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Bustling mototaxis are a pervasive phenomenon on Goma's streets and their emergence and proliferation is highly linked to the context of the protracted violent conflict in Eastern Congo. By highlighting the nexus of physical and social mobilities, work, and leisure, this paper aims to analyze the different trajectories of young mototaxi drivers that go beyond concepts of "being stuck" (Sommers, 2012) and focus instead on their ways of working towards the future. In contrast to prior research, this paper shows that being young in the city does not necessarily lead to "abject futures" or condemn youth to an endless "waithood" that results in "social death". Based on ethnographic data I have gathered since 2008, I will trace the different ways young mototaxi drivers make sense of the ontological continuum of being young and becoming an adult. By centering on their everyday life worlds, I argue that motards have more options than simply ending up at a dead end.

Keywords: youth, waithood, DR Congo, Goma, motorcycle taxis, urbanity

Beco sem saída? Jovens condutores de mototáxi entre ficarem parados, atravessarem buracos e construírem um futuro em Goma, leste do Congo

Os mototáxis são um fenómeno generalizado nas ruas de Goma, e o seu surgimento e proliferação estão fortemente ligados ao contexto do conflito violento prolongado no leste do Congo. Destacando o nexo entre mobilidades físicas e sociais, trabalho e lazer, o presente artigo analisa as diferentes trajetórias de jovens condutores de mototáxi que vão para além de conceitos de "ficar parado" (Sommers, 2012), focando em vez disso as suas maneiras de trabalhar em direção ao futuro. Em contraste com pesquisas anteriores, o artigo mostra que ser jovem na cidade não leva necessariamente a "futuros abjetos" ou condena os jovens a uma eterna "idade de espera" que resulta em "morte social". Com base em dados etnográficos reunidos desde 2008, são traçadas as diferentes maneiras como os jovens condutores de mototáxi entendem o continuum ontológico entre ser jovem e tornar-se adulto. Centrando-me nos seus mundos da vida quotidiana, defendo que eles têm mais opções do que simplesmente acabarem num beco sem saída.

Palavras-chave: juventude, idade de espera, RD Congo, Goma, mototáxis, urbanidade

Goma's city center has changed a lot during the last ten years. During my first research period in 2008, the remnants of hardened lava flows from the Nyiragongo volcano's latest eruption in 2002 were still visible, and taking a motorcycle taxi through the bumpy and dusty streets was often an adventurous ride. Ten years later, Goma's road network has changed a lot. Not only do roundabouts and sculptures beautify the streets, but a giant traffic robot also regulates one of the busiest crossroads of the city. The robot stands with a solar panel over its head, displaying green and red arrows on its chest and knees to bring some order into the chaotic city traffic – even the motorcycle taxi drivers pay attention to its signals. To be sure, they still park in parallel lines of up to ten motards in front of the traffic stop, so close that their clients' knees would touch each other. Taking these improvements into account, however, it is obvious, that many of the neighbourhoods are still impaired by lava rocks, potholes, and huge puddles. This lack of infrastructure requires the motorcycle taxi driver to be particularly versatile – especially in residential areas – and it is noteworthy that as the number of motards continues to grow (20,700, the latest figure from September 2017, townhall) their paths give shape to the uneven urban landscape as they traverse and connect through the city – both as public transport and as means of transporting small material goods.

In many parts of Africa, mototaxis are a pervasive phenomenon that's associated with a vibrant street life, chaotic traffic situations, and a labor market for young male drivers. In a number of West and Central African countries, motorcycle taxis constitute a decisive post-conflict urban market and sociopolitical fabric (for the Great Lakes region, cf. Goodfellow & Titeca, 2012; Rollason, 2013; for the Mano River region, cf. Bürge, 2011; Bürge & Peters, 2010; Menzel, 2011). Goma, the emblematic capital of Eastern Congo's war-ridden North Kivu province, can be seen in this light. In the 1980s, motorcycles and some motorcycle taxis were already transporting people and goods, which inherently links the big boom and the onset of Goma's mototaxi market to the Rwandan genocide in 1994 and its aftermath[1]. It was further accentuated by the eruption of the Nyiragongo volcano (2002), eventually becoming a profitable and fast-growing urban sector in its own right. Many young motorcycle taxi drivers (hereafter referred to as motard) fled

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[1]   Interview with ACCO chairman, August 2008. When I started doing research on the life worlds of young motards in 2008, there existed three different associations in this sector (APROTAM, ATAMOG, ACCO-Section Moto). By 2017, this had increased to seven (COTAM, COPTAM, ASNAMOG, ATAMOV, SYPROTAC, MUDEI, ATAMOG). This development coincides with the growth of the city itself in the last decade but is also indicative of competing urban factions along ethnic, economic and political lines. Since compulsory registration was introduced by former mayor Nasson Kubuya Ndoole (abbreviated by his initials Kundos) in November 2014, more than 20,700 bikes were registered at the town-hall (latest update of records: 08.09.2017). In 2008, in contrast, only 7000 motards were registered with the former umbrella organization for motos: ACCO-Moto.

from rural areas to the urban center of Goma. Some of them are demobilized fighters who have fought in the manifold militias in Eastern Congo's hinterland while others have felt the pull of Goma's economic opportunities. As a result, the number of motards increased, thus generating a multitude of different stories, lifestyles, and expectations, be it due to their heterogeneous ethnic identities, educational backgrounds, financial means, urban experiences, or sociopolitical expectations.

It is hard to overlook motorcycles and their young drivers as they wait at Goma's street corners, honking to gain the attention of potential clients and roaming the city with colorful identification plates, pennants, and other decorations on their motos. They are a symbol of being (physically) mobile, even if the informal character of their work makes them a target of the public discourse that stereotypes these young men as the embodiment of inherent danger and violence; a typecast that is similar to young men in other contexts of crisis. Indeed, this appears to be a dilemma for youth in Africa. Many studies on young people tend to reproduce notions of hopelessness, decline, and bleak futures (Cruise O'Brien, 1996; Honwana, 2014). Catchy concepts such as "social death" seem to provide a compelling explanation for the future of these young people when their traditional path to social adulthood becomes blocked (Hage, 2003; Vigh, 2006). Such youth may give the impression of "being stuck," as Mark Sommers describes for youth in Rwanda (2012), or as Alcinda Honwana argues, they are in a liminal state of "waithood" (2012). Even if Honwana's prominent conceptualization of "waiting" does not draw away agency from these youth *per se*, I posit that the state of waiting for adulthood – "waithood" – projects a normative, socially desirable understanding of adulthood while the very notion of adulthood is undergoing a contemporary transformation anyway (Blatterer, 2010; van Dijk, de Bruijn, Cardoso, & Butter, 2011, p. 5). In this sense, "being stuck" has become one of the key descriptions of a generation that holds the little possibility for youths to undergo the passage from adolescence to adulthood.

As a truism, movement in any direction or in no direction (being stuck), is always necessarily spatial. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo), structural roadblocks in the form of protracted violent conflict, political factors, intergenerational relations, and economic hardship hinder young motorcycle taxi drivers from becoming "a somebody," from moving forward (Langevang, 2008). Here, roads may be read as "social promise" (Harvey & Knox, 2012) that gives way to the imaginative connection between physical and social mobility. Roads are political arenas, whether virtually or physically, where style and youth are enacted and become a "space of possibility afforded to youth" (Vigh, 2006, p.

37). As motards' attempt to outwit the traffic police and shape their present, they actively seek future routes along which they can keep moving and make detours in order to circumvent social immobility and achieve social adulthood. Questions of being mobile or being stuck have led to a conceptual approach towards youth that has gained much attention in recent years. However, these questions continue to underpin former descriptions of young people as marginalized, without a future, or with bleak and gloomy prospects. As a contrast to these characterizations, this article approaches youth through the various perceptions and emic understandings of what being young and becoming an adult means to young motorcycle taxi drivers as learning to "read" a volatile city.

I will focus on this young urban group's perspectives on mobility and their way of social becoming in a context where "learning" seems to be a necessary asset to make one's surroundings legible and therewith lay the foundation for achieving social status and getting by. Being streetwise, evaluating opportunities, bonding on the peer-level, or reaching out to other actors via associations or by tempting one's luck, indicate that identifying young men as desperately stuck or waiting seems to be one-sided. In this paper, I will show how motards are not only physically mobile but also achieve social mobility while reproducing their own socioeconomic conditions (similar to Paul Willis seminal study on why "working class kids get working class jobs", 1977). The social reproduction of a structural economic framework and practices to deal with it will serve as a useful lens for this article to illustrate the extent to which young men are living their youth and struggling to become adults. The skills for this cannot be acquired through formal learning but are, as Spittler argues, developed by imitation and become visible in issues of "work" (Spittler & Bourdillon, 2012, p. 74). Questions about how young mototaxi drivers move in order to "secure lifelihood" and where "to acquire the necessary skills and capacities to do so" (Simone, 2004, p. 3) are particularly important here.

Linking these questions of youth theory to a conceptualization of work, I intend to focus on the conundrum of three different aspects, perceptions, and understandings of work, which may be considered as "real work", as (informal) "*débrouillardise*," or as "mere survival." *Kazi ya moto* may be interpreted by young men as income-generating work in its own right, as a future business where they could possibly become the patron someday and have one or several motards working for them, it can be considered adventure, freedom, and a time of solidarity, or it can be seen as last option – the lesser evil – when they're oscillating between getting by or surviving. This differentiation neither dramatizes nor romanticizes motards' lifeworlds, but it does depict a complex situation that often

tends to be oversimplified in public and in academic discussions. Economic uncertainty is connected to social and existential questions that constitute crucial facets for growing up and thereby impacts how social adulthood can be enacted and achieved, especially in an urban context that is highly shaped by political tensions and economic precarity.

Work and learning have been fruitfully conceptualized by Gerd Spittler (2008) through the following four key questions: First, asking about the concept of rationality around which work is structured; second, how work is embedded in people's lifeworlds; third, how work can be performed; and fourth, inquiring about the significance of work for human beings. For this contribution, I will specifically concentrate on the fourth question as it focuses not only on issues of performance but also focuses more substantially on the meanings and significance of work itself[2] (Spittler, 2008, p. 18). As the skills valuable for both work and life, in general, can be acquired through work itself, the context within which work and learning take place is crucial. As such, the following analysis positions work as a school of hard knocks.

Methodologically, this article is based on the ethnographic data I gathered between 2008 and 2018. For a total of 24 months, I worked closely with motards and their organizations by hanging out at motards' waiting points on street corners and at open-air shops where they sell and purchase stylish moto attachments[3]. Furthermore, I have spent a lot of time on the backseats of motorcycles myself. This is where I first perceived this as a daily routine and as a necessity in order to move around Goma's urban landscape. I later realized that this interaction was what Taussig coined for Colombian taxis as "stranger intimacy" (Taussig, 2003, p. 8), the physical proximity that might open up dynamics of encounter and exchange and reveal much about motards' lifeworlds while both participating in their daily work and leisure practices.

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[2] "Work can be regarded as meaningful or meaningless. The worker finds his identity in it or is alienated by it. He can, but does not have to, see it as a purely instrumental activity. He can also turn it into play, a struggle or an art form. Above all, he can endow it with an ethical meaning (work ethic) going beyond its immediate benefit... The act of work is not exhausted in performance but includes a human aspect. It brings satisfaction or frustration. The worker may be eager or unwilling" (Spittler, 2008, p. 18).

[3] The time span of ten years comprises the fieldwork for my PhD research that was carried out between January to December 2008 and July to September 2009 on youth, war and everyday life in Goma (Oldenburg, 2016c). Motorcycle taxi drivers were part of the "ordinary" lifeworlds that I was investigating. When I had a good conversation on my way to the remote neighborhood of Keshero, where I've spent most of my time, I invited the motard for a drink, asked for his number and we met on another occasion, which allowed me a glimpse into their lifeworlds, getting to know family, friends and living conditions while I could observe them mastering the bumpy and dusty roads of Goma. For my PostDoc project, I went back to Goma in 2013 (five months), 2014 (one week), 2016, 2017 and 2018 for ten weeks each, where I continued to research urban subjectivities, among them motard's lifeworlds. Structured interviews and informal conversations were held in French or Swahili without assistance. Names of individuals and mototaxi associations I worked with have been anonymized in this article for reasons of confidentiality.

In order to explore their lifeworlds, I will first situate Goma as an empirical context, connecting it to a brief review of the urban scholarship on youth, conflict, and work. The empirical part delves into motards' understandings of their occupation reflecting how these shape and are shaped by the wider public and academic discourses. Experiences of mobility, learning, street smarts, conviviality and aspirations for the future are the ethnographic heart of this contribution. I conclude with reflections on the social skills the motards use to deal with uncertainty and unpredictable settings.

Goma as a school of hard knocks: context and infrastructures

African cities are mostly depictured as either site of perilous overpopulation, deteriorating infrastructures, chronic poverty, crime, and violence, or as being breeding grounds for creativity and inventiveness (Makhulu et al., 2010; Simone, 2004; Trefon, 2004). Cities are full of possibilities and futures but also might be experienced as a school of hard knocks. With Goma, we have a context that was not only shaped by IMF's structural adjustment programs in the 1980s, but it was implicated by protracted armed conflict in the 1990s and the eruption of a volcano in the early 2000s as well. Over the last four decades, Goma's face has changed substantially. A small town of little importance in the east of a vast country has been pushed into the spotlight of international media and humanitarian policies. Therefore, Goma's context is elusive and the city operates as many things at once: A safe haven from armed conflict in the rural hinterland, a prospering boomtown thanks to private investment, a market of intervention (Oldenburg, 2015), an NGO pole (Büscher & Vlassenroot, 2010), a comparatively dynamic labor market, among others. The flow of people, goods, and ideas related to war and displacement, (transborder) trade and transnational organizations, "traditional" and "expat" lifestyles have impacted the urban space. The accelerated flow of images, technologies, commodities, and people is symptomatic of a whole range of new connections that offer a space for narratives of sudden transformation but also new forms of exclusion and disconnection simultaneously (Makhulu et al., 2010; Simone, 2004, p. 3).

Both the growth of Goma as a city and the advent of the mototaxi market are consequences of the protracted armed conflict in the Kivu provinces. Quite similar to bike-riding in other post-war contexts (e.g., Sierra Leone), the boom of mototaxis started in Goma in the aftermath of a conflictive event, in this case, the Rwandan genocide in 1994, when many young men needed to find new sources

of revenue to get by. Because of its easy accessibility and the promise of physical and social mobility, the motorcycle became a very attractive asset in the urban post-conflict market. However, even before the wars and during the height of Mobutu's reign, mototaxis circled the town. When governmental institutions eroded successively, citizens found detours to substitute the lack of public investment in transportation. In turn, mototaxi driving became less than a "real profession" and much more than mere "politics of survival" (Goodfellow & Titeca, 2012), it became an economic niche, or more explicitly, a form of *débrouillardise*, an income-generating activity, where either a diploma is unnecessary or where having a diploma in hand does little to help an individual enter the job market (Oldenburg, 2016a). Moreover, the physical conditions of Goma's roads favor motorcycles as urban public transport: after the latest eruption of the Nyiragongo volcano in 2002, mototaxis became the most adequate means to roam the bumpy streets as they were able to cover unpaved roads and maneuver around potholes and puddles as large as lakes. This illustrates the correlation between crisis-related events (war and natural disasters), and the consequences it has on Goma's built environment and the economic opportunities they created. Motards, then, actively produce social space by maneuvering through it.

Roads – as infrastructure, as a social promise, and a factor of threat – are motards' everyday sites of work. Recently, advancement can be seen in the state of Goma's roads as the private enterprise *Safritex* began to (re)pave Goma's major avenues starting in 2016. Nevertheless, many urban residents observe the upgrading of the roads suspiciously and often subject it to mockery. For example, little remarks such as, "This will break down soon," or "It's badly made, who do they want to fool," suggest that even if the main road is paved, a decade of neglect has sown distrust regarding public urban works. Roads emerge as sites of connectivity and interfaces, where diverse social groups move, meet, and interact. They also generate a promise of speed, political integration, and economic connectivity (Harvey & Knox, 2012). Obviously, no formal education is needed to drive a motorcycle taxi or to transport people. Yet, as most roads are bumpy, working the roads on a mototaxi means learning the hard way. Following Spittler and Bourdillon, learning can be understood through imitation and education of attention (Spittler & Bourdillon, 2012). Brothers, friends, or neighbors continually teach the driver, and many encounters with traffic police or bandits make them feel the hard knocks of the urban environment. Here, learning often requires the driver to approach and deal with these instances case-by-case – on a basis of trial and error.

Approaching the concept of youth in Goma: *il faut tafuta kwanza*[4]

Youth take up a relational position within the generational spectrum, and they are equally shaped by and shaping sociopolitical contexts. In Goma, youth (*ki/vijana*) is not primarily defined by chronological age but often conceived as a period of searching, be it searching for success, money or a spouse, all of which are important ingredients for becoming an adult (*mutu mukubwa*). More generally, youth marks a quest for meaning in order to tame uncertain conditions. In places where uncertainty has become a dominant trope of life (Cooper & Pratten, 2015, p. 1), contemporary youth feel confronted with the impact of two decades of war and economic liberalization that hinder their chances to gain income, to marry, and, consequently, acquire social status. Even if youth is also regarded as a period of uncertainty in many countries of the so-called Global North, being young and living youth in a very violently shaped context requires some different skills to optimize one's life chances.

Mark Sommers has found that in both rural and urban Rwanda, young people have little plans for the future as they favor "stability over advancement" (Sommers, 2012, p. 200). In this study, the Rwandan youths express frustration about their lack of opportunities, which Sommers describes as a state of stuckness. In general, since the 1980s, economic liberalization and globalization have heavily impacted youth and their paths to adulthood (Diouf, 2003). Young people face uncertainties spanning from housing and education to meeting social expectations. It is against this backdrop that some scholars have articulated the notion of "waithood," which is described as social immobility or a prolonged period of suspension between childhood and adulthood (Honwana, 2012; Vigh, 2006, p. 37).

As a border town to Rwanda, Goma seems to be quite different as discussions among young motards focus on more than just "survival." In Goma, a different tendency seems to rule, as, sometimes, young people, having fled from rural areas to Goma, praise the urban setting. While some young urbanites might perceive their lack of opportunities as a personal failure (Oldenburg, 2016b), rural youngsters might confront their situation with a pragmatic attitude. Even if they cannot participate in the booming market of intervention[5] (Oldenburg, 2015) or if they feel excluded from future prospects, this does not necessarily lead to

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[4] Translation: "You have to search first." I follow the standard definition of "youth" as a generational category that's used in many African countries. This covers young people between the ages of 15 and 35.

[5] Market of intervention is a concept that I define as a contact zone between humanitarian workers and the local population where different arrangements of power constellations co-exist temporarily (Oldenburg, 2015).

shattered dreams. As one rural motard explained to me, "back in the village, we would not have it anyway" (fieldnotes, Mayai, June 2016). Here, rural or urban backgrounds manifest themselves differently in motards. Youth who are born and raised in the city often perceive and expect different opportunities than those from the countryside who have yet to spend much time in Goma and are still in awe of its possibilities. Different visions towards the urban landscape and its opportunities are based on "education" and "informal learning." Formal education still plays a strong part in Goma's imagination towards a modern, better future (Oldenburg, 2016b). However, motards particularly lack this background. In contrast to youths who have studied and experience failure in acquiring the status they long for, the dramatic drop height – the discrepancy between high expectations and shattered dreams – seems higher for a student than it does for a young motard (Oldenburg, 2016a).

Motards try to construct and improve their social, economic, and existential conditions even while having limited access to positions of power. Here, practices of work can be framed and understood as performances of masculinity and *machismo* (Fuh, 2012; Verweijen, 2015, p. 198). Many seek work to provide for their families, but jobs are increasingly difficult to find. They have to be inventive in order to succeed and in doing so, they confront the barriers and limitations of their economic condition. Consequently, motards move through situations of urban uncertainty. They are not passive, idle, violent victims but they do have agentive leeway, meaning that they can find ways to manipulate, comment on, and approach restrictive social conditions in the urban environment. By roaming their way through a volatile and unpredictable urban environment, they confront situations of uncertainty on an everyday basis. In literature, we find many active verbs that refer to agentive struggle, such as "maneuvering" (Berner & Trulsson, 2000), "navigating" (Vigh, 2009), "managing" (Langevang, 2008), "cruising" (Archambault, 2013), "straining" (Finn & Oldfield, 2015) or "hustling" (Thieme, 2013) to name a few.

For youth in Goma, the "*débrouillardise*" – the ability to fend for one's self – is integral to the everyday vernacular and social practice in DR Congo (MacGaffey, 1991). The deeper significance of *la débrouillardise* encompasses everyday struggles and opportunistic routines even if the presence of formal institutional support is lacking. *La débrouillardise* is a multifaceted concept that can either be linked to short-term goals to secure one's next meal or to long-term strategies to secure economic gain, continue to diversify their sources of income and to manage risks and rewards in an uncertain local landscape (Oldenburg, 2016b). As Karen Hansen observes, young people's reactions to uncertainty are situated by

their socioeconomic context and depend on the set of skills and resources they draw from within households and society (Hansen, 2005).

Following Wulff's concept of a "cultural moratorium" (1995), Henrik Vigh proposes the concept of a "social moratorium" to describe the unwanted prolongation of youth (2006). In the Global North, youth is regarded as period of freedom, status, and fun, an age of creativity, and a "space and time of innovation and cultural production" (Hebdige, 1988; Wulff, 1995, p. 7). In contrast, Vigh characterizes youth in the Global South as a social position of a "social moratorium" that does not allow for freedom but symbolizes social limitation and desperate struggles that easily result in "social death" (Hage, 2003; Vigh, 2006). While youth in the Global North are perceived as a group that refuses to grow up – described as "Peter-Pan-Syndrome" (Blatterer, 2007) –, young people from poor contexts are described as desperately trying to escape the status of youth to become adults. Chabal and Daloz write that youth "hunger after the age, which will endow them with an authority currently denied" (Chabal & Daloz, 1999, p. 34).

The subsequent sections empirically challenge the following questions about how young motards in Goma deal with economic hardship and conditions of physical uncertainty: In what way are young men striving and struggling to survive in order to escape "social death"? How do they comply with their socially-expected trajectory towards becoming an adult? Finally, have they surrendered to the difficult circumstances and accept the "social moratorium" as a dead end, as the title of this article challenges?

Motards' lifeworlds in Goma

Motards describe their work and its challenges as the need and struggle to make ends meet in order to live their youth in the present and achieve a socially recognized position as an adult in the future. This balancing act between being young and becoming an adult might be even more difficult when their chosen career has a bad reputation. As motard Junior deplores, "What shall I do? Our reputation is bad. Parents tend to give their daughters to a barber rather than to a motard. They consider us adventurers" (Junior, September 2009).

This bad reputation classifies the mototaxi market as a very ambiguous one. Although the market is essential for public transport in Goma, it is nevertheless closely related to the context of armed conflict where demobilized fighters integrate themselves in this recent economic niche in town. Alternatively, the mototaxi market is associated with urban criminality (robberies) and safety issues (accidents). The social and political influence of mototaxi associations as urban

pressure group (Büscher, personal communication, 2015; Oldenburg, 2018) is palpable for Goma's population as well. Urban struggle frames motards' every-day life and their difficult circumstances might be considered somewhat normal. Young mobile men are often judged and negated by their informal socio-economic practices. Nevertheless, motards as a group have become increasingly diversified over the last decade. In general, these young men are from lower social strata and they start working with motorbikes through their social networks. During an interview, chairman Gaspard from ACCO explained that the motards' income depends on the number of passengers they carry or the distances they travel. He continued explaining that being a motard comprises different categories of young men: many of them come from the rural hinterland – either having demobilized from one of the many militarized groups or coming to Goma in search of a better livelihood – and many others are internally displaced and try to ensure their livelihoods while living with their extended family (interview, 28.09.2008). I met motards from town who were part-time pupils or students and who needed to take up a job to invest in their education. Generally, motards are considered by the local population as "dangerous" and "bandits." The motards take up these prejudices with humor; for instance, the abbreviation of the Indian motor company TVS is laughingly translated into "*Tous les Voyous Sont des Motards*" (all the villains are motards).

Although a motard only needs a motorcycle and a short informal introduction to driving (mostly learned from friends, neighbors, brothers, etc.), very few young people have the capital to buy a motorbike from scratch. Most often, youngsters start working for a patron with the objective to buy a second-hand motorbike in the future. Patronage relations are very diverse in Goma and they range from patrons (mostly former motards themselves) who employ one or two motards to patrons who have up to 20 motards working for them. These are often military officials, police commanders, politicians, or local businesspersons[6]. Many of my research interlocutors plan to become a patron themselves in the future or open their own business one day. Most of them want to buy a motorcycle so that they could eventually hire one or even more motards driving for them. In the long run, none of my research interlocutors considered that they would be a motard for life; most view it as a provisional stage and not necessarily a dead end. For example, one of my research partners wanted to enter politics by getting elected

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[6]   The involvement of politicians, businesspersons, and military personnel demonstrates that motards might get involved in political conflict. Often times, motards are "used" as protestors to bolster demonstrations or political campaigns (Oldenburg, 2018).

to the biggest motorcycle association, which would allow him to exercise influence among his peers, gain visibility in the city, and increase his social status.

Maneuvering a motorcycle through Goma's urban infrastructure is demanding. It requires balancing around potholes that have swelled to the size of lakes, muddy soil and navigating slippery paths caused by the gravel and rocks that make the motorbike slip[7]. Riding a mototaxi is an embodied experience. To perform this work, a motard has to develop the corporeal skills such as strength and agility that allow one to drive a motorcycle in such environments. Because of the high degree of physical force needed, complaints about aching backs, rheumatism, or illnesses caused by dust are part of regular conversations as roads are in a bad condition: "*Mwili inatshoka,*" the body is tired, I often heard.

While motorbikes can be clearly seen as working instruments, yet some motards ascribe to them feelings of freedom and the effects of adrenaline. Motorcycles were regarded not only as instruments for work but also as "sources of agency, experimentation and pleasure" (Ivinson, 2014, p. 612). For example, decorating a bike, appropriating it, "styling it," and making it an extension of one's own personality, one's own imaginations of modernity, and of the future, might be interpreted as an extension of the body (De Boeck & Plissart, 2004, p. 54). Motard Jean-Jacques explains: "You know, I like my moto, my body and my machine become one, it feels good[8]." Here, the individual relationship to one's working instrument becomes obvious, and it expands the range of corporeal rhythms and relations motards share with the world (Ivinson, 2014, p. 609). This sentiment is comparable to the social situation of a young man being mobile and free to live an adventurous life.

For many youths coming from rural areas, these relations are highlighted by their migration to the city. Joseph, for example, underscores the myriad of possibilities that promise freedom and autonomy in Goma by contrasting it to social control in the village: "I never liked working the field, always going to the field, no… Goma is a big city, here there is a lot to do" (Joseph, May 2008). Motard Dieudonné sees it similarly. He had to flee from Mweso, in Masisi, to Goma because he feared he would be recruited to a militia like his brother was. In Goma, he now lives with a "*grand frère*" who introduced him to working as a motard. For Dieudonné, "Goma means freedom and chaos," indicating that he does not miss his rural life and he enjoys the freedom of the city. This kind of chaos might appear attractive to some while it raises many levels of mistrust and confirms

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[7]   In August 2017, I was hit by a car while I was on a mototaxi. The motard stayed balanced during the crash without falling over. When I retold this story, many people remarked that the motard was obviously very skilled and experienced having avoided the fall.

[8]   *Mwili yangu na machine yangu ni sawasawa tu, ni furaha tu* (Jean-Jacques).

the negative impression of danger that is attributed to motards as a collective for others.

The performance of work and its embeddedness in everyday life are, according to Spittler, facilitated by "knowledge and skill" (Spittler, 2008, p. 16). Motards, who roam through the city, looking for passengers, or gathering at neuralgic junctions while waiting for their clientele, demonstrate the social relations that constitute motards' lifeworlds. Furthermore, according to Spittler, work can be interpreted as "play, a struggle or an art form" (p. 17). As I describe above, frustration and satisfaction for motards are related to the purposes they follow. For Dieudonné or Joseph, *kazi ya moto* is satisfactory as they traded it in for a life in the fields or in a militia. Compared to what might have been expected of them back in their village, they interpret the type of work they find in the city as liberation because it offers them opportunities to save enough money to cover the dowry, contribute to their household, and even invest.

In 2009, Damien fixed a vanity license plate on the back of his moto that said, "*Sous le sang de Dieu*" (under God's blood) and a front plate that said, "*Decision 2009*." The sentiments expressed on these vanity plates display the future that Damien is trying to manifest by moving to the city, liberating himself, becoming a motard, and taking advantage of the opportunities that Goma has to offer. Unfortunately, I did not see Damien during my follow-up research visits, so I do not know if he actualized his goals or not. Nevertheless, his vanity plates display the hopes and ambitions that encompass what mototaxi work means to young motards, especially on the streets of Goma. For Damien, such a dream could be realized by acquiring and owning his first motorcycle, which is a purchase that would open up avenues to be a "patron" one day. Such an artistic display of what work means to this motard exemplifies Damien's determination, perseverance, and religiosity, and most notably, his ambition to succeed in life.

Most of the motards I formed relationships with refer to their work as "real work" (*kazi*) as opposed to *débrouillardise* (informal work). However, when talking about professionalism or their life goals, most of them stated that they did not find another occupation and chose motorcycle taxi driving as an alternative. Take, for instance, what motard Anibal had to say:

> No, *faire la moto* is no real job, it is just something provisional. See, I am in my second year of studies, but, you know, the context is difficult. I have to live from something and have to pay for university. I am living with my brother and his family and need to contribute to the household. If I could find something as easy as being a motard, I would do something else. The other motards are loud and not well educated, they come from the countryside (Anibal, July 2016).

Many urban observers would confirm Anibal's remark that mototaxi driving is a form of work due to the lack of alternatives that are available. Most motards would prefer being a *chauffeur* for an international NGO or the United Nations. However, being a motard does not provide the means to approach *Bazungu* (Westerners) or enter their exclusive networks. Ultimately, many motards consider being motard as a life phase, while others enjoy being motard. They would praise the freedom they feel while on the moto and how the moto allows them to meet different people while having a more or less secure way to gain income. Heritier, who deliberately chose to be motard, states:

> I studied education/pedagogy at ULPGL. But the longer I studied, the less I felt prone to teach. You always have to prepare everything and correct everything and no, there is no money in the end. Much work, no money. I am popular; I have a lot of friends who are motards, so I decided to do that as well. I have my own bike, it is used but I will be able to buy a new one soon. I like to drive, you see a lot, you are always up to date, you meet with interesting people and money comes in. If I feel tired, I am my own boss, I stay at home (Heritier, August 2016).

It was not uncommon to meet motards who are satisfied with their work. In September 2017, a motard was driving me back to the city center, close to the golden *Tshukudu* monument[9]. He started negotiating with me that I would not have to pay if we took a photograph together in front of the monument. Enthusiastically, he told me that he was coming from the *Grand Nord*, the northern part of the province, and has started working as a motard only four months ago. By sending the photo back to his family, he wanted to show that he is doing fine (fieldnotes, September 2017). I interpreted his wish to pose in front of the most prominent tourist attraction with a European passenger as way to show he is well, that he is making his way in the city, and that he has connections to the global world. In essence, a position on the road is a social promise to make connections and achievements, it is a promise that provides meaningfulness to his work.

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[9]   The golden *Tshukudu* is a wooden scooter used to transport freight and is only found in eastern DRC.

Bridging potholes – challenges, street wisdom, and solidarity on Goma's streets

Meaningful work, or work that establishes a foundation for a future as a so-cially recognized adult, is difficult to find in Goma. The potholes on the roads might be equated with the challenges young motards face while looking for chances to move up the social ladder. A sensitive and context-specific under-standing of the "road" or "social conditions" is essential in this regard. Roaming the roads as a motard interlaces this kind of work on the one hand with the generation of spatial knowledge on the other. Motards know the city inside out, they know which places to avoid and at what hours, how to take shortcuts, how to block movements through manifestations, and how to read the urban environ-ment in case of a threat. It is mostly by experience and learning from colleagues that the motards will gain this understanding of the city.

This knowledge might help motards realize better opportunities for their fu-ture. By driving through different neighborhoods and talking to different passen-gers, shop owners, and colleagues, short-term *coops*[10] might pop up. The money motards make is often invested in so-called saving systems, locally called *likir-imba*[11]. In case of need, the motards can get back to their money, which is admin-istered by a trusted member of the group and might be invested in whatever need is pertinent at a specific time. The *likirimba* can be understood as an urban networking group that demonstrates forms of solidarity and social integration among motards.

For the many challenges they face, solidarity among motards is an often-heard slogan. This comradery is important to their economic savings, as well as their ability to negotiate with police officers, which have almost become a daily routine for motards. In terms of livelihood, the police are often in the same des-perate position as the motards, so there is a lot room left for negotiation. As the headquarters of *débrouillardise*, Goma has an advantage in that there is always a way to circumvent problems with authorities as many people feel that they can negotiate everything.

According to the moto-associations, however, the arbitrary practices of the traffic police are identified as a substantial problem when roaming the road. Using roundabouts to make vehicles and mototaxis slow-down is only one of the

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[10] Temporary employment in Goma is emically called *bizniz* or *coop* and is mostly of informal and sometimes of criminal nature.

[11] *Likirimba* (in Goma), *likelemba* (in Kinshasa), *la tontine* (in French) is a social form of savings that exists in many urban contexts in Africa. See for example Koning's article on *Bendskin* drivers in Douala (2006, p. 58).

techniques used to pit the material space against the motards. For example, the following instance from my fieldwork exemplifies this phenomenon:

> I am walking through Birere when suddenly an ear-shattering honking comes up, accompanied by furious shouting: "*Namupiga*" (I will hit you). I hesitate as the noise comes out of the direction I need to go. I am thinking of retreating but continue nevertheless cautiously. At Roint Point Birere, I notice that there is just a little tussle between motards and the traffic police. The motards alerted their colleagues who in the meantime flocked together and circled around the six policemen with threatening gestures (Fieldnotes, August 2009).

This anecdote demonstrates that motards are active participants in the urban sphere who seek out allies and try to push their own interests. These everyday confrontations and contestations with public servants are indicative of the ways in which motards use, appropriate, and transform roadsides. Obstacles that seem to rule the present and the future in the school of hard knocks are confronted and "bridged" through forms of solidarity and street wisdom.

Rising levels of urban insecurity and increasing incidents of accidents strongly shape the motards' lifeworlds. Here, guidance and learning are achieved through forms of peer-culture whether in the framework of professional mototaxi associations or by exchanging with fellow colleagues while waiting at street corners for clients or sharing a drink. Enhancing social mobility with one's own physical mobility presents a way to follow up on one's own aspirations. Even if motards face many challenges, they try to bridge these potholes by coming together. Motards informally acquire the skills needed for their job through "imitation, observation, help and, experimentation" (Spittler & Bourdillon, 2012, p. 75). Providing help to each other when, for example, something breaks on the motorcycle, learning how to outwit the traffic police through trickery from the example above, or upholding solidarity with the objective to demonstrate for their rights, makes Goma's motards a collective of young men that know how to read the city.

The formation of this group is also significant on their path to becoming adults. Working as a motard means different things in the ontological continuum between being young and growing up. It can range from, for example, trying to save money to pay a dowry or to buy a motorcycle, learning to drive but also to read the city from their peers, preparing for harassment by traffic police, and controlling urban flows, and knowing where and how to move in contexts of unpredictable situations.

Rhythms of immobility (waiting at streetcorners for passengers while chatting with motard colleagues, personified *radio trottoir*) or mobility (rushing through

the city, traversing different socioeconomic spaces, and generating opportunities – e.g., talking to the ethnographer) mean that motards skillfully navigate a transforming urban landscape. The road as social promise leads to interactions and connections that might offer access to better jobs, financial opportunities, or new networks. Although working as a motard is socially ill-reputed and/or associated with banditism, motards find reassurance in solidarity and street wisdom. The next section addresses another facet of life as a motard that is often neglected when talking about urban male youth: fun.

Expectations of conviviality and leisure

This section comes back to the aforementioned notions of waithood and social moratorium. In order to achieve the means to become socially recognized as an adult, marriage and social reproduction are considered the most important elements of maturity even when new trajectories have already been mapped. This can be exemplified through the example Pychou used when he explained his "life plan[12]" to me. He argues that life expectancy in DR Congo is rather short[13]. To achieve his plans, he explains that he might have to integrate everything he: a) wanted to do himself, and b) is expected of him socially. When I met Pychou in 2008, he was 23 years old and earned under favorable conditions up to 15-20 US dollars a day[14]. He was able to support his family with this money. However, his life plan implied that he would get married within five years, which means when he turned 28. Until then, he wanted to party with his friends. He told me that if he married at 28 and died at 45, he would still have enough time left to have five children, which he regarded as ideal for his life plan. Self-realization and persistence helped Pychou to get along; and he was quite satisfied with his work and life. Like many other motards, his "professional objective" was to become a boss and have other motards work for him, while he would sit observing the streets: "*Ça me fera plaisir*" (I would like that).

A similar idea pursues motard Assumani. As an unmarried man, he wants to wait ideally five more years before he would marry. In his case, that would mean marrying when he turns 25. He plans to have 5000 US dollars as seed money. He already owns his own moto, the money for which he had saved over three years. He bought it second hand for 1,200 dollars and put an "*Omba Mungu*" (Praise God) vanity plate on it. In his perspective, it was God's help that enabled him

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[12] *Plan de vie.*

[13] Male life expectancy: 55.4 years (Retrieved 21.10.2017 from https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cg.html).

[14] Pychou has a "patron" to whom he pays around seven US dollars each day to use his motorcycle.

to succeed in reaching his first life goal. He arrived in Goma after fleeing armed conflict in Walikale in 2008. Assumani's example is interesting as it underlines the contradiction of somebody who has clear objectives in life (and who succeeds in meeting them, buying his own moto), but who did not pursue them straight-forwardly. I often observed Assumani hanging out in the *nganda* (local bar), *Chez Mama Eva*, where he would drink with some colleagues. Conversing and having a drink was important for his social ties within his network. Meeting friends, exchanging news, investing in pleasure might be read as hedonism. When I ask him what he does with his money, he smiles and answers: "*Minakula mimi pek*" (I eat everything myself).

Assumani's phrase, "*Minakula mimi pek*," suggests that we have to think be-yond theories of mere survival, especially in terms of their future. Furthermore, I posit that the experience young men face as they struggle to scrape up money for bridewealth requires a more detailed observation. The state of youth is often ana-lyzed as a dead end. However, I argue that youth do not desperately "hunger" after authority in times of uncertainty; instead, these young men prioritize forms of having fun, especially in terms of the conviviality and the ambiance of their environment. These behaviors might make them look dangerous or uncanny in the eyes of other urban observers, and as the motards' invest money in liquor or prostitutes, their moral character is judged. As a result, we can locate a di-chotomy between the motard's agency and the social conditions that restrict that agency. On the one hand, youths have more agentive leeway than the gloomy picture of waithood might suggest. On the other hand, motards reproduce the social conditions in which they live (Willis 1977) by fulfilling the negative stereo-types, a majority of the society might have of them.

I agree with Martin et al. that the relationship between youth and future in Africa needs to be studied by their own "perspective; ideas, expectations and concrete practices in regard to their future" (Martin, Ungruhe, & Häberlein, 2016, p. 1). As the examples of Pychou and Assumani illustrate, both motards are try-ing to "make a future" by taking action (Pelican & Heiss, 2014, p. 7). Here, the analogy between social and physical mobility becomes evident. Even if they are aware of different opportunities, motards exhibit different styles of pragmatism as they are sometimes manipulative, cunning, or stoic. Self-enactment and self-decoration underline one's connection to the future – to modernity – and this re-lationship is manifested through their pragmatic and crafty set of skills. Pychou and Assumani kept track of their concrete "plans" by sharing time with their peers, following up their long-term objectives, and integrating their pursuit of becoming adults in their everyday life. In this sense, life projects, or "plans" are

always directed "forward" (Cole & Durham, 2008, p. 21). Consistently planning ahead for the long run might be difficult in a context like Goma, especially due to the challenges that accrue with many societal factors and insecure landscapes or infrastructures. However, if one is flexible, it is possible to bridge their different plans, and even literally, traverse over the potholes that cover the road. If expectations are not too great, and, accordingly, the drop height not too high, pleasure and ambience have a prominent space in juvenile worlds of experience. This does not mean that general social norms have changed; but rather, alternative trajectories have emerged. Even if uncertain, these are not necessarily connoted with chaos but could be explained by a sense of adventure or living one's youth to the fullest.

"*On s'amuse quand même*" (we are having fun anyway) is a statement that I heard often in Goma. Ambiance, having fun, or enjoying oneself are lifeworldly phenomena that are rarely studied in contexts of protracted violent conflict as the dominant reading of youth in Africa focuses on potentially deviant street cultures and violence. As a result, such youths are rendered as a "lost generation" who are perpetually disoriented by the enduring violence that surrounds them without taking into account the experiences and relationships that allow them to find their identity and place in the world. These academic and social discourses ignore the processes of sociality, celebrations, romance, and friendship when ascribed adulthood is required.

Clearly, urban space is attractive for youthful peer-practices that can be enacted far from parental control and authority. Considered "bad work" and associated with "banditism," many young motards experience joy by roaming the city without many rules, hanging out with fellow motards, and having a good time. "Ambiance" is a crucial element of social practice and should not be mistaken as romanticizing difficult economic circumstances and war: chatting, drinking, playing football, or dancing constitute the social practices that foster embodied practice or can be used rationally by "conspicuous consumption" for self-staging. Accordingly, fun is likewise connected to social integration and stability just as it is to stigmatization. The moto is adorned, it is a symbol that someone is enjoying their youth, it is a working instrument that is not only looked after, but also engendered a form of social mobility as it opens up new opportunities to connect, acquire knowledge, and gain useful experiences.

Another facet of work is, therefore, in the context where unemployment or informal work dominates, the conceptual question of leisure. Here, hanging out at street corners or in bars, allows us to see social practices that are beyond the gloomy portrayal of the always depressed, the always managing/ navigating/

maneuvering/ straining young man. Youth cannot always be straining. They do not, as Chabal and Daloz write, "hunger after the age, which will endow them with an authority currently denied" (Chabal & Daloz, 1999, p. 34). Concepts that approach Goma's economic situation with theories of "mere survival" fail to adequately capture the situation of Goma's youths as these young men appreciate conviviality and leisure as social practices that allow them to relax, connect, and have fun – even in a context of protracted armed conflict and humanitarian crisis. To be sure, being mobile does not imply a steady movement in time, or a linear progression forward to mobility's end. There are different rhythms and priorities that may be important during different moments. Thus, relaxing and taking a rest is equally significant as working hard or taking a risk because one can be rewarded on the uncertain paths towards adulthood.

Ulf Hannerz explains Simmel's concept of "*Geselligkeit*" (sociability) as an end in itself: "Sociability is interaction for interaction's own sake, without a purpose other than enjoyment of the moment and without consequences beyond the encounter itself" (Hannerz, 1969, p. 105). Sociability and the "context of conviviality" (Nyamnjoh, 2002, p. 111f) are important for motards as they include social ties and networks that demonstrate the impact of peer groups, regardless of whether that is a circle of friends to share money in a *likirimba* or associational life in regard to mototaxi organizations (Kaufmann, 2017; Oldenburg, 2018).

Youth culture, sociability, and spaces of self-enactment are crucial to understanding youth identities. Leisure time seems to be a time that is not "under the control" of elders or public authorities, and this might cause feelings of mistrust towards motards. This demonstrates how leisure works as a social space: youth do not struggle and fight every day for survival or to secure the money for bridewealth. Instead, they enjoy leisure as a space of self-enactment, celebration, boredom, relaxation, and enjoyment while also reproducing power structures and urban socioeconomic conditions (Willis, 1977). Within a very constrained structural context, some agentive leeway is used by motards to enjoy their everyday life without losing hope for the future.

Conclusion: dead end or building a future?

Exploring visions beyond a state of waithood, which sees young people waiting to enter the normative sphere of adulthood (Honwana, 2012), motards' physical mobility is conflated with an imagined social mobility, or, in short, a better future. This contribution has focused on the dynamic urban lifeworlds of motards in Goma and the agentive moments they create while roaming the streets, creating

bonds, mobilizing each other, and practicing conviviality. Following Makhulu et al. (2010), it can be interpreted as "hard work." Nonetheless, it produces income amidst volatility, war, and sociopolitical constraints. As a bodily practice, driving a mototaxi opens up imaginations of overcoming social impasses. Not every pothole can be bridged, socially inherent power structures are reproduced by experimenting and performing ill-reputed work as part of an ill-reputed peer culture. Ascriptions of roughness and banditism are not exclusive labels for motards; rather, *kazi ya moto* is but one element that Menzel calls a "broader aesthetics of danger" (Menzel, 2011, p. 100). Conceptualizing young men as being "stuck" ignores their ability to shape their social and economic environments. By shedding light on their perceptions of work and their perspectives towards the future, I have shown that young motorcycle taxi drivers' lifeworlds are more complex than just portrayals of them as youth on the brink of a social abyss.

The idea that unemployed or informally employed youth are more prone to joining criminal or armed groups might sound convincing for African contexts. However, even if they sense their own social exclusion while experiencing and performing conviviality in associations or while having drinks at the next street corner bar, this adds to a repertoire of urban stories of being young and becoming adults. Motards might stumble into potholes while enjoying their youth and thereby hinder their own attempts to secure future success, prestige, and social becoming with such behavior. Nevertheless, these lived experiences of young people reflect varied trajectories that go beyond an exclusive survivalist attitude, especially as they try to construct their pathways even in difficult and uncertain times.

The urban landscape has increasingly become one that requires further analysis to determine the social practices, skills, and alliances that need to be mobilized for future success. Goma's motards are a heterogeneous group of young men that try to overcome social immobility through their work on the roads. Developing street wisdom through practice and experience, learning from peers in the school of hard knocks, helps them to slowly acquire the ingredients needed to secure their way to social maturity. However, their trajectories are blocked with many obstacles, some of which they can circumvent, others that might make them stumble. Nevertheless, working as a motard, even though it is mostly seen as a temporary occupation, is not necessarily experienced as a "dead end." It goes beyond conceptual approaches that depict African youth as being stuck: motards' strategies to "get by" both inform and are shaped by processes of learning, interpretations of work, and meanings of future aspirations.

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