

CHAPTER 6

The Dakar–Bamako Corridor: Between Boom and Contradictions

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‘Among the challenges to overcome in order to ensure the successful implementation of the Plan for an Emerging Senegal (PES) it was noted that some fall under the infrastructure and transport sector, notably roads, through the reduction of the infrastructure deficit and the strengthening of regional interconnection.’¹

Introduction

Among the assumptions underlying the PES (Plan for an Emerging Senegal) is the need – if not the obligation – to have high-quality infrastructure and transport, which requires the construction of new roads and, above all, the development of interconnections with neighbouring countries. With the PES, the tone has been set. Senegal is developing its new infrastructure programme, which was launched in 2014 by the president of the republic, Macky Sall, and has the goal of inserting itself more effectively in international, continental (and intercontinental) trade networks. In view of the importance of the Autonomous Port of Dakar (Port Autonome de Dakar, PAD), efforts are focused in particular on strengthening the Dakar–Bamako axis, especially the road network, while waiting for the railway to regain its former glory. What matters to the government of Senegal is the possibility that goods will be able to circulate more easily between Dakar and Bamako, which is the basis of Senegal’s attractiveness to international donors, shipowners and logistics operators.

¹ Ministère des Infrastructures, des Transports Terrestres et du Désenclavement, *Plan Stratégique de Développement de l’AGEROUTE Sénégal 2017–2021*, Dakar, 2016, p. 2.

By focusing on interconnection, Senegal is playing the modernity card, for which mobility has been regarded a watchword for more than a decade.² Like the new city of Diam-Niadio, the new airport of Ndiass and the Dakar–Thiès–Mbour–Touba motorway, the Dakar–Bamako axis, which has been renamed the ‘corridor’, must in the short term characterise the country’s entry into a new era and highlight a process of radical change, making Dakar an ‘infrastructure metropolis’.³

What works in favour of Senegalese policy-makers, port authorities and international donors (increased traffic and transit along the axis in question) raises a number of questions, however. Aside from the fact that no credible alternative to road transport seems to be in the making, the impact of increased road traffic on the spaces crossed and on towns and villages seems to have barely been taken into account. However, already-old work⁴ has cast doubt on the structural effects of transport infrastructure on the space. More recent analyses highlight the fact that the transport facilities located between central areas and territorial peripheries have deepened inequalities.⁵ Olivier Ninot insists on the need for much more empirical work in order to better understand what is being achieved by infrastructure, and what falls under public policy, stakeholder strategies and local decision-making.⁶ Along the Dakar–Bamako Corridor, the question of the growth-generating effects is still being raised. Policy-makers seem to be obscuring it, however, even as traffic increases and the axis polarises economic and social activity.

In this chapter, we will begin by discussing the role of the port of Dakar in Senegal’s economy. We will then look at the current claims about the place occupied by the Dakar–Bamako Corridor in Malian transit and the competition represented by other locations. Finally, we will re-explore the conflicted relationship between the fluidity of international traffic and local development of the spaces crossed by the corridor.

² Peter Adey, *Mobility*, London, 2000.

³ C. Prélorenzo and D. Rouillard, *La Métropole des Infrastructures*, Paris, 2009 pp. 189–99.

⁴ J.-M. Offner, ‘Les « effets structurants » du transport : mythe politique, mystification scientifique’, *L’Espace Géographique*, 3, 1993, pp. 233–42.

⁵ Danny MacKinnon, Gordon Pirie and Matthias Gather, ‘Transport and Economic Development’, in R. Knowles, J. Shaw and I. Docherty (eds), *Transport Geographies*, Oxford, 2008, pp. 10–28.

⁶ Olivier Ninot, ‘À propos des relations entre transports, territoire et développement’, *L’Espace Géographique*, 1, 2014, pp. 61–62.

Senegal, Gateway to the Countries of the Interior

The Dakar–Bamako road axis has seen unprecedented growth since the early 2000s, which it owes to the geographical location of the port of Dakar on the network map of shipping lines as the first unloading platform on the west coast of Africa. The continuous improvement of roads in Senegal, particularly those leaving the agglomeration of Dakar to the east, also promotes the development of national and international communications.

The Privileged Situation of the Port of Dakar

Senegal's reputation was built on the presence of a 'good port', which was developed in the early decades of the twentieth century due to its geographical location on the 'fork in the lines of communication leading to South America in one direction and to the Indian Ocean in the other'.⁷ In 1970, Assane Seck was the first geographer to emphasise the importance of the port of Dakar for the development of Senegal's international relations.⁸ Until recently, it was still the main entry and exit port for Mauritanian, Gambian or Guinea-Bissau trade. In the 1980s, the government justified its necessary adaptations of the Senegalese economy due to 'deterioration in terms of trade'. This phrase is part of the regime's ideological framework for explaining economic problems and having the solutions for emerging from them accepted: 'According to the Senegalese government's analyses, the new economic policy implemented is essential for ensuring economic development, participatory growth and a reduction in social cost that forced adjustment does not allow.'⁹

The country then found a new slogan for development: without mobility, there is no salvation. In the name of adjustment programmes, development requires the support of all economic actors and the population to connect the country to the world and locate it on the best international trade and transport routes. In a speech delivered in January 1988, the president of the republic presented the new philosophy guiding the country:

In this race for economic progress and social welfare, placed in this global context, Senegal, a country largely open to the Atlantic Ocean, a traffic distribution hub, the hub for the continent, has the assets required to join

⁷ Frederick Cooper, *L'Afrique depuis 1940*, Paris, 2008, p. 244; André Siegfried, 'Les routes maritimes mondiales', *Les Études Rhodaniennes*, 17:1–2, 1942, pp. 5–20.

⁸ Assane Seck, *Dakar, métropole ouest-africaine*, Dakar, 1970.

⁹ Momar Diop and Mamadou Diouf, *Le Sénégal sous Abdou Diouf: État et société*, Paris, 1990, p. 150.

the NPI club tomorrow With the prodigious development achieved by means of communication, the question is no longer confined to inter-African trade and extends to the whole world, and our country could become one of *the* offshore centres of the world economy.¹⁰

The programme stresses the need for good tertiary services to boost the Senegalese economy in its internationalisation phase in a pragmatic way.

As we enter the post-industrial era in most countries, regardless of their level of development, the service sector will become increasingly important in the economic game. To this end, our country and its capital at the extreme tip of West Africa have a privileged role to play as a centre of production and trade and shining home of a rapidly expanding array of services.¹¹

In view of Senegal's position on the world map and in Africa itself, international transport is vital for the country.

From 2000, investment in the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) by the new president of the republic, Abdoulaye Wade, confirmed the Senegalese authorities' desire to tie the country to Africa as a whole. Conceived as a long-term programme to eradicate poverty and integrate the continent into world trade, NEPAD emphasises the fields of telecommunications and transport, repeatedly stressing the strengthening of infrastructure, improved accessibility, public-private partnerships and regional connections.

It is President Abdoulaye Wade's intention to strengthen the pre-eminent position of the port of Dakar in West African maritime transport, with the objective of making Dakar a global hub for maritime traffic and a compulsory point of passage for all shipping lines active along the West African coast. The nautical conditions and the situation of the basins on the eastern part of the Cape Verde peninsula are remarkable assets. Modernisation of the port is being led by a director-general who is close to President Wade and has experience working on ports, and who, following foreign leaders in shipping, is driving unprecedented development. Until the early 2000s, the container terminal was mainly reserved for vessels registered by the companies belonging to the Union of Transport Auxiliaries of Senegal, which were Sdv and Saga (subsidiaries of

¹⁰ See the Senegalese daily newspaper *Le Soleil* of 11 January 1988, quoting the speech delivered the previous day by the outgoing president, Abdou Diouf, at the extraordinary congress of his party establishing him as a candidate for the presidential election in February 1988.

¹¹ Ibid.



Photo 6.1. Dubai Port World container terminal at Dakar port, 2015.
(Source: J. Lombard, 2015.)

Bolloré), Maersk Sealand, Simar and even Msc. The major new development of the Wade presidency is to break with this past. In 2007, Dubai Port World was awarded the new concession for the terminal for a renewable period of 25 years, with an investment commitment of CFA francs 333 billion (Photo 6.1). International competition requires new arrangements if Dakar's place in the extensive growth in containerised traffic in Africa is to be consolidated.

In 2012, Dubai Port World began the construction of a new terminal called the 'Port of the Future', which will have a capacity of 1.5 million TEU (twenty-foot equivalent units).

Increased Port Traffic

In the 2000s, an acceleration of the growth in imports led to an increase in port traffic from four million tons in 1997 to more than nine million tons in 2012, out of a total of almost 12 million tons.¹² Progress has continued steadily, and

¹² Autonomous Port of Dakar, 2013.

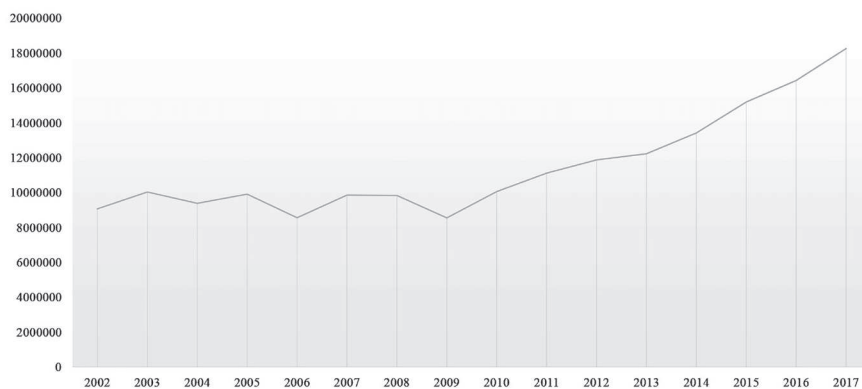


Figure 6.1. Traffic trend in the port of Dakar, 2002–2017 (Tons).
(Source: Dakar Port Authority; ANSD, 2019.)

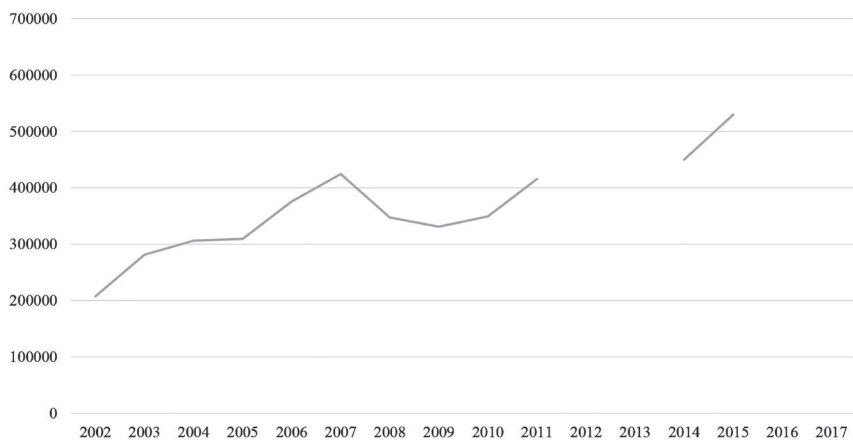


Figure 6.2. Container traffic at the port of Dakar, 2002–2017 (TEU).
(Source: Dakar Port Authority.)

in 2017 the overall volume reached 18.2 million tons (Figure 6.1). Development of the terminal has also boosted container traffic, which now exceeds 500,000 TEU. This only includes a small portion of the volume destined for Mali (at best 20 per cent, according to the SSATP study on road transport in West and Central Africa).¹³ Much of it is made up of goods that arrive in containers leaving for Mali on conventional trailers (Figure 6.2).

The growth of the Senegalese population (from seven million in 1988 to 15.7 million in 2018), especially in the capital (from 1.586 million in 1990 to 3.067 million in 2015), is one of the main drivers behind the development of the port of Dakar.¹⁴ The urban logistics within the agglomeration are an increasing element to which the port must constantly adapt.¹⁵ The other challenge is to consolidate its role in serving Mali. The Ivorian crisis of the 2000s¹⁶ stepped up the process of bringing West African ports into competition with each other, leading to the emergence of outgoing Malian traffic from ports in Ghana or Togo.¹⁷ The Senegalese Corridor also strengthened its grip on Malian transit, making Dakar the leading service port for Mali (Figure 6.3). Fluctuating between 300,000 and 600,000 tons in the decade beginning in 2000, Malian transit through Dakar jumped after 2010, reaching more than 2.6 million tons today.¹⁸

Despite Senegal's ambitious port policy over the past two decades, the port of Dakar must still constantly seek to strengthen its attractiveness, lest traffic be lost. Notwithstanding the improved local services and remarkable nautical conditions, its location at the heart of an urban fabric limits the possibilities for expansion and hinders its ability to compete with its most serious competitors. A new port is also expected to be established further east in Rufisque Bay. The condition of the road on part of the route connecting Dakar to Bamako (not to

¹³ Abel Bove, *et al.*, *Le transport routier en Afrique de l'Ouest et Centrale*, SSATP Working Paper No. 108, Washington, D.C., 2018.

¹⁴ Africapolis <www.africapolis.org/data> [Accessed 27 April 2021].

¹⁵ N. Mareï and Olivier Ninot, 'Transformation des transports en Afrique: Vers des systèmes à plusieurs vitesses?', *Questions Internationales*, 90, 2018, pp. 27–31.

¹⁶ In 2002, Côte d'Ivoire was split in two, with its northern part occupied by belligerents considered by the Abidjan authorities to be rebels. Economic activity slowed down and rail transport was interrupted completely. International transit to and from the port of Abidjan was partially suspended until 2003, forcing shipowners to move to other West African ports.

¹⁷ ISEMAR, *Enjeux et position concurrentielle de la conteneurisation ouest-africaine*, 104, 2008, p. 4.

¹⁸ Ministère de l'Économie et des Finances, *Situation Économique et Sociale du Sénégal. Édition 2009*, Dakar, 2010; Port Autonome de Dakar, 2013, 2017.

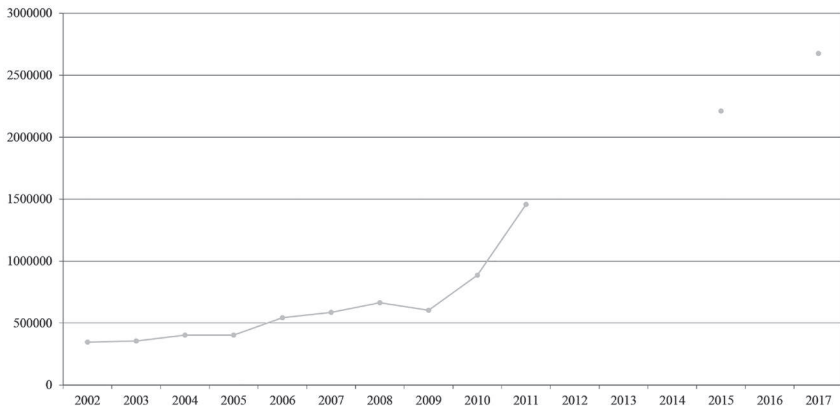


Figure 6.3. Transit traffic to Mali at the port of Dakar, 2002–2017 (Tons).
(Source: Dakar Port Authority.)

mention that of the railway) is variable, increasing transport times and forcing operators to opt for diversifying their logistics solutions and not favouring the Senegalese route at the expense of others.¹⁹ The extension of the motorway to Kaolack (190 kilometres east of Dakar) should reassure operators for a time. Finally, the transit times at the port of Dakar are still a disadvantage for the rapid clearing of containers.

The growth of port traffic in Dakar benefits both the Senegalese national market and Malian trade. The geographical advantage of the Dakar peninsula, which is the first major stopping point for ships operating on the Europe–Africa lines, is accompanied by active lobbying by the port authorities and the Senegalese powers in an extremely competitive West African landscape.

The Dakar–Bamako Corridor in Regional Competition

Service to Mali from the port of Dakar evolved throughout the twentieth century. Road transport has now overtaken river and rail, making the Dakar–Bamako

¹⁹ Jérôme Lombard, Benjamin Steck and Sidy Cissokho, 'Les transports sénégalais: Ancrages internationaux et dérives locales', in M.C. Diop (ed.), *Sénégal, 2000–2012: Les institutions et politiques publiques à l'épreuve d'une gouvernance libérale*, Dakar, 2013, pp. 642–71.

route the number one trade route with the outside world for Mali; however, competition from other transport routes and West African ports is a constant threat to Dakar's leadership.

From Rail to Road

The difficulties involved in transport by rail between Dakar and Bamako have made the need for a quality road axis more pressing. Since 2008, the completion of the asphaltting of the different sections has allowed Senegalese and Malian operators to circulate their goods more easily.²⁰

The Virtual Disappearance of the Railway Line

In the Senegal–Mali international arena, trade was first conducted by the river infrastructure, which from the nineteenth century served as an axis of penetration for the colonial conquest towards French Sudan and supported all the fortified towns, from Dagana to Kayes. This golden age was short-lived, however. From 1923, with the Thiès–Kayes rail link, the waterway saw its traffic decrease and 'enter, from that moment on, a period of sleep which endures today'.²¹ During the first 60 years of the twentieth century, the railway operator, whose network covered the entire Groundnut Basin, responded to the economic development challenges of the colony and then of the independent state. The shift of economic activity from the Senegal River Valley to the centre of the country reinforced the railway's primary role in west–east relations. In 1923, the traffic between Thiès and Kayes amounted to 447,500 passengers and 133,000 tons (civil servants, military personnel, traders); in 1966, freight traffic was approximately 150,000 tons.

In the last 30 years of the twentieth century, international rail traffic grew significantly (reaching 431,000 tons in 1998). However, operational difficulties coupled with the dilapidated condition of the railway caused accidents and derailments, which resulted in a rapid deterioration in rail activity, and by 2000 traffic had dwindled to 345,700 tons.²² With the privatisation of the operation in 2003 and its takeover by an international consortium with Canadian and French capital (Canac–Getma), international flows of goods

²⁰ 'Inauguration de la route Didiéni-Diéma: un boulevard sur Dakar et Nouakchott', *L'Essor*, 21–27 July 2008.

²¹ R. Keita-Ndiaye, 'Kayes et sa région: Étude de géographie urbaine au Mali', unpublished PhD thesis, Université Louis Pasteur, 1971, p. 69.

²² Ministère de l'Équipement et des Transports, *Mémento des Transports Terrestres du Sénégal*, Dakar, 2002.

appeared to be rising again – by approximately 9 per cent in 2004, due to an increase in traffic in the Senegal–Mali direction.²³ In 2007, Transrail was acquired by the Advens group of Franco-Senegalese businessman Abbas Jaber, and was managed on a day-to-day basis by Vecturis, which specialises in rail transport in Africa. However, the volume of traffic failed to take off, falling below 300,000 tons in 2011,²⁴ and continued to decrease thereafter, to 288,086 tons in 2013, 244,858 tons in 2014, 210,008 tons in 2015 and 74,989 tons in 2016.²⁵ In 2015, operation of the line by Advens was terminated, and in 2016, Transrail was replaced by the Dakar Bamako Railway (DBF), a transitional manager until a permanent solution could be found.²⁶

The Dominance of Road Traffic

Since the end of the 1990s, roads have played an important part in the transport of goods to and from Mali as a result of the end-to-end completion of an asphalted route between Dakar and Bamako.²⁷ Rapid changes have been seen over the course of 20 years. Observations made at the customs post on the Senegalese–Malian border (Photo 6.2) or the Kayes bridge in Mali (Photo 6.3) confirm the upward trend. In 2001, nearly 50 lorries weighing between 10 and 30 tons, mainly loaded with hydrocarbons, building materials (lime and cement) and foodstuffs (salt, fish and various others) crossed the border from Senegal towards Mali every day. In 2006, according to the Malian press, more

²³ Ministère de l'Économie et des Finances, *Situation Économique et Sociale du Sénégal. Édition 2004*, Dakar, 2004.

²⁴ Ministère de l'Économie et des Finances, *Situation Économique et Sociale du Sénégal. Édition 2011*, Dakar, 2013.

²⁵ ANSD, *Situation Économique et Sociale du Sénégal en 2016*, Dakar, 2019. The decrease in freight traffic is creating real financial difficulties for Transrail. See Sidy Dieng, 'Transrail. Le plan de sauvetage vaut 177 milliards', *Wal Fadjri*, 16 May 2012 <<http://fr.allafrica.com/stories/201205161173.html>> [Accessed 27 April 2021].

²⁶ The fall in international passenger rail traffic has been going on for several decades: in 1998, 41,900 passengers travelled by train between Senegal and Mali, while in 2000, there were only 30,800. Over the period from 1995 to 2007, the decrease was 42%. Since 2018, passenger rail traffic has been totally interrupted on the international line and the internal link between Bamako and Kayes.

²⁷ Road passenger traffic is also steadily increasing between the Malian capital and Dakar: 17,000 travellers in 2005 compared to 7,000 in 2002. In 2009, no fewer than ten coaches with approximately 50 seats left Bamako every day for Kayes, with some continuing on to Dakar. In the other direction, several vehicles left the Senegalese capital for Mali every night.



Photo 6.2. Queue of trucks waiting at the Malian border, 2001.
(Source: J. Lombard, 2001.)

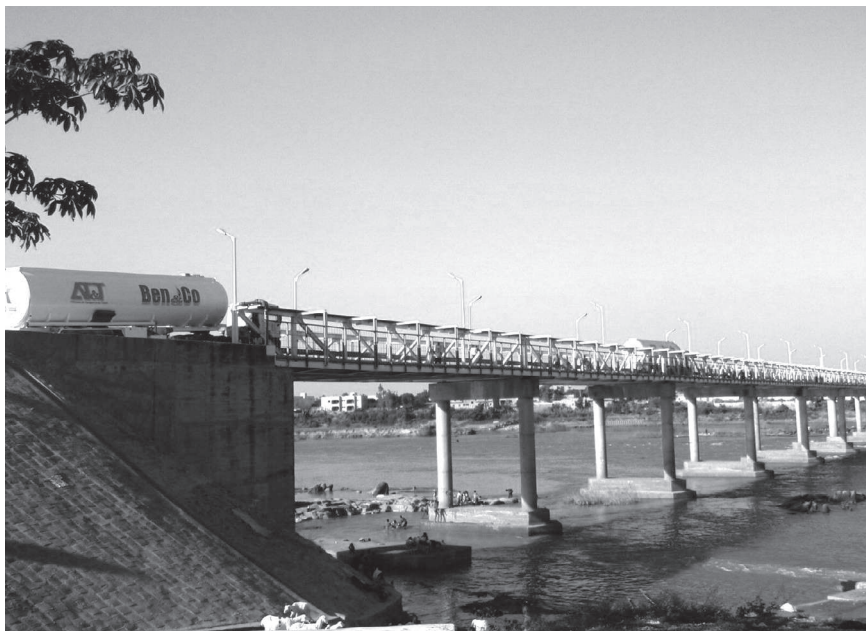


Photo 6.3. Convoy of tankers in the city of Kayes, Mali, 2009.
(Source: J. Lombard, 2009.)

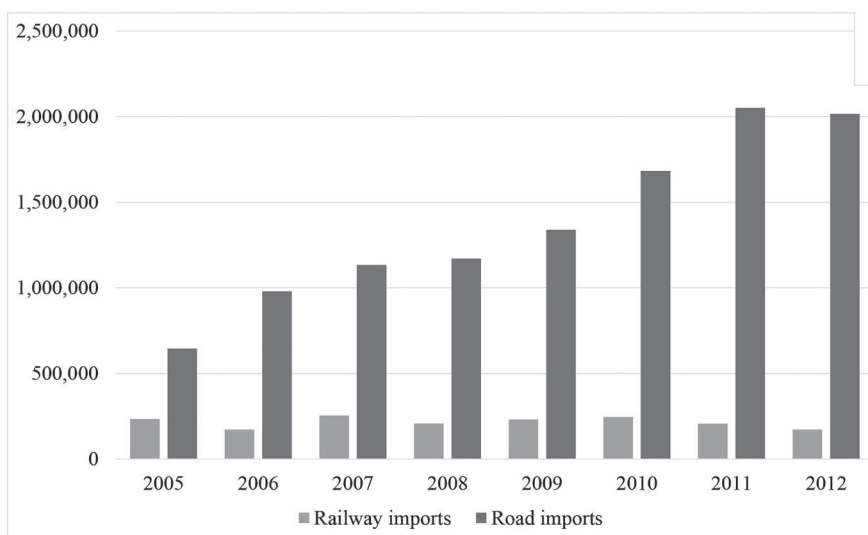


Figure 6.4. Malian import traffic by road and rail on the Dakar–Bamako Corridor, 2005–2012.
(Source: Malian Port Authority in Senegal, 2013.)

than 100 lorries from all over Mali and its neighbouring countries (including Burkina Faso and Niger) crossed Kayes daily towards Senegal.²⁸ In 2009, according to the prime minister of Mali, this number stood at more than 200. Today, according to the aforementioned SSATP study, nearly 400 vehicles use this corridor on a daily basis.²⁹

Between 2005 and 2012, the total volume transported along this corridor (imports and exports), road and rail combined, increased approximately 2.6 times, from 897,691 tons in 2005 to 2,326,802 tons in 2012. Road transport accounts for almost 90 per cent of Mali's overall traffic passing through Senegal, compared to 10 per cent by rail. Table 6.1 and Figures 6.4 and 6.5 illustrate the dominance of road over rail supply.

Table 6.1. Evolution of freight traffic on the Dakar–Bamako Corridor (in tons, 2005–2012).

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Imports by rail	233,410	171,935	254,353	207,503	230,572	245,830	206,356	171,838
Imports by road	644,707	978,995	1,133,173	1,171,088	1,339,574	1,681,812	2,050,257	2,016,142
Exports by rail	9,481	11,819	15,028	52,644	39,580	29,315	43,181	70,266
Exports by road	10,093	21,166	20,090	16,585	11,190	20,628	52,322	68,556

Source: Entrepôts Maliens au Sénégal (EMASE), 2013.

The Introduction of Competition between Corridors by Mali

Although the Senegalese Corridor is the main route of choice for Malian operators, other African corridors are equally advantageous. The development of the Entrepôts Maliens ('Malian Warehouses') organisations abroad has promoted competition among states on the Atlantic Ocean, for the benefit of

²⁸ 'Kayes amorce son décollage: Le soleil se lève à l'Ouest', *L'Essor*, 20 September 2006.

²⁹ Bove, *et al.*, *Le transport routier en Afrique de l'Ouest et Centrale*.

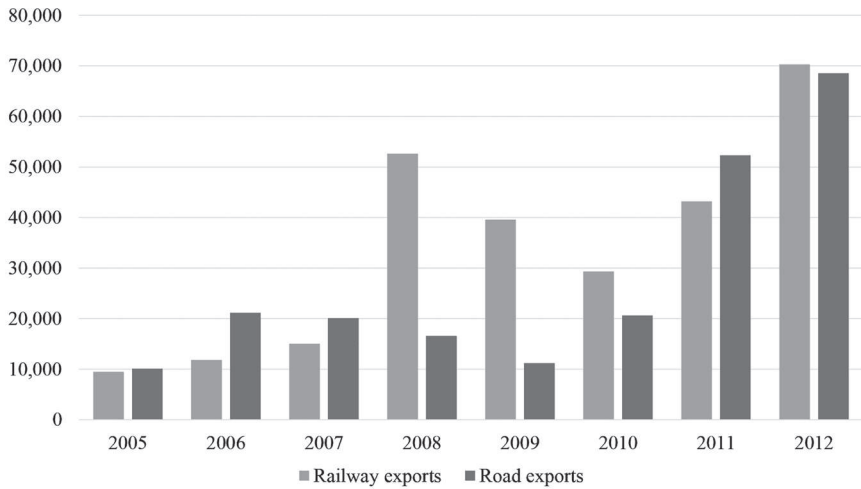


Figure 6.5. Malian export traffic by road and rail on the Dakar–Bamako Corridor, 2005–2012.

(Source: Malian Port Authority in Senegal, 2013.)

Mali, whose isolation is thereby diminished and its dependence on any one of them reduced.³⁰

*'Closing the Gap between the Coast and the Interior'*³¹

In a context characterised by the opening up of African economies to imports and the capitalisation of their exports, the landlocked West African states (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger) have opted for policies that diversify their supply and shipping routes. Rather than relying too heavily on the strategies of port authorities in the context of increasing competition among maritime entities that can sometimes benefit from political instability in order to gain market shares, these states have adopted a logic of pitting different platforms against each other.³² The aim of this is to restore the balance of power, and to make port authorities more attentive to – and even dependent on – national strategies. In Mali, as in Burkina Faso or Bouaké in the north-central part of

³⁰ There are also Entrepôts Maliens in Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal and Togo (EMACI, EMASE and EMATO respectively).

³¹ According to the expression of a Malian official interviewed in 2010 in Bamako.

³² Jean Debie and Sandrine De Guio, 'Interfaces portuaires et compositions spatiales: Instabilités africaines', *Autrepart*, 32:4, 2004, pp. 21–36.

Côte d'Ivoire, 'dry port' projects located within the borders or closer to the barycentre of national territories demonstrate the desire to circumvent the congestion problems of coastal ports, to reduce transit times by eliminating customs operations on landing, and to develop storage facilities in the territory of the destination country, 'to ensure regular supply to the population as well as the main sectors of the economy'.³³

The existence of transport corridors should be seen as more than a means of reducing isolation, and as the horizon of national and international transport policies. In Mali, the Shippers' Council (Conseil Malien des Chargeurs, CMC) seeks to develop winning strategies to improve the country's land-based services and support industrialists and traders, and to take on some of the logistics and transport operations by attracting them to Mali and entrusting them to national operators.³⁴

The First Transits of Malian Freight through the Port of Dakar

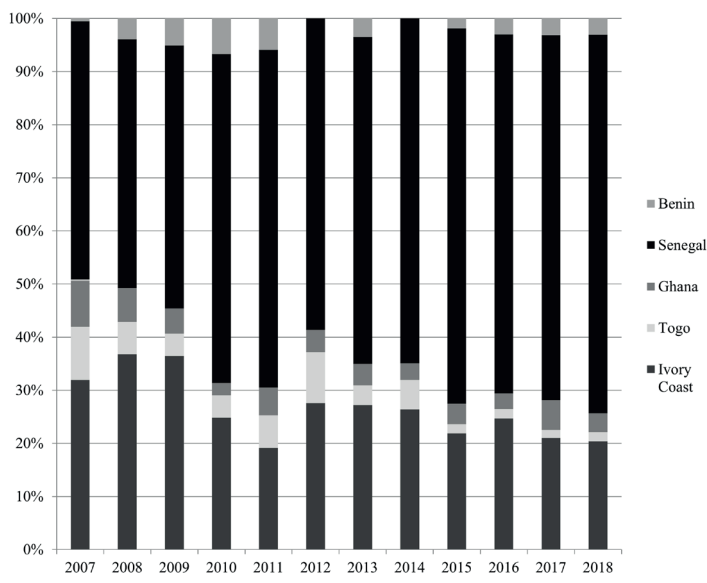
Observations of the evolution of the links between Mali and the Atlantic Ocean highlight the existence of multiple possible routes. The link to Côte d'Ivoire has been added to the route that has passed through the west of Mali toward Dakar since 1923, which since 1934 has linked the railway between Abidjan and Ferkessédougou, and then the track and road to Bamako, via Sikasso. These routes have long dominated Mali's land transport and communications landscape, with the link to Côte d'Ivoire overtaking the route to Senegal in the 1990s because of operational problems encountered on the Bamako–Dakar railway and the Ivorian port's efforts to attract Malian operators.³⁵ With the 1999 coup in Côte d'Ivoire and the country's split into two separate parts, the situation changed completely in favour of Dakar. Malian operators also look

³³ Jean Tape Bidi, 'Quelques réflexions sur l'existence d'un port sec à Bouaké en Côte d'Ivoire', in K. Fodouop and J. Tape Bidi (eds), *L'armature du développement en Afrique. Industries, transports et communications*, Paris, 2010, pp. 77–86; Harouna Cisse, 'La création des ports secs au Mali', Communication to the International Workshop *Systèmes de transport de marchandises en Afrique de l'Ouest*, World Road Association, Ouagadougou, 13–15 June 2005, p. 2.

³⁴ The CMC brings together an assembly of more than 250 industrialists and traders each year. While the secretary-general is a Malian state official, the president and vice-presidents are business leaders.

³⁵ In 1996, the Abidjan–Mali axis handled almost 940,000 tons (imports and exports combined), while the Dakar axis handled only 431,000 tons: Entrepôts Maliens au Sénégal and the Senegal Department of Transport.

Figure 6.6.
Distribution
of road traffic
to Mali by
West African
corridors,
2007–2018.
(Source:
Malian Port
Authorities,
2018.)



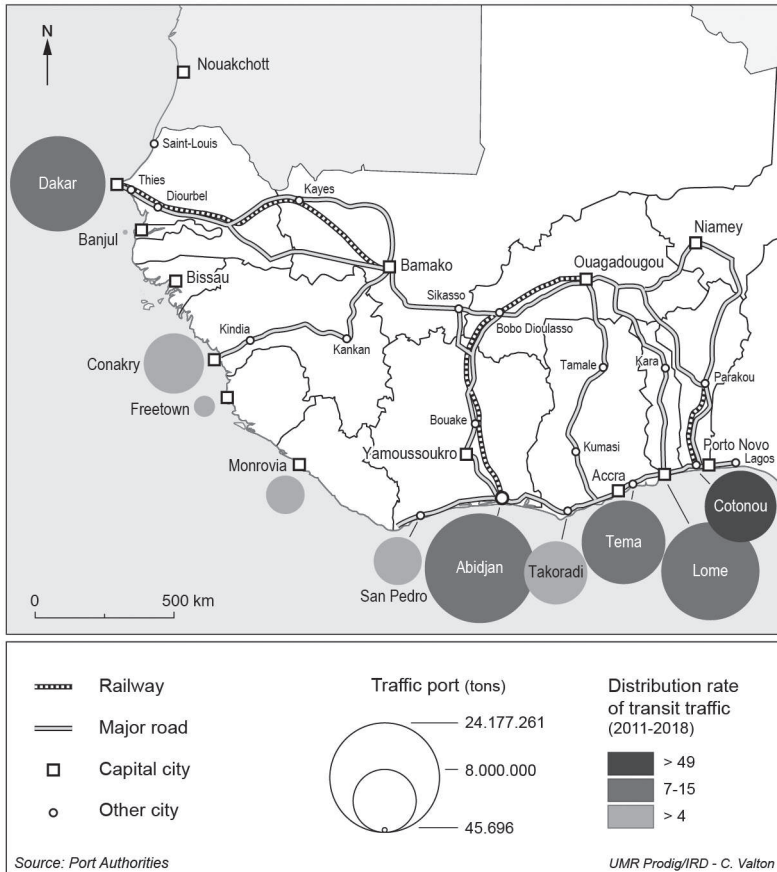
to Togo (Lomé: 26 per cent of Malian transit in 2004) and Ghana (Tema and Takoradi: 17.8 per cent).³⁶

Over the past 15 years or so, the Senegalese corridor has made gains over its competitors (Figure 6.6 and Map 6.1). At the end of the 2000s, the Dakar–Bamako axis took 50 per cent of Malian traffic, but this percentage grew steadily from 2013, rising to nearly 70 per cent in 2018. Malian transit traffic has continued to decline at the port of Abidjan, by almost 40 per cent in the 2000s, but by only 20 per cent in 2018. As for Ghana’s ports (Takoradi and Tema), which were able to capture 10 per cent of Malian transit for a time, their share fell to less than 5 per cent because of long waiting times at the port and difficulties with access (untimely roadblocks).³⁷

The advantages of the Dakar–Bamako Corridor are still undeniable. According to importers we interviewed in 2013 as part of a study on the

³⁶ See Jacky Amprou, *Crise ivoirienne et flux régionaux de transport*, Paris, 2005.

³⁷ Herve Deiss, ‘Afrique de l’Ouest: Le portuaire joue la carte de la solidarité avec les pays enclavés’, *Ports et Corridors* <<https://portsetcorridors.com/2019/ports/afrique-de-louest-le-portuaire-joue-la-carte-de-la-solidarite-avec-les-pays-enclaves/>> [Accessed 27 April 2021].



Map 6.1. Total traffic and share of transit traffic in West African ports, 2011–2018.

(Source: Port authorities.)

transportation of Senegalese goods by road, the corridor benefited from the Ivorian crisis and the resulting insecurity on the roads.³⁸ The distance between Bamako and the other ports (Cotonou, Lomé and Accra), which are located about 2,000 kilometres from the Malian capital, is turning into an advantage for Dakar, which is only 1,200 kilometres away. In addition to providing an alternative to the northern corridor, the implementation of the southern corridor (Tambacounda–Kédougou–Saraya–Kita–Bamako) in 2014 shortened the

³⁸ State of Senegal and the European Union, 2013.

Dakar–Bamako road link to 1,000 kilometres. According to the oil carriers we interviewed, there are also other factors that favour the Senegalese corridor, including the section of road that passes near the gold mines of the Kayes region (which are heavy consumers of diesel) and the reduction in waiting times at the Dakar refinery, which allows four monthly rotations per tanker truck, compared to two in Abidjan.

For almost two decades, the policy adopted by the port of Dakar and the construction of additional roads have consolidated Senegal's place in trade with Mali. Competition from Abidjan, which is in search of its former glory, is currently below what it might have been until the end of the 1990s. The current challenge for the Dakar–Bamako Corridor is to maintain its attractiveness for international transport operators and the populations residing along its route.

When the Dakar–Bamako Corridor Emancipates Itself from the Territory

Efforts by Senegalese actors to make the Dakar–Bamako axis the main choice for transport and logistics operators are increasing. With the opening of the second axis toward the Malian border, which crosses Senegalese mining areas, the corridor has become a national issue for the country. The aim of this policy, which is supported by international donors, is to improve traffic flows along this double axis. One question remains unresolved, however: is this objective becoming exclusive, or can it accommodate a more balanced territorial development?

Prioritising Fluidity

The development of international trade between Senegal and Mali is founded on a favourable and long-standing backdrop of improving road links between African capitals.³⁹ Support for corridors linking ports to capital cities in landlocked countries has become even stronger as one sees significant declines in transport costs along heavy traffic routes.⁴⁰ Donors, meeting the interests of landlocked countries and the major domestic and international operators, are pushing to strengthen corridors, with the goal of improving traffic flows on major roads and minimising

³⁹ Club du Sahel et de l'Afrique de l'Ouest, *Atlas régional des transports et des télécommunications dans la CEDEAO*, Paris, 2005.

⁴⁰ Supee Teravaninthorn and Gaël Raballand, *Transport Prices and Costs in Africa: A Review of the International Corridors*, Directions in Development; Infrastructure, Washington, D.C., 2009.

existing barriers, including so-called abnormal practices.⁴¹ Improving traffic on the main West African roads is becoming the backbone of the development of transport systems in Africa, and is one of the strategic axes of transport policies, led by continental organisations such as NEPAD.⁴²

The focus on international infrastructure and the consolidation of international corridors stems from the credit they enjoy in the dominant discourse and the extensive projects envisioned for the continent. International donors and global operators see this as an easy way of duplicating what is being done elsewhere. The corridor is viewed as the only alternative to a lack of international connections. In a sense, the prophecy of the corridor is self-fulfilling, in the words of Robert King Merton, and is also referred to by J.-F. Staszak.⁴³

The notion of the corridor is presented as one of the elements of the relationship between transport, regional integration and the development process. The corridor promotes institutional integration, which enables the development of international co-operation, the creation of public–private partnerships, and changes in legislation and inter-state agreements. Logistical and economic successes, which are given value by the prevailing narratives about the future of transport in West Africa, establish it as a new paradigm.⁴⁴ As a ‘programming and governance tool’, it tends to be organised into a functional (and efficient) space, concentrating infrastructures, flows, operators and public

⁴¹ Borderless Alliance <www.borderlesswa.com>; checkpoints (customs, police, etc.) along international roadways have been identified as additional cost factors (due, for example, to illegal taxes, bribes) and significant delays. They are monitored by a collective of public and private interests called ‘Borderless’, which aims to improve trade and transport conditions in West Africa. See comment prepared in 2018 by a Senegalese representative of the Observatory of Abnormal Practices (OPA – Observatoire des Pratiques Anormales): <www.dakaractu.com/Corridor-Dakar-Bamako-D-excellents-resultats-ont-ete-enregistres-en-2016-Mbaye-Chimere-Ndiaye_a137029.html> [Accessed 27 April 2021].

⁴² West Africa Trade Hub, *Coûts du transport et de la logistique sur le corridor Lomé–Ouagadougou*, Report #47, no place of publication, 2012; Jérôme Lombard, Olivier Ninot and Benjamin Steck, ‘Corridors de transport en Afrique et intégration territoriale en questions’, in A. Gana and Y. Richard (eds), *Les intégrations régionales dans le monde*, Paris, 2014, pp. 245–64.

⁴³ Robert King Merton, *Éléments de théorie et de méthode sociologique*, Paris, 1953/1997; Jean-Francois Staszak, ‘Prophéties auto-réalisatrices et géographie’, *L’Espace Géographique*, 29:2, 2000, pp. 105–19.

⁴⁴ Vivien Foster and Cecilia Briceno-Garmendia, *Infrastructures africaines: Une transformation impérative*, Paris, 2010, p. 202; Yann Alix (ed.), *Les corridors de transport*, Cormelles-le-Royal, 2012.

and private authorities.⁴⁵ Its operation is reduced to the establishment of simple accelerators of flows: that is, roads connecting two points – in this case capitals such as Dakar, Bamako, Ouagadougou, Abidjan, Accra and Lomé. These continental hubs exert their influence over the entire area being served and ensure the redistribution of goods in their inland areas. The pursuit of the technical-economic logic of corridors leads to territories dominated by fluidity and only slightly structured by the diversity of the transport systems. The example of the Maputo Corridor is emblematic of the development of this type of heavy axis in Africa, which benefits only international trade, and only rarely local traffic.⁴⁶

What are the Effects for the Territories Crossed?

The quest for fluidity on the Dakar–Bamako Corridor raises certain questions. The tunnel effect is often the first outcome of the concentration of efforts on a single axis. It results in low interdependence between long-distance traffic and local spatial dynamics. As transit traffic grows, small towns scattered along the axis become no more than milestones for drivers and exit and redistribution points for freight and passengers.⁴⁷

The corridor is designed by globalised economic actors as a logistical axis, which under optimal conditions must enable flows of traffic and ensure the maximum profitability of these flows, dictated by the needs of both shipping customers and consumers of the products being transported. At the same time, it is presented by institutional leaders as a development tool that benefits the territories crossed and as a resource for improving the accessibility of inhabited areas. There is no guarantee, however, that these populations will notice any positive impact, with the discourse on the structural effects obscuring the negative aspects, which include inconveniences such as pollution and accidents, and even insecurity and land pressures.

⁴⁵ Jean Debie and Claude Comtois, 'Une relecture du concept de corridors de transport: Illustration comparée Europe/Amérique du Nord', *Les Cahiers Scientifiques du Transport*, 58, 2010, pp. 127–44.

⁴⁶ Frederik Söderbaum and Ian Taylor (eds), 'Competing Region-Building in the Maputo Development Corridor', in F. Söderbaum and Ian Taylor (eds), *Afro-Regions: The Dynamics of Cross-Border Micro-Regionalism in Africa*, Uppsala, 2008, pp. 35–52.

⁴⁷ A former Senegalese driver interviewed in 2000 when he was the caretaker of a transport company, who had left a small town in the centre of the country to settle in Dakar, repeatedly told of seeing tanker trucks passing by on the road to Mali, no longer stopping in what had been the company's stronghold for 50 years: "Even breakdowns are repaired from Dakar", he added.

In the 1990s, one of Africa's top transport specialists, the economist Xavier Godard, underlined the importance of linking international and local flows.⁴⁸ The corridor can aid the process of bringing them together provided that it is not thought of just as a fluid axis of circulation, but is also viewed as an interface space. The existence of secondary intermediate hubs, holders of relay functions (transport, logistics, trade), and the polarisation of jobs and financing is one of the conditions. On the Dakar–Bamako Corridor, the question arises of the role and future of the towns and villages located along the road axis. The life generated by the flows results in a reduction of activities toward the axis, where sustainable human settlements and the seeds of future agglomerations emerge (Koumpentoum in the region of Tambacounda, in Senegal, or Diéma and Didiéni between Kayes and Bamako, in Mali). Corridors become tools of territorial reconfiguration, offering benefits to the territories. On the one hand, there is the possibility that people will benefit from what is circulating by offering numerous goods and services (fuels, various repairs, restoration and accommodation) and, on the other, there is also the potential capacity to meet travellers' needs at the stops with food products, construction materials, energy resources (for example charcoal) and handicrafts. The growing numbers of trips made by government officials and private companies, and even private vehicles, are creating a traffic market from which the local population can benefit. Finally, being located on a corridor means having easier access to health, education and administrative services.

Another major issue is the destruction of infrastructures. Between Tambacounda and Kedougou, the axis is in poor condition, as it also is between Kedougou and the Malian border.⁴⁹ The Kayes Bridge, which spans the Senegal River, has been weakened by uninterrupted truck crossings for almost two decades, as it was not built to take such a high level of traffic. In 2016, it was even closed for reconstruction, forcing vehicles over 40 tons in weight to travel by the southern route.⁵⁰ The main explanation for this was the systematic

⁴⁸ Xavier Godard, 'Transport local, transport global, quelle articulation ?' in SITRASS, *Efficacité, Compétitivité, Concurrence: la chaîne de transport en Afrique Sub-Saharienne*, Lyon-Arcueil, 1996, pp. 339–43.

⁴⁹ See Boubacar Dembo Tamba, 'Le corridor Dakar–Tambacounda–Bamako via Kédougou se dégrade dans sa partie située entre Niéméniké et Moussala', *Radio Tamba Online*, 23 December 2017 <www.tambacounda.info/2017/12/23/corridor-dakar-tambacounda-bamako-via-kedougou-se-degrade-partie-situee-entre-niemenike-moussala/> [Accessed 27 April 2021].

⁵⁰ Since 2021, a second bridge over the Senegal River relieves the old bridge of part of its traffic. See Aminata Sanou, 'Inauguration du 2ème pont de Kayes: contribuer à la

overloading of heavy goods vehicles in contravention of West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) community regulations (to which Mali and Senegal are subject), in particular regulation 14/2055/CM/WAEMU, on the harmonisation of standards and procedures for the control of the gauges, weights and axle load of haulage vehicles. Overloading is often used to compensate for low freight prices and the almost constant empty return journeys. A 2013 study on the state of road freight transport in Senegal indicated that at the Diam Niadio weighing site at the exit from the Dakar agglomeration, 78 per cent of heavy goods vehicles were overloaded. The same study concluded that the lifespan of the infrastructure has been drastically reduced (from 15 to five years).

The rail transport alternative represents one way of addressing the problem of vehicle overloading and destruction of infrastructure. On the link between Dakar and Bamako, however, despite repeated promises to boost use of the line, no large-scale plan has been envisaged to permit the complete restoration of the track or, presumably, widening it to standard gauge.⁵¹ Moreover, there is nothing that says that the revival of rail transport will benefit the localities crossed or their populations. In fact, the example of the Abidjan–Ouagadougou line, which is operated by SITARAIL, a subsidiary of the Bolloré group, shows the opposite: a reduction in the number of stops at passenger stations and a concentration of investment in freight trains.⁵² On the Dakar–Bamako line, the impact for the territories has been disastrous: since the takeover of operations by private funds in 2003, residents have complained about the disappearance of the passenger service, which was sometimes the only way available to them to

croissance économique et assurer la continuité du trafic du corridor Dakar-Bamako !', Maliactu.net, 2 March 2021 <<https://maliactu.net/mali-inauguration-du-2eme-pont-de-kayes-contribuer-a-la-croissance-economique-et-assurer-la-continuite-du-traffic-du-corridor-dakar-bamako/>> [Accessed 8 June 2021].

⁵¹ Khadim Mbaye, 'Macky Sall réitère son plaidoyer pour le développement du ferroviaire en Afrique', *La Tribune Afrique*, 25 September 2017 <<https://afrique.latribune.fr/finances/investissement/2017-09-25/macky-sall-reitere-son-plaidoyer-pour-le-developpement-du-ferroviaire-en-afrique-751648.html>> [Accessed 27 April 2021]; Michel Lachkar, 'Moderniser la ligne de train Dakar-Bamako, un projet stratégique pour le Sénégal', *franceinfo*, 11 August 2018 <www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/afrique/senegal/moderniser-la-ligne-de-train-dakar-bamako-un-projet-strategique-pour-le-senegal_3054631.html> [Accessed 27 April 2021].

⁵² Foussata Dagnogo, 'Rail-route et Dynamiques Spatiales en Côte d'Ivoire', unpublished PhD thesis, Université de Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2014.

travel outside their isolated region.⁵³ The revitalisation of the line has not been integrated with transport/space interactions in mind, and the only underlying goal has been the fluidity of traffic between the two terminals.

Conclusion: Senegal's Corridor at the Tip of Africa

By focusing its energy on infrastructure development, particularly that of the Dakar–Bamako road axis, Senegal comes across as a country committed to change. The Dakar–Bamako Corridor is apparently a project that serves a dominant vision of the economy, in which accelerating and securing intercontinental traffic are the fundamental principles.

However, Senegal's territory lies at the 'tip of the network', at the far end of the axis from Mali, and thus from central West Africa. Policies to strengthen national infrastructure in the direction of Dakar, coupled with disagreements with The Gambia, Mali and Mauritania, have highlighted Senegal's focus on itself and contributed towards distancing it from its neighbours, to the point where international land connections remain difficult: the Tambacounda/Malian border axis was only asphalted in 1999 and there is no bridge across to Banjul in The Gambia or to Mauritania, while routes to Guinea or Guinea Bissau are few and in poor condition. Nationally, therefore, Senegal is a country that is turned towards its capital, while at a continental level it is relegated to a peripheral position that is no more favourable in terms of better integration into West African trade than that of landlocked Mali and Burkina Faso, which seem to be more in control.⁵⁴

On the African chessboard, the question is whether the Senegalese economy can turn the advantage the location of the port of Dakar represents for international sea routes into a permanent asset, and attract global and West African

⁵³ See the two-part film by Julien Merlaud, 2007, who interviewed all the rail transport actors in Mali and investigated the entire Bamako–Kayes train route: *Bamako–Kayes Parts I–II*, film, Julien Merlaud <www.dailymotion.com/video/x4phtd_bamako-kayes-part1_news> and <www.dailymotion.com/video/x4pgyq_bamako-kayes-part2_news> [both accessed 27 April 2021].

⁵⁴ See Olivier David, 'Les Réseaux Marchands Africains face à l'Approvisionnement d'Abidjan', unpublished PhD thesis, Université Paris X, 1999 on onions from the Sahel exported to the Ivorian economic capital (more than 1,500 kilometres away); Audrey Fromageot, 'Dépasser l'Enclavement: Le Maraîchage des Savanes et l'Approvisionnement d'Abidjan', *Espace-Populations-Sociétés*, 1, 2005, 83–98, on market gardening in the savannas of southern Burkina Faso, the production of which is also intended for Abidjan (more than 700 kilometres away).

transport operators in spite of competition from other ports such as Abidjan, Tema and Lomé, and soon Nouakchott and Conakry. In addition, the trade between Dakar and Bamako makes an uneven contribution to the development of national territories. While the two cities benefit, other spaces such as landlocked urban neighbourhoods and rural peripheries remain isolated from the advantages that should come with the traffic that passes through them. The rhetoric of the structural effects of infrastructure mobilised by Senegal and donors remains wishful thinking.

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