



# Landscapes of hoping – urban expansion and emerging futures in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

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## Abstract

Hope is much discussed as a future-oriented affect emerging from uncertain living conditions. While this conceptualisation illuminates the role that hope plays in shaping life trajectories, hope itself remains largely unaddressed. In this paper, we approach hope ethnographically as practice through the lens of material-semiotics. We draw on fieldwork in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, where hoping turns out to be co-constitutive of peri-urban life and landscape. We challenge person-centred understandings of hope in order to bring materiality back in two ways: first, hoping in its various modes and forms is always situated in particular settings, thus, its enactment has to be reflected; and second, hoping “takes place”, it is co-constitutive of the transformation of urban life. Additionally, we consider the temporality of hoping and highlight how hoping persists through urban space. We conclude that a more profound and thoroughly materialised understanding of hoping’s generative and stabilising potential may strengthen the role of anthropology in current research on socio-ecological transformations.

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**Introduction**

The notion of hope has gained new prominence in anthropological studies as a means to address the future in cultural analysis (Appadurai, 2004; Kleist and Jansen, 2016). Based on fieldwork in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso, we<sup>1</sup> explore the potential of analysing hope as practice through the lens of material-semiotics. We argue that ethnographers' contributions to "an anthropology of hope" (Zournazi and Hage, 2002: 160) have to a great extent been person-centred. While such an understanding of hope highlights the role of hope as a symbol and as mental capacity in people's life trajectories, both the emergence and differentiation of *hoping* in everyday life, and the formative effects occurring from it, including just how embedded hoping is in physical environments, remain largely untold. Linking up with the notion of material-semiotics we thus suggest shifting from a person-centred examination of hope to hoping as a practice and an ongoing process, a co-constitution of an always "provisional assembly of productive heterogeneous, and [...] quite limited forms of ordering" (Law, 2009: 146) that is continuously "enacted into being" and thus "generate[s] realities" (Law, 2009: 151). In this perspective, the material dimension of hoping is reconsidered in two ways. First, hoping in its various modes and forms is always situated in particular settings. Emphasising the situatedness of the encounters with our informants in peri-urban Ouagadougou and including the role of the specific environment into the analysis of the emergence of hoping, our approach differs from those that apprehend hope as an *a priori* "internal resource" (Appadurai, 2013b: 127). Second, we highlight how hoping "takes place". Focusing on the (auto-)construction of houses and whole neighbourhoods by the peri-urban dwellers, we show that hoping is co-constitutive of the urban landscape. Finally, we connect both arguments in order to discuss how hoping persists through and potentially stabilises the processes inherent to the urban landscape. We conclude that a more profound and thoroughly materialised understanding of hoping's generative and stabilising potential enriches current research not only on urbanisation but on social-ecological change and emerging futures more broadly.

The paper is structured in four sections. First, we take a closer look at anthropological preoccupation with, and discussions of hope, how these discussions are informed by and in turn inform ethnographic accounts, and what the lens of material-semiotics might add to these debates. Second, we provide information on Ouagadougou and the restructuration scheme in place and highlight the gaps and entanglements between the formal processes and the practical conditions of zoning operations, as well as some elements that constitute an essential part of our analysis of hoping. In section three, we present three snapshots from our fieldwork.

To analyse hoping as practice we reconsider the notion of practice through the lens of material-semiotics. Thereby we challenge person- and mind-centred understandings of hope in order to reinstate the role of materiality and develop three interconnected arguments. First, we argue that hoping in its various modes and forms is always situated, thus its emergence has to be reflected. Second, we elaborate on how hoping ‘takes place’; it does not only (re)orient and shape life trajectories, but is co-constitutive of the shaping and changing of the urban landscape. Third, we focus on the temporality of hoping and emphasise how hoping persists through urban lives and landscapes; its generative dimension does not only point to possibilities, but literally brings potential futures into being and stabilises pathways for transformation. To conclude, we summarise our contributions to current anthropological approaches to hope and urge our readers to take into account that capacities to aspire (Appadurai, 2004) are always also materially grounded.

## **An anthropology of hope and hoping**

The notion of hope has recently gained new prominence in anthropological research (Kleist and Jansen, 2016; Miyazaki and Swedberg, 2017). Drawing to a large extent on philosophical and theological accounts of hope, anthropologists and scholars working on hope often conduct ethnographic fieldwork in contexts characterised by radical change and ontological insecurity. Topics such as severe illness (Eliott and Olver, 2007; Mattingly, 2010; Park, 2015; Soundy et al., 2013), displacement (Brun, 2015; Peteet, 2005; Turner, 2015), fleeing (Appadurai, 2015) and migration (Haines, 2011; Kleist and Thorsen, 2017; Mar, 2005; Pine, 2014), but also prolonged uncertainty in times of political and societal transformation and state building (Avramopoulou, 2017; Beyer, 2015; Jansen, 2014, 2015; Kornienko, 2014; Ross, 2010) with regard to the struggle for recognition (Appadurai, 2013b; Miyazaki, 2004) or simply ‘making a living’ (Dalsgaard and Demant Frederiksen, 2013; Miyazaki, 2006; Narotzky and Besnier, 2014; Pedersen, 2012; Stäheli, 2014; Zigon, 2009) are all prominent in this emerging field. Instead of narrowing hope down to a single entity, the notion is deployed to describe a wide range of everyday situations as well as to highlight people’s search for spaces of possibilities (Anderson and Fenton, 2008; Anderson and Holden, 2008; Head, 2016). However, ethnographically speaking, hope remains a “fuzzy concept” that is not easily translated into empirical research. Hage puts this succinctly in a conversation with the philosopher Mary Zournazi: “What on earth do you research when you are doing empirical research about [hope]” (Zournazi and Hage, 2002: 160)? And subsequently, what is gained from “an anthropology of hope” (Kleist and Jansen, 2016)?<sup>2</sup>

“Reflections on Hope as a Category of Social and Psychological Analysis” (Crapanzano, 2003) offers a starting point for such an endeavour. By presenting a panoramic approach, looking “at the discursive and metadiscursive range of ‘hope’”, Crapanzano (2003: 4) opens up a broad range of theoretical thinking regarding the notion of hope. On a conceptual level, some scholars have attempted

to either distinguish and demarcate boundaries between hope and related, but not entirely identical concepts such as expectation (e.g., Appadurai, 2013a; Zournazi and Stengers, 2002), optimism (Webb, 2007: 73), and desire (Crapanzano, 2003: 6) (to name just a few), or differentiate “modes of hoping” (Turner, 2015; Webb, 2007). Others have approached hope by providing minimal definitions and qualifying characteristics shared by distinct modes of hoping (Stäheli, 2014; Swedberg, 2017). While we drew on these works when the notion of hope first emerged from our field and entered subsequent discussions – ultimately an anthropology of hoping is itself a truly material-semiotic endeavour – we pursue a slightly different objective in this paper. Instead of pinning hope down or trying to develop an exhaustive framework in order to make it graspable, material-semiotics teaches us that the reality of an object is always fluid (Law and Mol, 2008). Thus, material-semiotics urges us to ask where hope comes from and what it does, to leave the quest for essences behind in favour of analytical sensitivities towards continuous enactments (Law and Mol, 2008: 74).

Ethnographers engaging with the notion have argued that hope is an “everyday feature of the human social world” (Pedersen and Liisberg, 2015: 5) but that it has no ontological status. Rather hope “is something we continually have to establish” (Pedersen and Liisberg, 2015: 11). This view opens hope up to be researched in and through the everyday life of people and their practices. Shifting from hope as a subject to hoping as a practice affiliates our endeavour with “the practice turn in contemporary theory” (Schatzki et al., 2001), which brings together a range of theories that conceptualise and locate the “smallest units” of the social as situated in practices (Reckwitz, 2002: 245). Our concern with hope as practice thus aligns with recent research on hope (Dalsgaard and Demant Frederiksen, 2013; Jansen, 2014; Mattingly, 2010; Pedersen, 2012), but slightly alters its focus by conceptualising practices through the lens of material-semiotics (Law, 2009; Law and Mol, 2008; Mol, 2010). As practice, material-semiotics does not refer to a unified theory but is to be taken as a sensitising concept (Blumer, 1954). Tracing the histories and diversity of both notions is clearly beyond the scope of this paper. What is relevant for our purpose is this: practices are relational. What comes together in a practice “make[s] each other to be” (Law and Mol, 2008: 58), in joint actions, though action here does not entail intentionality. Moreover, practices are contingent. To analyse them means to consider both their history as well as their non-necessity, and it means to consider processes of routinisation and convention as well as processes of creativity and discontinuity (Reckwitz, 2004). Finally, practices unfold within, draw on and shape specific material environments. They do not occur outside of specific spaces and epochs, but rather participate in constituting them. They make worlds – matter matters (Barad, 2003).

A closer look at two recent ethnographic approaches to hope clarifies our interest. The first example comes from Pedersen (2012). He analyses “The Work of Hope in Urban Mongolia” through a group of young men in Ulaanbaatar that regularly meets around an old broken Cadillac, “dusting, washing, cleaning, and

polishing the car while expressing, with never wavering enthusiasm, hopes of future prosperity” (Pedersen, 2012: 137). One day they finally manage to acquire the missing piece for the car and go for a drive. Being on the move, Pedersen argues, they actively build and keep their socio-economic network and their interest in the virtual potentials of their present and future; in other words, their hopes for another life and another world. Pedersen approaches the hope of these young men through their practices emerging around the Cadillac within the difficult social-economic conditions in post-socialist Mongolia. Their hopes are a concerted and collective effort. Hope stretches out between the men in the network, connecting them to one-another and in this way becoming an essential part of it: “we might say that the surplus produced by hope is the continual existence of the social network as such” (Pedersen, 2012: 147). Yet, although the story starts with and in the Cadillac, neither the car nor the city that the men drive through seem to play an important role in Pedersen’s understanding of hope in Ulaanbaatar. While it becomes clear from his analysis how hope plays out in social terms, he limits his notion of the social to the specific group he engages. The city becomes a mere stage for what is happening.

The second example is taken from a medical context. In her rich ethnographic study “The Paradox of Hope: Journeys through a Clinical Borderland”, Mattingly (2010) accompanies families with children living with life threatening diagnoses both within and outside of those clinical institutions providing treatment for them. She examines “healing dramas” as “moments of hope”, rooted in uncertainty as well as the “promise of progress”. Presenting an analysis that shifts from being person-centred to event-centred and finally discourse-centred, she succeeds in providing an ethnographic account that is close to the individual experiences of her informants, while simultaneously taking into account the structural and discursive conditions which contour the clinical encounters and biographies. However, in spite of her detailed and vivid descriptions of the clinical setting, the latter remains unquestioned in the background of the analysis.

Arguing that a material-semiotic understanding offers a tool to include material dimensions in the analysis of social practices, we aim to challenge ontological distinctions that privilege “a non-material version of the social” (Law, 2009: 148) as in the prevalent anthropological depictions of hope. Consequently, our analysis shifts from a person-centred conceptualisation of hoping to a more symmetrical and relational understanding. Put differently, we want to embed “hoping people” in their material surroundings and examine this nexus as a continuous process of dynamic co-constitution. This way we attempt to reconcile the apparently triple strategic use of hope in anthropological works: hope as the subject of analysis (e.g., Stäheli, 2014; Swedberg, 2017; Webb, 2007), hope as practice, still mainly phenomenological and person-centred (Dalsgaard and Demant Frederiksen, 2013; Mattingly, 2010; Pedersen, 2012), and hope as a method of knowledge production and redirection (Miyazaki, 2004, 2006; for a recent discussion of Miyazaki, see also Jansen, 2016). Drawing on fieldwork in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, we analyse our informants’ future-oriented “doings and sayings”

(Schatzki, 2001) as hoping, first, as it emerges from, and second, as it shapes the (peri-)urban landscape of Ouagadougou. This way, we literally place ethnographic research “where the action is” (Schatzki, 2011) in order to strengthen its relevance for a profound understanding and discussion of, as well as intervention into, the phenomena observed.

### Urban expansion and the promise of *lotissement*

According to the United Nations’ World Urbanisation Prospects for the period from 1990–2014, four of the ten fastest urbanising countries were in Africa, with Burkina Faso being one of them (United Nations, 2015). Since its designation as the capital of the former French colony Haute Volta in 1947, Ouagadougou has been, and still is a paradigmatic case of rapid urban growth (Njoh, 2016: 162).<sup>3</sup> The latest official census for Ouagadougou stems from 2006 when the total population of the city came to 1.475 million people (Ministère de l’Économie et des Finances, 2008) but projections from the United Nations estimated that the population would grow to 2.741 million people in 2015, reach 3.695 million in 2020 and 5.854 million by 2030 (United Nations, 2015). While these numbers are uncertain, there is no doubt that population increase caused by high urban birth rates and rural-to-urban migration will continue to challenge politics and people alike in terms of securing the supply of basic services, that is, water and energy, housing, education, security, food and health care. With the exception of some large construction projects (e.g., “Ouaga 2000”) most of the spatial expansion of Ouagadougou can be described in terms of “peripheral urbanization” (Caldeira, 2016), that is, the making of a city by its dwellers. The differentiation between authority-led planning and building on the one hand, and autoconstruction on the other hand is also captured by the French terms<sup>4</sup> used by the people of Ouagadougou. *Loti*, refers to the plotted and parcelled part of the city, while *non-loti* (Fournet et al., 2008: 12) denotes the apparently unstructured “city yet to come” (Simone, 2004) where authorised planning and basic supply infrastructures are largely absent. The structural differences are best illustrated through an aerial shot (Figure 1). While the already re-structured *zones loties* consist of equally parcelled rectangular plots, the *non-lotis* resemble a maze with houses that are significantly smaller and densely packed.

*Lotissement* refers to the zoning and restructuration of (urban) lands and implies gradual changes in land management practices, from customary practices of land allocation to statutory regulation, marketisation and the possibility of the ultimate acquisition of a private property title. Large-scale restructuration that aimed at integration through conversion of the *non-lotis* was initiated in the 1980s by the socialist government under President Thomas Sankara (Beeker and Guièbo, 1994; Prat, 1996). In the 1990s his successor Blaise Compaoré followed the call of international investors for decentralisation, and re-introduced private property (Bervoets and Loopmans, 2013). In consequence, a restructuration holds the promise of gaining a property title for those who “win a parcel”



**Figure 1.** Aerial shot of the *loti*–*non-loti* border in the south of Ouagadougou.

(*gagner une parcelle*). According to the planning scheme, the transition from peri-urban to urban involves several steps.

Step one is a population census initiated by the district city hall. It aims at counting the people who inhabit the area to be restructured in order to determine the demand for parcels. As soon as a district decides to carry out a plotting operation the upcoming census is publicly announced to the population. Counting and registration are carried out by inspectors from the local municipality. They visit every house in the district in order to register the head of the household as well as further information on the family and their possessions. Physical presence is a necessary precondition for registration. All information is recorded on a small piece of paper that serves as a residence certificate. This is kept by the inspectors and a carbon copy is given to the head of the household. Not all of our informants possessed this paper but those who did, emphasised its significance as a claim for a plot, if not in the same area then “somewhere else” in Ouagadougou. In addition to the registration, numbers were spray-painted on the houses during the census registration to locate households for a later attribution.

In a second step, according to the restructuration scheme, the grid plan is drawn up by the urban topographical service. This happens at the same time as, or shortly

after the census. As plans are made “at the desk” existing structures and constructions are not considered.

Third, marker stones are placed on site in accordance with the grid plan. These indicate future parcels. The stones are not large and it is a relatively simple operation. However, damage may occur when the grid does not match existing structures. Sometimes walls were pulled down to place the stones.

In a fourth step the land parcels are allocated to the local residents by a commission. This commission is supposed to ensure a just distribution to households or individuals mainly according to the information collected during the initial registration. Families with small children, people with work close to the plot, length of residence, and the presence of elderly people in the household are all part of the valid criteria that are supposed to steer the allocation. However, we were repeatedly confronted with accounts and suspicions<sup>5</sup> concerning criteria application in the decision-making procedure.

According to the planning scheme, after the attribution of parcels and within a period of one year, households that are not allocated a plot within the district are expected to relocate their houses. Whether or not an area provides sufficient space to create the appropriate number of parcels is not discussed in the literature and documents we analysed. But during fieldwork, our informants assured us that the officials would find them a parcel somewhere across the city as long as they were officially registered. Finally, following the planning scheme, the attribution of parcels is accompanied by the installation of public infrastructure.

The planning and restructuration scheme described above does not necessarily reflect the process on the ground. In fact, its implementation is repeatedly interrupted and delayed. Years may pass after the initial census or the installation of marker stones before any parcels are distributed, and many of our informants reported that “parcels never get attributed”. Indeed, the process of *lotissement* has been declared as highly problematic and largely ineffective and was suspended in 2011 before being restarted in 2012 (Ministère de l’Habitat et de l’Urbanisme, 2011); Président du Faso, Président du Conseil des Ministres, 2012). In the aftermath of the revolutionary uprisings of October 2014, and the subsequent fall of Blaise Compaoré’s presidency, the pre-government of transition leader Yacouba Isaac Zida published a communiqué that suspended all real estate operations including the process of *lotissement* in all municipalities of Burkina Faso “until new order” was achieved (Ministère de l’Habitat et de l’Urbanisme, 2015).

The ongoing failures and repeated suspensions render the process highly unpredictable for the people living in the *non-lotis*. Anthropological research has provided considerable insights into the contestations and conflicts evolving around urban restructuration operations in Burkina Faso (Harsch, 2009; Hilgers, 2009; Kirst and Engels, 2012) and West Africa more broadly (Hagberg and Körling, 2016). However, during our own fieldwork no open contestation or public protest was raised. Despite the constant uncertainty – people know they could lose their land, be relocated or even end up without compensation-by-resettlement – they hold on to and remain committed to the procedure of *lotissement*. Bervoets and



Loopmans (2013) point to the cleavages (e.g., autochthones/immigrants, rich/poor, etc.) that divide the population across Ouagadougou's giant *non-loti* areas and caution against an all too romantic reading of these spaces as potentially revolutionary, a starting point from which the "right to the city" (Harvey, 2008; Samara et al., 2013) is claimed. Rooted in these discussions around (in)formal housing between exclusion and deprivation on the one hand, and mobilisation for participation on the other hand, scholars have explicitly connected processes of urban change to the notion of hope (Appadurai, 2013b; Kornienko, 2014; Ross, 2010). Hope in these studies appears to be an internal resource and force (Appadurai, 2013b: 127) that give "rise to mass action, protest, insurrection, delicate negotiation, and inclusive vision of the future" (Ross, 2010: 210f.). Our approach to hoping as practice shifts attention from the special event of protest to the mundane "keeping on going" (Guyer, 2017; Head, 2016; Zigon, 2009) and its material dimension that we call landscapes of hoping.

### **Ouagadougou's landscape of hoping**

We begin our analysis with three short encounters recorded by the first author during fieldwork in 2014.<sup>6</sup>

The first story is that of Ibrahim:

Martin picked me up around 7:00 am and we left Somgandé where I lived. We drove on his moped into one of the many peri-urban *non-loti* neighbourhoods that sprawl across the plain of Ouagadougou. We stepped off the bike and walked through the narrow streets. Many residents seemed to have already gone to work but after a few minutes we met a man sitting in front a small yard, which turned out to be his own. Ibrahim was in his 40s. His wife and children were still living in the village but he wanted them to move to Ouagadougou. Ibrahim had come to Ouagadougou to find work and settled in a *non-loti* because he knew about restructuring and speculated that he might be able to obtain a parcel for himself and his family this way. "I want my own parcel" he explained. I asked him what made him think that this area was going to be parcelled. He looked around, then looked at me and then pointed to a neighbour's house on the other side of the narrow street. "You see the number? – They have already started". There was a similar number on Ibrahim's house. Martin reminded me that we had seen such numbers on other houses before and that they were put on the walls during the initial census, which marked the beginning of the restructuring process. "I see", I said, "but what if they do not continue?" "I have a piece of paper" Ibrahim said. He then told me how a group of people had come, inspected his house and then painted a number similar to that of the neighbour on his house. He had to present his ID and they in turn had written down his name on a small piece of paper, of which he received a copy. "This was approximately five years ago". I asked him why they had not continued to attribute the parcels. "They often speak about attribution. It will be done in one year or six months, but they haven't got around to it yet. There are too many people here and not enough space for all of

them” Ibrahim answered, “they have to find somewhere else”, a place for him and his family, as well as many other residents from his neighbourhood in another part of Ouagadougou. (Field note, 7 October 2014, JH)

Houses like the ones of Ibrahim and his neighbour constitute the peri-urban labyrinth described above. But a closer look at the seemingly endless reddish boxes reveals differences. In some neighbourhoods, houses were lacking windows, doors and sometimes even roofs. In fact, Martin, Inoussa and I occasionally wandered quite some time without meeting anybody between seemingly abandoned houses. One day, almost ready to leave in order to continue our day in another neighbourhood, we met Adama, who with his family was living among these empty houses:

“What about these empty houses?” I asked. “It is rich people”, Adama replied. “They live in villas in the city. They already have a parcel, or many, but they always want more.” He explained that their “owners” would move into the houses as soon as a census was announced to the public on the radio and the news spread. “They come during the night”. He added that people brought along family members and even metal pieces like doors and windows. They made cooking fires and hung out the laundry, so that when the agents passed, they would be considered to be “real residents” and not only temporary residents (which was an important distinction to increase one’s chances of being attributed a parcel later on). “They only want to get a number on the wall and a receipt and then they move out again”. (Field note, 19 November 2014, JH)

While people from all over Burkina Faso or Ouagadougou have settled in the urban fringe of the country’s capital, not all the area around the urban centre is empty and uninhabited. In fact, the growing city has been constantly expanding. Former rural areas and villages have been swallowed up by various reforms and thus are potentially subject to restructuration programmes and associated transformations. A third field note reflects these changes:

Josiane was about 65 years old and had lived on her piece of land approximately fifty years. After the decree of the RAF (Reorganisation Agraire et Foncière) her family’s land was officially declared state property but effectively continued to be managed by the customary authorities. Even when the gradual expansion of Ouagadougou incorporated her village, it did not immediately affect her, although she had noticed that more and more people were coming. The growing population led to the gradual transformation of fields into houses and courtyards. “People came and started building everywhere. We used to practice cultivation, but now there is no more space for the fields”. Then people came from the city hall and took her name and spray-painted a number on her house. “Maybe my husband got a piece of paper”. He had died some years ago, “but maybe one of my sons took it”. But even without that official piece of paper, she was still waiting for the *lotissement* process to continue. “We are waiting for the *lotissement*. Then I can get water pipes directly into my yard. They have been put

into the soil already over there”, she pointed to a flat rift near-by that vanished somewhere between the surrounding yards. I asked her, if she was scared that she would have to leave her yard, but she replied: “I have always lived here”. She couldn’t think of herself being anywhere else it seemed, so I asked how she felt about the *lotissement*: “I would appreciate it. It will make things better. If there are more people and water and electricity, there will also be work. We do not know when they will continue. We will wait and continue to do what we do until the *lotissement*”. (Field note, 1 October 2014, JH)

The accounts of Ibrahim, Adama and Josiane are exemplary and we use them as a starting point for our analysis and engagement with an anthropology of hope and hoping. Our approach resonates with recent attempts to trace hope in and through practices (Dalsgaard and Demant Frederiksen, 2013; Head, 2016; Jansen, 2016; Mattingly, 2010; Pedersen and Liisberg, 2015). While these works draw on different theoretical backgrounds – from phenomenology to Bourdieu’s theory of practice – and empirical case studies – from youth’s experience of marginality, or severe illness, to the study of climate change – they share an understanding of hope as social, embodied practice that needs to be continuously generated and updated. We build on their conceptualisation of hope as processual achievement. However, we suggest comprehending practices as material-semiotic. Most prominently, Latour criticises the asymmetrical treatment of the material world by social scientists (Latour, 2005). He argues that “the means to produce the social are taken as intermediaries [rather than] mediators” (Latour, 2005: 38). According to Latour phenomenology tends to neglect the role of non-human agency, though he adds: “This does not mean that we should deprive ourselves of the rich descriptive vocabulary of phenomenology, simply that we have to extend it to ‘non-intentional’ entities” (Latour, 2005: 61). As for Bourdieu, scholars drawing on Latour have pointed out that in his works artefacts are analysed solely as vehicles of symbolic contents (Schmidt, 2012: 66). Our concern with analysing hoping as practice through the lens of material-semiotics thus shifts person-centred notions of practice that are prevalent in anthropological writings on hope and hoping. It aims at re-considering the materiality of hoping.

Ibrahim, whom we introduced in the first field note, left his village and family – at least temporarily – to grab the chance of becoming an owner of a parcel of land in the course of an anticipated restructuration. He, too, “wants his own parcel” and things have happened that make him hold onto this possibility: he was present during the agents’ visit, presented his identity card, was recorded on a list and was finally handed a piece of paper. Lists, registration papers and spray-painted numbers are essential features of the practice of hoping. They were repeatedly referred to, pointed at and handed to us by our interlocutors. In our understanding, they constitute an integral dimension of the kind of hoping articulated and enacted in our informants’ stories and practices, such as settling in the peri-urban areas or anticipating registration procedures by building houses that can spontaneously be moved into overnight. The value of understanding hoping as constituted through socio-material relations becomes apparent once one or more of the interwoven

factors change. In some cases, registration papers could not be traced. Residents without this official piece of paper were less optimistic about the possibility of receiving a parcel, and in some cases people had even abandoned their small houses and plots because they felt that there was no future for them. They abandoned hoping. Lists, pieces of paper and numbers matter as they are an integral part of hoping-in-practice. The peri-urban environment does not induce hope, as a reduction of materiality to the role of intermediary would suggest. Rather, hoping in this context can only be understood when taking the affordances (e.g., Gibson, 1977) of the tangible aspects of urban restructuring seriously. In other words, hope is anchored in and co-constituted through the peri-urban landscape. We employ the term co-constitutive to avoid the registers of causality. Instead, we like to think of the socio-material practices of hoping as an ongoing, multi-faceted process; more rhizome than linear trajectory. Considering more deeply the materiality of hoping offers another new vantage point. Adama's report of the phenomenon of the empty houses that occupy large parts of peri-urban Ouagadougou is an eye-opener in this respect. According to Adama the empty houses around him belong to wealthier people who build them to benefit from selling them once they have been converted into private property. We met many Ouagadougou residents with three, four or even five such "empty" houses. They speculated on them, turning them into a future source of income or an insurance against continuously increasing rents. Further inquiry into the precise conditions of "speculation" would need to be undertaken to eventually distinguish it from hope, but our concern is another: we want to point out how hoping shapes places and landscapes and generates its own material realities (Law, 2009: 152). Empty shacks are made of *briques banco*, that is, clay bricks, which are fabricated within or close to the construction areas. Huge craters shape the landscape where the soil is removed. These sinks fill with water or are used for waste disposal. Such zones are a characteristic feature of the *non-lotis* of Ouagadougou. Additional practices of residents like Ibrahim and Adama can be productively analysed as a recursive process co-constitutive of the landscape of hoping in Ouagadougou. While some residents reported selling their plot – or essentially their registration paper – with the promise of it being turned into a registered parcel, others have started to improve their houses and establish neighbourhood networks to represent them in various forums where the *lotissement* shift is being discussed. In many places, small businesses are established and in some areas people organise themselves to get rid of household waste. Marketplaces, schools and other public amenities are constructed in these areas on the initiative of local authorities or non-governmental organisations in order to ensure a minimum provision of services for the large number of people residing in the peri-urban areas. For example, the water supply system has, according to our informants, been improved considerably over the two- to three-year period before the main fieldwork. A great deal of "anticipation work" (Clarke, 2016; for a striking example of such anticipation work see Nielsen, 2011) is therefore undertaken by the peri-urban residents themselves as well as the municipalities in order to "keep up" the possibility of the

restructuring process that is likely to “act after the fact” (Caldeira, 2016: 7). Almost none of our interlocutors raised any doubts about the *lotissement* as such. An eventual breakdown or final suspension of the whole procedure was never invoked and vehemently rejected when we brought it up. “Why would a census have been made, papers produced and marker stones been placed if not to continue the process sooner or later?” we were constantly reassured. People referred to and literally pointed at the improvements made to, infrastructure and other tangible initiatives set up to upgrade the neighbourhoods, just as Josiane did when she nodded towards the recently laid water pipes. Setting water pipes, she believed, was part of the process and as they were near she would wait until they finally reached her.

Building and re-building houses, selling and re-selling of plots, (self-)connecting to the water and electricity mains where technically possible and tolerated, establishing neighbourhood networks for waste disposal and setting up businesses – are all connected by their future orientation as well as their socio-material composition. Together these practices contribute to the transformation of the landscape and drive a fragile process of urbanisation that is neither entirely random nor determined in any linear fashion. The practices we analyse are as much anchored in the material environment as they contribute to shaping and changing it.

In the final part of our analysis we would like to add a temporal dimension to the spatial dynamics of hoping, which we have laid out above. As our three examples illustrate, most of our interlocutors had been living in the *non-lotis* for years by the time we met them. Seven to ten years in the *non-lotis* was more of a rule than an exception. People often articulated this experience in terms of waiting, keeping on going, staying and enduring<sup>7</sup>. Most strikingly in the account of Josiane, who has been living in the same place for more than 50 years, hoping and waiting were closely interlinked and almost became a state of being. The concepts of waiting and hoping are entwined, but their connection is neither unidirectional nor necessarily fixed. While some emphasise that waiting leads to a waning of hope (Kornienko, 2014: 47), others point to the active dimension of waiting (Brun, 2015) in the emergence of hope (Turner, 2015). The specific relationship between waiting and hoping remains an empirical question. It needs to be situated within a whole set of relevant co-texts and contexts (Beck, 1997: 342). Regardless of its specific conceptualisation, determining this relationship becomes an entry point for considering the (de)stabilising effects of hoping over time. In Ouagadougou’s peri-urban areas, waiting people engage in an ongoing maintenance of their houses, in the re-painting of numbers, and make various efforts to obtain a minimum amount of infrastructure services. Their hoping is active and effective. It contributes not only to the shaping and transformation of the urban landscape over time, but also stabilises it. Considering the effects of hoping over time through the lens of waiting reveals what people’s doing does (Foucault in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983 [1982]: 187). The dwellers, through their physical presence and the infrastructures that they co-constitute, contribute to the emergence of an urban landscape whose “material thickness” (Jaffe and De Koning, 2016: 132) is likely to “kick back” (Barad, 2007: 215) and therefore cannot be ignored by any of the actors involved in the ongoing

urbanisation process. On the one hand, our informants wait for the state that “started the process, and keeps telling us it will get sorted” (Field Note, JØN), they do their best to get along and thereby engage in the making of the city. The peri-urban dwellers settle at the edges of the city and live their lives day by day and the marks they leave shape any possible future while preventing others. On the other hand, the restructuration scheme, which was adopted initially, prioritised equal distribution of land and was subordinated to the preservation of existing structures. Moreover, infrastructure implementation was restrained until the zoning operation was completed. However, with the growing of the *non-lotis*, basic infrastructures were delivered (water) or tolerated (electricity) to improve living conditions for the population. Still, the quality of the services differs significantly from that in the inner city and therefore marks a difference in status between *non-lotis* and *lotis* that provides an anchor for hoping for a *lotissement* to come. In other words, addressing the temporality of hoping does not only point to “potentiality of the landscape” (Sejersen, 2004: 83), but highlights how hoping stabilises the processes in which it is enmeshed. Hoping’s generative dimension does not only point to possibilities, but literally brings potential futures into being and shapes future pathways. People’s continuous and ongoing activities – conceptualised as hoping – contribute to maintaining and carrying on the *lotissement*-related processes and institutions through times of crisis like its repeated suspension. Hoping temporarily prevents *lotissement* from breakdown. People continue to anticipate a potential *lotissement* and engage in construction activities of all kinds in accordance with an idealised restructuration scheme. Over time, supposed causes and effects are reversed: on the ground, delay, suspension or the stopping of restructuration are not easily distinguished. Hoping in this perspective is integral to the proceeding and shifting of restructuration and urbanisation in Ouagadougou.

## Conclusion and outlook

Throughout this paper we have advocated the concept of hoping as practice through the lens of material-semiotics in order to contribute and further develop recent anthropological efforts to make hope ethnographically graspable. Starting from this analytical background and drawing on our fieldwork in Ouagadougou we have argued for a re-consideration of the material dimension of hoping. This material dimension is not only crucial to an understanding of how hoping emerges. Simultaneously, hoping is performative; it has effects on the very surroundings from which it emerges. In Ouagadougou, hoping “takes place”, it does not only (re)orient and shape life trajectories, but it is co-constitutive of the shaping and changing of the urban landscape. The notion of landscapes of hoping draws our attention not only to the challenges the peri-urban dwellers face on an everyday basis, but also to the landscape changes that make up transformation. We believe that what we have shown for the case of Ouagadougou, namely that hoping is simultaneously emerging from the (material) world and leaving its, imprints on it, might hold true for many other fields as well<sup>8</sup>. The potential of a thoroughly

materialised understanding of hoping does not exhaust itself in reclaiming a meaningful role for anthropology in the analysis and shaping of the future (Appadurai, 2004). Rather, it holds the potential of generating a fruitful and enriching dialogue with other disciplines, such as earth sciences, economics, planning and law about “alternative socio-ecological orders” (Niewöhner et al., 2016: 9). To be sure, we do not mean to argue that hoping is secondary to material change. Rather, we emphasise the crucial role hoping plays in the expansion of Ouagadougou. We thus object to debates around (urban) change that marginalise hoping vis-à-vis the material dimensions of development such as infrastructure, market integration, housing, agricultural technology and medical facilities. Still, we need to be open for hoping being fulfilled or dying or turning into something else. While this paper was in review the first author returned for fieldwork to Ouagadougou and some of its *non-lotis*. The changes are striking. On many plots, the clay shacks have been replaced by bigger concrete houses. Some patios have been paved. Sewage dumps have been excavated. Even trees were planted. While the unevenness in size and arrangement of plots persisted and electricity only reached the better-off residents able to afford solar panels, the modes of construction have apparently changed. Further inquiry is needed to account for the changes this anecdote from Ouagadougou in July 2017 points to, but our point is that our understanding of hoping fosters precisely the open-endedness needed to enrich current research and discussions about emerging futures, and provides a thoroughly relational perspective accounting for the interconnectedness and co-constitution of semiotics and materiality, as well as the everyday life at the urban margins and powerful state institutions.

In this respect, Ouagadougou’s landscapes of hoping offer a starting point to “be appropriated, borrowed, and remapped” (Roy, 2009: 820) to examine entangled social imaginaries and material worlds – possible futures within material realities.

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## Notes

1. This paper is based on fieldwork by the first (in 2014) and the second author (between 2007 and 2013). The analysis has partly been laid out in the first author's Master's thesis that was handed to the Institute for European Ethnology at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin in September 2015 and supervised by the second and the third authors. In addition to these researchers the "we" throughout this paper includes the research assistants who supported fieldwork in Ouagadougou in 2014: Mamadou Kabré, Inoussa Ramde and Martin Wëndngüdi Compaoré to whom we owe special thanks for their practical support and insightful explanations and comments. With their approval, we decided not to change their names. All other names were changed.
2. The recently published Special Issue of *History and Anthropology* "Hope over Time: Crisis, Immobility and Future-Making" edited by Nauja Kleist and Stef Jansen is an exception in that respect because it explicitly addresses the questions raised by Ghassan Hage more than a decade ago.
3. In spite of the prominence regarding key issues of urban growth in sub-Saharan Africa, for example, population growth and spatial expansion, Ouagadougou is largely absent from current Anglophone literature dealing with "African Cities" (e.g., Locatelli and Nugent, 2009; Myers, 2011; Pieterse and Edjabe, 2010) or "Cities of the Global South" more broadly (e.g., Parnell and Oldfield, 2014). Söderström's relational comparison of Ouagadougou and Hanoi (Söderström, 2014), in which he looks at how cross-border relations shape the development of these two cities, constitutes a rewarding exception.
4. Speaking about urban restructuring, our informants used the French terms even when speaking local languages. *Loti* and *non-loti* designate and distinguish planned and unplanned. In the literature different terms are used for the *non-lotis*, all of which we find misleading. They are called *illegal* or *non-legal* by Ouedraogo (2001), *spontaneous* by Beeker and Guiébo (1994) as well as Prat (1996) and informal. However, none of these terms fully corresponds to the widely accepted, highly complex settlement patterns of these areas and their formalisation beneath statutory recognised property titles (Mathieu et al., 2003). Throughout the paper we thus keep the French terms *loti* and *non-loti*.
5. The term corruption was seldom used by our informants, although the evaluation report prepared in 2013 explicitly identified this problem in the allocation of parcels (Doh, 2014; Ouedraogo, 2014).
6. The main part of the fieldwork for this paper was carried out in Ouagadougou from September to November 2014 by the first author and supplemented by data collected by the second author in Ouagadougou between 2007 and 2013 (Nielsen and D'haen, 2015; Nielsen, in press).
7. As far as we became aware by talking this over with our assistants, there is no particular vernacular language used in this context. The French expressions used by our interlocutors and assistants varied between *on attend*, *on continue*, and *on reste*, to name just a few.



8. We thank the editors of *Anthropological Theory* for their encouragement to make this explicit and add – following what some authors refer to as the affective turn in social inquiry (e.g., Clough and Halley, 2007) – that this material-semiotic perspective and its consequences might also apply to other emotions, feelings, or affects that tend to be analytically treated in cognitive, symbolic or semiotic terms at the expense of their practical dimension.

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