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[1], 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?"[2]

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.

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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 Ivoirian 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 2011has 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![3]

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[4] 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

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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.[5] 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 inter-locutors 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.[6] 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"[7]

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 18th century[8], with the queen Abla Pokou's legend (Atta 1978). According to this legend, a group of Akan people flew 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 vulne-rable 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 repre-sented a monolithic group because they were all running away from a contested king

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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 t h e 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*[9], 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 20th 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)
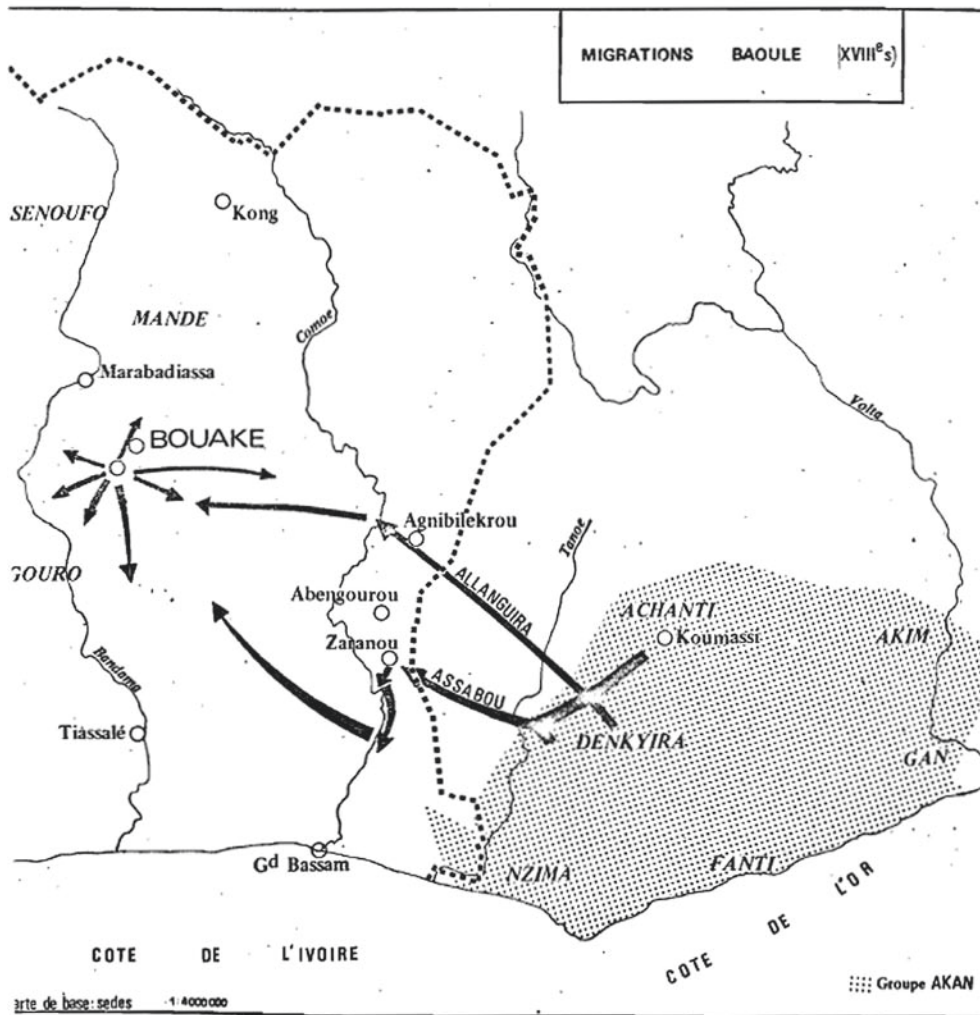
9   Again, this is a contested version somehow, since I have been told by a Bouaké dweller that the *Faafoue* were not the most powerful subgroup, but rather the *Fari*. It is also worth mentioning that history and tradition are continuously socially constructed and hence contestable. For more about the creation and evolution of tradition, see Hobsbawm and Ranger (2015)
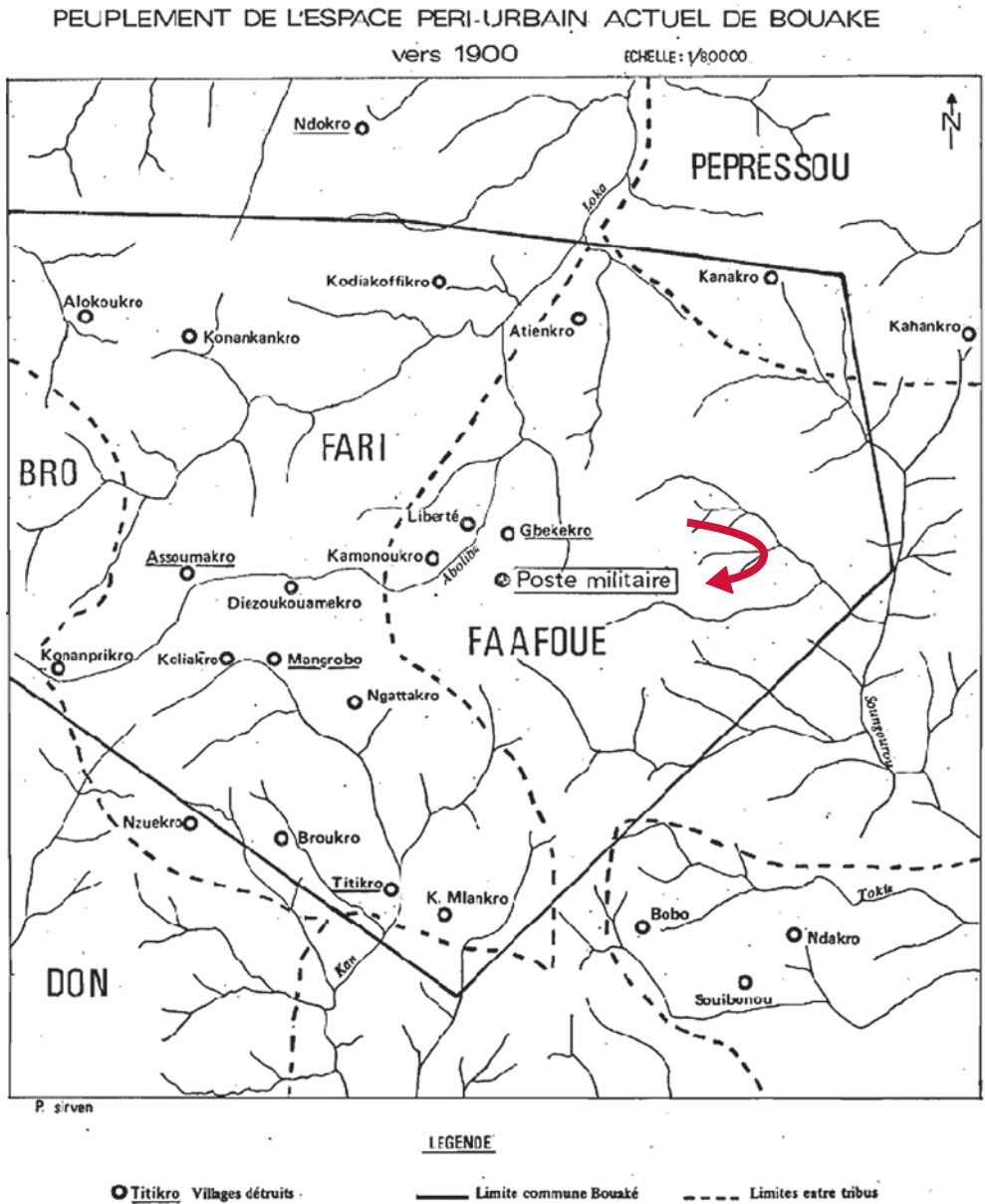
PEUPLEMENT DE L'ESPACE PERI-URBAIN ACTUEL DE BOUAKE
vers 1900   ECHELLE: 1/80000

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

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10   AOF stands for Afrique Occidentale Française.

region of the then French West Africa (AOF[10]) 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[11] 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[12] 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*[13] 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[14] 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![15]

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.[16] 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![17]

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-

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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".[18]

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![19]

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 Ivorian 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:

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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![20]

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[21] 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?[22]

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21 In 2012, the University of Bouaké was renamed "Université Alassane Ouattara", after the current Ivoirian 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…[23]

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 goodbye, 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)

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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.[24]

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[25] singers, Yode and Siro.[26] 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. Koua-mé 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![27]

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

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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 examin 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 disillusions 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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