

## **Mirroring the African Self and Mobility in Development Projects**

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### **Abstract**

*The aim of this paper is to explore and argue around the symbolist of the infrastructure in the modeling of an African recognition in global development and sustainability narratives (the African Self), in the context of a broader mobility discourse. The necessity of such an analysis consists in the need for reconfirmation of development projects as narratives of change, but also in the need to decide on which side of the colonial axis the African infrastructure development, the improvement of mobility in Africa and the intrinsic freedoms to “do things in their own ways” are. Moreover, the analysis would deepen and explore new philosophical-political perspectives on development, linked to the right to mobility in Africa or in relation to Africa. Methodologically, the analysis starts with a brief critical analysis of all projects, under lens of post-structuralism, followed by a comparative analysis using a holistic reference on the concepts as development, mobility, space, road, journey.*

**Keywords: development, African Self, mobility, space, road**

Since 2015, three relevant road infrastructure projects were selected and funded by the African Development Bank Group: the Ketta Djoum road for the connection of Brazzaville to Yaoundé, the HKB bridge in Abidjan (Côte D’Ivoire<sup>1</sup>) and the Dakar-Diamniadio highway. Starting from the

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<sup>1</sup> The suggestion here is to use the French name of the country, sustained by teachings of Prof. Dr. Annamaria Gentili, Prof. EMERITUS University of Bologna.

philosophical, political and epistemological meanings and endings of such projects, the present is a comparative and critical transdisciplinary analysis of the reasons and modalities in which the African Self and specific African mobility are mirrored in this type of development project.

The aim of this paper is to explore and argue around the symbolist of the infrastructure in the modeling of an African recognition in global development and sustainability narratives (the African Self), in the context of a broader mobility discourse. The necessity of such an analysis consists in the need for reconfirmation of development projects as narratives of change, but also in the need to decide on which side of the colonial axis the African infrastructure development, the improvement of mobility in Africa and the intrinsic freedoms to “do things in their own ways” are. Moreover, the analysis would deepen and explore new philosophical-political perspectives on development, linked to the right to mobility in Africa or in relation to Africa. Methodologically, the analysis starts with a brief critical analysis of all projects, under lens of post-structuralism, followed by a comparative analysis using a holistic reference on the concepts as development, mobility, space, road, journey.

Defining the position of the African Self, mirrored in development projects, mobility and the intrinsic freedom to do things, will be the third phase, after which, the expectations are to be able to define whether there is an authentic African self in this type of development project capable of assuring the success of the project and the sustainability of development it promises. In the meantime, if the freedom to mobility perceived by the African individual as it is valued in African narratives might influence, even boost achievements and the long-lasting utility to these projects or other similar ones.

## **Introduction**

Transportation, as a derived demand of the human (Rodrigue, Comtois & Slack, 2006, p. 2) and as subject to a geography of the transportation, included in the system of economy, sustains, in any perspective, the fundamental role of the mobility concept to the social and economic activities. Thus, from a

sociological, philosophical, political and cultural perspective, the conceptual meanings of transportation, the geography of cultures, the development and the mobility should be all seen as intertwined representations of the human agency, his existence in the society and, more broadly, the social Self.

From an interdisciplinary perspective, taking inspiration more from the philosophy of politics, the development studies and the communication and cultural studies, the social Self to which reference is made, is the materialization of the Self in a frame of realities and infrastructure possibilities assuring its transportability, defined in the geography of transportations as the “ease of movement of passengers, freight or information” (Rodrigue, Comtois & Slack, 2006, p. 1). In the human agency perspective that it is presently supported as well, the ease of movement corresponds to a freedom of movement, defined by certain levels of development or perceived capabilities, as a continuation of Amartya Sen’s perspectives on capacitation and development (2000), development being “a momentous engagement with freedom’s possibilities (Sen, 2000, p. 298), but also from an viewpoint of Sen’s, that one on individual freedom as social commitment, allowing discussions, in the context of mobility and road infrastructure, on negative/positive freedoms and a freedom centered view with inspiration from Rawlsian theory of justice (Sen, 1990, p.114).

For the study herein, that aims to explore and argue around the symbolism of the infrastructure in the modeling of an African recognition and self-determination in global development and sustainability narratives (the African Self), the concept of transportability is rubbed out from its geographical senses and enriched with the possibility to mean philosophically more. It means mobility, as flexibility or development tendency, on one side. On the other side, talking about infrastructure in African states, the transportability is valued from the perspective of a de-colonial taxonomy of extended transportation, where recognition should be a first step towards self-determination, which is a “sine qua non for African independence and decolonization and central to central to the contemporary postulations on decoloniality or decolonization” and mandatory for avoiding Fanon’s nonbeing (Mtapuri, Nhemachena & Benyera 2018, p. 278).

A central hint to this study is that the ways infrastructure projects are wanted, thought of, applied or welcomed in certain African states or communities, might represent an overall significant although culturally reductionist perception of the image that Africans have on their freedom, capabilities to move and tendency towards mobility. These would allow some critical reflections to conceptualize and contextualize the right to mobility, departing from a mobility culture that the colonization attempted to freeze (Mbembe, 2021, p. 214).

Consequently, there are four main directions of this analysis, the least talked through being the intent to develop the right to mobility, through the main ideas and conclusions on which further reflection and research is necessary, with a multidisciplinary approach. The most evident direction that this analysis follows is the objective to identify, in the development of infrastructure projects, if African Self and African mobility visions are reflected, in order to expect a positive and durable outcome of development (by own epistemological means). This would be the consequence of the secondly important direction of the analysis, that one of valuing how standardized global and globalizing projects are adapted to local but globalizing contexts. The assumption in this would be that the positive and durable outcome of development means focusing on the narratives of development studies that have necessarily supported the approaches on specific ways to do things, despite tendencies to consider the generally applicable rules that have distorted the idea of reality and progress and have proclaimed western type development, a term with an „unsuspected colonizing virulence” used by Harry Truman (Esteva, 1992, p. 7), a unique measure of the Good, from aspirations to *maisha mazuri* (the good life) (Escobar, 1995, p. 50) to a broader philosophical perspective of good and bad divided images in the narratives of white settlement (Fanon, 1955; Pieterse, 1992, p. 168).

On the consequence, it is expected from this study to be able to reconfirm the projects of infrastructure development as being able to imprint narratives of change to the African states and communities, that benefit from them directly or indirectly. In the meantime, considering the meanings of change, it is anticipated herein, the decision whether infrastructure development

projects may be considered as standing more close or far off, from the central point of coloniality on the axis of power relations expressed in the African narratives, thinking and even epistemology.

## **Methodology**

In order to assure a very casual exposure of cases of infrastructure projects to the eyes of the researcher, but also to the eyes of the reader, the choice was to focus on the last three more important infrastructure projects sustained, debated and financed by AfDB (The African Bank of Development). The reason for this is grounded on the fact that AfDB is an institution that symbolically means the ideals of pan Africanism while its role in regionalization and overcoming imperial borders remained marginal for a long period (Rempel, 2008, p. 135), besides representing the common thirst for recognition of each African state on a global market, starting from the Renaissance of Thabo Mbeki (Rempel, 2008, p. 148).

Although some critiques have focused on the neocolonial image of the infrastructure projects' co-financing and implication in the change of African countries, in general, for the major part of the projects supported or mediated through the AfDB, this might be called, a neocolonialism by invitation (Cheru & Calais, 2010, p.237), due to the main image of the African Bank of Development, in relation to the endings of such projects. It is the only major bank that was founded and originally owned by regional African members (Birdsall, 2018, p.17), so the intention to follow and analyse projects financed principally or under the instruction of the AfDB is also linked to the postulation that they could be representing the African Self, at best.

Actually, notwithstanding the fact that India became a regional member of the AfDB in 1982 already, and China in 1984 (Bhattacharya, 2010, p.73), according to Birdsall and Morris (2016) the top five shareholders by voting power, in AfDB, were Nigeria (9.3%), United States (6,6%), Japan (5,5%), Egypt (5,4%) and South Africa (4,9%), in 2016 (Birdsall, 2018, p.33). This reconfirms the "Africanness" of AfDB, but also the hypothesis of it being on a verge of neocolonialism and (sub) imperialism. Some critical reflections

will support the position of the AfDB in shaping and mirroring the African Self, in the perspective of this paper.

The number of projects of infracture sustained, the frequency, the amounts allocated for each phase or the entire project, the eventual supplements, the timings or financing calendars, the achievements of the projects, are only a few of the parameters that will not be studied herein, but that, from a formal and simple observation, might show, in the first place, how these kind of projects are received, applied and welcomed from an African perspective.

Following the idea to assure the maximum casuality, for the critical-comparative analysis, the selection of cases to be analyzed from AfDB's official webpage<sup>2</sup> was run using the most simple and effective method. The following three newly approved or focused on, by the AfDB, infrastructure projects, shown as results by the website's online search tool, were approached and analyzed, from a post-structuralist standpoint: the Cameroon-Congo Brazzaville road corridor, the third and major bridge in Abidjan (Ivory Coast) and a highway in Senegal.

Hence, the principal methodology of the analysis, after a description and critical reflection on the essence and possible outcomes of these projects (as they were depicted in narratives from scientific papers or media products), is the valuing of related or central terms, concepts and their contextualization in the frame of development studies, or the narratives of change, directed to express the transition of the African Self from the staging of colonial non-existence, immobility and non-transportability, to the staging of an existence, mobility and self-transportability in the context of decoloniality (in theory and practice) (Mbembe, 2017).

In order to assure an unanimous interpretation of this kind of transition, considering the three fundamental concepts of these stagings (namely, existence, mobility and transportability, with their shown variants), it was considered effective to concentrate on the most relevant concepts expressed by common substantives, linked to the subject in an unmediated logic (like: infrastructure, road, mobility, land, mapping, territory, population, African,

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.afdb.org/en/projects-and-operations/selected-projects/mali?country=All>

Self), or mediated by its difference, or being in a system of oppositions one with another (Eco, 1986, p. 23)(like: development, space, mobility, journey).

**Global contexts analysis in the scrutiny of facts,  
from a development theory perspective.**

Before entering the post-structuralist approach, a recall and a critical perspective on the facts related to the selected infrastructure projects is necessary.

All three projects express the interest and commitment of neocolonial powers to continue sustaining infrastructure projects in African regions or states and this maintained colonial dependency is met with critical resistance from a large community of African thinkers, economists and African philosophers who, along 30 years, declared themselves decoloniality defenders, from interdisciplinary perspectives. And they are, among others, Ngugi Wa Thiongo, early in 1981, on the mind's decolonization (1994), Paul Tiyambe Zeleza calling decolonization the proudest moment of African nationalism (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, p. 66), Dambisa Moyo (2009) developing financial decolonization directions departing from Walter Rodney's underdevelopment paradigm (1957), Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) on the decoloniality of knowledge, power and being, Kwasi Wiredu, for whom there is explicitly a conceptual decolonization that consists in „African divesting his thought of all modes of conceptualization emanating from the colonial past that cannot stand the test of due reflection” (Wiredu, 2004, p. 15).

Arrived to its second phase in 2016 and blocked ever since, the Youndee-Congo Brazzaville Corridor was projected to be relaunched with the Ketta-Djoum road, supported majorly by the Japanese International Cooperation Agency, with the participation of regional institutions such as ZLECA<sup>3</sup> and PDCT-AC<sup>4</sup>, while building works were carried by a Chinese company (Business in Cameroon, Youndee, March 2020). The transnational character

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<sup>3</sup> ZLECA stands for Zone de libre échange continentale africaine

<sup>4</sup> PDCT-AC stands for Corridor de développement n°29 du Plan directeur consensuel des transports en Afrique centrale.

of the project highlights, beyond economic and strategic considerations, the proclivity to a regional cooperation and integration, for example in the ECCAS<sup>5</sup> area (AfDB), but also a tendency to accept the dependency on foreign investments and practical solutions.

On the contrary, the second nominated infrastructure project targets the trans-city gauge, enhancing the urbanization process. The Henry Konan Bedié bridge in Abidjan (Côte D' Ivoire) is a project financed only for a fifth by the AfDB, being a public – private partnership between the Ivorian Government, Bouygues SA, The West African Development Bank (BOAD), the bank of ECOWAS<sup>6</sup> for Investment and Development (EBID), the Moroccan Bank for Foreign Trade (BMCE), The Dutch Development Bank (FMO) and Société Financière Africaine (SFA) (AfDB, 15 December 2014). These are evidence that, at a financial level, regionalism (West or Central african), subimperialism (Moroccan), that was said to have been invented or inherited from the western colonial vision of „divide et impera” concerning the division of Africa in Northern and Sub-Saharan (Bond&Dembele, 2012, p. 215) and (neo) colonialism (Dutch), all refer to space in mediated and unmediated logics, as mentioned before, in an analogous way.

After the interruption caused by the political crises, a new financial player took an important role in this project, namely China Exim Bank (Reuters, 26 May 2015). The Chinese financial intervention in urbanization projects reflects holistically the „give and take” logics promoted by the neocolonial presence of China in Africa, based on „giving more aid and loans”, „promoting trade and investment”, „forgiving debts”, „eventually work for a free trade area” (van Dijk, 2009, p. 24), all of which are supporting the strong industrialization, thus urbanization of interest areas.

The Henry Konan Bedié bridge in Abidjan (Côte D' Ivoire) has also a sister project, not so much for the roots of its financing but for the symbology of „gateway” it reflects. It is about the Dakar – Diamniadio, Senegal's Highway of Hope, aimed to assure and modernize the gateway for air transportation

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<sup>5</sup> ECCAS stands for Economic Community of Central African States;

<sup>6</sup> ECOWAS-Economic Community of West African States



from the international airport of Dakar, for the enhancing of international mobility and in the end, the globalization. The highway of Senegal project might be considered an inter-city or a city-building initiative in the light of the potential transformations such as a highway might bring to the inter-city connectivity and the city building, in case city would be valued as medium for important transformations of the collective mentality, from collective memory. As Roger Bastide suggested in regards to religions and we might extend to collective memory *per se*, in the city, memories can be reconstituted almost in full (2011, p. 161). Both the bridge and the highway project, in the context of a volatile city culture (Parry, 2004, p.118), bring forth a suggestion of futurism which in the narratives of Africa expresses the key preoccupation: if (African) futures can be imagined (Dery, 1994, p.180).

In this frame, the development of infrastructures pointing to three aims (the regionalization, the urban architecture and the internationalization) could actually be symbolizing three dimensions of the Self, very much related to the space. The first two of them are inspired by Achille Mbembe's assertion on the endings of slavery, colonialism and apartheid on the Black man, interpreted and extended to the historically de-constructed African Self: a) the position (in the region), being the acknowledgement on the Self as sovereignty; b) the holding of himself as autonomy (Mbembe, 2017, p.79), to which a third dimension, (c) of visibility or image of the Self, could be added, to express the internationalization as a matter of appearance of the state, by enhancing globalizing capabilities through airline tourism road infrastructure support.

Around these three dimensions several narratives, especially founding ones on a collective subject in the context of an imaged community (Eyerman, 2011, p. 306) have developed and could be overlapped on the narratives that express the african critical resistance to one or more results or endings of these three projects, defending the decolonization.

One ending could be, from the point of view of the integration into a regional system, the example of the Ketta Djoum road, from the Youndee-Brazzaville corridor, which could represent not only an act of strenghtening the region, but also the replication of a multipolar unity with contested and concurring centre points, due to Cameroon's advantaged position in central Africa in

comparison to Congo Brazzaville, as in comparison to any other state of the CEMAC<sup>7</sup> (Akara, 2018, p. 649).

Less territorial, the Henry Konan Bédié project, indicates, on the contrary, that position is not relevant, but what is relevant is the autonomy to refer and identify with Africa - being on an upward path, thus the urban architecture being harmonized with the social rhythms of the city, in an *Africa Rising* stereotypical narrative. The narrative that such a bridge constructs social bridges between people, expressed by Donald Kaberuka, President of AfDB (AfDB, 2014), fits perfectly the communitarian image of the African, as seen by himself or by others, but also the African perspective on communitarianism. Developing communitarianism from Wiredu's assertion on the individual's chance to realize its interests, that are intrinsically bound to the other's interests (2000), African communitarianism was considered to have an important role in the regulation of the circulation of the wealth (Masolo, 2004, p. 494), ultimately in the shaping of inclusivity, in a holistic perspective. The HKB<sup>8</sup> project, actually, was cited as model of inclusivity (Shepherd, 2017, p. 9).

However, two aspects are more relevant here, related to the autonomy in the overlapping of concepts: a) the aspect of Ubuntu as conditioning or limiting such autonomy and b) the more practical aspect of a certain „thirst for the urbanization” that affected Cote d'Ivoire (AfDB, 15 December 2014), with premise in this being example and barometre for a relativization of experience and trend on the entire continent. Here's how the project is presented on the official site of AfDB on December, 15th, 2014:

„An architectural gem, Abidjan's Henri Konan Bédié (HKB) Bridge is worthy of the most modern of megacities. Officially opened on December 16, 2014, it is an embodiment of the promise for the country's infrastructure. And, looking further afield, for the whole of Africa.”

Considering the reading of Ubuntu in the light of Menkiti's extension of Mbiti's understanding of the subject, as a person - with unique existence

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<sup>7</sup> Communauté Economique et Monétaire de l'Afrique Centrale;

<sup>8</sup> HKB- the Henri Konan Bédié bridge project;

in relation to others, existence that is defined by others, the personhood being acquired and sometimes individuals failing the act of gaining their personhood (Gyekye, 1992, p. 103)- in the context of the pride to imagine and promote the project as one which is ubuntu linked, as an „embodiment of a promise” or as *rising Africa*, these narratives show that autonomy, or freedom, is interconnected with recognition, thus integration. This way, integration is symbolized also in the logic of a global adhesion, to the time and major trends of urbanization, as a consequence of technological advancements and the changes in the labor market.

From another perspective, the urbanization at all levels, but especially concerning the transformations in the family lives, brought relevant changes to the collective understanding of the realities among ivorians who could have adopted an individualistic enhanced image of the Self, being a reflection of modern, yet exclusivistic, Paris or Manhattan (UN, April, 2016).

In the same leap of conceptual belonging, this image is repropounded in the national/international frame negotiated through the Dakar-Diamniadio „highway of hope” in Senegal, linking the urban centre with the airport representing a new centre, geographically irrelevant, but constituting the point of intersection with a policentric global world. In this, the periphery could be reinstated at the level of concept, in the areas between the town and the airport, like a periphery of the capitalist world, allowing for inequality, dependency, marginality and underdevelopment (Burity, 2009, p. 161). Both sister projects emphasized the feature of centrality of the city, but all three projects herein have actually contributed to a large number of people being affected by them, thus opening paths to criticisms on the overlooking of people-centered perspectives as mainstream development (Pieterse, 2010, p.105).

As data show (AfDB), in each of the three cases more than one thousand families have suffered from relocation and displacement, while more than thirty thousand people were affected by the three projects, in a context in which, especially considering the road infrastructure projects, the modalities and conditions of use made possible the escalation of corruption at the borders (Akara, 2018), the perceived victimization against utilization costs

(Gainer&Chan, 2016, p.16), but also a high and unexpected acceptance of tolls and increased use, despite them. These data show that overall, the three projects were met with „hope” from citizens in the countries affected, despite some problematization in the media.

Taking into account the Central African subregion’s context and the relations between Cameroon and Congo Brazzaville, with Cameroon posing as „bread basket” (Akara, 2018, p. 654), the project of the road from Ketta to Djoum as part of the Youndee – Brazzaville Corridor, could be perceived as meant to map the intentions of Cameroon to increase export capability towards Congo and, from a conceptual geographical perspective, towards Gabon, which is included in the leap created by the intersection of Congo with Cameroon, due to low positions of Congo and Gabon itself (only thirth and fourth) in the table of values of exported products from Cameroon, due to data provided by Nkenda, Nzoussin, and Moussa in 2014 and reported by Akara (2018, p. 651). This could reveal, in the last instance, that infrastructure projects not only express broader intentions in international relations, but also sustain them, shape them and eventually deconstruct them.

Many ideas have been forwarded about this topic, but from the perspective of this analysis, only the management of power will be regarded. In the case of the Congo-Cameroon corridor, the real act of power is the empowerment of the region, with the facilitation of transportation, mobility and transit, but also with the internationalization of problems (e.g. the corruption) and problems that not only need, but actually propose to take into account original but common solutions.

On the contrary, in the case of the Henry Konan Bedié bridge the concept of power is subjected to the double-folded image of equality and difference: the western modernized town as model to identify with (Paris, Manhattan) and the capability to be Africa, as representing Africa itself (UN, April 2016).

In this half-way position that constitutes the actual narrative that have been still categorized as critical resistance, between the deconstruction of the Western postmodernity and the reconstruction of conceptual bridges, based on a freed from Global South or only African epistemologies, the issue of power in the knowledge production and management, necessary

to support modernization projects and their endings, is relevant also in the case of Senegal's Highway of Hope, Dakar-Diamniadio, due to the fact that the preliminary study was funded by the French Development Agency (Gainer&Chan, 2016, p. 9).

From the point of view of the people involved in the endings of the project, the most important impact on them was the relocation of homes and activities, to special sites of development. There are few or almost no information on the real impact on families, in the media. The impact of the HKB bridge on people from Marcory and Cocody<sup>9</sup> could have been positive in the end, according to AfDB's press release reported by AllAfrica (15 December 2014), since areas involved needed to redevelop, from an environmental point of view "from people who had been less than careful in their actions", while land architecture also changed, piggeries near pollution dumps being "now unrecognizable, with the strip of sand bordered by coconut palms making it feel almost like a beach."

In the case of the highway of Senegal, the general dissatisfaction would have been doubled by those considering it a project of plunder (Gainer&Chan, 2016, p.16), due to high costs in comparison to the services and benefits gained, meanwhile authorities were concerned to solve the situation of compensations to those relocated in a fair manner, being for the first time in Senegal and also Western Africa, to make possible the realization of this type of project, thanks to a public-private partnership (Gainer & Chan, 2016, p. 2).

### **Findings and discussions after an interpretative approach**

After having valued the facts holistically, the invitation is to dig into the meanings of common substantives, linked to the subject in an unmediated logic (like: infrastructure, road, mobility, land, mapping, territory, population, African, Self), or mediated logic (like: development, space, mobility, journey).

Infrastructure is supported by a historical note to old relations of power in colonialism, when space organization, mapping but especially orienting the

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<sup>9</sup> The neighborhoods in Abidjan that were linked with the construction of the HBK bridge.

social and political economy using the tool of the infrastructure, was the principal action of the settler in order to secure the privileged position and the white supremacy (Eze, 2001, p. 37). In this logic, the critical resistance to foreign investment financed infrastructure advancement, in an African rhetoric, could be justified in line with the narratives of aids resulting in economic overdependency, besides having contributed to the „underdevelopment” of Africa (Rodney, 1973; Moyo, 2009; Mhango, 2018).

However, considering reports before 2010, at least one of the countries in question: Côte D'Ivoire, was considered by UNDP<sup>10</sup> a low development country, meanwhile Senegal's development was curiously depicted in the frame of a prescription of „hope” (Tylor & Gopal, 2010, pp.19-20). As a challenge to Africa's development, not the inexistence or low attention to shape, use and get advantage of the values infrastructure add to the main social life's fields with the aim of development, but the inadequacy of such infrastructure, was considered (Agugua, 2018, p.34).

Besides its inadequacy, infrastructure, considered broadly, calls for an institutional set-up and action also as education, according to the promoted 1995 actions of the World Bank (Nwuzor, 2018, p.103). This situation, valued in the mirror of critics to the World Bank as Bretton Wood Institution in a Global South's narrative (Sarkar, 2017, p. 128) but also of the critics to western neocolonialism in African narrative, starting with positions of Kwame Nkrumah (Rahaman, Yaezdani & Mahmud, 2017, p. 17), or the debate on the Asian rise, brings to front the possible African position of postmodernity deconstruction, in a context of double-folded reaction to modernization and conservatism, that characterises the panel of analytical discussions on African development, if we should consider at least the Zeleza-Mbembe debates on African nativism and the „posts” (Ndlovu Gatsheni, 2013, p.114; p. 247), considering also the controversial position of Mbembe with regard to the decolonization of knowledge (Ndlovu Gatsheni, 2018, p.183). In relation to infrastructure, broadly viewed as also accessibility, this debate has deep roots also in the Marxian theory that highlights the quality of infrastructures

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<sup>10</sup> UNDP –United Nations Development Program

as primary movers of development (Agugua, 2018, p.41), thus the locus of debates on marxism is of no less importance, as shown within the Zeleza-Mbembe controversial dialogues (Ndlovu Gatsheni, 2020, p. 38).

Nonetheless, as also Oloruntoba put it: „the issue of infrastructure is critical to fostering integration on the continent.” (2018, p. 332), which supports the narratives of spatial integration in the case of the Youndee Congo Brazzaville corridor, the image or integration as of rhetorical references to Africa in the case of the Ivorian bridge or, the integration as a whole in a geography of the world, in the case of the highway of Senegal.

The issue of integration seen from the perspective of a philosophical approach to the meanings of infrastructure, focused on the road infrastructure, thus taking into account the accessibility and mobility, points also to the African Self. Despite the mentioned critiques of Achille Mbembe, in this case the African Self would be considered a fluid concept, based on “self-rule, self-regeneration, self-understanding, self-definition, self-knowing, and self-articulation of African issues after centuries of domination and de-oracization/silencing” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, p. 54).

In the construction and reconfirmation of this African Self and in connection with the road infrastructure, the three cases relate to some characteristics of unity and difference as well as utilization of power, such as the subregional domination in the continent (in the case of relations between Cameroon and Congo) that might repropose the core and periphery virtual mapping. In the meantime, the reconfirmation of the African Self, as a consequence of a narrative on the six features of the African Self recorded by Ndlovu-Gatsheni, does potentially enhance the realistic although pragmatic view, generally present in the African retorics of self-recognition, or even Amilcar Cabral’s „return to the source” (1973) and development. These retorics prioritise the regional commercial interests despite socio-political conflicts and calls for modernization, that might also facilitate corruption, besides more popular advantages or disadvantages, such as the westernized postmodernity.

In the Ivorian narratives refering to the construction of the Henri Konan Bedié bridge, the response that needs to be given to population growth



and job accessibility, in the context of the urban expansion (OECD), places in oblivion the eventual interest to dismiss a-priori the infrastructure development projects from the point of view of an African self-recognition, decolonial and anti-colonialist Self. Hence, the city building narratives invoke the metaphores of city creation that are present in some genesys legends of western and central African origin, collected by Leo Frobenius and Douglas Fox (1937).<sup>11</sup> But the inclination to creation, that was, for example, documented for Congo, by putting it in relation to the fictional case of Macondo<sup>12</sup>, started with the entrance into the modern age, as independent and self-recognized agent (Conejo, 2018, p. 55) seems to surpass the tendency to support a critical resistance to projects that might ease the access to mobility, thus freedom.

For international actors, focusing on road infrastructure is an important asset to assure the expansion on African markets and the debate as to whether allowing the economies of Africa to stay dependent from the western world, or Middle East or Global South emerging powers, under this form, would be too long and therefore, impossible to carry herein. Relevant directions of this debate strategically point to the examples of „giving more aid and loans”, „promoting trade and investment”, „forgive debts”, „eventually work for a free trade area” that was said to have been applied by China in Africa (van Dijk, 2010, p. 24), besides the more holistic view on innovative sources on financing development (Shaw, Cheru & Cornelissen, 2012, p. 203).

The financing of road infrastructure development, as a new way to boost mobility, represents also the concern to displace the conceptualization of neo-colonial interest of Global South's powers (China, India) on African railway infrastructures (especially in Eastern and South Eastern Africa), that was considered as a support to the development of public transportation, thus general mobility, towards a post – colonial and highly capitalist form of underpinning the individual mobility, the competition among individuals, the demarcation of classes due to availability and capability to use own vehicles, capability differentiated based on occupation and wealth, as well as a form

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<sup>11</sup> Especially the Soninke legends on Wagadu and the Fulbe Legend on The Blue Blood, from the collection of Frobenius and Douglas, pp. 97-152

<sup>12</sup> From the novel of Gabriel Garcia Marquez – One Hundred Years of Solitude.



to assure a broad openness to globalization, which, in an optimistic but also realistic view, goes along with the Afroglobalization.

If we should consider the influence of contemporary epistemological thesis on a decolonial South winning its privileged position in a system of knowledge production on development likeages, as the category of development was invented and sustained in the western thought (Sachs, 1992), the concept of mobility, in direct connection with the land, the demography and the social dimensions of development, could be seen with the lens of Achille Mbembe when suggesting that:” neo-liberal all-out deregulation policies are thus undermining the arrangements that had, in practice, enabled the postcolonial potentate, at least in some countries, to reach more or less dynamic compromises with the indigenous systems of coercion, and to finance the relations of subordination” (Mbembe, 2001, p.56).

As a matter of fact, resistance to financial dependency should be overcome by the need to reassess the African Self in terms of will, freedom and right to mobility, and not the obligation to mobility. However, although this social dimension of the will or freedom to mobility was not included in the term of soft infrastructure, defined as “trade and transport policies, trade-related services, regulations and procedures, improvements in the business environment, and capacity-building activities” (UN, presentation of Zodwa F. Mabuza, from AfDB), the reflection on the importance of how infrastructure projects and their international determinants could be met by potential beneficiaries, rests on the conclusions of the Afrobarometer’s survey citing infrastructure at a fourth place among the key issues that governments should address, mentioned by only 22 % of Africans respondents in 32 countries (Afrobarometer, 16 January 2016).

Included also in the program of the New Partnership of Africa’s Development from 2010, the attention to infrastructure seemed more of a discursive means to bring about recognition and development in a pan-African repository, together with the realization of an African dream in the words of the then president of South Africa Jacob Zuma (Afrobarometer, 16 January 2016).

In the equation of development, its sustainability should be measured in the level of satisfaction its endings would bring to people affected totally

or partially by it and in fact, examples around the world have shown, as highlighted by du Plessis in 2005, that the first reason for destroying homes and moving people out is the property development and infrastructure projects (Zabielskis, 2018, p.139). As a consequence, the hypothesis of a good perception of infrastructure project's endings, sustained in institutional discourse, would lack of fundamental coordinates into the narratives of the civil society, especially when foreign determinants would act as magnifiers of civil African-centered dissent. However, for the moment, there are no or few available clear sources to deepen a research on this, for a non-African scholar. Nevertheless, since inadequate infrastructure limits the timely flow of merchandize, generates high costs of land transportations, limiting the cross border transaction and finally restricting intra-African business (Boso et al, 2016, p. 6), the building or improving of road infrastructure is seen as a practical step to take in order to achieve the Africa to Africa Internationalization project (Adeleye, White & Boso, 2016), which would be in line with a sustainable development in an African way.

How would therefore, be resolved this paradox, is a quest on the table of many development theoreticians, wondering on the limits of the economic growth dimension in the equation of development. This paradox represents one of the narratives in African Studies and perspectives that dominate, in some areas being subdued to the Blackness rhetoric, the picture of Global South's knowledge production. As a consequence, it was suggested that priorities in development, as well as levels of dependency's acceptance, in subject – *who*, object – *to whom*, *when* and *why*, reflect important cultural features of the community or state where these projects were finally financed, initiated and followed up. In fact, the founding fathers of the postcolonial African state would have had a choice not to ignore the indigenous institutions, by altering the state to meet the needs of Africans (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, p.76).

For the objectives of these reflections, the focus on road infrastructure, putting people and their mobility needs in relation to the land, space and territory, is also trying to deconstruct the idea that modifications to territory could transform the relation with the space and the right to owe the space, in an African narrative, still subjected to the colonial roots of the governance.

In this direction, it is a good perspective to look on Derrida's appreciation of space offered to the guests, with the condition of host being-oneself in one's own home (1977, p.4), which recalls a sensitive interpretation of possible invitations of the "colonized", as argued in the earlier recorded concept of neocolonialism by invitation. Countertrading this interpretation, a special feature of the infrastructure projects analyzed herein is the public-private partnership, but generally, the lack a more African financial presence in the infrastructure projects continues to be a fact and an issue, at some point also a mark on the vicious cycle of the African sustainable development.

But, the public-private partnership (PPP) also allows cultural and mentality changes in regards to the need of mobility, since, as mentioned before, for the first time mobility can be seen as a right, or a feature of self-recognition. This feature might be regarded with instrumental cultural relativism to demarcate the suffocating syndrome of high urbanization perspectives leading to over population of some areas considered centers and the de-mystification of space, territory and nature, from the nomad syndrome of mobility freed of stereotypes and limitations, such as an Afroglobalism in extension, consisting here in the strategies and representations of migration related activities, always gaining new lands, being supra-territorial and specific to a culture of pastoralism.

## **Conclusion**

The idea and the narrative of development itself is seen as fascinating, also in an African repository, despite the critiques of the term. Hence, talking about views, connections and perspectives of African narratives' encounters with the road infrastructure construction and modernization projects, as well as the city building in the context of the urbanization- industrialization twosome, is double-folded. On one side, there were evidenced some African particularities, broadly integrated in a Self paradigm herein, particularities in the ways the projects are welcomed and narrated. On the other side, the infrastructure projects themselves bring about some changes in the ways development, new dependency, financial ties and colonialism are reflected

upon, thus aiming to contribute to the perpetuation and the production of a freed African epistemology.

In the context of this traditionalism/modernism divide, supported by the aspirations to sustainability as a global positive narrative, the change that could be reflected, at a cognitive level, would be the adaptation to the belief that history slopes, that were positive for the imagined backward regions confronted with technological and/or historical progress are not always guaranteeing a rapid improvement of the life conditions.

The lack or misuse of indigenous financial resources to sustain projects of road infrastructure development in the continent, based on the example of the four states in analysis, the highlighting of private-public partnerships and moreover, the narratives on the endings of foreign involvement and possible ways to look at them with critical lens, show that, yes, it is continued and reconfirmed the focus on the paradigm of development based on “doing things in their own ways”, but with methods that are still slight and shy.

The ideals of independence, reflected also at a level of free economies in the context of a global transactional sphere, transposed on the subject of road infrastructure, are opening up interesting questions on the ways mobility could be valued in an African repository. A slight contribution to the right of mobility, as right not to exercise, in the conditions of by all means being able to do it, is sustained by the alms of cited philosophers and analysts, by a philosophical and critical reflection on the very structural aspects of the relevant notions herein. In the contemporary researches on foundations of mobility, it would be therefore necessary to focus on the multifaceted relations between the suffocating/static syndrome conducive to excessive traditionalism, and the nomad syndrome, as sign of conceptualizing unlimited mobility as a call to Afroglobalism and which, in the last instance, would not have to serve only the interests of those who invest in African infrastructure for the main purpose to preserve economic dependency, imperialism and neocolonial power relations.

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