

Transnational Migrants, Land and New Investment Hubs in African Cities

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Intensified and competing claims over land are crucial to understanding current urban transformations in Africa. This paper aims to highlight the role of transnational migrants in urban land investments and claim making on urban land. While the relationship between urbanization in Africa and migration has long been a focus of research and policy, attention had mainly focused on the intertwinement between rising urbanization and the influx of rural migrants, internally displaced people (IDPs) and refugees struggling to survive and gain access to urban space and services. More recently, the African city has gained a more positive image as a consequence of Africa's economic boom and has come to be seen as a pillar of development, rather than a place of chaos and poverty. In this 'urban turn' in development thinking and concomitant technocratic and infrastructural policy approaches, the link between urbanization and migration has been largely overlooked. We argue, however, that transnational migrants in particular are an important category in claim-making processes over urban land and real estate and add to these in specific ways. Using case studies in Khartoum and Dakar, we investigate the ways in which transnational migrants contribute to speculation, rising land values and processes of socio-spatial inclusion and exclusion. Rather than making a comparative analysis, we use two concrete cases to gain an empirical understanding of the processes associated with these diaspora investments, including the question of whether these transnational migrants can be considered as contributing to urban 'land grabs' or not.

Africa is urbanizing on a very large and rapid scale. Urbanization processes in Africa have hitherto mostly been ascribed to rural–urban migration, in-situ natural growth and the reclassification of rural areas as urban (Potts, 2009, 2012; Satterthwaite, 2007). But foreign investments have also started to contribute significantly to urbanization processes in Africa. In an era of 'neoliberal urbanization' (Sheppard *et al.*, 2015), urban development has been greatly influenced by global finance companies, international financial institutions and global consultants. Various international and national public and private actors have mobilized to claim urban land. In addition

the African city has started to be promoted worldwide as the new frontier for global capital (Watson, 2013; Myers, 2015; Fält, 2016; van Noorloos and Kloosterboer, 2018). Intensified and competing claims over urban land have resulted in increased scarcity and pressure on urban land markets in the Global South and have contributed to what has been denominated as the 'urban land grab' (Steel *et al.*, 2017; van Noorloos *et al.*, 2018).

Urban land acquisitions or changes in urban land use that result in 'grabs' generally involve a variety of actors. Yet they are in stark contrast to the rural land debate (Kaag and Zoomers 2014) where the big food and biofuel

corporations are often easily considered as the powerful and 'known enemy' of smallholders and other local populations. Instead, in an urban context, the influence of a multitude of hardly traceable financial players strategizing in urban real estate deals makes the situation less clear cut (van Noorloos *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, in discussions about urban land transformations, more attention must be paid to the multi-layered roles and functions of different actors in current investment patterns in African cities, as well as their indirect and long-term impact on urban development.

In this article, we start our empirical analysis with a focus on transnational migrants: important but often neglected players in the scramble for land in African cities. As reflected in the impressive migrant literature, transnational migrants from all over the world send huge amounts of remittance back home to invest in land and real estate, be it in cities or in rural areas in their home countries (Smith and Mazzucato, 2009; Klaufus, 2009, 2010; Lopez, 2015; Michelini and Pintos, 2016). By putting mounting pressure on real estate prices, they make urban land markets much more competitive and speculative. Yet in urban studies, with a few exceptions (Tall, 2009; Duroyaume, 2015; Lefort, 2015; Melly, 2010), transnational migrants are often overlooked as an important investment group claiming land for family homes and investment properties and as such contributing to urban transformations in Africa. A focus on this particular group of investors would, however, contribute substantially to a better understanding of manifestations of competition over urban land and the way it contributes to or obstructs (local) inclusive and sustainable development (see also Steel *et al.*, 2017).

In this paper, we will zoom in on the role of transnational migrants in urban transformations in Khartoum and Dakar, two African cities that are characterized by rapid urban development and related land issues, although in different ways. In Sudan, the authoritative regime has probably a more outspoken role in governing land and mediating urban land

conflict than in Senegal, where (urban) land governance is characterized by various and overlapping legal and non-legal governance regimes, and where solutions to land questions are most often *ad hoc* and provisional (Kaag *et al.*, 2011).

In addition, migration patterns and investments are taking a slightly different form in the two cities. Khartoum is known as a refugee city with more than 2 million internally displaced people (United Nations, 2004). Khartoum is a 'safe haven' for many refugees from Eritrea and Ethiopia. Offering shelter or transit to refugees from neighbouring countries, the city has come to be considered as an important migrant hub for transit migrants moving in the direction of Europe. As a consequence, the European Union has established a platform for political cooperation, known as the Khartoum Process, to discuss the EU–Horn of Africa migration route and to address trafficking in human beings and the smuggling of migrants (EU Horn of Africa Migration Initiative).

At the same time, many households in Khartoum rely on family members living and working in the Gulf states, Europe and the USA. The literature focuses on the migration flows of Southern Sudanese refugees towards the USA (Abusharaf, 2002; Shandy, 2007), Canada (Simich *et al.*, 2010), and Europe (Weissköpel, 2009). But labour migration from North Sudan to Europe and the Gulf states is at least as important as South Sudanese refugee movements (Schapendonk and Steel, 2014). Many of these Sudanese labour migrants in the oil-producing countries in the Middle East take their families with them or move back and forth between countries to build a multi-local livelihood for their families. While the husbands work abroad many women remain at home with their children and/or their parents.

Senegal's capital Dakar also serves as a migrant hub, attracting Senegalese from the rural areas and people from other West African countries such as Guinea, looking for work and better livelihood opportunities in the city.

In addition, Dakar serves as a transit migrant hub, particularly for Senegalese from the hinterland who aim to migrate to Europe and more recently to Asian and Latin American countries. Senegalese international migration is still a predominantly male phenomenon, with men going abroad while leaving their families behind. Family reunification in the country of destination is becoming more common, but is often also difficult as many Senegalese are illegal migrants. We will see how the characteristics of the diaspora have an influence on processes and forms of urban investments by transnational migrants.

Empirically, the paper draws on two particular case studies aiming at getting an in-depth understanding of the processes associated with these transnational migrant investments and the way they put mounting pressure on real-estate markets and create new processes of socio-economic inclusion and exclusion. The first case study focuses on the Green Valley in Khartoum, a migrant investment hub in the northeast of the city. It draws on a field study conducted within the framework of a broader research project on urban land transformations and inclusive urban development in the capital city of Sudan. Data were collected during five visits to Khartoum between 2016 and 2018, totalling a period of six months and through continuous online and offline engagement with people in the Sudanese diaspora who have acquired land in this migrant investment hub. As land-related issues are rather a sensitive topic of inquiry in Sudan, ethnographic data are built on participant observation and informal conversations with residents, government officials and other land specialists in Khartoum. In addition, together with an Arabic-English-speaking research assistant, ten in-depth interviews were conducted with landowners and members of the Green Valley organization (seven) and urban land specialists (three) about the history of the case-study area, the prospects and the current building situation.

The second case study concerns Keur Massar, an urban frontier area to the northeast

of Dakar. Building on earlier research on land issues in Senegal (Kaag, 2001; Kaag *et al.*, 2011), ethnographic research was conducted in Keur Massar during two short fieldtrips in August 2017 and May 2018. As in Khartoum, land issues in Dakar are a sensitive topic. This is partly because rights to land plots and houses are often not formally/legally recorded and are easily contested, while the growing pressure on urban land and urban development initiatives contributes to a steadily increasing value of land. Because of this sensitivity, data were mainly collected by observations and informal conversations with residents and local authorities in Keur Massar. In addition, more formal interviews were held with project officers and staff at the mayor's office of Keur Massar. Working with a young female research assistant (a law student originating from the area but currently residing elsewhere in Dakar) proved to be very helpful: she knew her way around and also helped to create trust as the people knew her (or her family) while at the same time, as a young woman, she was considered unthreatening from a more political perspective.

In the following sections, we will start by elaborating how land, urbanization and international migration are interrelated and why transnational migrants are often neglected in these debates on land and urbanization. Thereafter, we focus on the two particular investment hubs in Khartoum and Dakar, in which transnational migrants play a prominent role. Rather than making a comparative analysis, we will use the two case studies to gain an empirical understanding of the processes associated with these diaspora investments, including the question of whether these transnational migrants can be considered as contributing to urban land grabs or not. In the conclusion, we reflect on the findings of the two case studies and their meaning in terms of inclusive growth in African cities.

Transnational Migrants: Ignored but Important Actors in African Urbanization

Migration and urban studies have been relatively disparate fields of study. Interestingly, developments in both domains, both empirically and in terms of knowledge production, have made a connection between the two increasingly necessary and promising. In migration studies, by the so-called 'transnational turn', the focus on push and pull factors explaining migration flows and on questions of integration, came to be supplemented by an increasing interest in migrants' transnational lives in general, and on their remittances in particular (Levitt and Nyberg-Sørensen, 2004). Also empirically, the amount of remittances sent home by African transnational migrants has increased substantially. These developments have also paved the way for considering migrants' investments in urban land and infrastructure. But where these have been studied, the focus is on the socio-cultural meaning of these types of remittances in terms of belonging and identity construction (Buggenhagen, 2012; Melly, 2010; Smith and Mazzucato, 2009). Less emphasis has been put on the direct role of transnational migrant investments on the built environment of Africa cities or on African urbanization in general.

In urban studies, a focus on Africa developed over the last few decades when African cities started to boom and expand at an unprecedented rate of 3.5 per cent per year (African Development Bank Group). The huge challenges associated with this have contributed to an 'urban turn' in development studies in which African urbanization is considered as one of the main challenges of the twenty-first century, but at the same time perceived as an engine for economic growth and social development (McGranahan *et al.*, 2016). As a consequence, African urbanization has received renewed attention from academics and policy-makers. The ambition is to make African cities 'inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable' as expressed in Sustainable

Development Goal 11 and the New Urban Agenda (UN-Habitat, 2016).¹ To meet this goal, enormous investments in housing, infrastructure, energy and economic development are expected to flow into cities over the coming years (Zoomers *et al.*, 2017).

As van Noorloos *et al.* (2018) indicate, the New Urban Agenda and its call for new and 'well-planned' urban solutions pushes new investments in urbanism globally. Much finance – ranging from international donor money to private capital – is meant to become available for implementing this New Urban Agenda in the Global South. But more informal capital flows should also be included in the analysis (as also argued by Stacey in this issue), and this, particularly insights from transnational migration studies as mentioned in the foregoing, may help to bring to the fore the role of migrant remittances as a possible source of capital for urban development.

The New Urban Agenda officially serves the objective of inclusive and sustainable development. But in practice, the associated increased investments in African cities by a plethora of public and private actors has led to increased pressure on, and competition for, urban land and other urban resources. This has led some authors to question whether we are really dealing with an 'urban land grab'. Interestingly, unlike in the rural land grab debate where the foreign investors are considered as the 'grabbers' gaining control over the land of the local populations – considered the 'victims' of the large-scale land acquisitions – in an urban context the division between 'grabber' and the ones 'being grabbed' is not self-evident (van Noorloos *et al.*, 2018). Indeed, in many instances of African urban development, the built environment can be seen as a complex arena in which many actors interact and often compete, ranging from local government actors and central state agents, multilateral projects, international NGOs from all parts of the globe, international commercial enterprises and investors to local land sellers, claimants and brokers. In addition, formal and informal rules and regula-

tions overlap, compete and are put to use by various categories of actor. Within these complex dynamics and hybrid formal and informal forms of land acquisitions it is difficult to define who wins and who loses (Steel *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, van Noorloos *et al.* (2018) argue ‘for moving beyond the directly visible outcomes and presumed “culprits” of land investments by critically analysing indirect and long-term effects of land acquisitions on people’s livelihoods as well as the differentiation of these effects for different actors’.

The complexity of roles and functions becomes even more opaque when looking at transnational elites – and more particularly diaspora populations – as an important group of investors in African cities. As elaborated by Kaag (2013), in the few migration studies that have explicitly dealt with elite formation, the focus has usually been on the incorporation of the migrant elites (generally a minority) into the established elites of the host country (Gowricharn, 2001). It is, however, important to consider the position of diaspora groups transnationally. Then it becomes visible that certain categories of African migrants may occupy a marginal position in the host context, but are viewed as an elite group in their country of origin. This holds true for most migrants that are the subject of this paper. Thanks to their capital acquired abroad they are able to invest in the urban landscape back home, which is beyond the reach of many other (local) groups, and in this way add to the pressure on urban land.

In the following, we will investigate how transnational migrants from Sudan and Senegal add to the investment dynamics in Khartoum and Dakar. We will do so by focusing on two particular migrant investment hubs: the Green Valley in Khartoum, and the urban frontier of Keur Massar in Dakar.

A Migrant Investment Hub created by the State: The Green Valley in Khartoum

Khartoum is the capital city of Sudan. It is the

fourth largest city in Africa after Lagos, Cairo and Kinshasa, with an estimated population of 6 to 7 million inhabitants (Denissen, 2014). In 2000, the city was almost fifty times larger than it had been during the mid-twentieth century (Abdalla, 2008). City growth can be attributed to the large influx of migrants ranging from small-scale farmers (who had to make way for large-scale agrobusiness projects and mechanical farming schemes) and farmers hit by hard droughts in the 1970s and 1980s. Also, civil wars between North and South Sudan (1963–1972 and 1983–2005) and the war with Darfur (since 2003) has provoked a huge wave of migration to the capital, particularly internally displaced persons (IDPs) (Jacobsen, 2008). The United Nations estimates that 1.8 million IDPs are living in and around Khartoum (2004, p. 177). The city also hosts many refugees from neighbouring countries (Ethiopia and Eritrea) and more recently from Syria and South Sudan. The large number of IDPs and migrants from neighbouring countries have made Khartoum a real migrant hub and gateway to Libya, for those who want to cross the Mediterranean to Europe.

While these IDPs and international migrants struggled to access affordable housing or temporary shelter, land and real-estate prices in the city skyrocketed (Choplin and Franck, 2014). Due to the devaluation of the Sudanese pound and a lack of trust in the formal banking system, land and real-estate investments seem to be the most secure and lucrative deposits in times of economic inflation (Steel *et al.*, under review). In addition, the Sudanese tradition of investing in land and real estate has been further supported by the sites and services policies, in which the Ministry of Housing allocates land at subsidized prices to low- and middle-income households on the basis of specified eligibility criteria, taking into account household income, family size, number of children and current housing situation (Hamid and Mohamed Elhassan, 2014). Also, other policies have focused on the assignment of land and services to specific professional

categories such as lawyers, architects, journalists, soldiers and other military personnel (Pantuliano *et al.*, 2011).

As a consequence, selling and buying land is part and parcel of the livelihood of many Sudanese citizens living in Khartoum and/or abroad. Sudanese migrants working for instance in the Gulf states tend to invest their money in real estate in Khartoum in anticipation of returning to their home country at some point in the future (see for instance the investments of the Sudanese diaspora in gated communities in Khartoum as discussed in Klaufus *et al.*, 2017). But we also found during informal conversations with many civil servants and other middle-income citizens living in Khartoum that as soon as they are able to afford it (with or without the support of family members living abroad), they try to invest in small plots of urban land throughout the city, envisioning the construction of their own family house or an investment property.

Ibrahim² is a civil servant in his early forties who lives with his wife and his two young children in the home of his elderly parents. During one of our conversations, he tells us that he has just decided to construct an extra floor on top of his parents' house. He plans to live there with his wife and children. For a long time, he had planned to construct his own house elsewhere in the city and had bought a piece of land some years ago for that purpose. However, he was unable to afford the cost of constructing a house on his own due to the lack of economic means and the high prices of steel and cement (which are highly taxed because they are imported from outside of Sudan). Instead, he sold his plot and liquidized his assets, and was in the process of constructing the extra floor to his parents' house. (Informal conversation, Khartoum, November 2018)

Rather than being a direct investment strategy, and similar to Ibrahim's story, we observed that many people buy plots of land around Khartoum when the opportunity arises but then sell them again without actually constructing a family home. Especially in times of economic crisis, land in Khartoum has become an important asset to ensure access to liquid assets as exchange values are

enormously high by all standards, especially when compared to average income.

The Khartoum state government is also actively capitalizing on the high land prices in the city by using land as an income-generating asset, either through direct sales of land or registration fees. A World Bank report (2011, p. 54) indicates that since the early 1990s the state government of Khartoum has been actively involved in the sale of prime urban land, vacant land reserves and centrally located pieces of land by auction. Within the framework of the New Urban Agenda, urban growth and the need for more urban land for residential use is anticipated with the Khartoum Structure Plan (KPP5) planning new residential projects and five satellite towns in the outskirts of the city (Ministry of Physical Planning and Urban Development 2010).

One of these projects concerned Al-Alwadi Al-Achdar, or the Green Valley, a large empty area of some hectares on the northeast fringes of the city. Between 2006 and 2008, the Ministry of Physical Planning of Khartoum State sold this land in the East Nile district with the expectation that it would construct a new airport in this region surrounded by high-income residential areas. Apart from approaching Sudanese professionals with a fixed salary (such as lawyers, engineers, architects and governmental officials), the ministry also actively recruited potential buyers abroad by circulating advertisements through different Sudanese embassies across the globe as well as by circulating online adverts through the social media networks of Sudanese diaspora groups. Our informants told us that through land sales to Sudanese migrants living abroad, the government hoped to bring in hard currency as well as foreign money. This was needed to supplement the state budget during severe inflation, the American boycott and a lack of oil revenues due to the secession between North and South Sudan. In addition, the migrants were expected to be able to pay upfront in cash and not by instalments as local residents would.

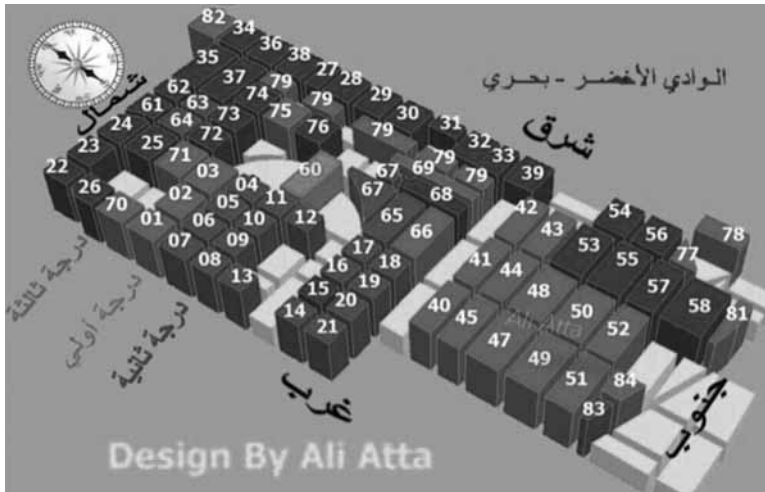


Figure 1. Map by Ali Atta, one of the members of the Green Valley Facebook group that contributed to the mapping of the site. (Source: www.greenvalley-sudan.org)

Despite high expectations, however, in the case of the Green Valley and like other similar 'white lands' (empty land where no construction has yet happened) the hoped for high-income residential site has not yet materialized. There are some middle- and low-income housing projects in the area (financed by the Khartoum Housing and Development Fund). But there is no construction taking place on the plots of land sold to transnational migrants. It remains empty land with no service provision except for one asphalted road. This road is the only material sign that the government has any plans for the area.

Although there is a lack of official figures, many original owners have already sold their piece of land to relatives, private investors or land brokers who still speculate on a breakthrough in terms of construction. Even at the beginning of the project, international migrants were seen as intermediaries between the Sudanese government and the local city dwellers in order to 'assist' them to have access to land. For instance, one of our informants told us that he had heard about the land sales in the Green Valley through his brother working in Morocco. Initially, the brother bought the land (as he could access it through the Sudanese embassy in

Morocco) and directly resold it to his brother in Sudan, who was unable to buy it directly from the government because of his lack of official income and migrant status (interview with former owner, November 2018). This ethnographic narrative illustrates one of the many cases in which the profile of the current landowners has diversified. Over the years, the landowners in the Green Valley have become much more diverse (ranging from transnational migrants to private investors, land brokers and local owners) than was initially the case when the government decided to sell only to Sudanese migrants living abroad.

Meanwhile, the profile of the owners keeps changing because the lack of electricity and water services to the area is blocking residential construction. In addition, much illegal sand extraction is taking place. Pickup trucks drive on and off to fill containers full of sand for the booming construction sector in the rest of the city. As a result, one broker told us that at least 8,000 plots of land are becoming ever less suitable for construction because the land is full of holes (see figure 2). Owners lack any faith that this residential project will be realized, and so keep on selling their land. The previous respondent, for instance, sold the land he bought from



Figure 2. This photo illustrates some of the consequences of illegal sand extraction in the Green Valley, Khartoum 2018. (Photo: © Griet Steel)

his brother after only two years of ownership because there was a family crisis for which he needed direct access to cash. And he indicated that he does not regret having sold the land because after more than ten years, there is still no actual habitation on the site.

In March 2012, a diverse group of landowners organized themselves and began a closed Green Valley Facebook group. Their aim was to use their collective power to enumerate, demarcate, map and share information between landowners and to lobby the responsible state officials to make good on their promises for service delivery. The Green Valley Facebook group currently has more than 24,000 members. It has opened a dialogue with government, asking it to fulfil its responsibility to provide the promised water and

electricity infrastructure and connect the area to the water grid so that the owners can start construction.

Increased access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) and social media in particular has not only opened up land and real-estate markets to an international public. It has also created opportunities for non-residents (or people living outside the city and even the country) to engage in claiming access to land, urban services and other resources. However, as most owners live abroad and only visit Sudan sporadically, there is a lack of action or the physical presence necessary to move their case forward. As one of our informants clearly expressed, the residential project has stagnated because of the absence of transnational migrant landowners.

They are unable to make appointments with the government to discuss their cases face to face (interview with landowner, November 2018). During our research, we found that landowners are realistic about the possible materialization of the project and consider it as a project for their children and grandchildren. As one landowner told us: 'We are not going to live there, but as my father did for us, we want to get land [in Khartoum] for our next generation' (interview with landowner living in Saudi Arabia, March 2017).

In the meantime, people living in the surrounding residential housing schemes have become important brokers on these social media platforms, maintaining connections with the landowners and negotiating the status of the land with the government. They are also making some money out of registration work that the transnational migrants cannot do from a distance. Over the years – and much to the frustration of the Green Valley Facebook group administrators who seem to be unable to control this unintended development – the group page has developed into an online commercial platform for urban land in the Green Valley. Many brokers use it to buy and sell land and speculate on the development of the area (interview landowner, March 2017). These brokers are not (yet) following up with actual construction (unlike in Dakar, as the next case study will show). But they are 'eating their piece of the cake' by having a physical presence on the ground and linking the global with the local.

Competition, Networks, Development and Marginalization in Keur Massar, Dakar

Dakar is the capital of Senegal and is situated on the peninsula of Cap Vert at the extreme west point of the African continent. Currently a megacity of 2.5 million inhabitants,³ until the mid-1800s it was only a sparsely inhabited area controlled by the fishing community of the Lébou. The island of Gorée situated a few kilometres of the coast was a European trading post for centuries and particularly

important for the slave trade. After the abolition of the slave trade, in 1857 the French colonial regime decided to establish a colonial settlement on the peninsula to facilitate the conquest of the hinterland.

In the beginning, Dakar developed only slowly as it suffered from competition from other more-developed colonial cities like Saint-Louis in the north, which served as the colonial capital at that time. Its development only took off after the headquarters of the colonial government of French West Africa (l'Afrique occidentale française, AOF) was moved from Saint-Louis to Dakar, which meant the installation of large administrative services. The supremacy of Dakar *vis-à-vis* Saint-Louis was finally established in 1904, when Dakar became the capital of the AOF. From that moment onwards, it has been Dakar that receives the major part of infrastructure investments. Also the population started to grow at a rapid rate: from 6,000 inhabitants in 1887 to 8,300 in 1891, 18,000 in 1904, to 25,000 in 2010 (Seck, 1961).

Dakar's growth continued and accelerated when the city replaced Saint-Louis as the capital of Senegal in 1957. After Independence in 1960, the severe droughts of the 1970s and 1980s led to a rural exodus with Dakar as the main destination. It seems that in the 1990s, Dakar's growth was predominantly caused by natural urban growth, and because secondary towns also started to attract rural migrants. Recently, a new élan has developed by investments of Senegalese international migrants, as a result of the important take-off of international migration since the 1990s (Tall, 2009; Buggenhagen, 2012). It appears that many Senegalese migrants aim to build in Dakar and its suburbs, even if they originate from other parts of Senegal (see also Melly, 2010).

From early on, the authorities have tried to control and plan Dakar's development. This resulted, *inter alia*, in the SICAP project, subsidized housing for the middle classes, and in the construction of an entire new town, Pikine, about 10 km outside Dakar, which

was meant to accommodate the overflow of the growing population (both in the 1950s and 1960s). It was not long, however, before Pikine became a suburb of the ever growing agglomeration, and planned urban development increasingly went together with informal squatting in the form of *bidonvilles* (slums or shantytowns), but also with the illegal building of large villas both in the better-off neighbourhoods and in the midst of poor areas. The old city centre on the peninsula (the Dakar Plateau and its surroundings) became saturated early on and now Dakar's development mostly takes place in its ever-extending suburbs (Tall, 2009). But while the state is involved in this process (for example through infrastructure development and relocation projects) it is not able to control it.

Under President Abdoulaye Wade (2000–2012), large modern infrastructural projects were initiated, such as a toll road and a new international airport. Since the arrival of President Macky Sall in 2012, Senegal has gone a step further and adopted an ambitious development policy, called Plan Sénégal Emergent (Emerging Senegal Plan or PSE) aiming at 'economic growth with a strong impact on human development', among other things by 'strengthening current drivers of growth and developing new sectors that can create wealth, jobs, and social inclusion with a strong power of attraction for export and investments'.⁴ The PSE and its elaboration in a plan of priority actions 2014–2018 have attracted much enthusiasm from bilateral and multilateral donors. As the PSE coincided with the global adoption of the New Urban Agenda, concrete urban-focused projects have since then evolved, such as the Programme de Modernisation des Villes (Promovilles),⁵ focusing on infrastructure development in Senegal's urban centres. These large infrastructure projects by the World Bank, African Development Bank and others add to the dynamics surrounding land investment and land claiming in Dakar. They are often managed by Senegalese ministries and state agencies but are not very centrally controlled

or coordinated, as we will also see in Keur Massar.

Keur Massar is one of the growth hubs in the Dakar area. Its development was propelled during Wade's presidency with the building of a toll road. This made the area much more easily accessible from central Dakar and *vice versa* (traffic congestion being a major problem). In 2005, President Wade announced that the new international airport would be built in Keur Massar, which led to a flow of large and small investors interested in buying land there. When a few years later, it appeared that the airport would be built further inland in Diass, many had already invested in Keur Massar and contributed to its growth and urbanization dynamics.

Fieldwork in Keur Massar, made it possible to consider the opportunities and challenges of Senegalese transnational migrants in investing in land and housing in this peri-urban development hub, and to gain an idea of the effects of their investments in terms of local processes of inclusion and exclusion. One of the first issues that emerge when talking to people in Keur Massar is that prices for plots have risen sharply over the last ten years, going up to FCFA 5 million



Figure 3. View of Keur Massar 2018. (Photo: © Mayke Kaag)

for an allotted plot and FCFA 9–10 million for an unallotted plot, due to the strong interest by public investors and elites from the Dakar region, but also transnational migrants. Local young people cannot afford these prices and are pushed to more marginal neighbourhoods.

Interestingly, many transnational migrants who want to invest in Keur Massar do not originate from the area but come from other parts of Senegal. This means that they need a local broker to get information on plots for sale, current prices, local owners and their form of ownership for negotiating a good deal. While there are online offers of plots of land, it is commonly assumed that local personal contacts are needed in order to facilitate and accompany the process of land acquisition. Knowing someone personally – particularly when the connection has come about by mutual acquaintances, kinship or ethnic bonds – creates trust, which is needed because the land market and land rights are opaque and also state housing agencies work through personal networks rather than through objective and written rules. An older informant narrated how staff of state agencies responsible for land registration also may profit from the brokerage system: ‘There are for instance brokers who are able to sell a plot for FCFA 10 million, while this plot’s official value is only 5 million FCFA. The state office then makes a contract for the official amount, and the 5 million is then distributed between the broker and the person(s) of the state office involved’.

The interest of transnational migrants in investing in Keur Massar thus, on the one hand, blocks access to land for local young people who cannot afford the higher prices, but on the other hand brings profit for local brokers. In addition, the affluence of transnational investment in housing also creates employment in construction and related works. All over Keur Massar, one finds improved and new constructions in different stages of completion, as in other parts of Dakar (Melly, 2010; Tall, 2009) and elsewhere in urban

Senegal. Houses built through diaspora investments are often long-term projects of incremental building (see also Smets, 2004) and depend on how well the migrant fares abroad and how much he is able to save and send home. A mason working on the third storey of a house in Keur Massar owned by a Senegalese migrant working in France, told us that the construction of the house had started in 2003 and that the second storey had been added in 2005. The ground floor had since then been occupied by tenants and the second storey by the migrant’s family. It was only now that the third storey could be finalized. One of the migrant’s younger brothers was overseeing the work. A young local entrepreneur told us that he specialized in creating fashionable lowered ceilings with integrated lights; he mainly works for *modou-modou* (a term commonly used in Senegal for Senegalese international migrants, having the connotation of working hard under difficult circumstances) as local people cannot afford the price.

Keur Massar is not only an important locus of private land and housing investment. When walking through the area and talking to people, it is clear that the municipality of Keur Massar is a major benefiter of international programmes associated with the New Urban Agenda in Senegal, as a consequence of being labelled as an urban development area in order to lessen the population pressure on Dakar. This is particularly visible in road and other infrastructure construction. Emphasis is also put on preservation of the natural environment as one of the priorities of the UN Urban Agenda and illustrating its ambition to link to the larger objectives of the SDGs.

It is remarkable that in the current projects, the focus on income generating activities for (specific categories of) the local population that was prominent in the former generation of development projects has almost completely disappeared. Staff at the Keur Massar mayor’s office indicated that they were nevertheless happy with all project activities,



Figure 4. Unfinished houses in Keur Massar.
(Photo: © Mayke Kaag)

but that there is very little or no coordination between the various projects, which can lead to situations like the one in which one project had planned to asphalt a road, while another project had planned to dig a canal across the site of the same road only a week later.

It also appears that for profiting from projects, such as from a relocation project or the opportunity to get vocational training, access to (local and national) political and state networks is important, as these opportunities are largely distributed through the patron-client relationships that make up these networks. The transnational migrants investing in housing in Keur Massar, especially those who are from another region in Senegal, frequently do not adhere to the local political networks (often because they are abroad, with their family members staying in the house, or renting their houses out to temporary renters), which means that they do not, or only marginally, contribute to local urban govern-

ance (see also Tall, 2009), and also that their access to specific opportunities related to incoming projects is rather limited.

Conclusion: Transnational Migrants, New Investment Hubs and the Urban Land Grab Question

Although generally overlooked in the debates on African urbanization, this article has shown that transnational migrants have become important actors in urban transformations in the African city. At least in the case of Senegal and Sudan, transnational migrants have become important investors in the land markets of their respective capital cities. The cases have, however, shown that they do so in different ways.

In Khartoum's Green Valley, transnational migrants were actively targeted as investors by the government so as to contribute to residential development in the city. However,

although real construction has yet to materialize, transnational migrants are still actively involved in place-making from a distance by putting pressure on the local government to assume responsibility in providing adequate infrastructure required to start construction. Also in Dakar, in the rather anarchistic process of urban extension, transnational migrants play an important role through their investment in land and house construction. Because most of them are not originally from the locality in Dakar where they invest, they still need local brokers. The state is an important stakeholder, too, but seems not to play a central proactive role in directing the process, unlike in Sudan.

The central question to be addressed in this issue of *Built Environment* is this: can we consider the kinds of processes and claim-making involved in these urban investment hubs as land grabs or not? Instead of speaking about an urban land grab with clear categories of 'grabbers' and 'victims', in the cases discussed in this paper, it seems more useful to speak about an urban land rush, in which a multitude of actors have an interest in accessing land, but where no specific actor has a clear monopoly. Hence, in both cases the transnational migrants are powerful players in land investments – via the resources they bring in – but they are also vulnerable in the face of local power dynamics and local actors who are stakeholders in local urban development.

In Sudan, transnational migrants are vulnerable because they lack the power to exert influence on the progress of infrastructure development. Meanwhile, they see their land becoming less and less suitable for construction due to illegal sand extraction. In Dakar, it can be concluded that transnational migrants are important economic players in the land markets, but that, by contrast, they are quite marginal from a political perspective. Their lack of inclusion in local political networks and in instances of local urban governance, means that they often lack access to specific opportunities, for instance those that come

with the booming urban development projects in the context of the New Urban Agenda. Interestingly, unlike in the case of Khartoum, they do not have coordinated (digital) forces, probably because their joint interests are less clear-cut than in Khartoum's Green Valley. In this sense, there are as yet no clear winners or losers in the rush for land in the cases studied.

In the context of the New Urban Agenda and the increased investments expected in housing, infrastructure, energy and economic development, the processes associated with this urban land rush, including the role played by transnational migrants, should be further scrutinized. Already, the outward-oriented policies of the Sudanese government have excluded more vulnerable city populations such as IDPs and refugees. What will happen when there is a breakthrough in the infrastructure provision in Khartoum and the construction of the Green Valley residential site is set in motion? Other construction projects in Khartoum have shown that they lead to urban land transformations, increased land values and asymmetric power relations between those who can afford to start construction or access labour opportunities on construction sites and those who cannot.

Who really benefits from these migrant investments? Are they contributing to the urban needs of the local inhabitants or are they just manifestations of 'speculative urbanism' in order to increase land prices and attract luxury development investment for a certain segment of society? Also in the case of Dakar, processes of inclusion and exclusion related to urban investments in land should be further scrutinized; it seems that those who do not have access to local political networks or to the economic networks of transnational migrants, will most likely lose out in the dynamic process of urbanization. Additional case studies could shed more light on what state policies, the character of the diaspora, and other specific investment actors (including, but not restricted to, those stimulated by the New Urban Agenda) would

mean for the forms, courses and outcomes of the current urban land rush in Africa.

NOTES

1. The New Urban Agenda was adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in 2016. It represents a shared vision for a better and more sustainable future, including the role of urbanization in sustainable development. See: <http://habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda>.
2. Pseudonyms have been used to preserve anonymity. Place names and other ethnographic details have been omitted to ensure that the personal narratives of our informants cannot be recognised by others we have worked with.
3. See: <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/senegal-population/cities/>.
4. See: <http://www.presidence.sn/en/pse/emerg-ing-senegal>.
5. See: <https://www.sec.gouv.sn/dossiers/projets-et-programmes>.

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