Mobility, Transnationalism and Contemporary African Societies

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Edited by

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INTRODUCTION: MOBILITY, TRANSNATIONAL CONNECTIONS AND SOCIOCULTURAL CHANGE IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICA[1]

TILO GRÄTZ

Issues of mobility and migration form part of the most salient topics in Africa today, both by their various social and cultural dimensions and effects, but also with regard to the growing anthropological literature these phenomena continue to produce in African Studies (to name but a few: Adepoju & Hammar 1995, Adepoju 2004, Baker & Aina 1995, Bilger & Kraler 2005, Coquery-Vidrovitch et al. 1996, 2003, De Bruijn et al. 2001, Diop et al. 2008, Manchuelle 1997, Lambert 2002, Bakerwell & de Haas 2007, Hahn & Klute 2007, Pellow 2002).

Today, migration as a particular form of mobility is a central feature of many contemporary African societies, contributing to the creation of supra-regional social, political and economic connections. The latter also extend beyond the continent, by way of Africans migrating to Europe, North America or elsewhere, the constitution of new African Diaspora communities (Koser 2003, Orozco 2005) and various modes of integration of Africans into the world economy 'from below' (Mohan & Zack-Williams 2002). Against state policies, spanning from the exclusion, even expulsion of migrants (Bredeloup 1995, Pérouse de Montclos 1999) to the administrative fixation of local populations in some African states, the spatial flexibility of people (apart from enforced displacements) moving back and forth between places and economic sectors, establishing links between distant rural and urban sites, is considerable. Beyond the classical debates on short-term versus long-term systems of migration (Arthur 1991, Guilmoto 1998, Adepoju 2003, 2005), gender aspects (Trager 1995, Meier 2000, Peleikis 2003), so called push - and pull - factors influencing

[1] The contributions to this collective volume primarily adress various forms of voluntary migration.

migrants' decisions and the discussion on structural political positions of migrant minorities, contemporary empirical research has been focussing much more on actual strategies of (trans-) migrants, their institutions, and the subsequent creation of new social spaces related to complex socioeconomic networks across regions and nation-states. Migration is today often a combination of interests and motivations, such as the interrelation of pilgrimage with mobile trading patterns (Grégoire 1993, Yamba 1995, Bava 2003, Kane 2007, Gemmeke 2007) or labour migration connected to visits to kinsmen.

The contributions to this volume are intended to address the political and cultural dimensions of these migratory linkages with regard to issues of citizenship, ethnicity, religiosity and economy. They do not claim to exhaustively discuss all aspects of the phenomena, nor do they represent a comprehensive, overarching theory that might explain causes and effects of migration. Deliberately employing an empirical approach at actual practices and local perspectives on migration, beyond the often narrow media representations, they discuss, however, not only the various opportunities and aspects of socioeconomic change induced by migrants in the respective home and host societies. Beyond the classical issues, such as nomadism and circular dry season labour migration (Rain 1999, Linares 2003), they also address new livelihoods, social and religious practices and lifestyles created by migrants, without neglecting those contexts where migration is rather restricted. Connected by mobile strategies, urban areas and rural homesteads in Africa are no separate worlds; although a certain ambivalence still remains between evolving more stable social structures in new contexts and the flexibility offered by practices of mobility (or, according to the context, enforced by them). The respective new transnational social spaces are not only shaped by movements of people, but also by ideas and memories across nations, landscapes and social fields. Migrants are, to quote Nina Glick-Schiller (2005), transborder citizens, often simultaneously incorporated in various societies, moving between moral fields as well as spheres of exchange (see also Basch et al. 1994, Glick-Schiller et al. 1995, Smith & Guarnizo 1998, Ong 1999, Vertovec 1999, 2001, Pries 1999, Faist 2000, Glick-Schiller & Wimmer 2002, Levitt & Nyberg-Sorensen 2004). This approach questions previous, rather static and localised assumptions about identities, social and ethnic figurations of African societies and consequently also underlines the

necessity of new methodological approaches to migration in and outside Africa[2].

Circulations, Livelihoods, Long-distance networking

Despite the fact that migration, as a particular form of mobility, is historically well established in Africa and is connected to various cultures of mobility (Hahn & Klute 2007), migrants cannot, however, be subsumed under a simple category. Here, the concept of transnationalism has certainly its limits[3], especially with regard to the diversity of degrees and modes of interaction of various migrant groups. Their itineraries as well as their modes of settlement and livelihood, especially in urban centres, are as manifold as their ethnicities, origins and social strategies. Migrants often appropriate niches of urban formal and informal economies (Lo Sardo), in smaller as well as larger cities. In some transitory cities such as Tamanrasset (Badi 2007, Nadi 2007) or Agadez (Brachet 2005) migrants introduced new economic specialisations contributing to the growth of these centres as economic hubs.

Others have meanwhile become rather well-established land-lords or work under official contracts (see Pelican in this volume for Cameroonian teachers in China). Many of these trans-migrants, however, represent, as Boesen and Marfaing (2007)[4] argue, a particular category of "cosmopolitans", creating their own social spaces by connecting various places. In many cases, border regimes may represent contemporary constraints to mobile populations, as Ciavolella shows. In other cases, people living on both sides of a border try to be flexible with regard to

[2] Research on these phenomena often faces the problem that is encouraged by political institutions with their own agenda, e.g. providing answers to illegal migration of Africans to Europe, but its findings often do not propose the expected simple solutions (cf. Bakewell 2008).

[3] For a critical review see Portes et al. (1999), Bommes (2003), Lüthi (2005), Gabaccia (2005).

[4] This concept, previously discussed in anthropology, most of all by Ulf Hannerz (1990), and primarily referring to educated and business elites, has recently been applied to strategies of other social groups, including those operating at the periphery of urban areas, in their "vernacular"(Diouf 2000) cosmopolitanism. Boesen and Marfaing (op.cit) discern the particular aspects of a "cosmopolitanism from below" in West Africa, of actors that form part of urban economies without being fully integrated into these urban polities, featuring particular modes of spatial flexibility and the management of risks, policies of exclusion and public representations of "otherness. For the political consequences of these processes, see Appiah (2005).

potential benefits of political integration into the respective nation states. Giulia Casentini, in her contribution, reports e.g. on the political history of the Konkomba living in two neighbouring African countries of Ghana and Togo, and on the way national politics affect political structures as well as social links across state borders.

Degrees and modes of the integration of migrants into local host societies are, however, quite diverse. In West Africa, there are often particular (often ethnically mixed) migrant quarters, especially in Muslim contexts, offering shelter and social integration, following the *Zongo*-tradition (Lo Sardo; Pellow 2002). In other cases, migrants are closely tied to hosts and landlords, acting as mentors and patrons. This role is often assumed by successful, established migrants towards members of their original communities, meanwhile acting as powerful brokers. Long-established institutions such as migrants associations fulfil both social and political functions, mediating between newcomers and pioneer migrants, use "home" as a resource to maintain cohesion and identification (Quiminal 2001). In many cases, migrants develop particular strategies to cope with their often marginal situation, either in developing new identities, or material culture becomes relevant (Lo Sardo). Migrants use to develop their own infrastructures, such as bars, workshops, teleshops etc. Religious networks such as Islamic brotherhoods (Riccio 2004) or Protestant Churches (Shakhbazyan, see below, Nieswand 2005a, Adogame & Weißköppel 2005) may serve as an important social anchorage for trans-migrants, assuming an additional role of integration in the absence of other institutions and moral references. Ekaterina Shakhbazyan argues, however, that Churches promote both the adaptation of migrants into host societies and guarantee the maintenance of strong links to their countries of origin.

Establishing in the host society thus rarely means abandoning any relations and identifications with communities back home (see also Zongo 2003). While simultaneously adapting to the new circumstances, we often find a reaffirmation, even reconstruction of these ties in the new contexts. However, often there seems to be the danger of becoming too isolated a migrant community, easily excluded and often targeted in times of conflicts. Migrants, whether legally recognised or not, often face forms of xenophobia, even racism (Ciavolella, see also Geschiere 2004, Whitaker 2005, Nyamnjoh 2006, Geschiere 2009, Kersting 2009), and have to find their own ways of dealing with these challenges. Despite the fact that they often live in a precarious situation, most contributors especially focus on migrants agency to create new sociabilities (cf. Youngstedt 2004a, Weiss 1998) and to shape their migratory conditions. One example are Tuareg

migrants, studied by Ines Kohl, that often obtain several passports and change their nationalities according to the circumstances. Political regimes, e.g. with their divergent tax and immigration policies, may even become a resource for those moving back and forth the frontiers, such as smugglers (Nugent 2002) and day labourers. Their practices can only be understood by a complex analysis of the structural options and repertories of action used and constantly enhanced by migrants.

Employing this perspective, several essays, especially the contributions by Pelican, Kohl and Lo Sardo, address practices of networking and cultural exchange between local communities of origin and migrants in the Diaspora, by way of associations, Churches and other institutions and channels enabling the transnational flow of formations, of goods, people and ideas. Ines Kohl follows the strategies of Tuareg migrants and their livelihoods in the transregional area between Libya, Algeria and Niger. She argues that a new migrant lifestyle emerges among young men that considerably differ from former nomadic attitudes. Young Tuareg develop a multitude of borderline-strategies as particular ways to cope with different political and border regimes, and skilfully use the respective opportunities.

Sébastien Lo Sardo studied Hausa migrants both in Belgium and in Niger, exploring their livelihoods and networks, as well as aspects of their material culture that serves as an important vehicle both for identity processes as well as with respect to investments back home. Michaela Pelican retraces diverging trajectories of Cameroonian migrants with respect to "south-south" movements of African migrants, and thus opens a new empirical field of research on African migration towards destinations such as Gabon, but also China and Arab countries (see also Pelican & Tatah 2009).

The often discussed question whether migration is benevolent, in terms of remittances (Arhinful 2001, Smith 2007), transfer of capital, knowledge and experiences, or whether it contributes to social pressure, destabilisation, yet problematic exploitation especially of remaining populations, is, nevertheless, difficult to answer. This depends on the very way migration is socially organised, above all by a system of intermediation between places and sectors, and integrated into the social life of a polity. It is contingent upon lucrative economic activities and the way in which migrants are tied back to their home regions and develop communication and networking strategies in order to assure their control of their assets. Furthermore, income strategies within informal settings are linked to precarious circumstances. This, however, does not preclude the emergence of moral fields among migrants, even of divergent ethnic and

social backgrounds, as Tilo Grätz demonstrates in this chapter on motor taxi drivers and gold miners, both low-threshold options for flexible yet self-conscious migrants, les *débrouillard*s, in the Republic of Benin.

Of bush fallers and exodants

The contributions to this edition, employing a socio-anthropological perspective, reveal that migration is not only a spatial, economic and political development. It is above all a socially and culturally embedded process that depends on the cultural context of migration, the management of identity processes, and the (often tense) relation to established local groups. It seems, however, necessary to underline that in many cases the "culture of mobility" is rather the result of primarily economic and social strategies necessary to cope with problematic circumstances, being in the fore of migratory decisions. For many young people in Africa migration, ideally to one of the major African cities such as Abidjan, Dakar, and Kinshasa or even to Europe (see also Timera 1996, Riccio 2005, Salzbrunn 2007, Schmitz 2008) or to the US (Stoller 2002, Abusharaf 2002, Youngstedt 2004a), has meanwhile become almost a necessity. Inspired by the talks of their fathers, neighbours or peers (Meier 2003), successful returnees and the media representation, leaving home to seek some fortune elsewhere is, however, more than an income opportunity. Such times of journey have become an integral part of juvenile dreams and aspirations projected to urban life (Ferguson 1999), a period of the life-cycle that may be compared to an initiation rite, an element of becoming adult: the experience from leaving their homesteads, through long voyages, passing the adaptation and integration into migrant communities and finally coming back at least as an experienced fellow, often leads to a decisive moment of recognition and self-assertion (see also Timera 2001, Barrett 2004). In this perspective, also those young girls from rural areas who are working as housemaids for wealthier townspeople perceive, as well as their parents, the periods of migration as an extension of their youth, and a way to enhance their social options especially with regard to marriage (Alber & Martin 2007; Sieveking).

Returning migrants face big expectations, are called "*exodants*" (Lo Sardo), "*been-tos*" (Nieswand 2005b; Martin 2007), "*bush fallers*" (Pelican), "*aventuriers*" (Jónsson 2008:18), "*eaters of the dry season*" (Rain 1999), or according to the (former) host countries "*Ivorians*" or "*Russians*". Successful returnees in Ghana are, with regard to their lifestyle, called "*burger*" (Nieswand 2009). Those who failed or had to

come back involuntarily are hardly perceived (Donkor-Kaufmann 1999). Migration entails, however, withstanding challenges and hardships; in the dramatic case of boatpeople also mortal risks, but potentially also the acquisition of languages and social capital. Returning migrants, equipped with experiences and material advantages, may contribute to emancipation processes within a hierarchically organised society back home, as Leservoisier demonstrates in this volume by the example of former slaves in Mauretania. He explores the dynamics introduced by returning migrants of slave origin among the Halpulaar, a society featuring important hierarchies and status differences. Within the context of a new legitimacy of "traditional authorities" during decentralisation processes and the declining importance of the election of chiefs among the Halpulaar society, dissent groups of former slaves tried to contest and formed their own community. Re-migrants considerably contributed to processes of emancipation, of mitigated success though, but added new legitimacy.

Those staying at home often feel uncomfortable, stuck between hope and disenchantment (Graw 2005), and in same cases those still luring to travel to Europe or the US experience a kind of denigration and psychological stress, as described in Gaibazzis paper. He reports about the way immobility is culturally understood in Gambia and refers to the general position of youths in national economic and political life. Immobility is perceived by many young men as a syndrome, commonly called *nerves*, expressing much more than impatience and despair (see also Jónsson 2008:29pp.). Lacking the experience of migration may thus create, together with hope for economic benefit, a feeling of stagnation not only with regard to their economic improvement, but also their individual position among peers. For some groups, mobility has for a long time been both a livelihood and an option, e.g. to evade pressure from central authorities (e.g. Fulbe, see Pelican & Dafinger 2006), contributing to their ambiguous image as a roving yet defiant kind of population. Today, these options are becoming more and more limited, either by official restrictions on migration or the pertinence of state borders with regard to migratory strategies and issues of citizenship.

Finally, most papers remind us that migration is shaped by gender relations, as Nadine Sieveking stresses with regard to the very different perceptions by men and women of causes and effects of migration in Mali and Senegal, and underlines the complex social meanings of mobility, rejecting any simplified policy approaches of fixing populations by localised development projects (see also Bakewell & de Haas 2007,

Bakewell 2008) or seeing migrants as perfect agents of change. Against these backgrounds, any discussion on migration in Africa should take a view at both the ensuing socio-economic and legal aspects, as well as the politics of belonging pertinent to the respective societies. The various modes of mobility discussed in this volume bring about considerable social changes on the continent, induced by socially creative mobile actors.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part looks at migrants´ flexible strategies of adaptation to changing economic and political environments where often cross-ethnic informal associations or religious groups may get particular importance. The second part follows the multiple effects of migration on home societies, but also evaluates problems of immobility caused by political restriction or lacking opportunities. The third part focuses on the way mobile actors respond to and make use of state borders, and discusses transnational relationships shaping migratory practices and discourses.

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CHAPTER ONE:

MOBILITY AND MODES OF FLEXIBLE ADAPTATION

MINERS AND TAXI DRIVERS IN BENIN: EMERGENT MORAL FIELDS IN INFORMAL MIGRANT SETTINGS

TILO GRÄTZ

Introduction

This essay[1] explores two particular socio-economy fields, related to artisanal gold-mining and to motorbike taxi drivers, exemplified by a case study from the Republic of Benin. Frequently, migrants are seeking income through these activities, because in both cases entry into the respective sectors is comparatively easy and not connected to ethnic networks, economic capital or skills. These features make these occupations quite attractive, especially for those hoping to solve a temporal crisis by way of migration. Both settings are characterised by a high degree of social fluctuation, informality and temporality. I argue that despite these features, norms and rules of behaviour are not less demanding and compelling and do not, however, obstruct the establishment of particular moral fields. In both cases, various daily conflicts between individuals occur, but actors have developed institutions of conflict resolution, mostly beyond the state. Referring to recent publications on comparable case studies in Africa, these examples underline the need for a re-assessment of theories of social structuration with regard to occupational roles and emphasize the necessity to discuss more sophisticated approaches to cultures of migration.

First case: migrant gold miners

Artisanal gold booms are resurgent phenomena in West Africa today. Especially in the dry season, numerous migrant miners engage in the

[1] The chapter is based on several field trips to the Republic of Benin between 2000 and 2008 as well as various scientific and media publications on these issues, collected between 2004 and 2008.

small-scale exploitation of mountain shafts as well as alluvial gold fields. At many mining sites, a sudden gold boom triggered massive immigration, the rapid installation of huge mining camps, the establishment of new markets and infrastructures. Subsequently, a variety of conflicts emerged in many such places, inside the mining camps and between local residents and immigrant miners. Generally, artisanal gold mining[2] has been practised in these areas since medieval times. Several regions had local systems of gold exploitation, mainly of alluvial deposits (Kiethega 1983, Dumett 1998). At the end of the Eighties and the beginning of the Nineties of the last century, new booms occurred simultaneously in several regions of West Africa (Carbonnel 1991).[3] Informal modes of exploitation and gold trading (smuggling) developed beside small enterprises controlled by the state or by licence holders. This recent growth of small-scale (artisan) gold mining is related to massive waves of labour migration into rural areas, above all in Mali, Niger, Benin, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire[4] and Guinea.

A second new feature is the massive engagement in reef mining by numerous migrant small-scale miners, which results in more profit and more demanding systems of labour organisation, involving more actors, but also in new ways of sociability in the new, huge mining camps. The exploitation of new mining sites and the reopening of abandoned deposits led in most cases to the rapid establishment of new immigrant communities with new markets, increased circulation of money and the spontaneous development of infrastructures and services. Recently discovered mines also led to the massive immigration of petty businessmen, traders, barkeepers and those offering other services, including prostitution. In a short period of time, small villages have become larger settlements; new communities of settlers have emerged in all mentioned countries.[5] In most cases there is a considerable divergence

[2] The common denomination for all modes of non-industrial gold-mining today is artisanal and small-scale (gold)- mining (ASM).

[3] Migration to the gold mines can be seen as a reaction to a situation of crisis, especially in the agricultural sector, with fewer job opportunities, the effects of structural adjustment and the general devaluation of F CFA in 1994 causing higher living costs ("push factors", for Burkina Faso see Asche (1994:194f); for Benin Bierschenk et al. (2003). Other factors, relevant to some areas, are droughts and civil wars.

[4] For recent case studies on gold-mining in West Africa see Grätz (2009), Werthmann (2009), Hilson (2006, 2009) and Luning (2006, 2008).

[5] I do not employ the term „gold rush" because it infers too much irrational social action and chaos. I would like to focus on the many more regulated social relations in that field that are of more interest for the ethnological discussion. This does not

between official laws – as developed, for example, in the *Code Minier* – and local practices, especially significant as regards the access to resources, labour organisation and the legitimacy of mediators. As a consequence, conflicts often emerge between gold miners and state authorities, but also between the locals and immigrants and between interest groups among the miners themselves concerning the rights to exploitation and settlement.[6]

Small-scale gold-mining in West Africa is carried out in two ways: as a small side-business carried out by the local populations close to mining pits (above all related to alluvial gold extraction), or as a major activity at some mining sites as "hot spots". The latter are linked to the influx of many translocal migrant miners, either leading to the enlargement of previous settlements or to the establishment of new mining camps. The cases discussed here belong to the second category. Such mining sites move from one area to the other, representing scattered, isolated spots of economic micro-systems. In all these cases, however, the number of miners decreases considerably during the agricultural high season and increases considerably in the dry season. They may also change in periods of festivities and religious duties. Rainfalls, the drying of rivers, etc, also trigger the seasonality of activities.[7]

Apart from these changes in numbers, the inner composition of the mining communities differs according to the time spent in the mines and the degree of professionalism, of people who rarely return to their home regions and engage more permanently and exclusively in gold-mining over a longer period of time, when necessary, moving to new mining fields or exploring them. Migration is linked to the diffusion of the special arrangements, norms and roles guiding small-scale mining in several such mining camps. It also sets up new economic circles, related to the circulation of goods, to new traffic connections and the proliferation of skills, financial assets and knowledge. The new mining frontiers constitute

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suggest that I deny the dramatic dimensions caused by the rapid change of consumer practices, alcohol abuse, and the monetisation of everyday life, the production of winners and losers and the use of violence in many gold mining areas.

[6] Often there is a similar scenario: an initial period of serious conflicts is followed by a period of stabilisation and "working arrangements" between all actors.

[7] In the case of Kwatena in Bénin, there is a special pattern of small-scale migration, just a way of commuting, especially from the area of to Kwatena, exercised by some people on a weekly basis, possible because of short distance and frequent transport facilities.

at the same time frontiers of cultural transgression, of promises of consumption and cultural creativity for potential young migrants.

Miners have developed an intricate system of labour organisation, which features role differences, shift work and allowances. Generally, miners work in small teams headed by a team chief, who, in most cases, has the informal right to exploit a shaft or pit. Generally, the rights of the exploitation of shafts and pits are attributed to the person who first discovered and exploited them, assuming he or she has the technical and financial means to do so. In the event that this person does not possess these means, he/she may forge a contractual agreement with a small-scale entrepreneur who, in turn, engages in exploitation in exchange for shares in the yield or the payment of one-off or recurring compensation. Most of these arrangements disregard of the official mining law. The shaft owner usually acquires tools, rents motor pumps, feeds the workers, and when needed, pays medical costs during the exploration cycle, which he may deduct later when it comes to sharing the profits. The majority of shaft owners work on their own account, although many are indebted to moneylenders or wealthier gold traders. The number of workers in a team varies from 6 to 20 according to the size of the pit, the expected gold yield and the available manpower. Often – according to the overall number of workers in the team - there is a further hierarchy including assistants, heads of the work shifts and guards. Every team shares the profits from the gold ore directly on the spot. Usually, the patron gets half of all the stones containing gold and then his assistant and the other workers receive their shares. Everyone then has to extract the gold and in most cases they employ assistants to pound and mill the stones. Women, who are paid either cash or a certain amount of gold-containing materials, carry out some of these activities, especially pounding, milling, and sieving.

This system of risk sharing involves a social contract between the team chief and his workers comprising a kind of ‘trade- off’: the more unpredictable the yield, the greater the possible gain for the team chief in case of success. On the other hand, a chief must satisfy the basic living requirements of mine labourers, regardless of the yield. Miners recognise an effective team leader as someone who possesses knowledge of not only where and how to exploit gold veins and to organise the shifts, but also how to work efficiently, and how to excavate in ways which prevent injuries and accidents. An experienced team leader commands respect and prestige. Team leaders must fulfil their responsibilities to ensure that workers stay with them and do not join another team leader for the next extraction cycle. Hierarchies thus provide security for working arrangements. They are flexible enough so that former gold diggers

potentially may become shaft owners or team leaders when acquiring experience, esteem and, of course, sufficient capital.

Gold-mining camps gather people of extremely heterogeneous social and ethnic origins. They are typical frontier-communities,[8] although they feature many differences to the classical settler-frontiers. A (non-industrial) gold mining frontier represents a particular set of phenomena related to the appropriation of mineral resources by miners and by simple technical means, the establishment of many dispersed mining and processing sites of artisanal production, new massive transnational migratory drifts, the development of miners' camps or mining villages, and finally rapid economic shifts often in rural areas hitherto only partly integrated into the realm of market economy. The new mining camps offer new (although instable) income opportunities; a flourishing gold trade and the emergence of "hot spots" of economic and social change, advanced by the subsequent emergence of markets, infrastructures and businesses of all kinds.[9] Not always gold mining frontiers develop on the periphery of political spaces, but often develop within; nevertheless stetting up completely novel modes of resource use, economic circuits and social fields. In most cases, they represent frontiers of ethnic /and or regional identities, connected to power relations that are negotiated in those interstitial spaces in the light of mining resources. Internally, the respective mining communities develop their own rules, featuring a growing degree of occupational identity, and are marked by various hierarchies and modes of labour division, composed of socially and ethnically heterogeneous actors, including service providers and traders. We have to deal with a relative (semi-) autonomy (Moore 1978) especially of roving groups of gold miners as regards their patterns of migration, the mode of labour organisation, their social norms and lifestyle patterns (Grätz 2002).

Nobody is born a gold miner, but one may gradually grow into that business. Newly arriving migrants are firstly entrusted with minor assistant work at the mining sites, later with more demanding tasks and finally they are integrated as full members of a mining team. This entails withstanding the hardships of work and 'proofs' of all kinds, to withstand the continuous disputes over claims, but also to demonstrate a good

[8] The frontier theorem refers to Turner (1893), and was applied to Africa by Kopytoff (1999; cf. also Grätz 2003, 2004). Different to agrarian settler frontiers (Doevenspeck 2004), mining frontiers are pirmarily related to movements of young people.

[9] For a historical and contemporary account on gold mining in Africa cf. Dumett (1998).

working spirit and providing help when needed. The newcomer will be rewarded by acknowledgement among his fellow miners and participate in male rituals such as collective drinking. Becoming a fully recognised peer also means to behave according to male conspicuous consumption patterns (see below), and to spend free time accordingly. Conflicts are very frequent, over the limits of the mining pits, concerning small treacheries and insults, either between gold miners or team heads and their crews. Meanwhile, most mining sites feature a kind of council, mostly composed of team heads, and sometimes there is even a militia, to police the mining camp. Miners accept their verdicts, in order to continue mining; otherwise they would have to leave the camp, a kind of ultimate solution in serious cases. There is, however, a discourse of comradeship: cheating too much is heavily sanctioned, although small treacheries may be tolerated. Miners show unity especially vis-à-vis adjacent communities and state authorities.

Second case: Motor taxi drivers (Zémidjan)

Motor taxi drivers appeared in Benin at the beginning of the 1980s[10] as a result of the general economic crisis dominating the last decade of the socialist period and the (first) government of Kérekou (1972-1990). Migrants from rural areas and smaller towns, but also employees, students or craftsmen started to offer their driving services, either as a side business or full time (Bancolé 1998, Boko 2003:32pp., Agossou 2003). Today, Zémidjan motor taxis are providing about 70% of the overall urban transport (Trans-Africa Consortium 2008: 34).[11] Initially, the businesses of Zémidjan or Kèkènon, as these drivers are usually called in Benin, were confined to the major economic centre and biggest town, Cotonou, and its suburbs, but at the beginning of the 1990s, as a typical activity of urban survival (Simone & Abouhani 2005), they rapidly spread all over Benin and even abroad.[12] Subsequently, there were several attempts by the governmental authorities to interdict these activities, in favour of cabin

[10] The origins of Zémidjan can be traced back to bicycle taxis in Porto-Novo, called taxi-*kanna* in the 1960s, that used to transport female akassa vendors to the Adjarra market (Agossou 1979, 2003:101).

[11] Generally, the system of public transport in the Republic of Benin is not very well developed. Beside the collective overland taxis (Taxi brousse), there is a growing number of overland busses, but inside the major town, obnly the major avenues are served by reasonable prized minibus- or collective taxi lines.

[12] Motorbike taxis are also known from Togo, from Zinder, the Republic of Niger and Cameroon, where they are also called *bend-skineurs (*Mahamat 1982, Kengne Fodouop 1985, Kaffo et al. 2007).

taxis, but without success. On the contrary, these pressures made Motor taxi drivers associate[13], organise rallies to demand legalisation. [14] Many of them became also formally organised in associations or clubs.[1516] Finally, governmental agencies had to accept their existence, and asked them only to register[17] and being visible as taxi drivers.[18]

Today, motor taxi drivers are estimated to number more than 100.000 (Agossou 2003: 113), half of them in Cotonou alone. They constitute a very visible aspect of urban life[19] in all major towns of the country. They are easily perceptible by their coloured, short sleeved, button down shirts with real or fictitious numbers of registration on their back. [20] In Cotonou, they usually wear yellow shirts, whereas in Porto Novo red and in Grand

[13] There is even a *Syndicat national de Zémidjan du Bénin* and the metropolitain *Union des conducteurs de taxi-moto de Cotonou*.

[14] An important factor was the committment of one of the most popular Benin pop stars, Stan Tohon, creating a special song on that occasion, which soon became widely popular and helped to ally larger parts of the population to the cause of the Zémidjan.

[15] I would argue that even those (numerous) "illegal" Zémidjans who are not officially registered and members of one of the professional associations indirectly profit from this kind of institutions, as the latter occasionally defend the interests of Zémidjans and publicly manifest their strength as a group

[16] In Natitingou, in August 2004 some Zémidjan drivers formed a football team for a competition, although it mostly consisted of young people that had already been peering before becoming Zémidjans (Hahnekamp 2005).

[17] At the time of investigations, costs for registration ran up to 19000 FCFA (Hahnekamp 2005) and meanwhile are probably higher; a comparatively large sum as it represents one up to two weeks of income of a driver. Frequently, violent clashes between informal (non-registered) Zémidjans and the police occur, rencently in Cotonou in October 2009

[18] Zémidjans are frequently objects of cartoons or comic videos, shot e.g. by *Mediateurs sans frontiers*, a collaboration of Beninese and French actors and filmmakers (see e.g.. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lwYxR0W_-JU&feature=related; 23.4.09)

[19] During election campaigns, Zémidjans were discovered by NGOs as ideal ambassadors of civil rights and duties. In 2001 e.g. the NGO „Centre Afrika Obota"and the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation vested them with new shirts, carrying slogans such as „*Chère soeur, Cher frère, conserve bien ta carte d'électeur*! or „*Allons tous voter le 4 mars!"*. Similar projects relate to HIV/AIDS protection.

[20] West African (Cab-) taxi drivers in towns or overland services ('bush taxis') feature similar modes of organisation, though mostly they are much better mostly organised, see Stoller (1982) Lawuyi (1988), Grätz (2007). For technical aspects of driving in Africa see the Website (in German) of a research project based at the Institute of Ethnology, University of Munich, URL:
http://www.ethnologie.lmu.de/Africars/index.html (22.7.08).