private sector, such as telecommunication and a few NGOs, also offers jobs. Furthermore, people work as tailors, carpenters, blacksmiths, hairdressers, labour in the constructing or transportation sector, produce bricks, soap and woodwork. Still, most of Kankan's population is engaged in some form of trade or in agriculture. Kankan's markets are important for the weekly markets of surrounding villages (Bertrand 1997, 243). According to a UN-study, the poverty rate in Kankan is higher than in the rest of the country (United Nations 2013). Djénabou Dramé, my other research assistant, used to say: "*Ici, ça va à la kankanaise*",<sup>5</sup> meaning that everyday life is continuing and things, especially on the economic and infrastructural level, are not progressing. Kalil Mara, a man in his thirties who originates from Kankan and holds a good position in a telecommunication company in Conakry, speaks for many who have seen other Guinean

- 3 I talk of imageries when a cluster of images emerges around important themes. Different imageries exist and usually compete with each other. "Imageries are not closed systems; they are embedded in ongoing processes of social, political, and cultural articulation." (Förster 2013a, 530) Images and imageries are intrinsically linked: Images form imageries and imageries are expressed in images. Our imageries are influenced by our habits and our daily sensual experiences.
- 4 Kankan n'est pas bien construit.' When visiting the Fouta Djallon for the first time, the difference between Kankan and the towns and villages there were eye-catching: Even in small villages I saw impressive mosques and two-floor houses are no exception. Further, there are almost no huts in these cities. Obviously, there are other reasons for this difference, too.
- 5 "Here, things proceed the Kankanian way."



Male youth imagines its neighbourhood.  
C. Ammann, March 2012

cities or foreign countries: ‘Kankan is a city without money. All the money that is there comes from other parts. Everybody just sits around and waits for someone to send them money. [...] I am from Kankan, but, honestly, I would not recommend anybody to invest there’.<sup>6</sup>

Generally, Kankan’s population is quite mobile: Adults visit their families in the village, travel around for business or participate in festivities of friends and relatives somewhere outside Kankan. Young men and women try their luck in one of the booming artisanal mining centres in Guinea and beyond. Young people typically go to Conakry for education and in search of employment or spend the holiday with family members in another city. When going to big cities like Conakry or Bamako for the first time, the research participants recounted that they were overwhelmed by the infrastructure, the fancy buildings and the crowded streets, that evoked a general feeling of confusion and disorder. Further, they complained about the high prices in these big cities. Returnees then valued Kankan’s non-polluted air, the non-congested roads, its tranquillity and its security. Thus, Kankan’s “rhythm”, to use Filip De Boeck’s (2015) term, is seen as quite calm. Here, contrary to the metropolises, people know how things ought to be and how to behave socially, in brief; they feel being part of the large Kankanian family.

Till Förster is right in saying that the images of cities “enhance, if not produce identification with the city. Many urbanites in Africa, as elsewhere, are proud of being from and living in a particular city” (Förster forthcoming, 10).<sup>7</sup> This holds also true for Kankan. In what follows, I elaborate on the imagery of Kankan: Since Guinea’s independence in 1958 until 2010, Kankan has been regarded as a rebellious city as its inhabitants were, most of the time, opposed to the regimes in place. At the same time, Kankan’s urbanites promote the imagery of their city as being traditional. These two images do not contradict each other, as I will illustrate.

6 ‘C’est une ville qui n’a pas d’argent, tout argent qui est là-bas est importé d’autre part. Tout le monde s’assoit seulement et attend l’argent envoyé de quelqu’un [...]. Moi-même je viens de Kankan, mais sincèrement parlé, investir là-bas, ça ne vaut pas la peine.’ (Informal conversation, Conakry, 24.02.2013)

7 See Förster for more information on how the images of a city emerge out of social practice, as “objects of their intentionality” (Förster forthcoming, 13)

## Kankan, the Rebellious City

Kankan's population is known as rebels; they refuse to subjugate. It has already been like that with its founder. [...] With Sékou [Touré] it was the same thing. They refused to do what he demanded. The case of Kankan does not date from today. In brief, Kankan has too much pride.<sup>8</sup>

Matthieu Hilgers (2012, 41) describes that secondary cities often produce specific procedures that go against the interests of the capitals, in this case Conakry, that embodies the state. Not surprisingly, such cities then come to symbolise political opposition. This is also the case for Kankan: At the beginning of Sékou Touré's regime (1958–1984), Kankan's inhabitants supported him. One factor for this support was Touré's ethnic background: He was a Manding, like the large majority of Kankan's population. But gradually the good relationship faded away. Decisive for this shift was Kankan's urbanites' long-standing engagement in trade. The Manding traders disposed of large networks and were importing and exporting commodities from neighbouring countries. Since the government's socialist attempts to control the economy – especially trade – in 1964 (Ladipo 1976, 58), Kankan's population suffered from these restrictions and started opposing Touré's policies. When the government closed the frontiers to Mali and Côte d'Ivoire, Kankan's black market flourished – very much to Touré's discontent. In 1975, the tensions between the government and Kankan increased: The regime misused the so-called *Complot Cheytan* ("Satan's Plot") to target mostly Manding merchants from Kankan (O'Toole and Baker 2005, Ixiii). A lecturer, teaching history at Kankan's university, explained: "The Kankanian [...] likes his freedom, he likes travelling, and he likes to know what is going on. In the end, he [Touré] told the people in Kankan that they are traffickers."<sup>9</sup> The elderly research participants vividly remember how the government has closed Kankan's shops and markets because the merchants had sold their items for a higher price than the one fixed by the economic police. In brief, Kankan gained the image of an oppositional city already during the Touré-period. This had negative consequence for the city's infrastructure as Touré stopped investing in Kankan:

Dabola [...] and Kankan [...] are both regarded as 'bastions of the counter-Revolution'. Not only has the complete deterioration of the railway weakened their economy, but the new tarred road from Conakry to Kissidougou has isolated them [...]. The construction of an international airport, which had begun in Kankan in 1965, abruptly stopped in 1968 [...] and did not start again until 1973. The construction of a dam in Kamarato to provide electricity to Kankan and its region also came to a halt in 1971, thereby ensuring that most of the city is periodically in darkness. (Kaba 1977, 41)

The deterioration of the railway and the incompleteness of the international airport negatively influenced Kankan's economy. First, employment got lost. Second, the connection to other cities, especially Conakry, became more difficult and thus isolated Kankan.

8 'Les Kankaniens sont connus comme des rebelles, ils refusent de se soumettre. C'était déjà comme ça avec le fondateur de la ville. [...] Avec Sékou [Touré] c'était la même chose qui s'est passé, ils ont refusé de faire ce qu'il demandait. L'affaire de Kankan, ça ne date pas d'aujourd'hui. Kankan a trop d'orgueil, tout court.' (Djénabou Dramé and Thierno Sow, informal conversation, 30.11.2012)

9 'Le Kankanai [...] aime sa liberté, il aime voyager, il aime connaître ce qui se passe. Il [Touré] a fini par dire aux gens de Kankan qu'ils sont des trafiquants.' (Interview, 12.12.2012)

The relationship between Kankan and Lansana Conté, a Susu who was Guinea's head of state between 1984 and 2010, was not good either. Kankan's Manding population was suspicious of the president who built his power mainly on members of his own ethnic group (Camara 2014, 271). After the 'Coup Diarra' in 1985, the government arrested Manding militaries, businesspeople and state employees. Thereafter, riots against people from the Upper Guinea Region took place in Conakry. Conté's comment *wo fataara* to these lootings, meaning 'what you have done is justified', is still cited by my Manding informants. The incident in October 1991, when government's troops fired on demonstrators in Kankan, further fuelled the tensions between the president and the city (Camara, O'Toole, and Baker 2014, xIv, 296, 306). According to the Manding research participants, Conté's liberalisation policy, the subsequent inflation, and the benefitting (Fulani) traders were responsible for the high food prices and the resulting suffering of the people (cf. International Crisis Group 2005). Further, they blamed Conté for the cessation of Kankan's three factories.

At the beginning of the 1990s, Alpha Condé, a dissident in his fifties who stayed in France where he had done a doctorate, entered the political scene. The population of the Upper Guinea Region quickly rallied around him. During the presidential elections of 1993, the ballots in Kankan and Siguiri, another secondary city, where Alpha Condé was supposed to gain the majority, were annulled (International Crisis Group 2011, 2). In February 2003, manifestations by students in Kankan were severely suppressed (International Crisis Group 2003, 29). Finally, the government accepted the results of the communal elections of December 2005 and thus, Kankan and two other important cities in the Upper Guinea Region came under the direct rule of Condé's Guinean People's Rally (*Rassemblement Populaire Guinéen, RPG*) (International Crisis Group 2006, 7). Therefore, the RPG could already appoint Kankan's mayor in 2006 and the city thus consolidated its reputation of being in opposition to the government in place.

To sum it up, due to its opposition to the presidents of the First and the Second Republic, Kankan has been labelled a rebellious city. Monique Bertnd aptly sums this up: "Kankan's Manding traders have been the object of such confusion: From the figure of 'speculator' and 'conspirator' trafficker under Sékou Touré's regime, to the one of the bad citizen of 'tax resistance' under the rule of Lansana Conté, the continuity is striking"<sup>10</sup> (Bertrand 1997, 241). This had a crucial impact on the city's infrastructure as its inhabitants had to pay the price of their dissident behaviour.<sup>11</sup> Kankan's inhabitants are proud of having gone their own way, even against the odds. And finally, in 2010, they were successful in having Alpha Condé, one of 'theirs' as Guinea's head of state.

## Kankan *Nabaya*, the Traditional City

Kankan is a Muslim religious centre (Rivière 1971a, 295) and there are no apparent cleavages between Islam and Christianity. Kankan's population is very proud of this; people like to mention that a Protestant church stands just besides the city's main mosque. Kankan's urbanites stress that in their city different ethnic com-

10 "Les commerçants malinké de Kankan font souvent l'objet de telle confusion: de la figure du trafiquant 'spéculateur' et 'comploteur' sous le régime de Sékou Touré, à celle du mauvais citoyen des 'résistances fiscales' sous celui de Lansana Conté, la continuité est frappante."

11 Matthieu Hilgers (2009) labels Koudougou, the city of Burkina Faso's first president, also a rebellious city. He describes how the government in power had marginalised it due to its oppositional position.

munities live harmoniously next to each other. However, inter-ethnic cohabitation is much more complex and challenging (Ammann and Kaufmann 2014). Kankan's inhabitants refer to their city as a traditional one, where religious and customary norms are important and elderly's words have great weight. The discursive formations of tradition versus modernity are very present in many African societies. While tradition is attributed to the African (or Guinean in this case) ways of doing and behaving based on the imaginary of a fixed, mostly positively connoted past, modernity is considered as a 'Western' import.<sup>12</sup> As Peter Geschiere et al. note, modernity refers "to a basic sense of living in a new time" that "wield[s] tremendous power in everyday African life" (Geschiere, Meyer, and Pels 2008, 1). Normative expectations of behaviour in Kankan imply standards of dressing, speaking and courtesy, such as respecting elderly people and men in general. All these social norms are highly gendered (Ammann forthcoming).

Signboard of Radio Nabaya.  
C. Ammann, December 2012



In the secondary city of Kankan, the central government's influence is less pronounced than in the capital Conakry. This gives its population more room to manoeuvre and to improvise and thus, it breeds novel, sometimes creative forms of governance. In Kankan, the so called traditional authorities, namely the *Sotikemo*, the city's traditional chief, and the council of elders (*conseil des sages*) have considerable influence on the local state institutions – like in other Guinean secondary cities (cf. Rey 2016). Since 1985, the government formally recognises the council of elders (Rey 2007, 55). In Kankan, its members are elderly men and usually descendants of the powerful Kaba or

12 Colonialism has been driven by the idea of modernity. For more examples on the ambivalent experience of modernity in Africa see the edited volume by Elísio Macamo (2005) and the article by Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (2004)



Chérif families. Once enthroned, the *Sotikemo*, who spiritually and politically watches over the city, does not leave his house anymore. His counsellors inform him about what is going on outside his compound. Jeanne Konaté, a historian who stems from the Forest Region, ascribed the distribution of power in Kankan as follows: “Kankan is a big city, but it has remained a little bit closed up and it is very much attached to cultural values. If you look at the *Sotikemo* [and] the erudite men, even the authorities are afraid of them.”<sup>13</sup> In brief, the power of Kankan’s traditional authorities goes quite far, too far for some like Sory N’Nay Béréte, a young graduate, and Sala Diawara, a lecturer at university, as the following two quotes illustrate:

In Kankan, some traditional rules hinder the state system from functioning properly.<sup>14</sup>

There are no political acts, no cultural acts, no decisions by the trade unions without the elders’ consent. First, people must submit all activities to the elders. They are asked for advice for everything.<sup>15</sup>

Alfa Kabiné, Kankan’s founder, is said to have introduced a system called *Nabaya*, meaning welcome, “to signal its open-armed embrace of merchants and migrants, whom he integrated into the households of the state through marriage” (Osborn 2011, 50). Especially single men could profit from this method, as they were usually given one of Kankan’s women. Thus, as Emily Osborn (2011, 57) notes, marriage was seen as a state-building strategy. To this day, Kankan’s population refer to the notion of *Nabaya* when talking about their city. By calling Kankan *Nabaya*, they refer to its openness vis-à-vis foreigners, Kankan as a *ville des venants*, a city where strangers are welcome. That resulted in Kankan’s religious and ethnic diverse population, on the one hand, and in its economic vitality, on the other hand.

Especially elderly people like to diffuse the imagery of Kankan as being special in a positive sense by calling it *Nabaya*. Thus, foreigners are welcome and should easily feel at home. Indeed, during the whole time of my fieldwork, Kankan’s inhabitants welcomed me warmly and demonstrated why their city is labelled *Nabaya*. During a workshop, the vice mayor stated: “*Nabaya* is not a simple city, but a symbol of democracy, of open arms, tolerance, national unity and solidarity”.<sup>16</sup> Bemba, a man born in the mid-1950s who acts as a consultant for the mayor and, at the same time, as an advisor of the *Sotikemo*, once stated to me regarding the principle of *Nabaya*:

We accept everybody, because we know that the name *Nabaya* is sweet; you are welcome! We reach out a hand. For us, it is an honour if someone goes elsewhere to tell how life is in Kankan. That is why I am at your disposal to talk. I could also say that you must pay for what I tell you, for what you will finally exploit. But the fact that you can say that you received this information from

13 “Kankan est une grande ville, mais elle est restée un peu renfermée sur elle-même et elle est très attachée aux valeurs culturelles. Quand on voit le Sotikemo [et] les érudits en place, même l’autorité a peur d’eux.” (Interview, 12.12.2012)

14 “À Kankan, certaines règles coutumières empêchent le bon fonctionnement du système étatique.” (Sory N’Nay Béréte, interview, 24.12.2012)

15 “Il n’y a pas d’actes politiques, il n’y a pas d’actes culturels, il n’y a pas d’actes syndicaux s’il n’y a pas d’abord la volonté des sages. Il faut d’abord soumettre les activités aux sages. Ils sont conseillés sur tous les plans.” (Sala Diawara, interview, 26.11.2011)

16 “Nabaya n’est pas une simple cité, mais un symbole de démocratie, de mains tendues, de tolérance, d’unité nationale et de solidarité.” (Recording, 13.11.2011)

the sons of one of the sons of the city, for me, this is an honour, that's enough. It is not easy to deliver, elsewhere they will tell you that they do not have the time for it. But I think this is our society's character.<sup>17</sup>

As Bemba's statement illustrates, he was very proud in knowing that someone had come from far away to learn more about 'his' beloved city and its inhabitants. Due to his personal networks, his knowledge of Kankan's history, and especially his narrative talent, Bemba became one of the key research participants for my project. Interesting for me was especially how he framed Kankan in between tradition and modernity. Bemba supported, for example, an opening up of the traditional authorities in reaction to the democratisation processes on the national level.

The imagery of the traditional city is fostered by many means, not least through the radio where, for example, a well-known, young, male journalist reprimanded young men not to wear their trousers too low on their hips and young women not to wear tight trousers and skirts that show their knees. Dress practices often differ between metropolises and secondary cities. While in the former, one can observe a huge variety of dress styles that are influenced by the global, regional, national and local levels; the dress codes in the latter are typically stricter. These nuances might be small for an outsider, however, Kankan's inhabitants immediately recognise people originating from Conakry or Bamako. We must not forget though, that people dress differently within different social spaces, be it in metropolises or secondary cities: Young women, for example, do not wear the same clothes when going to the market or to the night club. In the 2000s, many private radio stations emerged all over the country and in Guinea, freedom of speech is officially guaranteed. Still, Djouba Boumbaly, a young female radio journalist, who initially came to Kankan for her studies, recounted that their listeners complain if her radio criticises the local authorities too openly, for example for their corrupt practices: "Here in Kankan, ok, there are things, nonetheless, people say: 'The radio shouldn't say that, we are in Kankan, one shouldn't.'" <sup>18</sup> For her, this is evidence for Kankan's conservative population. Kankan's imagery of the traditional city consists of conflicting images. Here, a generational conflict becomes visible. It is not least influenced by the increase of young people – boys and to a lesser degree also girls – attending a 'Westernised' schooling system. I argue that this tension between tradition and modernity which is present in all West African cities, is even more prominent in secondary cities than in the capitals because the former act as intermediaries between the rural hinterland and the global, glittering metropolises.

17 On accepte tout le monde, parce que on sait que le nom de Nabaya est doux, venez. On tend la main. Pour nous c'est un honneur si quelqu'un va ailleurs pour raconter comment se passe la vie à Kankan. C'est pourquoi je me mets à ta disposition pour parler. Je pourrais aussi dire que pour ce que je te raconte, ce que tu vas exploiter, il faut facturer. Mais le fait que tu peux dire que tu as eu ces infos par les fils d'un des fils pour cette ville, pour moi c'est un honneur, ça me suffit. Ce n'est pas facile de livrer, ailleurs ils vont te dire qu'ils n'ont pas ce temps. Mais je pense que c'est la nature de notre société." (Interview, 10.12.2012)

18 "Ici à Kankan, bon, il y a des choses, quand même qu'on dit: 'La radio ne doit pas dire ça, on est à Kankan, on ne doit pas.'" (Interview, 06.03.2012)

19 [...] partager une mentalité liée au statut de la ville."

## Conclusion

By regarding Kankan's imagery as a rebellious and at the same time traditional city, it becomes clear that Matthieu Hilgers is right in stating that inhabitants of secondary cities "share a mentality that is related to the city's status"<sup>19</sup> (Hilgers 2012, 42). The imageries of cities are of interest because they influence the cities' population, their self-perception and the cities' perception in other parts of the country and beyond. Furthermore, such imageries have concrete consequences. As I have shown, the Guinean central government did not invest in Kankan's infrastructure as its inhabitants have been regarded as rebellious due to their opposition, first to Sékou Touré and then to Lansana Conté. This imagery of the rebellious city can be a typical feature of secondary cities like Kankan.

As the national government is far away, its administration has less power than in the country's main or capital city. This results in new forms of governance, for instance a strong influence of so-called traditional authorities like the *Sotikemo* and the council of elders. In Kankan, these two are said to be so powerful that they can achieve the dismissal of the prefect or the governor. The traditional authorities are all elderly men who are descendants of Kankan's Manding first-comers. Thus, their power has also wide-ranging consequences in terms of inclusion and exclusion: Youth, women, Manding late-comers and other ethnicities do not have access to traditional authorities and, thus, their influence on these traditional spheres is restricted.

The populace's imagination of their city depends on other places. In Kankan, they compare their city to Conakry and Bamako, but also to other Guinean secondary cities like Nzérékoré, Boké, Mamou or Labé. Kankan's urbanites are proud of their city, even though they know that it cannot compete with Conakry or Bamako on many levels. They call it affectionately *Nabaya*, hinting to the welcoming culture of its inhabitants. *Nabaya* is linked to the imaginary of harmonious cohabitation between different religions, ethnicities and between long-time residents and newcomers. Especially Kankan's elderly population emphasises that Kankan still holds on to traditional norms, not like the people in the big West African cities and abroad, notably in Europe and the US, who have forgotten African or Guinean values and the rich history of their ancestors. Because Kankan's elders feel that current trends threaten their traditional norms, they stress them so strongly. In many informal conversations and interviews, elderly men and women accused male youth of disrespecting them, being lazy, hanging out in cafés and taking drugs like marihuana and drinking beer. They also blame young women for not dressing properly, being prostitutes, questioning local gendered norms and thus of not being submissive to men. The depicted imagery of Kankan as a rebellious and traditional city do not necessarily contradict each other. On the contrary, for many, especially Kankan's elderly inhabitants who have lived during the First and Second Republic, these two imageries can perfectly exist side by side. Both enhance their identification with Kankan, their place of origin. African cities, as any others, are always changing. This also holds true for their imageries. Thus, it remains to be seen how Kankan's imagery alter due to recent changes, not least because the city is the stronghold of the current president Alpha Condé.

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# Beyond the Metropolis

## Inclusive Urbanity – Made in Korhogo, Côte d'Ivoire

Till Förster

### Introduction

The concept 'secondary cities' already seems to imply that these cities are characterised by 'less' than capital or 'primary cities': less sprawl, less metabolism, less bustling, but also less industrious, less innovative and less productive. Then again, secondary cities are depicted as bland copies of capital cities, reproducing what the capital has created since long. 'Real urban life' with its blossoming culture is always elsewhere. Such assessments are largely produced by the implicit comparisons that urban hierarchies entail. They mirror more the views of urbanites identifying with primary cities and much less the views of those who live in secondary cities. Such cities are perhaps less ambitious – but they are surely more ordinary, accounting for the bigger part of urbanisation in Africa and the Global South more generally. Perhaps, their ordinariness, if not their mediocrity, is also why secondary cities are rarely studied in their own right. The ordinary city in Africa is, in Jennifer Robinson's (2006) sense, a secondary city – a city that lacks perhaps the shiny facades of the capital, but that accommodates all sorts of social life, from the most-humble migrant from the rural hinterland to the well-paid development expat. And secondary cities also link different forms of social life in other ways than metropolises with their endless cityscapes.

This ethnographic vignette aims at describing such an ordinary secondary city. It looks at Korhogo in northern Côte d'Ivoire and in particular at a square that became a popular place for urban social life during the times of rebel governance. Five years after the end of the rebellion in 2011, the square is still a place where town dwellers of all backgrounds can and do meet and enjoy their lives. It is a social space where urbanity as the interplay of encounter and distanciation is practiced by whoever wants to take part in it (Förster 2013a). As the source of a specific urbanity, it may tell us more about secondary cities than the classification along national and international urban hierarchies.

### A Short Look Back at Entertainment Neighbourhoods

As all cities, Korhogo always had places where people met and encountered each other. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the city was still a modest market town and when the French had barely established colonial rule, most of these spaces looked like meeting places in the villages that belonged to the newly formed administrative unit, the *cercle du Bandama*. Many of them were circular shelters with thatched roofs. Each compound used to have one, a *vogo* in Senari, the language of the Senufo, or an *hapatame* in West

African French. It was here where the members of the lineages met when they needed to discuss an issue. The shelters persisted a long time parallel to other places where people met for other reasons, for instance when they just wanted to enjoy themselves and perhaps share a beer with a visitor or a friend. In the two decades after independence, when the city began to grow at an unprecedented pace, the shelters were still there, but many people began to consider them as places where only serious issues were discussed – issues of relevance for the entire descent group. The elders and spokespersons of the lineage received visitors and neighbours here, and if there was nothing serious to discuss, the shelter served as a place where the women of the house would offer meals to their visitors and where the men would chat to learn more about the wider world.

When the city began to grow faster, more and more eateries emerged. The first and most popular ones were, of course, in the centre and in the neighbourhood that was known as Soba,<sup>1</sup> “the big village”. According to local legends, it was the place where the clan of the Coulibalys had founded the city and where the former palace of *le vieux*, “the old” Gbon Coulibaly stood. He had dominated urban and regional politics from the first days of colonial rule through its end in 1960. His heirs owned several central properties in Soba, and while his palace slowly deteriorated, they attracted many an investment in restaurants, bars and, to a lesser extent, in night clubs. Soba became the entertainment district for most town dwellers. Only the affluent few, mainly high-ranking civil servants with a decent income and expats from Europe and North America would go elsewhere, namely to *Quartier 14*. Neighbourhood 14 was to some extent a counter-image to the much more popular Soba. It had not existed before urban planning took root in Korhogo – hence its name, which was deduced from the number of its grid square of 1964 –, and it was meant to accommodate the rich and powerful. In the 1970s, *quartier 14* was mainly a white neighbourhood, with a few houses inhabited by bigwigs of the government and its subsidiary organisations. Two nightclubs, *Le Negus* and *Le Poro*, situated at the margins of the neighbourhood, were places where one could meet, and there were Italian and French restaurants as well. However, these places were for the happy few, not for ordinary people who would stay in Soba and rarely ever encounter the inhabitants of neighbourhood 14. A couple of drinks in one of the night clubs or a meal with three or four courses in one of the restaurants could easily add up to a monthly salary of an unskilled labourer.

Together with the economic downturn of the late 1980s and through the 1990s, the polarisation between Soba and *Quartier 14* faded. The city was still growing as fast as it had done through the 1960s and 70s, mainly due to rural-urban migration from the hinterland and, to a lesser degree, through migrants coming from the Sahelian countries seeking employment. At the same time, however, many parastatal organisations and development projects were closing down and their development experts left. Korhogo was no longer a showcase of *le miracle ivoirien*, “the Ivorian miracle” to its northern neighbours, it increasingly became an ordinary secondary city somewhere in the African savannah. *Quartier 14* transformed into a mixed neighbourhood. In 2002, when the rebellion finally drove the remaining expats out of the North of Côte d’Ivoire, it had become as ordinary as any other neighbourhood. The few remaining rich people had moved to another neighbourhood farther off the city centre. The rapid pace of urbanisation had not lead to more segregation – it rather suspended it by producing more mixed neighbourhoods. The architecture of *quartier 14* made this new mixture visible: Former villas of respectable size and appearance were rebuilt and converted into homes for several large families, for instance by closing the veranda with additional walls, by mounting two extra rooms on another side and by opening a small store room as a shop towards the street. Former gardens were filled with small shacks and sometimes,

1 Soba is Manding and means *so\_* ‘built ensemble of houses’, e.g. a compound or a village, and *\_ba* ‘big’. I translate it as it is usually translated in Korhogo itself.



The *Bois Sacré* in 2012. A couple of eateries exist, but the centre of the square is still a half-empty parking ground for motorcycles.  
*T. Förster, February 2012*

the walls around the compound were torn down so that outsiders would walk across the yard. The few richer people who did not move were those who had invested their money in real estate and who had no opportunity to sell. They were a tiny minority, and as such, they made sure that the walls of their compounds were solid, distancing themselves from the ordinary people around them. The closed gates of their homes stood in stark contrast to the vivid urban life that unfolded around them.

## The Forest in the City

As other cities of Côte d'Ivoire, Korhogo was deeply affected by the tide of historical events. After the coup of 1999, which brought General Gueï to power, and the short period under President Gbagbo until the outbreak of the military insurgency in September 2002, Korhogo was increasingly marginalised at the national level. During the early years of the rebellion from 2002 through 2006, Korhogo was finally completely cut off from the southern parts of Côte d'Ivoire (Bouquet 2011; Förster 2010; McGovern 2011).

But then, the marginal position in the country gave rise to more regional trade with Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. China began to play a central role for Korhogo's merchants. They imported motorcycles and tricycles and sold them at highly competitive prices as there were neither custom controls nor taxes to pay. The rebel-held part of Côte d'Ivoire supplied the entire region with less expensive vehicles of Chinese production – not only Côte d'Ivoire. In addition, there were young rebel soldiers who had enriched themselves during the combats and who now sought opportunities to re-invest their sudden wealth. New buildings transformed the cityscape, new offices opened and sometimes closed again as quickly as they had emerged. Entertainment was another field where rebels became active. For instance, there was a new night club, *Eden Park*, in a neighbourhood that had not been known as an amusement district before. A savvy Moroccan restaurant offered its services for less money to rebel soldiers and the UN

peacekeeping forces. It became a neutral space where all actors could meet and talk to each other.

However, an initiative by the chief rebel leader, the *comzone* as he was called in the rebels' parlance, has had a much bigger significance for the city and its culture: He rehabilitated an old city park that had known a sad fate since decades. On the occasion of the independence ceremonies of 1964, a small park with concrete benches and acacia trees had been created in a triangle of streets close to the square where the French administration had once celebrated July 14, its national holiday. The acacias in the park had grown and made it a shady place protected from the hot sun. But the park was abandoned and only attracted homeless and mentally ill people who would spend the night on one of the benches. It was also considered to be very dangerous at night – one should neither cross the park on one of the pathways that led through it nor should one even come close to it, I was told at the time. Rubbish was lying on the ground in huge piles, and its odour warned against the nightly dangers when one was walking past the park.

Although the *comzone* has had no written development plan for "his" city, he tried to realise several projects in the field of culture. Among them were the construction of a cultural centre (Förster 2013b) and the rehabilitation of this old park. It was linked to the erection of a Monument for the Unknown Rebel Soldier, which showed a rebel with a machine gun and a hand grenade between the park and the police barracks which were situated right opposite. The rubbish was removed,<sup>2</sup> the space between the acacia trees was cleaned, the ground levelled and, where necessary, covered with brownish gravel. Finally, businessmen were invited to establish eateries or *maquis*, Ivorian cookshops, in the three corners of the square. Two corners were occupied by humble establishments. One was run by a Baule woman and her daughters. It had an open grill and offered fried chicken with *attiéké*, the popular Ivorian granulated cassava. The Baule women also served cooled beer and wine. The second corner was soon occupied by a tiny shack that sold beer and other beverages in big bottles, no less than a litre for beer. In the beginning, it only had benches and no tables. Later, very small tables were added – just big enough to put the beer bottles down.

The third corner became a restaurant that offered French, North African and local cuisine. It was a branch of the Moroccan restaurant in the old city centre. The three corners had their specific audience. The restaurant was a solid building with an elevated terrace under a tin roof and more tables standing in front of it under two old acacia trees that cast their light shade on them. It had a printed menu with photos of the meals, the tables were covered with tablecloth, and there were glasses as well as paper napkins on which the waiter carefully arranged knives and forks. When driving, or walking past this corner of the square in the evening, garlands of twinkling lights in the branches of the acacia trees attracted the sight of possible visitors. A luminous advertising decorated the wall: *Le Bois Sacré*, "The Sacred Grove". It made sense under the huge acacia tree towering over the tables that were evenly distributed and nicely arranged under its crown.

Visibly, it was not a restaurant for everybody. Eating here was more expensive than in the opposite corner where the Baule woman offered her chicken with cassava. It was also more expensive than elsewhere in town. However, the cuisine was better – or more precisely, the restaurant addressed another clientele. Its *couscous* soon became famous among the UN peacekeeping forces as a significant contingent of the UN soldiers came from North Africa and Pakistan. And the chef claimed that his French fries were by far the best in town. Because of the two old acacia trees, the place resembled a little clearing with a small house in the background. "The Sacred Grove" was both a reference to the place and to the local culture of the Senufo, the dominant ethnic group in the

2 The rebel leader labelled the removal as compulsory labour contribution to the municipality and forced wealthy merchants to provide labourers.



region. Each Senufo village has such a grove, which is the seat of their secret society and, unsurprisingly, it was surrounded by countless legends and rumours that this place under the shady tree and the flickering lights of the garlands alluded to.

Of course, it had nothing to do with a real sacred forest where young Senufo men would pass their initiation into the secret society of poro. But it attracted a comparatively affluent clientele as there was no other place that could compete with it. Most eateries in town had only African dishes, and they usually were crammed with small tables and stools so that the publican could accommodate more people. The parlours were mostly hot and sticky, and if there was more space outside, the seating was often as narrow and dense as the space between the shack and the street would allow. In contrast to these ordinary *maquis*, all three corners of the square opened towards its middle ground and hence had a lot of free space in front where the guests could arrange their tables and seats as they preferred. The restaurant was the first that made use of the opportunity, but the eatery and the drinking spot adopted the same pattern as well. The desks with table cloth, carefully laid for guests, stood vis-à-vis yellow plastic tables and monobloc chairs in the opposite corner and confronted simple benches and stools close to the third corner.

As noted, the three corners attracted different customers. The *Bois Sacré* was soon known for its cuisine, but since the Moroccan did not offer alcohol, he allowed his waiters to walk across the square to one of the two other corners to buy a bottle of beer or wine and to bring it back to the tables of the *Bois Sacré* where the more affluent clientele would consume it – not without an extra tip for the service. In the beginning, that is, in the years 2006 through 2011, the middle of the square remained empty, but as soon as others became aware of the growing attractiveness of the place, more and more eateries, cookshops and tiny shacks offering other services opened along the sidelines of the triangle. Right in the centre of the square was a stand for air time for three, later for all four mobile phone providers. It also offered cigarettes, matches and sweets.

What had been a calm, open space where people could meet and chat under the light shade of the acacia trees increasingly became a space where town dwellers of all origins and social strata met to feast, and to debate whatever could stimulate their excitement. Depending on the corner where they would want to eat or drink, one could meet teenagers as well as elderly people in their 60s. Difference and diversity were what characterised the square – and the more eateries and *buvettes* it attracted, the more diverse it became, attracting still more people. However, by then, the square with all its three corners, eateries and drinking spots was already generally known as *Le Bois Sacré*. It would have been difficult to find anybody who would not have been aware of its central significance for the city's public sphere. 'The Sacred Grove' had become synonymous for social life in the city at large – for people living together, socialising, encountering each other.

## Urban Encounters

The more popular the square became, the more it lost its character as a calm place under acacia trees. Many people associated it with the initiative of the rebel leader and called it *La Place de Fofié* (after Fofié Kouakou Martin). Only when the rebellion ended in 2011, it seemed inappropriate to refer to the former rebel leader whose presence in the city's public sphere had become debatable as he was also sought for war crimes by the United Nations. However, such political intricacies did not affect social life on the square. More than ever, 'The Sacred Grove' was a place where people encountered each other, where they could and often did meet people from all neighbourhoods of the city and most of

A billboard painted in white serves as a screen during the football tournament.  
T. Förster, February 2012



its social strata. Only very few fervent Muslims, followers of a salafist reading of the Quran, would not go to this place because they would find it sinful.

Friday through Sunday were the days when the place filled with people from all neighbourhoods of the city. After fitiri, the four o'clock prayer, most of the eateries and drinking spots opened or prepared for their cooking. Fires were lighted and fowls and beef were put on iron grids or on spits while fridges were filled with as many bottles as possible. There were soft drinks, but as many more customers would ask for beer, the *buvettes* were mainly offering beer in two bigger bottles; 0.66 and a whole litre. Groups of friends were soon sitting and chatting together, emptying the bottles and aligning them proudly on their tables. The longer they gabbled on, the more bottles they accumulated on the table. It was not unusual to find rows of a dozen beer bottles on a table. In particular, the first drinking spot in the third corner became known for the hard drinking policemen and gendarmes that increasingly began to spend their after-work hours there. At times, they saluted when they walked past the guests of the eateries nearby, and some of them invited young women to share a drink with them. Of course, women would first decline the invitation, but some of them would at least accept a soft drink and perhaps another drink later when night would fall. There was some hooting here and there, while others stayed sober and did not talk as much as those who had already had their second or third litre.

“You’re a foreigner in town”, says Amidou Touré,<sup>3</sup> a police sergeant, “here is the place where I can hang out with my peers. They’re all from elsewhere. I’m from Touba, I can’t travel home over weekend, it’s too far. And too expensive as well. Most of us are not from Korhogo. Many come from the South. Even if they have motorcycles, they can’t drive home. So, we meet here, and oftentimes, we also meet others. Many civil servants<sup>4</sup> also come here the evening to enjoy themselves.”

3 All names replaced by other, typical names from the same region. Amidou Touré is in his mid 30s, pers. comm. January 2015.

4 Seargent Amidou used the French term *fonctionnaires*, which implies that the civil servant enjoys the social security of a life-time employment.

Opposite of the policemen's *buvette* stands another which has local cuisine in addition to beer. It does not offer anything else, but after 5pm, its rice with groundnut sauce is always ready. The customers are served immediately after they order. Meat must be ordered separately and is laid on top of the rice. Civil servants from the South would not eat here, they prefer other dishes, and groundnut sauce is "Northerners' food" – not fit for them, they say.<sup>5</sup> It should be sauce graine made of red palm kernels. Recently, an eatery at another corner has it – cooked by a woman from Divo in the South who also adds *djoumblé*, dried and pounded okra fruits that make it "nice and viscid". The Baule woman in the second corner has grilled chicken and guinea fowls with cassava, onions and cabbage. Most people will eat this food from central Côte d'Ivoire, and her tables and stools are never empty the evening. The latter, the fowl, is expensive meat and almost twice as expensive as chicken. Its hearty taste is what brings Northerners and Southerners together – they all like it, she says. But not everybody can afford it, she adds: "It's a dish that you'd order for a special evening."<sup>6</sup>

And there are special evenings. Right next to the Baule eatery, another has opened. It has chicken as well, but also spits with beef and sometimes lamb. Unlike the other eateries, one can choose the side dish, even chips made of potatoes or yams with green salad. Young men would take their beloved maidens here if the Moroccan restaurant is too expensive for them. Sometimes, older couples come and eat the somewhat fancy meals if they want to enjoy the special atmosphere of the place. Several *maquis* in the Sacred Grove have large TV screens where one can watch new sequels of the very popular Brazilian soap operas or, every two years in January and February, the football matches of the latest CAN tournament, the African Cup of Nations. Unlike the others, this place has a huge screen, some four meters high, and it displays the live broadcast with a digital projector on it. On such evenings, the guests become spectators – and all of them virtual trainers that comment and criticise the teams loudly. The waiters also have a special beer for such events. And if the Ivorian team wins, they are lying in each other's arms. Unfortunately, that often does not happen.

Opposite is a quieter place. This *maquis* has a tent only and little free space in front of the grill that is its kitchen. Here, couples can talk more confidentially to each other, or business men can bargain over their next deal. One may also look for a partner or some other adventure. If one walks past a woman, one may ask her for her phone number, and she may giggle and banter – but in the end, "...she might give you a false number", a young man says, "you should use another method: tell her that you will want to verify the number by dialing it immediately. Then you'll hear whether it's actually her phone."<sup>7</sup> Such interactions are at the centre of what urbanity is about: encounter and distancing at the very same moment.

Behind the plastic tarp that separates this *buvette* from the next, a young waitress has a stretch on a pink chair. She wears white jeans, a striped blouse and her blond hair is straightened – clearly keeping up with fashion. Her eyes are half closed, and one might think that she is sleeping. But she observes whether visitors of "The Sacred Grove" take a seat at the tables where she would have to serve them. Two men walk past and stop at one of the tables, while she raises her head a little, looking whether they will sit down. The two men finally choose a table. She gets up tardily, meandering slowly between the other tables towards them. Eventually, she stops in front of them, not saying a word, just looking at them, one hand touching the yellow table top. The men are asking what the eatery offers. "Rice with fish or chicken", she says – not one word more. Shortspoken is also the question the men then ask, and she replies again in the briefest possible

5 Spontaneous statements by two bank employees, both of Southern origin, November 2013.

6 Adjoua Koffi, c 50 years.

7 Ouadjo Silué, around 30, living in Korhogo since his childhood.

Two years later, many more eateries are serving a growing clientele. More and more motorcycles fill the square.

T. Förster, February 2014



way: “*arachide, sauce graine, sauce claire.*” The two men exchange a few words and order while she turns away towards another guest who has a big bottle of beer. His voice is soft as he offers her a glass of his beer. She gets a fresh glass from the kitchen behind her, comes back and smiles while he is filling her glass. She gives him another smile, says thank you and walks back to the pink chair where she had had her stretch, sits down and sips her beer. The two had more than one quick look at each other until both had finished their beers.

Between the last tables, heavy motorcycles are parked. Some waiters had tried to keep them out, but driving loudly into the inner free space of the square had become an impressive entry for many a young man until it became so crowded that driving meant to go as slow as a pedestrian. Again a few steps farther, another *maquis* has heavy loudspeakers and played popular African music the entire evening. However, that came to an end when the audience on the other side wanted to watch the football tournament. The spectators shouted across the square and told them that football is more important and that Côte d’Ivoire does not play every day. They had to reduce the volume so that it did not cause any inconvenience to the guests of the other eateries and drinking spots. Only very late in the evening when most people are no longer eating, they turn it up again.

Much more than this, the visual dominates many of the urban encounters in ‘The Sacred Grove’. It is here that one can see the latest fashion and the most fanciful hairdos (Baker 1990). Of course, strolling over the square at night is a presentation of selves to the urban public. Men and women can show who they are or more precisely who they would want to be. They can wear what they would never wear when they would go to other places, to the mosque or the church, to the office or the market. “Yes, the clothing of the young girls is not always decent”, says Lacina Coulibaly, a father of five, a Muslim and an employee of the urban council, “...but they [his daughters] could do worse in the bars and night clubs. Here, there are so many people watching. They could run into my friends or my neighbours – everybody could be here. You can’t make sure that you’re not seen.”<sup>8</sup> We were watching a young woman in black leather pants and a white blouse, which was loosely bound together over her breasts. Her hair was softened and long, flowing in the warm evening air, surely a wig.

8 Pers. comm. in one of the eateries, October 2016. In another conversation, a year ago, he said that The Sacred Grove has no walls – which bars and night clubs would have.

## Are Secondary Cities Different?

All the little encounters and moments of distanciation could have taken place in other cities as well – the urbanity that surfaces in such secondary cities is no different from that of other, bigger cities. So finally, very little of what I have described above seems to be specific to urban life in secondary cities – with the exception of its ordinariness. An anthropology of urbanity would reveal more or less the same social practices elsewhere. However, some traits of social life in Korhogo and its ‘Sacred Grove’ are worth being mentioned. They are exceptional with regard to the inclusiveness of ‘The Sacred Grove’ as a social space. How come it is so embracing, that it attracts visitors from the entire city? A closer look at this feature can take our analyses of secondary cities further.

First, there is the ethnographic finding: the mixture of different social and cultural backgrounds that ‘produces’ this inclusive social space – to borrow Lefebvre’s (1991) term for now. People of different origins – ethnic as well as regional – can get together in one place. Most urbanites do not perceive it as compromising to be there and to be seen there. ‘The Sacred Grove’ sets aside segregation in different neighbourhoods and communities. Of course, there are temporary limits. When the visitors go home, they also move back into their respective neighbourhoods and stick to the social networks they are part of. As a social space, ‘The Sacred Grove’ is a counter-current to the town dwellers’ everyday networks and the reciprocal obligations that come along with them. They can go beyond them, try to forget about them or to establish new ones. Older social ties and obligations have not ceased to exist – but they are temporarily lifted. That makes ‘The Sacred Grove’ attractive to most *Korhogolais*, the people who identify with their city – and simultaneously suspicious to those who prefer to stick to more rigid, normative interpretations of daily sociality, for instance stricter versions of faith. Salafist interpretations of Islam would stipulate that women should be entirely veiled and never be seen in such a place. For them, such an escape – even if only transient – from their religious rules would be unacceptable. But until today, only a tiny minority of Korhogo’s Muslims would approve such behaviour. Most visitors of ‘The Sacred Grove’ are Muslims.

Second, the rebel command had planned the place as a meeting point for all town dwellers. To invite *maquis* and restaurants of all categories to do business there was a wise decision – though it is unlikely that the rebel command actually reflected on it. They did not have urban planners, and besides, urban planning does not always achieve what it claims. It was not a conscious planning in the sense that they, the rebel command, wanted to bridge the social cleavages in town or that they wanted to create an ‘inclusive social space’, as one would try to plan it in a more orderly city with a state-driven policy of urban governance (Knox 2005). It is much more likely that the rebels simply wanted their initiative to be a success so that they would indirectly profit from it as well. It allowed them to raise some fees<sup>9</sup> and to promote their rule as “democratic”, which, in their understanding, meant that it would mirror the expectations of “the people”. As already mentioned, this was not the only initiative of its kind, but it was one of the very few that proved to be sustainable. Long after the end of the rebellion, ‘The Sacred Grove’ still flourishes.

Thirdly, and probably most importantly, ‘The Sacred Grove’ remains closely linked to the city as an amalgam of overlapping, sometimes distinct, sometimes blurred social spaces. From the actors’ point of view, the proximity of the neighbourhoods extends into the Sacred Grove – and here, the secondary city might come into play. The

9 In ordinary times, each *maquis* has to pay a weekly or daily fee to the urban council. During the rebellion, these fees were levied by employees of the dormant municipality together with rebel soldiers.

way of “seeing each other” that characterises Korhogo’s neighbourhoods is not much different from how it would be practiced outside ‘The Sacred Grove’. “You can’t make sure that you’re not seen,” said Lacina Coulibaly, the employee of the urban council. Though the neighbourhoods all mix in the open square that ‘The Sacred Grove’ is, they remain visible as such. The visitors of ‘The Sacred Grove’ presume that there could be others who know them – which relates their social practices; their urbanity back to the places where they come from. Eventually, ‘The Sacred Grove’ seems to be a paradox: It is a thoroughly urban space where people can and do encounter each other, but by the very same token, it does not produce the anonymity that we tend to associate with urban life since Georg Simmel’s ground-breaking work on the metropolis (Simmel 1903 [1976]).

This dimension of urbanity in ‘The Sacred Grove’ takes me back to my initial question: Is the secondary city as ordinary as any? Korhogo is not a metropolis. It is an ordinary secondary city, somewhat marginal in its country. Many people in Abidjan, the economic capital of Côte d’Ivoire, do perceive it with the arrogant blasé attitude that has become so infamous since Simmel. But as an ordinary secondary city, Korhogo does breed its own, specific form of urbanity – one that does not simply copy from the capital city. In this case, it is an inclusiveness that, perhaps, is more unlikely to emerge in an endless megacity. A short glance at Abidjan may illustrate this. In his brilliant work, based on thorough empirical research, Sasha Newell (2012) analyses the emergence and persistence of common public youth spaces in Abidjan before and throughout the Gbagbo regime. However, these spaces differ in important ways from what I have described above: They produce a particular kind of citizenship which, at the time, became a normative model for the populace under the Gbagbo regime – but they do so on the basis of youth culture and its specific moral economy. Other people rarely ever participate, and in that sense, the social spaces that Newell addresses are exclusive – even if they aimed at producing a general, ‘Ivorian’ citizenship.

‘The Sacred Grove’ is different. It is less focused and it is less ambitious. Is this a specificity of secondary cities more widely? Perhaps (for Europe see Montgomery 1998). The social practices of encounter and distancing that unfold on the square in Korhogo are as urban as those in Abidjan, but they are more modest as well. Although the basic practice of urbanity exists everywhere, the multiplicity of interconnected processes has generated a different urban outcome in the two cities.

One could be tempted to argue that this is, to some degree, related to the smaller size of Korhogo where such spaces are unlikely to emerge across the entire cityscape. There would not be enough people to feed more than one such space, and hence, they would rather meet in the one that already exists. But that is a shortcut at best since other cities of similar size do not have such inclusive spaces. Another point is what I mentioned in the beginning: Secondary cities do not aim at more than an ordinary urbanity. One could argue that urbanites living in Korhogo will not aim at creating a particular kind of citizenship. They are what they are and do not need to show that they are somebody else. Yes, they play the game of expressing their masculinity as often and as thoroughly as young men would do in the metropolis. And young women would play with the men’s desires as much as they do elsewhere. The inclusiveness of ‘The Sacred Grove’ as social space does not need to be cast into some particular kind of citizenship as it was in the capital until the end of the Gbagbo regime. However, the complexity of the interrelated social practices that constitute urbanity could also breed other outcomes. To answer the question how the urban unfolds, more comparative research is needed (Robinson 2016) – research that looks beyond the metropolis.

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Pedestrians, motorbike riders and drivers intermingle at one of the main crossroads of Bouaké, Côte d'Ivoire. A. Sanogo, March 2015





# Images and Imageries of Bouaké, Côte d'Ivoire

Aïdas Sanogo

## Introduction

“Why are you coming to Bouaké to work on land issues? Go to Abidjan<sup>1</sup>, there are bigger problems there!”

“No, in my research project, we focus on secondary cities, because we think that there are already a lot of studies on big cities like Abidjan, and not enough on secondary cities.”

“Secondary?! Are you saying that Bouaké is a secondary city? Come on! Bouaké is absolutely not a secondary city; we are the biggest city of the country after Abidjan! If what you say is true, then you should have gone to Man, it is a secondary city, and they have a lot of land issues, why don't you go there?”<sup>2</sup>

This conversation snatch between a Bouaké dweller and me took place in September 2014, a couple of months after the beginning of my first fieldwork. It was not the first time – nor the last – that I got this reaction whenever I would mention my research topic. Most of my interlocutors were puzzled at my description of their city, and would eventually try to convince me to go to a “real” secondary city. Towards the end of my first field stay, a colleague from the University of Basel, who was conducting her research in Kenya within the same research project, came to Bouaké for a workshop. When I took her to the city centre, her first reaction was to point out at how “empty” it was. In a defensive reply (probably due to me almost “going native” after more than six months of data collection), I tried to convince her otherwise, and it was not until I visited her in Kenya a year later, that I understood her initial reaction. Her field site, Eldoret, despite being the fifth largest populated city in Kenya, looked way busier, more crowded, and had more visible infrastructure (mainly high-rise buildings and tarmacked roads) than Bouaké, the second largest populated city in Côte d'Ivoire.

1 Bouaké, Abidjan and Man are respectively the second, the first and the eighth most populated cities in Côte d'Ivoire. For this paper, the fieldnotes and the citations have been translated from French and Ivorian French to English by the author.

2 “Pourquoi tu viens à Bouaké travailler sur le foncier? Va à Abidjan, c'est là-bas que ça chauffe!”

“Non, dans mon projet de recherche on se focalise sur les villes secondaires, parce qu'on estime qu'il y a déjà beaucoup d'études faites sur les grandes villes comme Abidjan, et pas assez sur les villes secondaires.”

“Secondaire?! Tu veux dire que Bouaké est une ville secondaire? Toi aussi! Bouaké n'est pas une ville secondaire! Nous sommes la plus grande ville du pays après Abidjan! Si ce que tu dis est vrai là, donc fallait aller à Man! C'est une ville secondaire et puis ils ont beaucoup de problèmes de terre, pourquoi tu pars pas là-bas?” (Fieldnotes, Bouaké, September 16, 2014)

These examples add to the long list of instances quoted by many authors, to show how difficult it is to designate what exactly a secondary city is (Otiso 2005; Bell and Jayne 2009; Roberts 2014), and most importantly, they point at the effects of urban hierarchies that surfaces whenever one would use the term secondary city. Secondary to whom, compared to what, in which context and why? According to Jennifer Robinson (2011), the micro, meso and macro setting, as well as the temporality dimensions need to be taken into account when not only defining a city, but also its roles and functions. As stated by Saskia Sassen, “we need to enter the diverse worlds of work and social contexts present in urban space, and we need to understand whether or how they are connected to the global functions that are partly structured in these cities” (Sassen 2012, 4). For this paper, I choose to define Bouaké as a secondary city, not based on its demography, but rather in relation to its role in the ‘network of cities’ in the Ivoirian and West African economic, social, political, historical and cultural context. To be complete, such a definition would require a three dimensional approach to understand the city and its articulations at the global, regional and local level (Hilgers 2012).

At the global level, Bouaké’s identity has been strongly linked to the Ivoirian crisis and its attribute as the rebellion headquarters from 2002 to 2011 has been the most predominant one both in the media and academic writings (Fofana 2011; McGovern 2011; Yeboué 2011; Hazen 2013). The role played by Bouaké during the crisis decade also had an impact on the country’s geographical images among its population, as sarcastically expressed by one of my interlocutors:

Since the early 2000s, the Ivoirian geography has changed a lot you know! In school I learned that Bouaké was located in the Centre of Côte d’Ivoire, but in 2002, I relearned that Bouaké was located in Northern Côte d’Ivoire, and that I was from then on a Northerner. I’m telling you, things have changed, even the four cardinal points!<sup>3</sup>

The roles and functions of Bouaké are however not exclusively related to the Ivoirian crisis and its aftermaths. At the local and regional level, the city’s central location has historically given her<sup>4</sup> the status of linking city in the regional trade network between Côte d’Ivoire and its neighbouring countries, more particularly Guinea, Mali and Burkina Faso.

Coming up with a clear definition of a secondary city would be too ambitious and is not what I am aiming for here. The goal of the paper is to contribute to the production of anthropological knowledge on Sub-Saharan African secondary cities, described and experienced through the lenses of their inhabitants. I focus on the imageries that Bouaké dwellers have of their city, and how they compare it to other cities in Côte d’Ivoire and in West Africa. Beyond the simple (in)visible images that one has of a specific matter or event, imageries refer to the means and processes through which an individual or a group of individuals relate not only to each other, but also to oneself (Strecker 1997; Förster 2012a). What I provide here is a deconstruction of urban dwellers’ discourse and imageries of their city. This paper is mainly based on informal discussions that took place during a twelve month fieldwork spread over two years from 2014 to 2016. In the first part I briefly trace the historical urban trajectory of Bouaké, and how it came

3 “Depuis les années 2000, la géographie Ivoirienne a changé wooh! A l’école j’ai appris que Bouaké était situé au Centre de la Côte d’Ivoire. Mais en 2002, j’ai réappris que Bouaké était maintenant au Nord de la Côte d’Ivoire, et que maintenant je suis Nordiste. Je te dis, les choses ont changé dhè, même les quatre points cardinaux!” (Informal discussion with a shop owner, Bouaké, December, 2, 2015)

4 I chose to use a female pronoun because in French the word “city” is female. Plus, Bouaké’s origin is currently commonly associated to the legend of the queen Abla Pokou, in the popular knowledge.

to be the second most populated – and most developed infrastructure-wise – city in Côte d’Ivoire. In the second part I present instances in which Bouaké dwellers compare their city to five cities, namely Korhogo, Abidjan, Yamoussoukro, Accra and Kumasi. Korhogo is the largest city in Northern Côte d’Ivoire, and the fourth most populated Ivoirian city.<sup>5</sup> Abidjan, the Ivoirian economic capital, is also the most populated city of Côte d’Ivoire, with roughly 4,5 million inhabitants. The third city to which my interlocutors compared their city to is Yamoussoukro, the political capital of the country, which is also the fifth most populated city in Côte d’Ivoire, with 300 000 inhabitants. Accra is the capital of Ghana, and also its second most populated city. Located in the Centre of Ghana, Kumasi is the capital of the Ashanti region, and the most populated city of the country.<sup>6</sup> I also illustrate in the second part of the paper how breaking down these comparisons can provide a genuine insight into the urban dwellers’ images of themselves on the one hand, and their imageries of the national development agenda, on the other hand.

## Bouaké, Historical “Linking Town”<sup>7</sup>

One of the main oral traditions traces back the origin of Bouaké’s first settlements to the population movement of Akan people from current Ghana to current Côte d’Ivoire in the 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>8</sup>, with the queen Abla Pokou’s legend (Atta 1978). According to this legend, a group of Akan people fled from the Ashanti region in current Ghana, to escape a royal succession conflict (see Figure 1, below). The group led by Abla Pokou is said to have reached the Comoe river and could not cross it because of the current’s strength. According to the legend, the queen then sacrificed her son to calm down the river’s gods, and allow her group to cross the river. As soon as they crossed the Comoe, the current resumed its scary flow, making it impossible for the attackers to follow Abla Pokou and her group, who carried on peacefully their escape till the current central Côte d’Ivoire, which would be their final destination. After crossing the river, it is said that while the fugitives’ group was celebrating its escape, Abla Pokou mourned the death of her son, and kept on whispering “Ba Ou Li”, which literally translated from Baoulé language, means “the child is dead”, or also “having children makes you vulnerable and go through hardship” (Atta 1978). The term “Ba Ou Li” from then on was said to be used by the fugitives’ group to create their new identity, calling themselves “Ba-Ou-Li”, which would later on, with the French colonisation, be westernised and transformed into “Baoulé”. It is important to mention that the Baoulé people represented a monolithic group because they were all running away from a contested king

5 All the figures and ranks in this paper are drawn from the latest 2014 Ivorian national census.

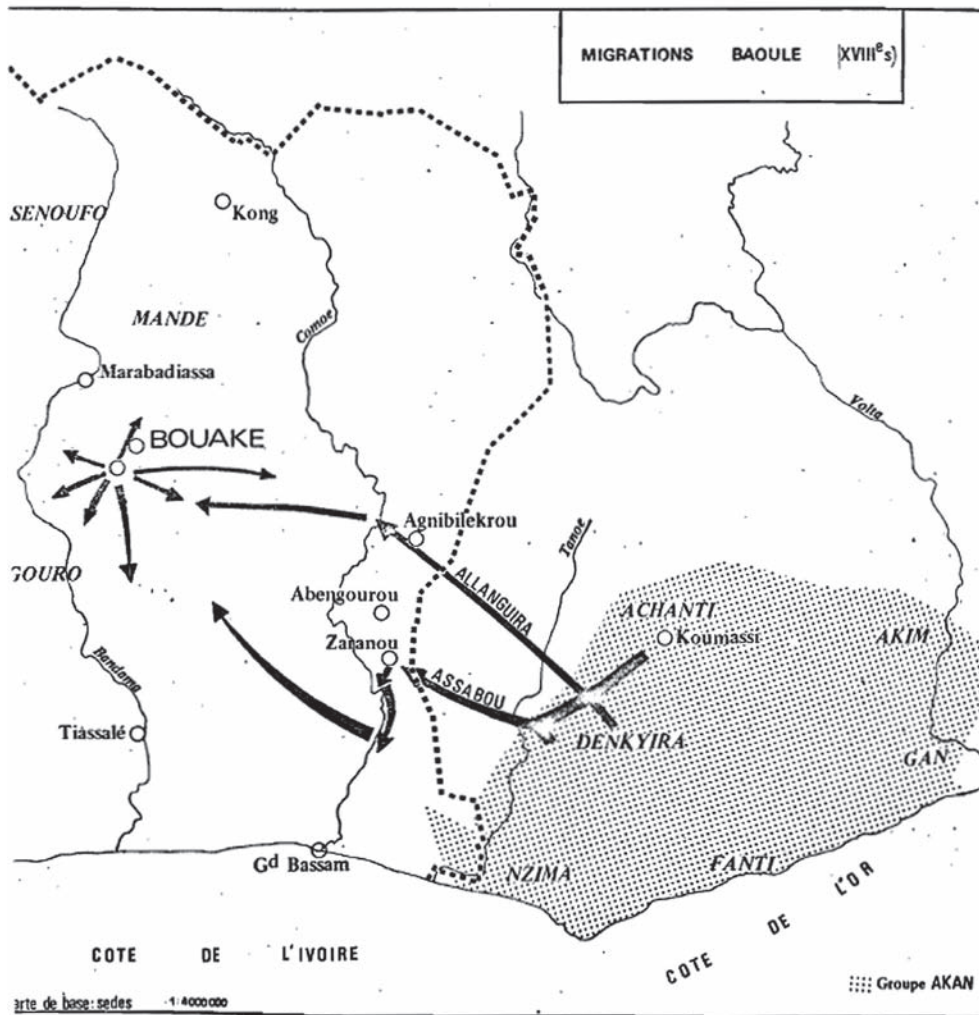
6 For exact figures see <http://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/> [last accessed 25.5.2017]

7 The linking characteristic stressed here refers both to the role played by the city in the national and regional trade trajectory, as well as the migration trajectories (generally from Northern Côte d’Ivoire and, or neighboring countries, to the Southern or Western parts of Côte d’Ivoire)

8 It is important to note that this version of the Baoulé people movement is just one of several other versions. The legend of the queen Abla Pokou has however been the most disseminated version, to the point that it is now considered as the official version. For more about the caution to observe when using multiple historic sources in general, and the socio-economic history of Baoulé people in particular, see Weiskel (1976)

in the Ashanti region, but they were also diverse in the sense that they belonged to two different sub groups in the big Akan group: the Allanguira and the Assabou (Allou 2003). These two sub groups were also divided in several lineages and upon their arrival in current Côte d’Ivoire, they settled all over the central region of the Ivorian territory, between the savannah (up North), and the forest (down South). The lineage of the most powerful Baoulé subgroup, the *Faafoue*<sup>9</sup>, would have founded the village Gbekekro, that would be occupied by the French colonisers, who wanted to take over the political and economic control of the region at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (see Figure 2, below). After driving out Gbekekro inhabitants out of their village, the colonisers set up a military camp on the same site, and kept the name Gbekekro, or rather westernised the name Gbekekro into “Bouaké”, creating at the same time the very core of what would

Figure 1: Baoulé migrations, 18th Century.  
Source: Atta (1978, 40)



9 Again, this is a contested version somehow, since I have been told by a Bouaké dweller that the *Faafoue* were not the most powerful subgroup, but rather the *Fari*. It is also worth mentioning that history and tradition are continuously socially constructed and hence contestable. For more about the creation and evolution of tradition, see Hobsbawm and Ranger (2015)

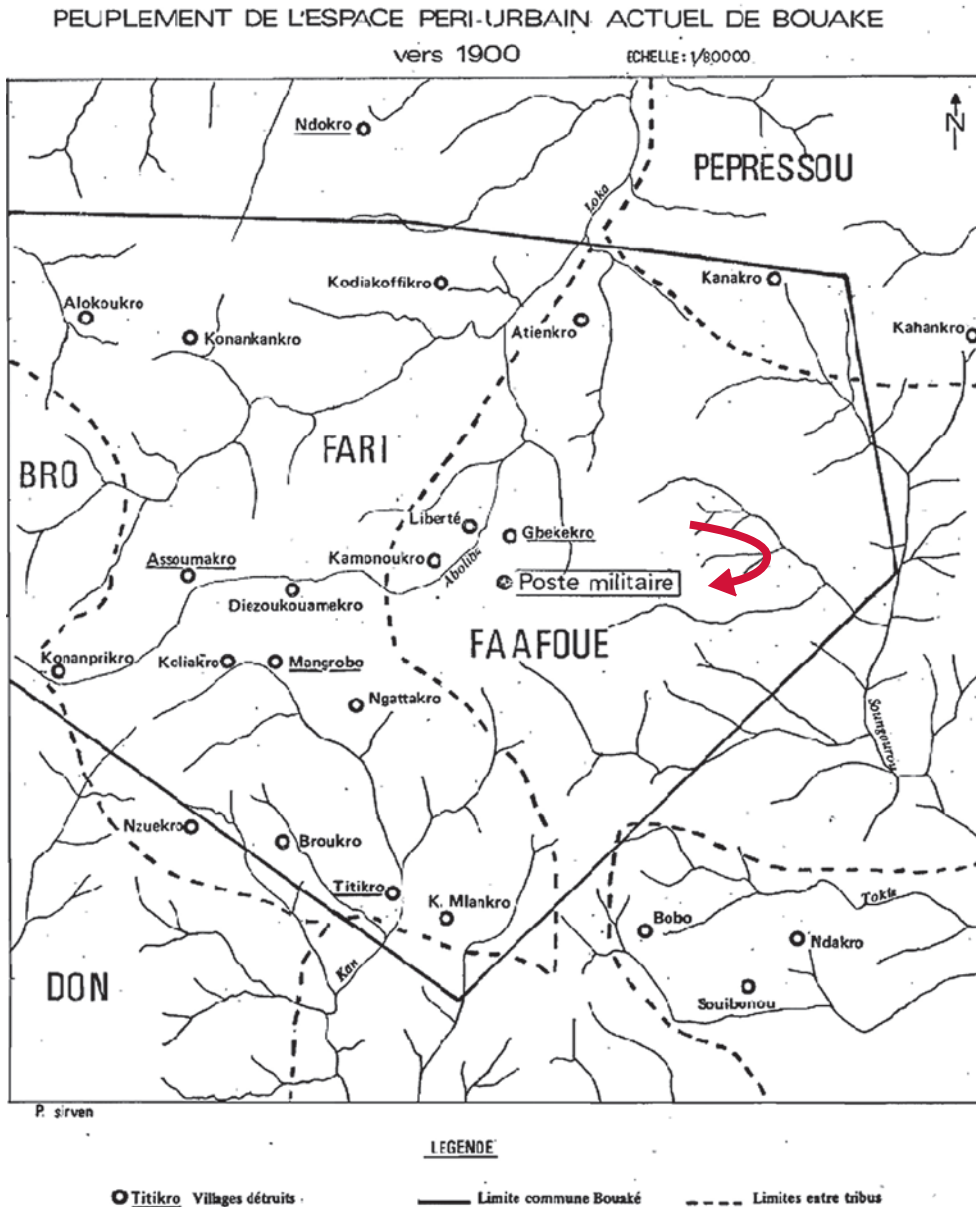


Figure 2: Settlement of the peri-urban space of current Bouaké, around 1900.  
Source: Atta (1978, 44)

turn out to be the second most populated city of Côte d'Ivoire.

Over the course of time, Bouaké's expansion gradually moved from the railway station (that reached the city in 1912) to the main market in the post-independence period in the 1960s (Atta 1978). Goods from the savannah region were exchanged against goods from the forest region: agricultural products, salt, gold, but also slaves. The strategic location of the city, between the savannah and the forest, had always made it a great convergent spot, long before the colonial era. This situation however considerably increased with the creation and development of the roads network, as well as the railway network, enhancing a continuous and growing populations' mobility between the savannah and the forest regions. Numerous groups of people coming from the savannah

10 AOF stands for Afrique Occidentale Française.

region of the then French West Africa (AOF<sup>10</sup>) went to Bouaké for various reasons over time: forced labor, paid labor, trade. In spite of the flow of new comers, Bouaké was still considered as a *ville relais*, a linking town, in the migration trajectory: migrants would go to Bouaké, stay there for some time (long or short stays depending on the status, qualifications and aspirations of each migrant) and then go to Abidjan or in the fertile plantations located in the Western part of Côte d'Ivoire. Bouaké was seldom a final destination choice for migrants, who were more attracted by the fruitful opportunities offered by the “big city” Abidjan (Atta 1978). This “second best” feature has since then been a characteristic of Bouaké throughout the Ivorian national urban history: second most populated city after Abidjan, second most developed city after Abidjan, and so on. However, very few Bouaké dwellers I interacted with referred to their city as the “second best” after Abidjan.

The normative and hierarchical implication associated with “second” could most probably explain why few Bouaké dwellers do not see or label their city as “secondary”. This term is used as “less than” in an emic way, hence the defensive reaction of most of my interlocutors, who systematically rejected the “secondary” characteristic to designate their city. The expressions used to describe Bouaké would either be “positive” ones, or at least “non-inferior” ones. For instance, “best city climate-wise”, “ECO-WAS<sup>11</sup> city” and “major economic centre” often came back during the discussions.

## Life Stories and Imageries

This section presents four kinds of comparisons established by my interlocutors to explain or justify Bouaké's current status of “second after Abidjan”. While three of them develop these comparisons as a form of auto-biography, the fourth one draws on a metaphor to express his resentment about his country's urban governance policy in general. The information gathered about the imageries of Bouaké comes from a variety of dwellers with diverse backgrounds. For this paper, I have focused on the stories of four urban dwellers: a young male moto taxi driver, a middle aged officer from the Construction Ministry, a middle aged businesswoman and a middle aged officer from the Town Hall. I have had several interactions with each of them in the course of my field stays. The roles and functions of Bouaké in the national and regional economy growth often came back during our informal discussions. They would also engage in a kind of “comparison game” that portrays their imageries of the social and political situation of their country. The four of them compared Bouaké respectively to Korhogo, Abidjan, and Yamoussoukro, emphasising past, current, future advantages and disadvantages of living in their city.

### Healthy Siblings' Contest

During my first months in Bouaké, I resisted the urge to acquire a motorbike or a bike to move around in the city: My host family<sup>12</sup> strongly advised me not to get a motorbike because I was living alone, and a motorbike would attract thieves who would consider me as a vulnerable target. Getting a bike was also off the table, because I would be the only woman riding a bike in the whole city, and if I wanted to “fit in” as quickly as possible, I had to adapt and live like most Bouaké dwellers, by using public transport. I

11 ECOWAS stands for Economic Community of West African States.

12 I lived with a family for three weeks, before moving to my own accommodation.

therefore resigned myself to use taxis, and luckily for me, there was a moto taxi station close to my accommodation. As a *Ouagalaise*<sup>13</sup> born and raised, riding a motorbike was not new to me, but I was more used to being the rider, rather than sitting behind the rider. At first, I was concerned about the moto taxi drivers' riding skills, or lack thereof. Whenever they would try to start a conversation with me during the ride, I would answer with mono syllabuses. Some of the drivers got tired of trying to talk to me during our rides, but others insisted, and ended up being my designated drivers. Kofi<sup>14</sup> was one of them. He would talk tirelessly about everything and anything during our rides. When we reached our destinations while in the middle of a conversation, he would stay a few minutes, taking the time to end the topic he started, before starting off his motorbike and leave. Kofi's imageries of Bouaké came up often during our discussions. He was more particularly concerned by the rapid development of Korhogo (the most populated city in Northern Côte d'Ivoire) during the rebellion period. A sentence that he frequently repeated was:

Nowadays, Korhogo is better than Bouaké, it's not normal!<sup>15</sup>

Kofi grew up in Bouaké; he had lived in Ghana for some time during the crisis decade, and had also visited one of his friends in Korhogo in early 2014, a few months before I started my first fieldwork in July 2014. A young man in his late 30s, Kofi claimed that very few cities in West Africa could compare to Bouaké: He believed that his native city had one of the best climate in the sub region, not too humid or too dry; and its geographical location also gave it an advantage for trade within Côte d'Ivoire and the West African region in general. He blamed the rebellion period for the deterioration of his beloved city, and considered it unfair that Korhogo – which had much less development potential in terms of soil fertility, according to him – could not only reach Bouaké's level, but go beyond it, thanks to the influence of its former rebel chief.<sup>16</sup> When asked about why Korhogo could not or should not out-perform Bouaké in terms of infrastructures, Kofi used an allegory to express his feelings:

In a family, the senior brother is the leader, and sets the example for the junior brother. Even if afterwards the junior brother succeeds in life, the senior brother remains the one who takes care of the family businesses, for example for family functions. If upon arrival at the senior brother's house, everything is deteriorated, it's a pity!<sup>17</sup>

Kofi thus compared Bouaké and Korhogo to siblings, who should follow the family's logic, or at least, try as much as possible not to deviate from it. In his under-

13 *Ouagalaise* refers to "female inhabitant from Ouagadougou," the capital of Burkina Faso. Ouagadougou is also known as the capital of "two wheels" in West Africa, due to the high number of bikes and motorbikes in the city.

14 For anonymity purposes, I have changed all the interlocutors' names in the entire text.

15 "Aujourd'hui, aujourd'hui là, Korhogo est mieux que Bouaké, c'est pas normal!" (Informal exchange with Kofi, Bouaké, November, 4, 2014)

16 For more information about the Ivorian crisis, the rebellion and its impact on Korhogo, see Förster (2010 & 2012b)

17 "Dans une famille, c'est le grand frère qui montre la route au petit frère. Même si après le petit frère grandit et devient grand quelqu'un, c'est toujours chez le grand frère qu'on va aller pour les grandes fêtes, ou bien pour demander la main des filles de la famille. Si on arrive chez le grand frère, et que sa cour est sale, ses murs sont gâtés, grand frère lui-même il se cherche, tu vois que c'est pas bon, ça fait pitié!" (Informal exchange with Kofi, Bouaké, November, 4, 2014)

standing, Bouaké should regain its “senior brother” attributes, by refurbishing its entire infrastructure and achieve its former glory. The infrastructures ranged from public facilities such as roads, to the reconstruction of destroyed public and private buildings, the reopening of factories and other similar companies that used to be the main employment providers. This Bouaké dweller experienced being out performed by Korhogo as a shame and a failure. Kofi considered it unacceptable that the image projected by Bouaké when compared to Korhogo, was not in favour of his native city. He thought that the situation should be changed as soon as possible, to avoid any further disgrace in the eyes of “Bouaké’s sons and daughters”.<sup>18</sup>

Mr. Kouakou, a Construction Ministry officer, without comparing Bouaké to Korhogo, also evoked Kofi’s wish to improve the visible features of Bouaké. I had met Mr. Kouakou in the course of interviews regarding urban land governance in Bouaké. The issue of the city’s image came up a couple of times during our interviews. While talking about the city’s expansion and the implementation of an urban planning scheme, Mr. Kouakou associated the “uncontrolled” expansion of the city to weed that needs to be removed and replaced by “nicely built buildings”, especially at its periphery:

Even if our city is not nice, at least we should pretend and flatter the newcomers!<sup>19</sup>

Mr. Kouakou then went on to explain how important appearance was, insisting on the fact that first impressions are always important in any relationship, and the same applies to a city like Bouaké, trying to attract as many investors as possible, to recover from the Ivorian crisis decade. To him, the importance of the image projected by the city was a decisive factor in drawing economic partners, at any cost, even if that meant luring the potential investor into the mirage of a modern and industrialised city, during the first minutes he or she enters the city.

The economic potential of Bouaké was also a recurrent topic during my interviews with Ms. Coulibaly, a businesswoman who spends her time between her two residences in Abidjan and Bouaké. The very first time I interviewed Ms. Coulibaly, she had just come back from Abidjan, and was complaining about how noisy and stressful the economic capital was. When asked why she did not delegate a bigger part of her business to an assistant and stay in Bouaké for good, she answered that she had not yet found someone who would take a good care of her trade business. After a few minutes into the interview, we were interrupted by one of her collaborators, who also arrived from Abidjan, and had to go back the very same day, as soon as his mission in Bouaké was accomplished. The man asserted that Abidjan needed to stop being the country’s main business centre. According to him, an improved political will was urgently needed to redirect some of the private sector’s main branches to Bouaké, wishing for an economic tandem similar to Accra and Kumasi in Ghana. He strongly believed that a redistribution of regulatory power all over the country would be of great help to the Ivoirian business world, by shortening the waiting time between goods production and their delivery for instance. To my surprise, Ms. Coulibaly simply nodded without adding a word. When her collaborator left, she admitted that Bouaké would soon or later absorb some of Abidjan’s economic and political power, but she would rather it be later:

18 In French, “les filles et les fils de Bouaké”. The expression “sons and daughters of ...” commonly used in Côte d’Ivoire and in this context, by Kofi, generally refers to the natives of a given locality.

19 “Même si notre ville n’est pas jolie, au moins il faut flatter un peu le touriste qui arrive!” (Interview Mr. Kouakou, Bouaké, October, 22, 2014)



Here I can charge my batteries, it's quiet, I can rest. Let's keep the stress in Abidjan!<sup>20</sup>

Despite her wish to see her native city grow stronger, and contribute more to the national economy, Ms. Coulibaly also wanted Bouaké to remain the same, for her



Minibuses such as the ones displayed on this picture transport thousands of people on a daily basis from and to Bouaké, connecting the city to a myriad of cities in and outside Côte d'Ivoire.  
A. Sanogo, March 2015

own relaxation needs. To her, Bouaké was the ideal place to rest. It had a much more affordable living standard when compared to Abidjan, but still had most of the urban characteristics she longed for like electricity, and running water, whenever she wanted to escape from the “big city” for a while.

Regardless of the common wish that these three urban dwellers had to see their city play a bigger role in the national economic agenda, they all had singular approaches as to the how and why the city should or could change. The comparisons between Bouaké, Korhogo and Abidjan are somehow similar to brotherly relationships, where each sibling has his distinct characteristic, but a more or less invisible contest pushes them to either try to do better than each other, or at the very least, not to be left too far behind.

20 “Quand je viens ici, je recharge mes batteries, c'est calme et ça me permet de me reposer. Le stress-là n'a qu'à rester à Abidjan, c'est bon comme ça!” (Interview Ms. Coulibaly, Bouaké, November, 14, 2015)

This diversity of imageries of the city can also be explained by the strong link between self-identity and one's living environment. To Ms. Coulibaly, Bouaké represents a breath of fresh air, which helps her to take a break from her hectic schedule. Mr. Kouakou felt overwhelmed by the enormous urban planning work that needed to be done with limited means. His strategy was to "do his part", lure his successor in believing that "it is actually possible to get something done" and retire in a couple of years. As for Kofi, his wish for a stronger Bouaké was directly linked to his own experience, and shaped his reality as well. I discovered later that one of his best friends had managed to climb up the social ladder and build a house in Korhogo, thanks to his active involvement in the rebellion from 2002 to 2010. Kofi's friend was not younger than him, but Kofi used to "help him out" financially from time to time. The roles are now reversed, and whilst admiring his friend's success, Kofi would like to reclaim his former social elder status.

### "Not Everything Is Said ..."

The fourth interlocutor, Mr. Kouamé, is an officer from the Town Hall, and a key contact person for my PhD thesis topic, thanks to his experience (he is one of the oldest employees at the Town Hall) and his great knowledge of land issues in the municipality. Despite my efforts, I could hardly meet him during my first two field stays in Bouaké in 2014 and 2015, due to his busy schedule, and the weakness of my network within the Town Hall. Indeed, getting an appointment with someone depended most of the time on who introduced me to that person; Mr. Kouamé was not an isolated case. After getting rejected (be it diplomatically or not) a few times on the phone, I relied a lot more on networking and iteration to get some doors opened. It was not until my third field stay that a colleague of the University of Bouaké<sup>21</sup> gave me some tips on how to "get a hold" on Mr. Kouamé, after I complained about how "slippery" he was. I had to rely on my colleague to get Mr. Kouamé to open up to me, and even so, the presence of my colleague was not enough for me to dive right into the issues I wanted to discuss. Instead, during our first meeting, I had to let Mr. Kouamé warm up to me a bit, observe his interaction with my colleague, nod from time to time, intervene only when my opinion was asked. After this first meeting in his office, I had the opportunity to interact with Mr. Kouamé in different other settings, but always in the company of my colleague, whose presence I still very much needed to keep the door from closing once he had opened it for me: In formal settings such as a municipal meeting or an interview, and during informal ones such as lunch in a restaurant, or a couple of rides in his car. We had already discussed the role and functions of Bouaké in the national urban planning policy a couple of times in formal settings. However, it was during an informal discussion over lunch that Mr. Kouamé shared a metaphor to hint at his feelings about the role of Bouaké on the national and regional political stage. Together with two colleagues of the University of Bouaké and Mr. Kouamé, I was having lunch in one of the city's numerous restaurants, after a meeting at the municipality. Located right behind the Town Hall, the restaurant offered an unobstructed view of an unfinished building positioned right in the middle of the Town Hall compound. I had heard various versions explaining why this building had remained unfinished for the last fifty years. Taking advantage of Mr. Kouamé's presence and counting on his experience, I asked him about the story of the ruin. He looked at me, smiled and answered with a question:

What were you told about that?<sup>22</sup>

21 In 2012, the University of Bouaké was renamed "Université Alassane Ouattara" after the current Ivorian president, Alassane Dramane Ouattara.

22 "Qu'est-ce qu'on t'a dit à ce sujet ?" (Informal discussion, Mr. Kouamé, Bouaké, December, 6, 2016)



Rear view of the unfinished building in the Town Hall.  
*A. Sanogo, December 2016*

I replied that I did not know much apart from the rumours about evil spirits inhabiting the building, forbidding its completion. Without confirming or declining this version, Mr. Kouamé shook his head slightly, silently took a look at the building for what felt like a full minute to me, and added:

Not everything is said...<sup>23</sup>

I thought about his cryptic answer for a while, hoping that he would elaborate more, but not daring to enunciate my wish. Mr. Kouamé then moved to another topic for a few minutes. He did not have time to eat with us because he had to attend another meeting. He had ordered his meal and chatted along while waiting. As soon as the waiter brought the four lunches to our table, Mr. Kouamé got ready to leave after telling the waiter to leave the take away lunch in his car parked nearby. Before he could say good-bye, I gathered the courage to ask him a second time about the reason why the building was not completed. This time he did not answer directly, but used a metaphor:

23 "C'est pas tout on dit ..." (Informal discussion, Mr. Kouamé, Bouaké, December, 6, 2016)

Do you know the song that says that Man will never be beautiful? You don't know it? And yet this song made a lot of noise back then. The answer to your question is in this song! You see how Bouaké is? Everything that should have been in Bouaké was diverted to Yamoussoukro.<sup>24</sup>

When Mr. Kouamé left, I asked my colleagues about the infamous song unknown to me, and what was the link between the song, the unfinished building, and the city of Bouaké. I was then told that the song was released in the early 2000s, by famous Ivoirian Zouglou<sup>25</sup> singers, Yode and Siro.<sup>26</sup> The song referred to the relationship between the growth of a region, and the Ivoirian president's cultural group. In other words, a town, city or region can only prosper if the president is from that part of the country. The song cites a list of a few Ivoirian secondary cities and towns that would forever remain "under developed", unless they were homes of the president who would then make it his priority number one to "beautify" those towns or cities. By referring to this specific song, Mr. Kouamé went further than the singers in his analysis: To him, the unfinished building in the Town Hall was a vivid example of the negligence of which Bouaké was victim, in favor of Yamoussoukro, that was the hometown to Félix Houphouët Boigny, the first president of Côte d'Ivoire after the country's independence in 1960. Going beyond the cultural group belonging factor, he rationalised this discrimination by the fact that even if two out of the five successive Ivoirian presidents were from the Baoulé cultural group, none of them was specifically from Bouaké, hence the delay experienced by the city.

The comparison between Bouaké and Yamoussoukro expressed by Mr. Kouamé reflects an injustice that is different from the "healthy siblings' contest" that appeared in Kofi's comparison of Bouaké and Korhogo. Beyond the frustration contained in "Not everything is said ..." lies an imagery of urban governance in Côte d'Ivoire. Evidently, the growth of a city strongly depends on partial political will, rather than a clear urban planning agenda. A few days later, my colleague and I were dropped off by Mr. Kouamé in town, after a work session in his office. There was a Zouglou song playing at the radio during the ride, and I seized the opportunity to tell Mr. Kouamé that I now had a better idea of what he had meant previously when quoting Yode et Siro. After telling him that I found it sad and unfair that a city's economic and socio-political development depended so much on who the president was, I asked him what should or could be done to alter this. Without hesitating, he replied very confidently:

That's easy; we should also do our best to have a president and more senior officers!<sup>27</sup>

Although he was dissatisfied with this situation, Mr. Kouamé's attitude was not to demand more equal treatment from authorities, independently from their place of

24 "Tu connais la chanson qui dit que Man ne sera jamais jolie là? Tu ne connais pas ? Et pourtant cette chanson a fait beaucoup de vagues en son temps! La réponse à ta question est dans cette chanson-là! Tu vois comment Bouaké est? Tout ce qui devait être à Bouaké là a été détourné pour amener ça à Yamoussoukro." (Informal discussion, Mr. Kouamé, Bouaké, December, 6, 2016)

25 Zouglou is an Ivoirian musical genre, born in the 1980s and that became popular in the 1990s. Zouglou songs often describe societal problems in a humoristic and sarcastic way.

26 Song title: "Tu sais qui je suis?" by Yode and Siro in the album "Victoire", released in 2000.

27 "C'est simple, il faut que nous aussi on grouille avoir un président et plus de haut cadres!" (Informal discussion, Mr. Kouamé, Bouaké, December, 14, 2016)

origin. On the contrary, his attitude was rather one of “active fatalism” towards the prevailing clientelism (Blundo and Olivier De Sardan, 2001; Olivier De Sardan, 2009). Fatalism because according to him, there was no way to change the ongoing partial development policies of cities. This method of ruling had been going on for decades, and did not seem to end anytime soon. Nonetheless, the fatalism, the disappointment in the system was not synonymous to being passive either. His strategy was to play by the order’s rules, and manage to “get by” despite all. To him, the most effective means to ensure that Bouaké would not be left behind was to constantly remind the senior and international civil servants coming from Bouaké that they had a moral obligation to contribute to the prosperity of their hometown, and eventually hope for a president born and raised in Bouaké in the more or less close future. The contribution to the development of the city could take several forms: financial, political and economic. This imagery then leads to a personification of the power in place, be it executive, legislative or judiciary. The key idea being that nothing should be expected from power as an institution, but rather seek assistance from one’s “own people” involved in the various branches of the power.

By this roadside in Bouaké, urban dwellers can make various mobile money transactions and buy bottled fuel.  
*A. Sanogo, March 2015*



## Conclusion

In this paper I aimed to examine the imageries that different Bouaké dwellers have of their city and urban governance. The four interlocutors’ assertions are not in any case an illustration of the whole of Bouaké’s population imageries of their city. The goal was rather to understand and experience a secondary city from the perspectives of urban dwellers with diverse backgrounds and sometimes opposite views on the role and function of their city.

Beyond the aspirations, the successful and failed operations implemented, the future perspectives elaborated or being elaborated about Bouaké at the institutional level, very few attention is given to the beliefs, dreams and disillusiones of the very ones who

shape the city on a daily basis: Bouaké dwellers. Kofi, Mr. Kouakou, Ms. Coulibaly and Mr. Kouamé all have distinct thoughts about their city. Whether analysed in terms of their own projections onto the city or imageries of urban governance and different forms of power (executive, legislative and judiciary), the four urban dwellers' ideas about their city do not really relate to a strict hierarchical logic. They situate their hometown in a 'network of cities' within which each city plays a specific role, and where each city's functions are inter-dependent. For instance, the connecting function of Bouaké in the cola nuts trade network of Ivorian and West African cities would not have been valuable without the provider function of a city like Anyama, located in Southern Côte d'Ivoire, or the receiver function of a city like Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso.

Furthermore, the comparisons established between Bouaké, Korhogo, Abidjan, Yamoussoukro and other West African cities, were more about fulfillment and improving one's life conditions, than claiming an ideal position in the national urban star blocks. Reaching this gratification point meant taking different actions for all of them; while Mr. Kouamé advocated for the active involvement of the sons and daughters of Bouaké within the highest levels of power, Ms. Coulibaly was willing to commute regularly between Abidjan and Bouaké, in order to preserve her safe haven. Going through the analysis of a secondary city through the global, national and local level as suggested by Hilgers (2012) requires an interdisciplinary approach that would shed light on the continuous social transformations taking place not only in metropolises, but also in smaller urban centres. I would add that for a thorough analysis of secondary cities at the local level, urban dwellers' imageries of urban governance need to be given as much attention as the abundant socio-economic statistics issued by governments and international organisations.

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*(Cover, modified by  
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# “Tu sais qui je suis?”

by Yode et Siro

Album “Victoire”, released in 2000\*

Lyrics transcribed and translated by Aïdas Sanogo, with the gracious help of Jean-Michel Attié

Tu sais qui je suis?  
Tu sais qui je suis?  
Si l'Ivoirien, te dit “tu sais qui je suis?,  
il veut te dire qu'il est Ivoirien que toi!  
Tu sais qui je suis?  
Nouveau millénaire arrive,  
où chaque pays prépare son bilan,  
c'est là l'Ivoirien a la peur au ventre,  
Affaire de Ivoirité  
Parce qu'il ne sait pas,  
S'il sera toujours Ivoirien  
Tu sais qui je suis?  
Je connaissais un monsieur,  
Il était Ivoirien,  
Vers la fin il est devenu Ghanéen  
Il y avait un autre aussi,  
Il était Ivoirien,  
Et puis après il est devenu Mossi  
Même le chef du village,  
Les gens ont commencé à dire qu'il  
n'est pas Ivoirien aussi  
Tu sais qui je suis?  
A l'école primaire,  
L'histoire de la reine Pokou,  
Les gens nous ont dit que les Akan  
viennent du Ghana  
C'est pour éviter la guerre  
Que les Krou sont descendus du Libéria  
C'est pour aussi fuir la guerre  
Que ceux d'en haut sont descendus  
un peu en bas  
Et puis ensemble,  
On a formé un joli pays  
Où il n'y a pas palabre  
Évitons l'injustice entre nous  
Parce que beaucoup d'injustice  
Peut créer un petit désordre  
Pourtant c'est les petits désordres  
Qui créent souvent les grands gbangban  
Évitons l'injustice entre nous  
Parce que beaucoup d'injustice  
Peut créer petit désordre  
Pourtant c'est les petits désordres  
qui créent les grands gbangban  
Tu sais qui je suis?  
Tu sais qui je suis?

Tu sais qui je suis?  
Si deux personnes se disputent à cause  
d'un billet de 1 000 francs, c'est qu'il y a un  
qui veut 600!  
Yié you bli lao! You bli lalé, zito you bli lao!  
Zito gngana mila!  
Yié you bli lalé! You bli lao, zito you bli lao!  
Zito gngana mila!  
**Korhogo** sera jamais jolie, parce que Sénoufo  
n'est pas président!  
Zito gngana mila!  
**Dabou** sera jamais jolie, parce que Adjoukrou  
n'est pas président!  
Zito gngana mila!  
**Katiola** sera jamais jolie, parce que Tagbana  
n'est pas président!  
Zito gngana mila!  
**Daloa** sera jamais jolie, parce que Bété  
n'est pas président!  
Zito gngana mila!  
**Man** sera jamais jolie, parce que  
c'est pas Guéré qui est président!  
Zito gngana mila!  
**Aboisso** sera jamais jolie, parce que  
c'est pas Agni qui est président!  
Zito gngana mila!  
**Bassam** sera jamais jolie, parce que Appolo  
n'est pas président!  
Zito gngana mila!  
**Guézon** sera jamais jolie, parce que Depahoua  
n'est pas président!  
Zito gngana mila!  
**Divo** sera jamais jolie, parce que Dida  
n'est pas président!  
Zito gngana mila!  
**Adzopé** sera jamais jolie, parce que  
c'est pas Attié qui est président!  
Zito gngana mila!  
**Agboville** sera jamais jolie, parce  
c'est pas Abbey qui est président!  
Zito gngana mila!  
Yié you bli lao! You bli lalé, zité you bli lao!

\*The name of the cities and towns cited by the singers have been highlighted in bold

# “Do you know who I am?”

by Yode et Siro

Album “Victoire”, released in 2000\*  
English translation

Lyrics transcribed and translated by Aïdas Sanogo, with the gracious help of Jean-Michel Attié

Do you know who I am?  
Do you know who I am?  
If the Ivoirian, tells you “do you know who I am?”  
he wants to tell you that he is more Ivoirian than  
you!  
Do you know who I am?  
New millennium is coming, where every country  
is getting ready for its assessment, that’s when  
the Ivoirian is filled with fear  
Ivoirity issue  
Because he does not know  
If he will still be Ivoirian  
Do you know who I am?  
I knew a sir,  
He was Ivoirian,  
Towards the end he became Ghanaian  
There was another one too,  
He was Ivoirian,  
And then he became Mossi  
Even the village chief,  
People started saying that he is not Ivoirian too  
Do you know who I am?  
In primary school,  
The story of the queen Pokou  
People told us that the Akan come from Ghana  
It is to avoid the war  
That the Krou came down from Liberia  
It is also to escape war  
That those from up there came down here a bit  
And together  
We formed a beautiful country  
Where there is no palaver  
Let’s avoid injustice among us  
Because too much injustice  
Can lead to a little disorder  
And yet little disorders  
Often create big gbangban\*  
Let’s avoid injustice among us  
Because too much injustice  
Can lead to a little disorder  
And yet little disorders often create big gbangban  
Do you know who I am?  
Do you know who I am?  
Do you know who I am?  
If two people quarrel over a 1 000 francs bank note,  
it means that one of them wants 600!

Yié you bli lao ! You bli lalé, zito you bli lao!  
Zito gnanga mila!  
Yié you bli lalé! You bli lao, zito you bli lao!  
Zito gnanga mila!  
**Korhogo** will never be beautiful, because Senoufo  
is not president!  
Zito gnanga mila!  
**Dabou** will never be beautiful, because Adjoukrou  
is not president!  
Zito gnanga mila!  
**Katiola** will never be beautiful, because Tabgana  
is not president!  
Zito gnanga mila!  
**Daloa** will never be beautiful, because Bété  
is not president!  
Zito gnanga mila!  
**Man** will never be beautiful, because it  
is not Guéré who is president!  
Zito gnanga mila!  
**Aboisso** will never be beautiful, because it  
is not Agni who is president!  
Zito gnanga mila!  
**Bassam** will never be beautiful, because Appolo  
is not president!  
Zito gnanga mila!  
**Guézon** will never be beautiful, because Depahoua  
is not president  
Zito gnanga mila!  
**Divo** will never be beautiful, because Dida  
is not president!  
Zito gnanga mila!  
**Adzopé** will never be beautiful, because it  
is not Attié who is president!  
Zito gnanga mila!  
**Agboville** will never be beautiful, because it  
is not Abbey who is president!  
Zito gnanga mila!  
Yié you bli lao ! You bli lalé, zité you bli lao!

\*Gnangan is a Nouchi term, and means “trouble”, “fight”

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