


# STRATEGIES FOR THE INTEGRATION OF MIGRANT ITINERANT SELLERS IN THE URBAN MARGINS IN KORHOGO

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## ABSTRACT

This article is based on the results of an empirical research that addresses the integration of migrants into marginal activities in northern Côte d'Ivoire. Its objective is to analyze the strategies of social integration of migrants from the ambulatory sale in the city of Korhogo. As part of a qualitative approach, the data was produced using interview guides and focus groups built around the social imaginaries associated with the phenomenon. Network sampling was used for this study. In total, thirty-five migrant street vendors were interviewed. The data produced was stripped manually and subjected to content analysis. The socio-economic profile of the interviewees is organized on the basis of nationality, educational background, age and marital status. As soon as they arrive in Korhogo, migrants are welcomed and hosted by their resident peers. They are introduced to work on the margins by the latter with whom they maintain relations of solidarity, tolerance which constitute social springs which positively influence the integration and maintenance in the ambulatory trade. Put to the test of the institutional system of social and professional integration, the urban margins offer potentialities which are transformed into sources of subsistence and production of social ties.

**Keywords:** Urban Margins, Migrants, Ambulatory Sale, Social Integration, Subsistence, Korhogo

## 1. INTRODUCTION

According to the International Organization for Migration [I.O.M. \(2020\)](https://www.iom.int/), there are nearly 281 million migrants worldwide. This number represents 3.6% of the world's population. The number of international migrants is constantly growing. Indeed, from 281 million people living in a country other than their country of origin in 2020, this figure has increased by 128 million more than in 1990 and more than three times more than in 1997.

Côte d'Ivoire welcomes more than 6 million foreigners out of the 23 million inhabitants of the country according to the General Census of Population and Housing [RGPH \(2019\)](#). The large number of migrants in the country is explained by the fact that since independence, the Ivorian State has opted for a free migration policy, that is to say without administrative papers authorizing entry into the country. Still according to the 2019 RGPH, in this population originating from other West African countries, there are more than 61% Burkinabés and 21% Malians, representing the large percentages of migrants from the countries of the sub-regions. Other nationalities represent less than 5% of the total migrant population. In total, there are almost as many migrants in urban areas (49%) as in rural areas (51%) in Côte d'Ivoire. Migration concerns both men (52%) and women (48%). If the illiteracy of migrants is very accentuated with 53% illiterate, it affects women drastically with a rate of 66%. Migrants are relatively young, with an average age of 32.9 years, live with a partner (60%), practice Islam as a religion (78%), mostly work in the agricultural sector (39 %) and have a very low level of income, with 75% having an average monthly income that hardly exceeds the SMIG in Côte d'Ivoire. For the study by [Afrobarometer \(2020\)](#), most migrants arrive in Côte d'Ivoire for professional reasons (70%) or family reunification (27%) and half settle in rural areas while the other half settle in urban areas.

In Korhogo (north of the country), it is the informal sector, specifically the ambulatory trade that welcomes migrants. In terms of housing, migrants are faced with remoteness and crowded homes. Indeed, these are the peripheral districts of the city of Korhogo such as Haoussabougou, Sossonbougou, Boribanan, etc. which are home to the majority of migrants. Some come together in small groups of 4 to 6 people to rent a shack, while others do so in groups of 15 people, especially young single people, for a home that later becomes a welcoming house for all migrants in transit in the city. At the level of the activity itself, migrants are also confronted with pendular migration. Indeed, to sell the maximum number of products, ambulatory sales require covering the entire city through daily trips from their home to their place of work and vice versa during the day. These migrant itinerant sellers, visible in the streets, in restaurants and maquis, in stations, offer passers-by or customers a variety of goods, telephone accessories, clothing, shoes, watches, fashion accessories, etc. Ambulatory sales bring together individuals of various social profiles, ranging from children to heads of families, from little girls to mothers, from those with no schooling to students. In Korhogo, itinerant trade takes place in a context of peri-urbanization marked by the monopoly of public transport by motorcycle taxis, thus reducing movements between home, work, and the market. Consequently, the places of restoration or entertainment multiply replace the market where one can take advantage of the goods on the spot. The customers of these spaces are also the customer base of itinerant traders. Not having a store or shop, itinerant traders circumvent the official circuit, circumventing, for example, tax control. It is because evolving outside formal trade that this activity is qualified as informal, or marginal activity. Urban margins situate us in places sidelined by dominant representations [Agier and Bouillon \(2018\)](#), [Armelle and Riccardo \(2008\)](#), [Rode and Sierra \(2008\)](#).

The objective of this article is to show how, in a context of precariousness, itinerant trade produces social ties and contributes to the subsistence of migrants in Korhogo. The question that guides it is what are the factors underlying the integration of migrants in the ambulatory sale in the city of Korhogo? This central question raises subsidiary questions: What is the profile of migrant street vendors? What are the logics that structure the social and professional integration of migrants

in ambulatory sales? What is the system of social relations on which the integration of migrants in street vending is based? We adopted the following methodology.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The study took place in the city of Korhogo, capital of the Savannah district and the Poro region. It is part of a qualitative perspective. The data was produced using interview guides and focus groups built around the social imaginaries associated with the phenomenon. Network sampling was used for this study. The interviewees were contacted through their comrades, themselves previously interviewed. In total, thirty-five migrant street vendors working in the town of Korhogo were interviewed. The data produced was stripped manually and subjected to content analysis. The surveys led to the following main results.

## **3. RESULTS**

### **3.1. PROFILES OF STREET VENDORS**

Migrants who sell manufactured or non-manufactured products on an outpatient basis in the city of Korhogo constitute the main social category under study. The corpus of data reveals the socio-economic profile of the interviewees through the nationality, educational background, age, and marital status of the interviewees.

As far as nationality is concerned, they are essentially Burkinabés, Malians, Senegalese, and Nigeriens. These nationalities dominate all the people interviewed. They are nationals of West African countries. This corroborates the situation of Côte d'Ivoire, which remains one of the countries with a high number of foreign people on its soil [RGPH \(2019\)](#).

With regard to marital status, the body of data reveals that the majority of interviewees are adventurous singles. As for the school career and the age of the interviewees, the information collected shows a majority aged between 16 and 35 having attended the Franco-Arab school called "*Dougoumakala*" in Bambara.

With regard to the information relating to the professional experience of the interviewees, the study reveals that the majority did not follow professional training before embarking on the ambulatory trade. As for religion, the information collected shows that the respondents are all of the Muslim religion. This has favored their insertion into the social fabric in Korhogo which is full of a strong Muslim community.

The analysis of the socio-economic profile shows that ambulatory sales constitute an activity accessible to the interviewees. In fact, ambulatory sales are presented as an activity of the informal sector, because the sellers of this sector are neither listed in the tax registers nor in those of the town hall. Then, the observations showed that a large number of sellers change products quite regularly beyond the fact that they are difficult to locate. Entry into the profession does not require any initial training.

### **3.2. THE INVOLVEMENT OF MIGRANTS IN STREET VENDING**

This part reports on the ideologies associated with the exercise of the profession of itinerant salesman. The study revealed that the ideologies associated by the actors under study oscillate between the improvement of living conditions and the fight against cultural barriers.

### 3.2.1. A SOURCE OF ECONOMIC PRODUCTION

Analysis of the corpus of data shows that the majority of migrants associate integration into the ambulatory trade with the improvement of living conditions. Indeed, migrant street vendors are mostly single without children who came to Côte d'Ivoire through a relative or as an adventurer for economic reasons or in the hope of a better tomorrow. Many say they left their countries of origin because of poverty and other disasters. One of the traveling salesman interviewees says:

*"I fled Mali because of terrorism and poverty (...), I came to Korhogo to do the ambulatory trade because in my family, we are 7 children in charge of our parents (...) We live in a situation of poverty (...) I decided to come and join my big brother, itinerant salesman in Korhogo (...)"*

These remarks show that the socio-economic situations underlie the insertion of the majority of the actors in the ambulatory trade in the city of Korhogo. This reveals that the climate of peace which reigns in Côte d'Ivoire in general and in the town of Korhogo in particular promotes both trade and attracts the populations of the sub-region. Settled in Korhogo, they invest the street as a space for the production of financial resources to support themselves financially and to support other family members who have remained in the country of origin.

### 3.2.2. A TOLERATED ACTIVITY

The majority of the actors in the study justify the insertion in the ambulatory trade by the acceptance of the profession of itinerant salesman by the Ivorians. Unlike their country of origin where there are cultural barriers to this profession, Ivorian standards are rather favorable to migrants. Sheltered from the rejection of their society or their own family in their country of origin, migrants prefer to engage in ambulatory trade in Ivory Coast without being the victim of stigmatization or rejection. During the interviews, one of the interviewees said the following:

*"When you are in your own country with your family, you cannot do this type of business because it is part of the marginalized activities (...). Because of the gaze of your society, you suffer (...) the best thing is to migrate to another country to flourish"*

## 3.3. INTEGRATION INTO SOLIDARITY NETWORKS

This section aims to highlight the social relationships that migrant street vendors have with each other on the one hand and with other migrant actors on the other.

### 3.3.1. HOSPITALITY RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MIGRANTS AND THEIR PEERS

There is a relationship of hospitality when migrants welcome, house and protect other migrants who are new to Korhogo. To this end, the analysis of the corpus of data shows that migrants are welcomed and accommodated by their peers residing in the city of Korhogo. With regard to accommodation, of the 35 migrant street vendors interviewed, only five of them live with their biological families who have been established in Korhogo for several years. The others live with brothers from the country of origin and/or as their protégés in neighborhoods such as Haoussabougou, Kassirimé, Banaforo, and Sosonbougou. In other words, the migrants studied live with guardians, brothers from the same country of origin in

different popular neighborhoods of the city. On the part of the population of the town of Korhogo, they are not subjected to any aggression. This situation of hospitality is noted by a seller in these terms:

*"I spent several days or even months with my brothers before having my own house. Even when I travel to sell, I have no problem with the police and the town hall (...) people are nice in Korhogo (...)"*

These remarks show that hospitality is a factor of integration and control of the ambulatory trade by migrants from the West African sub-region.

### **3.3.2. RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN STREET VENDORS**

There are reports of solidarity when the actors of the ambulatory sale help one of their own in order to get him out of a difficult, pressing situation which prevents him from carrying out his activity. This relationship is mentioned in the following words:

*"You may not have an item that a customer is asking for when there is another salesperson nearby who has the item in question. So, you take the item with him to sell it to the customer and then you come back and give him his money."*

Another adds in these terms:

*"We have set up an association whose fund allows us to help certain members in the event of a happy or unhappy event (...)"*

The information collected during this research highlights the tolerance among street vendors. Indeed, there is a relationship of tolerance, because the disputes between the actors do not turn into fights or aggression but are the subject of an amicable settlement. This is what this other itinerant trader relates in the following words:

*"We know each other (...) When there is a problem between us, it is settled with the chef (...) we always end up finding common ground"*

The relationships of hospitality, solidarity, tolerance between sellers, are factors that positively influence the integration and maintenance of migrants in the ambulatory trade in the city of Korhogo.

### **3.4. RELATIONS WITH MUNICIPAL AUTHORITIES**

The ambulatory sale is an informal commercial activity not subject to the control of the communal police officers of Korhogo. To this end, the migrant street vendors encountered have no official relationship with the municipal authorities or with the tax services. However, during ceremonies or political meetings, access to certain spaces is prohibited. Non-compliance with occasional restrictions generally results in the confiscation of the goods and the condemnation to the payment of a fine. The ambulatory nature of their activity makes them difficult to tax on the part of the municipal authorities.

## **4. DISCUSSION**

The difficulties of professional integration reject each year a large segment of the population of working age on the margins of employment. In Korhogo and in general in the small urban centers of northern Côte d'Ivoire, the two decades of military-civilian crisis have largely contributed to the destructuring of the industrial sector. This greatly limits employment opportunities for people living in these areas. These populations with different social profiles and trajectories are generally found



in highly stigmatized urban spaces, in particular smoking rooms and traditional alcohol consumption spaces, where drugs and alcohol become sources of consolation.

The issue of employment and the professional integration of populations is certainly on the political agenda, but institutional initiatives regularly show their limits. The Youth Employment Agency, for example, through its various projects, offers employment opportunities to young people. These initiatives, such as “the Youth Employment and Skills Development Project (PEJEDEC) financed by the World Bank to the tune of 25 billion CFA francs, the Debt Reduction and Development Contract (C2D-EMPLOI) financed by the French Development Agency to the tune of FCFA 21.8 billion and the Project for the Socio-Economic Reintegration of Vulnerable Populations in Western Côte d'Ivoire (PRISE) financed by the Japanese government through the World Bank to the tune of FCFA 1 billion 350 million”<sup>1</sup> have the professional integration of many young people.

However, this institutional system leaves many people on the margins of employment. It therefore only partially responds to economic insecurity, poverty, and the quest for subsistence of populations at the bottom of the social scale.

Among this population made vulnerable by the lack of access to employment, living in the urban margins, our study targeted the fringe of migration, originating from border countries who invest the streets and urban public spaces. They work there while being part of social networks based on their communities of origin.

Indeed, even if one can think that the investment of streets and urban public spaces by these young people is not a matter of choice, it very often hides a commercial activity, capacities for action and professional initiatives. Ambulatory commerce is based on a well-built and solid social network. The young person who, with a motorbike or on foot, offers items to passers-by or consumers, is part of a social network made up of traders who have been established for a long time and are well integrated into the professional fabric and local political networks.

Although professionally qualified as a marginal activity, the actors have no particular difficulties with the municipal and police authorities. Their activity is known but they are not under any pressure from them. R. Cavagnoud, from his study on itinerant workers in Lima, notes that the reaction of municipal authorities to itinerant shops depends on the neighborhood. *“In the neighborhoods of Lima where the middle and wealthy social classes dominate (San Isidro, Miraflores, Surco), this situation gives rise to tensions between street vendors and municipal order services, on the one hand, and between street vendors and shopkeepers “fixed”, on the other hand. In some popular neighborhoods, the border between formal economic activities, in the markets, and informal, in the public space, is not easy to distinguish and sometimes tends to disappear to give rise to an almost symbiotic relationship between the two”*. Cavagnoud (2010). 32-33. In Korhogo, itinerant traders are accepted by the municipal authorities.

Straddling the market, the avenues of the city and all urban and rural spaces, ambulatory trade is independent work built on solid social and political logic. Positioning itself on the margins of salaried employment, it is a response to the difficulties of access to traditional employment. The migrants working in the street that we surveyed all show signs of precariousness in their social environment. They have no stable sources of income (apart from itinerant sales), they live in unsanitary group housing, they have no level of education or professional qualification. They

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.pejedec.org/?p=bb1&projet=bcpe>

therefore have no other alternatives in the urban environment than engaging in a subsistence activity. In this context, the orientation towards ambulatory trade is the consequence of the lack of “capability” of migrants. By capability Sen (2000), considers that beyond the monetary dimension, we must think of poverty in terms of freedom of action, capacities to do. *“When the actors’ ‘capabilities’ materialize, they give way to ‘functionings’ which are expressed in people’s quality of life and the development of their skills and a decent way of life”* Sen (2000), quoted by Cavagnoud, (2010), op cit.: 33.

In our contemporary societies marked by the difficulties of access to the job market for young people of working age, work deserves to be rethought. In general, there is confusion both for politicians and for people seeking professional integration, a confusion between work and employment. According to Vatin (2011), work is defined as any productive activity. Employment refers to the social recognition of this productive activity through a status, most often a salary. *“To confuse work with employment is then to confuse the activity of work with the status it confers, and, by nested reductions, with the status of work of reference in contemporary developed market societies, namely the wage-earning system.”*

The experience of migrants in the urban margins of Korhogo, makes think about the social classes in their dynamics of production of the urban social link and especially in the way of occupying the urban margins as a space of economic production, as a workspace.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The issue of work is a primary concern both for people of working age and for the policies that organize this sector. Added to this are the political unrest that encourage young people to immigrate to build a life elsewhere, far from their country of origin. The experience of young migrant street sellers shows us how urban margins serve as a framework for social and professional integration. In a context marked by strong suburbanization and the domination of public transport by non-reassuring motorcycle taxis, street sellers take over the streets and entertainment and catering areas to offer people an alternative to the traditional market. They offer them at home or at the service, a variety of items, thus allowing them to save time but above all to reduce the risks of traveling on a motorcycle. It is essential to remember that engaging in this ambulatory trade allows young migrants to build a social network and a subsistence economy. They benefit from the support of people of the same national origin who serve as their moral guarantee. Although escaping municipal taxation, the municipal authorities allow this ambulatory trade to develop. The occasional restrictions they impose relate to security arrangements during public demonstrations. This reflection is an important step in our approach to urban margins and the companies that develop and structure them. It is limited to the production of social ties and subsistence on the margins.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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