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THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH
**School of Social and
Political Science**

**The Political Economy of Sino-African Infrastructural
Engagement: The Internationalisation of Chinese State-Owned
Companies in Kenya**

By Elisa Gambino

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Philosophy (PhD) in African Studies, at the School of Social and Political Sciences, the
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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	6
Abstract.....	8
List of Figures	9
List of Tables.....	9
Abbreviations and Acronyms	10
<i>Introduction.....</i>	<i>12</i>
1.2 Sino-African infrastructural engagement in context.....	16
1.3 Thesis objectives and contributions	24
1.4 The overseas expansion of Chinese state-owned enterprises: a spatial understanding of the internationalisation of economic activities	27
Towards a context-sensitive analysis of economic activities overseas	29
The centrality of embeddedness: making sense of Chinese companies' spatial expansion	33
1.5 Methodological considerations	38
The research process.....	39
1.6 Thesis structure	51
<i>The evolution of Sino-African engagement in infrastructural development: integrated fragmentation and the role of SOEs.....</i>	<i>55</i>
2.1 The fragmented nature of Chinese state-SOE relations	56
2.2 The intensification of Sino-African infrastructural engagement.....	59
2.3 African transport corridors and the One Belt One Road initiative.....	65
Chinese companies' embeddedness and their internationalisation.....	69
2.4 African infrastructure “with Chinese characteristics”.....	73
Chinese-funded and -built infrastructure: engagement process and contractor selection	76
Conclusion.....	80
<i>The political economy of Kenya's infrastructural development: the growing role of infrastructure for the country's developmental agenda and political elites</i>	<i>83</i>
3.1 Early post-independence period (1963-1978): inheriting colonial infrastructure and the early post-independence resource allocation.....	85

3.2 Moi's administration (1978-2002): losing control over state resource allocation and the growing role of business elites	92
3.3 The rise and fall of the opposition coalition (2002- 2007): Kenya's 'infrastructural turn' and the return of calls for <i>majimbo</i>	97
3.4 Kenya Vision 2030: infrastructure as a central pillar of political agendas and development initiatives	102
The case of the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR	106
Conclusion.....	109
<i>LAPSSET Corridor and Lamu port: emerging controversies in the implementation of the national development vision</i>	<i>112</i>
4.1 Kenya vision 2030 and the margins: the origins and development of LAPSSET Corridor..	114
4.2 Contextualising the Lamu port project: 50 years in the making?.....	120
4.3 The decision-making actors and their diverging agendas.....	125
The 'oil jetty debate'	127
4.4 The Lamu county government: emerging geographies of power amongst CRBC and Lamu county	132
4.5 Controversies in the supply chain: the agency of non-state actors in (re)negotiating the employment of Kenyan seafarers	140
Conclusion.....	143
<i>Lamu port construction site and workplace relations: an investigation of Sino-African labour relations</i>	<i>146</i>
5.1 The spatial organisation of Lamu construction site	149
5.2 Work in Lamu construction site: aspirations of social mobility and job insecurity.....	156
The 'virtue' of <i>chiku nailao</i>	158
The incentive/deterrent regime.....	160
5.3 Instances of controversy: the brokering of labour relations	161
Conclusion.....	167
<i>The political economy of Chinese state-owned companies' internationalisation: embeddedness and business expansion</i>	<i>170</i>
6.1 Chinese SOEs venture overseas	171
6.2 Early-days subcontracting and Chinese-funded infrastructure.....	176

6.3 Participation in EPC tenders: outbidding the competition	181
The conjunction of CRBC's embeddedness and political (elites') profiteering.....	183
The financial capabilities of CRBC and the company's lower mobilisation costs	189
Conclusion.....	193
<i>Conclusion.....</i>	<i>196</i>
Chinese engagement in Africa's infrastructural development: towards the intertwining of Chinese interests and African elites' agendas?	197
The proliferation of (diverging) agendas around the development of infrastructure projects: Chinese participation and evolving geographies of power.....	200
Making sense of the internationalisation trajectories of Chinese SOEs: the centrality of companies' embeddedness in different networks	203
<i>Bibliography.....</i>	<i>209</i>
<i>Appendix I: AFRIGOS Consent Form</i>	<i>263</i>
<i>Appendix II: AFRIGOS Information Sheet.....</i>	<i>264</i>

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Abstract

Since the turn of the 21st century, the development of infrastructure on the African continent has assumed a prominent role in national, regional, and continental developmental agendas. The increasing focus on infrastructural development in Africa has coincided with a push towards internationalisation given by the Chinese government, in an attempt to address the national overcapacity crisis. As such, Sino-African infrastructural development is a process influenced by many Chinese and African actors, which cannot be reduced to ‘China’ and ‘Africa’. The fragmented nature of the relations amongst the Chinese state and its state-owned companies echoes in their overseas engagement, which, in turn, is (re)shaped by the agency of African actors and their (diverging) agendas. Nevertheless, these two aspects of Sino-African infrastructural engagement have rarely been put in conversation. Through the lens of embeddedness, this thesis explores the multi-layered dynamics amongst the actors involved in the development of Sino-African infrastructure. This research is based on qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews, textual analysis, and ethnographic observations conducted during extensive fieldwork research in Kenya and China. The thesis draws from the case of Lamu port in Northern Kenya – financed by the Kenyan government and built by the Chinese state-owned contractor China Road Bridge Corporation – and other Chinese-built and Chinese-funded projects in Kenya, and beyond, to explore the intersection of different trajectories in the development of Sino-African infrastructure projects. Throughout the decades of economic reforms, Chinese state-owned companies have gained substantial autonomy with regards to their overseas activities, and the quest for market expansion is thus closely linked to the companies’ embeddedness in the contexts in which they operate. The reframing of Kenya’s political economy around infrastructural development is conducive to the spatial expansion of Chinese companies, but also to the profiteering of Kenyan political and business elites. As infrastructure gains political prominence, it also becomes yet another site for contestation and dispossession, highlighting the proliferation of African actors and their diverging agendas. This thesis argues that the internationalisation of Chinese state-owned companies in Africa is not only reliant on spatial expansion through Chinese state incentives, but also on market expansion through non-Chinese funded business opportunities.

List of Figures

<i>Figure 1: China's Loans to Africa 2010 - 2018 (USD billion), source: CARI, 2021c.....</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Figure 2: Chinese loans to African governments by lender 2000 - 2018 (USD million).....</i>	<i>74</i>
<i>Figure 3: Chinese actors relevant to overseas engagement in infrastructural development</i>	<i>77</i>
<i>Figure 4: Official engagement process for overseas infrastructural financing</i>	<i>78</i>
<i>Figure 5: Kenya's Road Network in 1965</i>	<i>86</i>
<i>Figure 6: Map of area referred to as Northern Frontier District</i>	<i>90</i>
<i>Figure 7: Evolution of Kenya's road network (1979-1992)</i>	<i>95</i>
<i>Figure 8: Kenya's expenditure for infrastructure by sector between (2007 – 2016) as percentage of GDP.....</i>	<i>103</i>
<i>Figure 9: Kenya's expenditure for transport infrastructure (2007 - 2016) as percentage of GDP.....</i>	<i>104</i>
<i>Figure 10: ODA and Chinese loans to Kenya's transport infrastructure 2014 – 2017 in USD million</i>	<i>105</i>
<i>Figure 11: LAPSET Corridor Map.....</i>	<i>116</i>
<i>Figure 12: Lamu port design</i>	<i>123</i>
<i>Figure 13: Lamu Town and Lamu Port Construction site</i>	<i>149</i>
<i>Figure 14: Map of Lamu port construction site</i>	<i>151</i>
<i>Figure 15: Management structure in Lamu port construction site</i>	<i>153</i>
<i>Figure 16: Lamu construction site living compound.....</i>	<i>154</i>
<i>Figure 17: CCCC organisational chart</i>	<i>175</i>
<i>Figure 18: Average Profit Margins of construction companies by region 2006-2016.....</i>	<i>191</i>

List of Tables

<i>Table 1: Loan Commitments to Africa's Infrastructure 2012 - 2018 (USD billion).....</i>	<i>60</i>
<i>Table 2: Key FOCAC Financial Commitments between 2000 and 2018.....</i>	<i>62</i>
<i>Table 3: Lamu Port Details</i>	<i>121</i>
<i>Table 4: Lamu port Phase I timeline</i>	<i>122</i>
<i>Table 5: Chinese-funded infrastructure projects in Kenya (2000-2018).....</i>	<i>179</i>
<i>Table 6: Key EPC contracts awarded to CRBC (2005-2021)</i>	<i>182</i>

Abbreviations and Acronyms

AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
AfDB	African Development Bank
AFRIGOS	African Governance and Space
AU	African Union
BOT	Built Operate Transfer (Model)
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CCCC	China Communication Construction Company
CHEC	China Harbour Engineering Company
CHINCA	Chinese International Contractor Association
CIDCA	China International Development Cooperation Agency
CMPort	China Merchants Port
CRBC	China Road Bridge Corporation
EAC	East African Community
EPC	Engineering Procurement Construction (Contract)
ERC	European Research Council
EUR	Euro
Exim Bank	(China) Export Import Bank
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FOCAC	Forum on China-Africa Cooperation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GoK	Government of Kenya
GPN	Global Production Network
HQ	Headquarters
HR	Human Resources
ICA	Infrastructure Consortium for Africa
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JV	Joint Venture
KADU	Kenya African Democratic Union
KANU	Kenya African National Union
KPA	Kenya Port Authority
KSH	Kenyan Shilling
LAPSSET	Lamu Port – South Sudan – Ethiopia Transport (Corridor)

LCDA	LAPSSET Corridor Development Authority
LIBOR	London Inter-Bank Offered Rate
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MNC	Multinational Corporation
MOF	Ministry of Finance
MOFCOM	Ministry of Commerce
NARC	National Rainbow Coalition
NDRC	National Development and Reform Commission
OBOR	One Belt One Road
ODA	Official Development Assistance
ODM	Orange Democratic Movement
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
PPP	Public Private Partnership
PRC	People's Republic of China
REC	Regional Economic Community
RFI	Resource for Infrastructure
RMB	Renminbi (Yuan)
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SASAC	State-Owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
SGR	Standard Gauge Railway
SOE	State-Owned Enterprise
USD	United States Dollar
VPN	Virtual Private Network
WB	World Bank

Introduction

After a giant ocean storm, six hundred years ago, capsized an admiral's junks and drowned at least six thousand of his men, some of the survivors floated onto Pate's mangroves and dark sand beach, crossing thresholds. It is said they conceded to the past by naming their living zone "Shanghai", their place of memory and ghosts. Time, decay, and Pate abbreviated this to "Shanga", a necklace or a yoke; unrequited memory can be an adornment or a prison. (Owour, 2019, p. 154)

Starting from a reinterpretation of the tale of Admiral Zheng He's shipwreck in the 15th century, Ivonne Adhiambo Owour's novel *The Dragonfly Sea* tells a story of friendship, sorrow, connection, and distance between Lamu, in Northern Kenya, and China. Ayaana, a young woman from Pate, an island in the Lamu archipelago, is selected to embark on a journey to China on the basis of a DNA test which confirms she is the 'Descendant' of Chinese seafarers. She boards a ship in Mombasa accompanied by a Chinese representative, setting off for a tumultuous and captivating journey tracing the steps of Admiral Zheng He's fleet. In China, Ayaana is immersed in the study of the Chinese language and its classics. Although the rhythm of her days is marked by events celebrating the long-lasting bridge between China and Lamu, organised and guided by Chinese officials and teachers, she simultaneously explores what China and being the 'Descendant' mean to her.

In the midst of a whirlwind of new encounters, what remains constant is Ayaana's connection with the ocean, its boats, its fishers, its waves, its noises, and its smells, a metaphor of longing for her native land, Pate. Eventually, she is drawn back to Kenya, to the Lamu archipelago and its waters. Upon her return, Ayaana finds Chinese builders constructing a port just across her native Pate Island. After over 600 years, the Lamu port project is cutting through the veil of 'friendship' between Lamu and China.

China says she has come back. An 'old friend.' [...] We hear China will build a harbour, and ships will come; we hear that an oil pipeline shall cross our land. We hear a city shall emerge from our sea, but first they will close our channel. (Owour, 2019, p. 470)

In February 2019, I was cruising through the calm waters and dense mangroves of the very same channel, on my way back to Lamu Island. Just half an hour before, I had been surrounded by dust and construction site noises, a combination of the busy engines of cranes, the shouts of Chinese supervisors, and the constant rasping coming from the dredger. Approaching Lamu, I could see fishers preparing to set off for night fishing, loading their boats surrounded by the lively sounds

of street vendors and their braying donkeys carrying water, snacks, and fishing supplies. On the background, Swahili buildings and palm trees reflected the last moments of the setting sun as the few street lights went on. Once on the shore, I turned to the water and looked towards the channel and the construction site. Even from the distance, I could see the constant haze of light hovering over the soon-to-be port. As Lamu Town was preparing for another quiet summer night, work in the construction site continued round the clock.

The next day, I was sipping my morning coffee when the restaurant owner approached me and shared the latest rumours in Lamu Town: “the Chinese are building a city in Manda!”. According to these rumours, a Chinese company was about to build a city on Manda Island, one of the islands of Lamu archipelago, located between Lamu Island and Pate Island, just opposite the UNESCO site of Lamu Old Town. This was to be a ‘modern’ city, crowded with skyscrapers, a new airport, and shopping malls. In addition, the rumours continued, the city would bring a million Chinese people to Lamu. The national government in Nairobi was understood to have begun acquiring land on Manda Island, and Lamu residents worried that high-rise buildings, expensive housing, and migration would forever transform not only the landscape, but also the identity of the Lamu archipelago. However, the lights and noises rising from the port construction site suggest that a transformation might already be underway.

Since 2016, the Chinese state-owned contractor China Road Bridge Corporation (CRBC) has been building Phase I – the first three berths – of Lamu port, an infrastructure project valued at USD 480 million and envisioned to become one of the largest ports in East Africa (LCDA, 2020). Phase I is currently being financed by the Kenyan government, which, after failing to secure funding from international organisations, prioritised the construction of the port to kick-start the development of the transport corridor initiative planned for the Northern regions of Kenya, and beyond. In fact, Lamu port is part of a broader project, the Lamu Port - South Sudan - Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) Corridor, which aims to connect Kenya to South Sudan and Ethiopia through cross-border infrastructure, such as brand-new highways, and a railway. Upon completion, the port of Lamu is envisioned to serve as an import-export hub for South Sudan, Ethiopia, as well as the Northern regions of Kenya, in a bid to further East African regional integration.

Lamu port is one of the *flagship projects* of Kenya’s developmental agenda, Kenya Vision 2030. This agenda heavily relies on the construction and refurbishing of infrastructure to lead the country to “a rapidly industrialising middle-income nation” by 2030 (GoK, 2007, p. i). As such, the financial commitment by the Kenyan government to fund Phase I of Lamu port to promote LAPSSET fits within the country’s broader development plan. Yet, Lamu port Phase II – the development of 20

more berths – is expected to be financed through Public Private Partnership (PPP) agreements, for an overall total of USD 5 billion (LCDA, 2020). In 2019, just before rumours on the development of a city on Manda Island started spreading, a Chinese state-owned port operator giant, China Merchants Port (CMPort), submitted an investment proposal for Lamu port Phase II. The port operation proposal included the financing of three additional berths, as well as the development of a Special Economic Zone (SEZ), and a city next to Lamu port. The increasing interests of Chinese actors in Lamu port speaks to the growing participation of Chinese actors to the development of Africa's infrastructure, which was prompted by the renewed focus on infrastructure development across the African continent. Currently, Chinese actors' total loans to Africa's infrastructure are estimated at USD 148 billion (CARI, 2021c), making China Africa's largest bilateral infrastructure financier.

The CMPort proposal is still under negotiation with the Kenyan government, but it is crucial to highlight that the rumours spreading in Lamu archipelago – such as the concerns over the development of a city and a SEZ – echo broader debates around the development of infrastructure projects with Chinese participation. As a matter of fact, growing Sino-African engagement is giving birth to several debates amongst political leaders, businesspeople, and civil society organisations in Africa and beyond. On the one hand, the rumoured migration of one million Chinese people to Lamu resembles debates around Chinese contractors' practices of employing Chinese workers brought from China, thus limiting the job opportunities of Africans. Indeed, Chinese contractors' employment practices have been questioned across the board in relations to African infrastructure projects. Labour relations, particularly in terms of contractual conditions (Center for Chinese Studies, 2006), management practices (Oya, 2019; Fei, 2020), skill transfer efforts (Meng and Nyantakyi, 2019), and localisation of labour (Kernen and Lam, 2014) have been at the centre of these debates. Nevertheless, as will be discussed in more details soon, the activities of Chinese companies are becoming increasingly embedded in the socio-economic (and political) life of African nations, prompting their leaders, citizens, and civil society organisations to demand more accountability and transparency.

On the other hand, these rumours also question the role of governmental agencies in Nairobi, which would appear to have already approved the Manda City project, while Lamu residents were only just hearing about it. Similar narratives of marginalisation emerge with regards to other projects in the region. First, there is the Lamu port project, whose critics lament lack of consultation processes with Lamu residents and of compensation schemes for Lamu communities (Chome, 2020). Second, there is the Chinese-backed Lamu coal plant project, which was supposed

to begin the construction phase in 2015, but was challenged by Lamu communities after Nairobi approval. A PPP agreement between the Kenyan-Omani Amu Power and the Chinese company China Power had been signed for the construction of a coal plant in Lamu, financed by the Chinese state-owned commercial bank Industrial and Commercial Bank of China. Once this project had been approved, members of the Lamu county government quit in disagreement, while Lamu residents, particularly those part of the non-governmental organisation SaveLamu, rallied around the *deCOALonize* campaign to challenge the project's environmental assessment in the Kenyan courts. In June 2019, the Lamu coal plant project was shelved indefinitely (BBC, 2019). Meanwhile, other infrastructure currently under development, such as the Lamu port project and the LAPSSET Corridor, continue to raise similar concerns and controversies.

The rumours circulating in Lamu speak to the fact that several historical, contextual, and multifaceted narratives encounter in the project of Lamu port and the broader LAPSSET Corridor. These initial vignettes show that multi-layered dynamics are at play, even around a rumour. First, the relations amongst the Lamu and the Nairobi governments vis-à-vis decision-making processes for planned infrastructure projects is imbued with trajectories of marginalisation. Second, the encounters in the context of contract (re)negotiation and project implementation unfold amongst Kenyan national agencies and Chinese actors, leaving Lamu communities out of the loop. Third, broader connections between Chinese and Kenyan state actors in terms of development and economic cooperation – such as loan agreements – resonate to Lamu port even if this project is not currently funded through loans from Chinese financiers. In other words, the port of Lamu offers a window into the relations of power amongst different actors involved in the development of this infrastructure project. However, this leads one to wonder whether there are more dynamics at play. For instance, to what extent is the Lamu government interacting with the Chinese contractor building Lamu port? What is the nature of relations amongst Chinese contractors and financiers? Or even, what about Lamu and China's old 'friendship'?

In this thesis, drawing from the case of Lamu port and other Chinese-built and Chinese-funded projects in Kenya, and beyond, I will explore the multi-layered dynamics amongst the array of actors involved – to different degrees and to different extents – in the development of Sino-African infrastructure projects. This work understands African infrastructural development with Chinese participation as a process influenced – albeit differentially – by both Chinese and African actors and the contexts they are embedded in. In this thesis, I will argue that Chinese contractors' internationalisation in Africa does not only rely on market expansion through Chinese state incentives, but also on the scouting of non-Chinese funded business opportunities. These

opportunities are emerging in light of the ‘infrastructural turn’ underway across the African continent and the agency of African actors, as well as Chinese companies’ embeddedness in different political and business networks.

1.2 Sino-African infrastructural engagement in context

The push towards regional and continental integration (see Bach, 2016) has played a key role in repositioning infrastructure at the centre of African developmental agendas (Nugent, 2018). The developmental agenda of the African Union (AU), for instance, aims to “connect Africa with world-class infrastructure” (AU, 2015) and the African Development Bank (AfDB) estimates a current ‘financing gap’ of USD 68-108 billion a year to reach this goal (AfDB, 2018). Indeed, since the late 20th century, the African continent has been undergoing a process of *respacing* (Engel and Nugent, 2010) through the construction of small, middle and large-scale infrastructure expected to foster development. Connectivity initiatives – such as cross-border transport corridors or the formation of cross-regional platforms to promote infrastructure, such as the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa led by the AU – contribute to the sedimentation of the idea that infrastructure is essential to foster development and reduce poverty (Calderón, 2009, p. 1). Accordingly, “African governments, corporate investors and the international agencies [...] are fixated upon the transformative potentialities of infrastructure” (Nugent, 2018, p. 22), which translates in the increasing demand for infrastructure financing and construction.

Africa’s current infrastructure development agenda shares similarities with past calls for infrastructure-driven development during the early independence stages, and, as such, is highly influenced by historical trajectories of specific countries and regions in Africa, an aspect which will be central in my thesis. Driven, but also financed, by Bretton Woods institutions, spending for infrastructure in sub-Saharan Africa first peaked in the 1960s and 1970s (Mold, 2012), but many of these infrastructure projects were then “regarded as too expensive and unsuited to African requirements” (Nugent, 2018, p. 22). For instance, before the turn of the 21st century, around 30% of the roads built in the 1970s were not in use anymore (Zawdie and Langford, 2002). During the 1960s and 1970s, amongst Bretton Woods institutions, the World Bank (WB) focused on financing large-scale infrastructure projects, which were considered central to the development of other economic activities (see for instance Caufield, 1996).

To this day, the promotion of the principle that infrastructure needs to be built, upgraded and rendered more efficient to decrease transportation costs and increase African states' ability to deliver economic and social development continues to dominate international discourse (see Cissokho, forthcoming). Consequently, infrastructure development has become attractive to a multitude of different actors. Amongst them, "the state as the driver and promoter of development is now back on the agenda" (Wethal, 2019, p. 492; see also Péclard, Kernen and Khan-Mohammad, 2020). In the East African Community (EAC) alone, for instance, it was estimated that 84.2% of infrastructure projects are state-owned (Edinger and Labuscchagne, 2018). Yet, the (re)emergence of the state as driver of development should not be seen as a break from the cardinal principles of privatisation, liberalisation and deregulation of the so-called Washington consensus. Indeed, the quest of attracting foreign and private investment underpinning the current push towards infrastructural development reminds one of the similar trajectories suggested by Bretton Woods institutions during the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) in the 1980s and 1990s (Péclard, Kernen and Khan-Mohammad, 2020).

In addition to the push towards continental integration, the renewed focus on infrastructural development stems from the necessity to reduce transportation and commodity prices, the development of new information and communication technologies systems expected to increase efficiency, and the growing role of the private sector (Nugent, 2018). Increasingly, states are pursuing PPPs or moving towards the privatisation of operations in mega-infrastructure projects, as it is the case for both Kenya's Mombasa and Lamu ports. For more than 25 years, an increasing number of emerging economies have worked on encouraging private investment in the development of infrastructure through PPP agreements. According to international organisations and supporters, PPPs are believed to contribute to "expanding the capacity and improving the quality of their infrastructure" (Farrel, 2014, p. 181) and meet the growing demand for infrastructure financing (Robert, Dansoh and Ofori-Kuragu, 2014; Osei-Kyei and Chan, 2016). However, many have pointed towards the extractive nature of PPPs, which are agreed upon the delivery of guarantees, thus implying severe risks for the public party within a PPP (Loxley, 2013; Hildyard, 2016; Bayliss and Van Waeyenberge, 2017; Zajontz, 2020a, 2020b).

The growing demand for infrastructure financing and construction in Africa certainly played a role in promoting Sino-African engagement in this sector. On the one hand, Chinese loans came to represent an alternative when, in light of economic stagnation in the 1990s, many African countries could not equally rely on funding from Bretton Woods institutions (Goodfellow, 2020). On the other hand, the push for infrastructural development in Africa coincided with a push towards

internationalisation given by the Chinese state. Already at the end of the 1990s, the Chinese government had published a set of guidelines under the Going Out Policy (走出去政策 – *zou chu qu zhengce*) for companies to access financial incentives in the form of preferential lines of credit, access to preferential foreign exchange rates, and trade insurances to support their overseas expansion. Under this ‘first push’ towards internationalisation, Chinese companies – State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) in particular – ventured overseas. For example, in the early 1990s, SOEs in the oil sector had already begun engaging in Sudan, and were quickly followed by other SOEs in the wider natural resource sector, such as in the Democratic Republic of Congo (a country rich in cobalt), Nigeria (where many oil and natural gas deposits are located), and Zambia (where much of the world’s copper is sourced) (Yi-Chong, 2014).

In this period, the presence of Chinese companies was seen through the lens of resource extraction, which were needed to support the growth of the Chinese economy (Jiang, 2009). The goal of continued economic development was being pursued through an economic policy based on increasing exports, stimulating infrastructure-driven economic growth, increasing national demand, accumulating foreign currency reserves, and attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) (Naughton, 2007; Lardy, 2012). Nonetheless, in light of the rapidly-shifting (and volatile) global economy, China’s economic growth model was faced with several challenges. In the aftermath of the 2007/8 financial crisis, as overseas demand for Chinese goods declined, the reduction in exports posed a severe risk to the profitability of many businesses, particularly in the manufacturing and construction sector. The Chinese government introduced a stimulus package encompassing a broad programme aimed to the development of the national infrastructure systems (Lardy, 2012, p. 129), which, however, was not enough to mitigate the overcapacity crisis in the construction sector (Sum, 2019; Taylor and Zajontz, 2020). The knock-on effects of the global financial crisis in China quickly became evident.

Compounded with the decrease in domestic and overseas demand, overcapacity was hindering the government’s policy efforts for the recovery of the national economy. In the construction industry, since the domestic market had saturated, many construction SOEs were facing considerable profit losses (Jones and Zeng, 2019). To avoid severe economic stagnation and a (likely) debt crisis, companies were told to “turn the challenge into an opportunity by ‘moving out’ this overcapacity” (He, 2014). Former Deputy Foreign Minister He Yafei suggested that new clients and markets should be found overseas, and Chinese companies were encouraged to “closely study the investment environment abroad” and “act without delay” as “a ‘win-win’ future awaits” (He, 2014). Thus, the ‘second push’ towards internationalisation to sustain the recovery of the national

economy relied upon ‘exporting’ overcapacity beyond Chinese borders (Sum, 2019). To this end, the Chinese government outlined another round of incentives and increasingly relied upon established and new diplomatic and cooperation channels – such as the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (hereafter, FOCAC)¹ or the more recent One Belt One Road (hereafter, OBOR)² Initiative – to foster Sino-African engagement.

In other words, the conjunction of the growing demand for infrastructure in Africa and the necessity to address China’s overaccumulation crisis through the ‘moving out’ of overcapacity created the conditions for the proliferation of Sino-African infrastructure projects. In terms of financing, Chinese actors have joined funding from countries belonging to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and from international organisations, such as the WB (Kavalski, 2013; Alden and Jiang, 2019; Sum, 2019). Between 2012 and 2018, Chinese actors have committed an average of USD 14 billion/year in loans to infrastructure in Africa (ICA, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018a, 2018b). Loans disbursed to Africa’s transport sector (see Figure 1³) have averaged at about 4 billion/year in the same timeframe (CARI, 2021c). The peak in total loans in 2016 can be explained by the USD 19.3 billion loaned to Angola, over half of which was loaned by China Development Bank for a mining project (*ibid*). Simultaneously, Chinese contractors have rapidly expanded their market share in Africa (Huang and Chen, 2016). In 2009, Chen and Orr (2009) observed that 50% of the overall projects built by Chinese companies were funded by non-Chinese actors, and estimates suggest that Chinese contractors’ revenues grew from USD 28 billion in 2009 to a record USD 54.7 billion in 2015 (CARI, 2021a). Total revenues of Chinese contractors in Africa represent about 28% of global revenues, the majority of which (about 50%) continue to derive from projects in Asia (*ibid*).

¹ 中非合作论坛 – *zhong fei hezuo luntan*

² 一带一路 – *yi dai yi lu*. In this thesis, I use the word-by-word translation from the Chinese *yi dai yi lu*, but I acknowledge that the official translation was changed in 2016 from ‘One Belt One Road’ to ‘Belt and Road Initiative’ (commonly referred to as BRI).

³ Due to the limited availability of comprehensive loan data, the figure below shows data from the China Africa Research Initiative (total loans and loans to the transport sector), which might differ from loan commitments (data from the Infrastructure Consortium for Africa), as some loans might not have been disbursed.

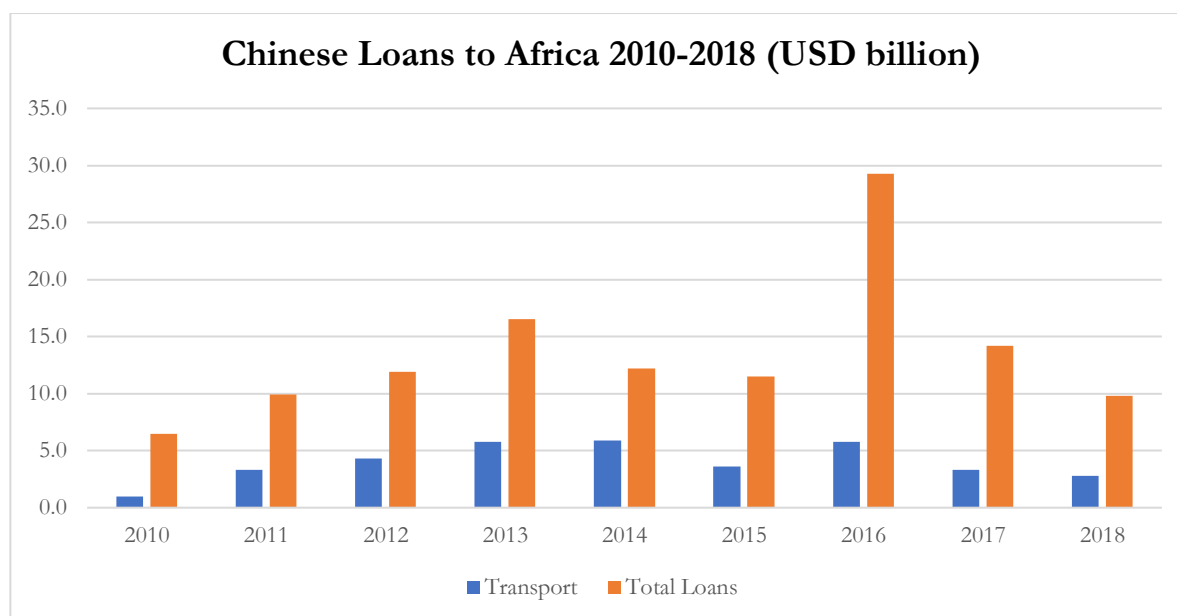


Figure 1: China's Loans to Africa 2010 - 2018 (USD billion), source: CARI, 2021c

The sustainability of Chinese loans and the nature of their conditionalities – particularly as the contracts are negotiated behind closed doors and are not publicly available (Zhao, 2011) – are being questioned by political leaders, civil society organisations, and the public across African nations, China, and the West. In Washington, the long-standing narrative of the ‘China Threat’⁴ was considerably fuelled by the former Trump administration, which labelled Chinese lending practices ‘debt-trap diplomacy’. This suggests that Chinese loans are aimed to ‘trap’ borrowing countries in unrepayable loan agreements to then appropriate infrastructure upon default (Chellaney, 2017). The ‘debt-trap’ narrative builds upon the case of the Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka, where, upon default of loan repayments by the government of Sri Lanka, the Chinese state-owned CMPort obtained concession of the port and surrounding land for 99 years (Abi-Habib, 2018). Nevertheless, through the analysis of loan data, scholars have suggested that Chinese financiers⁵ have been turning to debt relief programmes – such as debt restructuring or cancellation – as opposed to the seizure of assets (Acker, Brautigam and Huang, 2020; Brautigam, Huang and Acker, 2020).

⁴ For further details on the origins and development of the ‘China Threat’ narrative see Yee and Storey (2013); in China-Africa studies see Brautigam (2020) and Links (2021).

⁵ Chinese financiers for overseas project include the state-owned policy banks, namely the Import-Export Bank of China (Exim Bank) and the China Development Bank, state-owned commercial banks, namely the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, the China Construction Bank, the Bank of China and the Agricultural Bank of China, as well as multilateral development banks, namely the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the New Development Bank.

Similar concerns have also emerged across the African continent, where several actors are increasingly problematising the sustainability of Chinese loans in light of mounting public debt. Currently, most of African infrastructure continue to be financed by African governments (ICA, 2018a). Yet, rising debt levels are causing concern around whether Chinese-funded infrastructure are responding to African actors' needs, in an echo with the previous infrastructural push in the 1960s and 1970s (Nugent, 2018) and the privatisation push in the 1980s and 1990s (Alden and Jiang, 2019). African governments' debt to Chinese financiers was estimated to be between USD 72-100 billion in 2017, amounting to 20% of their total stock of debt, compared to USD 66 billion owed to the WB (Jubilee Debt Campaign, 2018, pp. 7–8). In Kenya, total debt to Chinese lenders amounts to about 30% of these governments' total debt (Jubilee Debt Campaign, 2018, p 8). Even considering recent debt restructuring initiatives in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic (see CARI, 2021d), concerns remain on whether any of the Chinese-funded projects are at risk of default on loan repayment.

In scholarly literature, Sino-African engagement in infrastructure development has prompted a lively debate. Some have argued that China's engagement in Africa is 'neo-colonial' in nature (Tull, 2006), as the financing and construction of transport infrastructure is considered to be a means to securing and retaining access to natural resources (Carmody and Owusu, 2007). This perspective echoes current discourses in media and policy circles, where the support from the Chinese state through preferential financial incentives aimed towards internationalisation has quickly fed into the so-called 'China Inc.' narrative (Fishman, 2006), according to which Chinese firms' engagement on the African continent not only supported by the Chinese state, but also orchestrated and guided by it. As a result, Chinese companies' overseas engagement is often portrayed as "an extension of government economic policy" (Robins, 2013, p. 526), and thus seen as fitting within a broader (and supposedly coherent) geopolitical agenda.

Through these lenses, Sino-African engagement is considered to be undermining the influence of the United States and other Western countries (Campbell, 2008). According to this zero-sum stream of literature, China is attempting to build its position as a new 'imperial' power through the promotion of the so-called 'China model' or Chinese 'state capitalism' (Davies, 2008, 2010; as also discussed in Pairault, 2019; Brautigam, 2020). The perspective of an all-coordinated 'grand strategy' was further fuelled by the 'debt-trap diplomacy' discussed earlier, which prompted a re-evaluation of the modalities of engagement and further investigations on the actors involved. Indeed, many scholars have refuted the argument of an overarching and coordinated 'Chinese strategy', highlighting the diverging interests of myriad of actors – what Taylor and Xiao (2009) refer to as

multiple ‘Chinas’ – involved in developing Chinese foreign policy and disbursing loans or other financial incentives (see for instance Jones and Zeng, 2019; Brautigam, 2020).

An opposite perspective, instead, suggests that Chinese companies’ activities on the continent answer to market forces as opposed to the Chinese state. Downs (2007) goes one step further and suggests that Chinese companies have evolved into actors able to fully pursue their economic interests overseas. This view is supported, albeit partially, by the fierce competition in which Chinese companies are engaged abroad (Jones and Zou, 2017) and the fact that their overseas activities can (at times) counter the policy objectives of the Chinese government (Varrall, 2015). Nonetheless, the state support in the form of preferential financial tools has had an indisputable role in fostering the internationalisation of Chinese companies. An instance of this can be found in the construction sector, which, between the publication of the Going Out Policy in 1999 and the financial crisis in 2007, saw a 20% growth/year in revenues (Foster *et al.*, 2008, p. xv). This exponential growth leads to questions about the market-based perspective which considers Chinese companies’ activities to be fully unrelated to the Chinese state’s policy objectives (as also suggested by Pairault, 2013).

Lastly, as “Chinese relations with many African countries are maturing and moving beyond state-to-state deals, implicating many more actors” (Mohan and Lampert, 2013, p. 100), the scope of research has moved beyond the narrative of China steering the engagement with African nations. Indeed, Chinese-funded and Chinese-built infrastructure projects are not being developed on a ‘blank slate’, as the earlier discussion around the African infrastructural development agenda clearly highlights. Until recently, little attention was paid to the agency of African actors – such as state ministries, presidents, or even regional organisations – in negotiating loan agreements, as well as the planning, implementation, and operation of infrastructure projects (as highlighted by Alden and Large, 2019b). However, following growing controversies around the economic sustainability of Sino-African infrastructure and widespread concerns of malpractice and corruption in public tendering processes, an increasing number of scholars have begun to focus on “the role of African agency in shaping the relationship with China” (Carmody and Kragelund, 2016, p. 4).

This emerging body of literature – which Alden and Large (2019b, p. 13) refer to as the ‘African agency turn’ in the study of China-Africa engagement – has highlighted the heterogenous nature

of Sino-African interactions.⁶ Although much of this emerging literature has focused on state agency – particularly that of political elites (see for instance Phillips, 2018) – it has become clear that many actors at different governance levels are involved in the negotiations and re-negotiation processes of China-Africa encounters (Brown, 2012; see also Fisher, 2020). With regards to Sino-African infrastructure, for instance, Soulé-Kohndou (2019) argues that, in the contract negotiations amongst Benin and China, Beninese bureaucratic agency shaped the engagement by influencing the choice of contractor. As suggested by Mohan and Lampert (2013), this reframing of the study of Sino-African engagement speaks to the relevance of the notion that African political elites do not act in a vacuum, but are connected to networks of state and non-state actors well beyond the political sphere.

In other words, Sino-African infrastructural development is a process shaped by many Chinese and African actors, which cannot be reduced to one-to-one interactions. On the one hand, scholars have ‘unpacked’ China and suggested that its multifaceted nature as more than a “single entity” (Yi-Chong, 2013, p. 90) is relevant to the analysis of Sino-African engagement (see for instance Taylor and Xiao, 2009; Yi-Chong, 2014). Indeed, the “Chinese central state and other Chinese political and economic actors have developed complex and sometimes conflicting relationships” (Lam, 2017, p. 3), which inevitably reverberate to their encounters with African actors. On the other hand, scholars have suggested that the extent to which African agency shapes Sino-African interactions has “as much to do with African politics as it does with the politics of China-Africa relations” (Mohan and Lampert, 2013, p. 93; see also Cheru, 2016; Procopio, 2019). Sino-African encounters are shaped through the agency of an array of African actors, which similarly echo dynamics of the political economy of infrastructural development in Africa. In the literature, however, these two aspects of Sino-African engagement have rarely been put into conversation, something this work aims to do.

⁶ See amongst others Corkin, 2013, 2016; Mohan and Lampert, 2013; Carmody and Kragelund, 2016; Makundi, Huyse and Develtere, 2017; Phillips, 2018; Alden and Large, 2019b; Soulé-Kohndou, 2019; Mohan and Tan-Mullins, 2019; Procopio, 2019; Links, 2021.

1.3 Thesis objectives and contributions

This PhD project seeks to nuance the all-too-common narratives – particularly in media and policy discourses – portraying China as a unitary neo-colonial power seeking to engage with African nations to extract resources and counter Western influence in the international arena. Although much of the literature identifies China as the driver of Sino-African engagement, there is indeed more than one actor representing the ‘China’ in China-Africa, prompting the necessity to further reflect on actors’ connections to the Chinese state. Specifically, the evolution of state-business relations over the past 40 years has a profound influence on the ways in which Chinese SOEs engage in African markets. Similarly, Chinese financiers and contractors are far from being the only actors shaping Sino-African infrastructural engagement, as evidenced by the African agency literature in China-Africa relations. Thus, this research aims to simultaneously explore these dynamics in relations to the investigation of the development of Sino-African infrastructure projects.

As the activities of Chinese SOEs on the continent continue to ‘puzzle’ observers, this thesis will complement current understandings of Chinese economic expansion overseas by focusing on the internationalisation processes of SOEs. The ‘unpacking’ of the Chinese context to account for the multiplicity of actors will illuminate the complex networks of relations that are involved in companies’ internationalisation and bring to light particular power dynamics amongst Chinese state and parastate actors. Through an analysis of the broader ‘infrastructural turn’ across the African continent and the political economy of Kenya’s infrastructural development, this thesis will speak to the ways in which the agency of African state and non-state actors (re)shapes Sino-African engagement in infrastructural development. Taking stock of the analytical side-lining of Chinese construction companies’ activities beyond Chinese-funded infrastructure, this work will focus on both Chinese-funded and non-Chinese funded infrastructure. Doing so will underscore the relevance of non-Chinese funded projects to the internationalisation processes of Chinese SOEs, while also stressing the importance of understanding the ways in which Chinese companies are embedded in specific African contexts. In other words, this work will focus on examining geographies of power in both the context of the Chinese SOE sector and Kenya’s political economy with the goal of investigating their interactions.

The first objective of this work is to analyse the geographies of power of the two contexts which encounter in Sino-African infrastructural development. In other words, who are the actors involved in Sino-African infrastructure projects? How is power distributed amongst the various

actors? To what extent do these power relations evolve? Second, this work aims to go beyond the characterisation of engagement as shaped by a multitude of Chinese and African actors to investigate the specific practices through which infrastructural development is (re)shaped by said actors. In other words, who shapes what in Sino-African infrastructure projects? In what ways? This means that this work not only pays attention to paths of Sino-African engagement as prescribed by official Chinese state guidelines or the ways in which it is governed by rules and regulations of specific African countries – although this is one contribution of the thesis – but also to the practices of Sino-African infrastructural engagement in action. This will contribute to moving beyond the study of China-Africa engagement through the lens of a mismatch between ‘policy and practice’, but instead moving towards the study of transnational practices emerging through and from Sino-African projects.

Drawing from the main case study of the Kenyan government-funded and Chinese SOE-built port of Lamu in Northern Kenya, and complimentary insights from other Chinese and non-Chinese funded projects in Kenya and beyond, this work makes several contributions to current understandings of Sino-African engagement. Overall, this thesis argues that the process of internationalisation of Chinese state-owned companies in the African infrastructure sector, although prompted by Chinese state financial incentives and facilitated by Chinese-funded projects, is also reliant on market expansion through non-Chinese funded projects. The latter are emerging in light of broader patterns of infrastructural development in Africa and Chinese companies’ embeddedness in different (transnational) networks.

This thesis contributes to current scholarly understandings of Sino-African engagement by focusing on an empirically grounded analysis of the internationalisation of Chinese SOEs. The increasing engagement of Chinese actors in the development of African infrastructure has prompted a rapidly expanding body of literature, which focuses on the drivers and impact of Chinese engagement, and, more recently, on the role of African actors in shaping interactions with their Chinese counterparts and the implications for the evolving relations amongst the Chinese state and construction SOEs. Currently, over 10000 Chinese-owned companies are operating across the African continent (Sun, Jayram and Kassiri, 2017) and while Chinese SOEs have been operating in Africa for over 50 years, their activities on the African continent continue to foster debates amongst observers and practitioners alike (see for instance Yi-Chong, 2014).

Only a limited number of studies have focused on either the activities of SOEs (see for instance Pairault, 2013) or of private companies (see for instance Gu, 2009) on the African continent. Even less literature deals with both the companies’ relations with Chinese and African actors, with the

notable exceptions of Corkin's (2012) work on Chinese contractors in Angola and Lam's (2017) work on Chinese SOEs in Benin and Ghana. As such, this thesis will contribute to literature on China's overseas engagement by investigating the significance of SOE-state relations to these companies' internationalisation processes. Specifically, it will show that while the state-owned nature of Chinese SOEs is a crucial aspect of their spatial expansion, this does not mean that the company directly and univocally follows Beijing directives. Throughout this work, I will show how the relations between the Chinese state and its SOEs – particularly in terms of the extent of their (dis)connection – crucially shapes the companies' internationalisation trajectories.

In this regard, I will show that there is more to Chinese economic engagement on the African continent than Chinese-funded and Chinese-backed infrastructure projects. Through the thesis, I will investigate both Chinese and non-Chinese funded infrastructure projects constructed in Kenya by the Chinese SOE CRBC focusing on the company's (dis)connections to the Chinese state, other Chinese companies, Kenyan political and business elites, and geographies of power in the context in which the company operates. Doing so will enrich current debates by suggesting that the internationalisation processes of Chinese SOEs are closely linked to the context in which they operate, particularly in terms of their embeddedness in various networks. As such, my work will underscore the centrality of a context-sensitive analysis of Chinese engagement with African nations (see for instance Links, 2021).

With regards to this, I will focus on investigating the interactions between the Chinese SOE sector and Kenya's political economy. The analysis will highlight the intersection of different trajectories – such as the relations amongst the political and business elites of Kenya, the country's developmental agendas across time and space, and Kenya's influx of Chinese infrastructure financing – that have contributed to infrastructure gaining prominence in Kenya's political economy. This has also meant that infrastructure has become a site for political and economic profit-making. More specifically, infrastructure features electoral campaigns across the political spectrum and are the topic of speculation around corruption and profiteering of Kenyan elites. This part of the analysis will contribute to a key argument of my work, namely that these interests are increasingly intertwined with those of Chinese actors.

Lastly, the case of Lamu port and the broader LAPSSET Corridor, due to their location, open an additional avenue for research, which makes a valuable addition to the study of China-Africa relations. The fact that the political economy of Kenya is witnessing a spatial process whereby the centre is attempting to 'capture' value and project its power in previously-disregarded peripheries suggests that Chinese economic engagement needs to be investigated against this background.

Thus, this work sets off to explore the relations between Chinese companies' presence in Northern Kenya and the evolution of centre-periphery relations in Kenya's political economy. In this regard, the thesis will highlight different ways in which a wide array of Kenyan actors engage with Chinese SOEs. On the one hand, the analysis will illuminate the growing embeddedness of Chinese companies in the African context of operation, suggesting that their operations are being shaped by many different actors – including at the level of local governance. On the other hand, the study will suggest that the Chinese presence in Lamu is underwriting the agency of local governance actors, although not altering broader centre-periphery relations. The latter point brings to light an under-researched area of Sino-African studies, namely how Chinese actors fit into, participate to, or reshape power relations in the context of their engagement.

1.4 The overseas expansion of Chinese state-owned enterprises: a spatial understanding of the internationalisation of economic activities

As highlighted earlier, Sino-African infrastructural development is a process shaped by many different actors. On the one hand, Chinese construction SOEs operating in Africa are part of a broader network of relations with Chinese actors and, as such, 'China' cannot be considered as one entity. On the other hand, different Sino-African infrastructure projects also reflect broader dynamics and narratives amongst African actors and networks of actors in a specific context. In other words, the array of actors involved, and their relations, cannot be equated to "'Africa' and 'China' as unitary actors" (Links, 2021, p. 130). Instead, the interplays and connections amongst actors and the networks they are part of should be taken into account in the study of Sino-African infrastructure. This approach to the study of power relations in Sino-African infrastructural engagement poses clear analytical challenges due to the multiplicity of actors, networks of actors, temporalities, scales, and their intersections.

Here, I propose a spatial understanding of Chinese state-owned companies' internationalisation that accounts for the multiplicity of actors and their relations across space and time. This approach is reliant on key concepts in the disciplines of (critical) political geography and economic geography, as well as international political economy, which have long been investigating the ways in which economic activities unfold in the global economy. In light of major transformations, such as the end of colonialism, the rise of post-Fordist economic systems, and the socio-spatial restructuring linked to increasing globalisation, geographers – inspired by the works of Henri Lefebvre (1991), Allen Scott (1988), David Harvey (1982), Neil Smith (1984), and Doreen Massey (1995b) – have

been at the core of the spatial turn experienced across several disciplines. For instance, in African studies, the necessity to “shift away from mapping social stratification towards an analysis of networks” (Engel and Nugent, 2010, p. 3) drove the spatial turn that led to consider the ways in which space is not only formed and used, but also contested.

Within international political economy, critical geographers’ critiques of developmentalist and modernisation theory approaches, have shown that, contrary to an understanding which convenes “spatial difference [...] into temporal sequence” (Massey, 2005, p. 68), a spatialised perspective should encompass different temporalities and trajectories, or, in other words, “alternative pathways” (Massey, 2006, p. 90). Space – and of course also time – is not a surface upon which relations are merely reproduced over, but instead is the “simultaneity of unfinished, ongoing trajectories” or “stories so far” (ibid, p. 92; see also Massey, 2005). This understanding of spatiality allows to capture the possibilities that Sino-African encounters encompass. Space represents “*both* the medium and outcome, as consequence *and* cause” of social processes (Castree, 2002, p. 191). (Massey, 1992, p. 11, italics in original). As such, Sino-African engagement is crowded by connections and disconnections amongst the actors and networks involved in the development of infrastructure projects.

Transporting this concept to the spatial process of internationalisation of economic activities, this means that internationalisation can be simultaneously understood as follows. On the one hand, internationalisation is a process of (re)distribution of economic activities pursued to maximise profits, which produces different forms of spatial unevenness (Harvey, 2003; Smith, 2006). On the other hand, internationalisation is a process of “taking advantage of the specificities of conditions [...] whether these be cheap labour, lack of unionisation or the availability of particular skills” (Massey, 1994b, p. 158). The ways in which and the extent to which spatial unevenness is incorporated in economic activities “var[ies] both between sectors and for any given sectors with changing conditions of production” (Massey, 1995b, p. 118). This means that, the processes and practices part of spatial expansion are inevitably shaped by the context (political, economic, social, cultural, institutional) in which companies operate. Based on this premise, the following sections will present a spatial understanding of the internationalisation of Chinese companies’ economic activities.

Towards a context-sensitive analysis of economic activities overseas

Since the 1970s, multinational corporations (MNCs) have assumed centre-stage as major players in the global economy, prompting reflections on the ways in which economic activity's "geography [...] has been changing and becoming more complex" in light of globalisation (Massey, 1994b, p. 159). The growing complexity of economic flows, however, does not signify an overhaul of previous trajectories, but instead a process of reshaping of engagement through interactions with other emerging patterns. In the case of Chinese flows to African infrastructure, the 'outward' journey of Chinese SOEs and their rapid market expansion across most African nations, for instance, are part of broader processes of (re)integration of China into the global economy (Lardy, 2002), which drove the reorganisation of the geography of production and accumulation outwith China (Sum, 2019; see also Taylor and Zajontz, 2020). Simultaneously, although there continues to be to be a "clear geographical 'direction' to the flows" (Massey, 1994b, p. 159), the encounter amongst Chinese internationalisation processes and African actors is bringing about a reshaping of engagement.

The previously-mentioned literature on African agency in Sino-African encounters offers a window into this process of reshaping. Sino-African engagement is often portrayed in terms of unbalances of power, where a 'powerful' China is set to get the most out of projects in 'weak' African nations. China's economic and political clout in the international arena undoubtedly represents a key aspect of Sino-African engagement. Yet, this unbalance in both power and (material) resources is by far the only determinant in China-Africa relations. As a rapidly growing body of literature suggests, regardless of the unequal power relations, African actors – at different governance levels (Fisher, 2020) – enact their agency in Sino-African engagement. At the continental level, for instance, the AU has been seen to exercise agency by co-defining the agenda and themes discussed at the FOCAC meetings taking place every three years (Alden, van Staden and Wu, 2018). In terms of state agency, studying Sino-Ghanaian engagement in the energy sector, Phillips (2018) suggests that the Ghanaian government has been able to exercise agency when dealing with foreign players after the discovery of oil in 2007. This work suggests that the Ghanaian state has been able to exercise agency only within the confines of negotiations, thus not changing the structure of relations.

Nevertheless, African agency in the context of Sino-African engagement cannot be reduced to the "interests [that] are *successfully* achieved" (Links, 2021, p. 128, italics in original). Instead, "a flexible conceptualisation of agency is needed to locate agencies in the complex dialectical interplay with the structural contexts from which they arise and in relation to which they operate" (Brown, 2012,

p. 1890 cited in Links, 2021). To clarify, it is useful to draw from Massey's seminal metaphor of the 'combinations of layers'. In the second edition of *Spatial Divisions of Labour*, speaking of geographical patterns of investment and disinvestment in the United Kingdom in relations to uneven development, Massey sets the basis for a relational understanding of economic activities' spatiality.

At any point in time the geographical pattern of economic activity which is associated with the new spatial structures is overlaid on and combined with the patterns produced in previous periods. And each new combination of successive layers produces, or may produce, a new form and a new distribution of [spatial] inequality, which in turn is the geographical basis for the next round of investment. (Massey, 1995b, p. 119)

Relating this to the study of Sino-African infrastructural engagement, the perspective of the combination of layers offers an excellent analytical starting point. On the one hand, the layer of Chinese companies' internationalisation 'meets' the layer of the infrastructural development push across the African context. The interactions and combinations amongst these layers represent the reshaping, or possible reshaping, of patterns of Sino-African engagement. On the other hand, each of these layers is itself associated with previous 'rounds' of economic activities, which not only refer to previous Sino-African engagement, but also encompass encounters beyond Chinese and African actors.

Relating this metaphor to the main case study of this work, Lamu port, it emerges that the construction activities of the Chinese state-owned contractor CRBC are part of the current 'round' of Sino-African encounters, which involves a growing market presence of Chinese contractors beyond their participation to Chinese-funded projects. Simultaneously, the presence of this Chinese contractor in Lamu is also associated with Chinese companies' 'outward' journey, which is underpinned by the push for internationalisation as part of the reshaping of the patterns of economic activities prompted by the economic reforms began in 1978. Meanwhile, in Kenya, the political economy of infrastructure development in the country is underpinned by the renewed push for infrastructure construction across the African continent. In turn, the political economy of infrastructural development trajectories shapes the spatial patterns of infrastructure projects in Kenya. This last point is exemplified by the development of Lamu port project and the broader LAPSSET Corridor in the historically marginalised Northern Kenya, a central aspect of my thesis. Therefore, the analysis of Sino-African infrastructural engagement relies on the understanding of each layer's dynamics – achieved through a questioning of the actors' relations to each other, the

ways in which these have evolved, and how these relate to previous ‘rounds’ of encounters – to then examine the combinations and interactions amongst layers.

Moving away from the metaphor of layers, this means analysing the trajectories, patterns, and narratives surrounding the internationalisation processes of Chinese state-owned companies, the political economy of infrastructural development in Kenya, and their encounters in the Lamu port project and complimentary cases studies. In doing so, it will be necessary to also reflect on how these encounters shape or are reshaped by broader dynamics in and beyond Sino-African engagement. For instance, Chinese companies’ economic activities overseas are shaped by the economic, political, and cultural social relations of the context in which they operate (Mohan and Lampert, 2013; Carmody and Kragelund, 2016; Corkin, 2016; Alden, van Staden and Wu, 2018; Mohan and Tan-Mullins, 2019). This indicates that Chinese companies’ embeddedness in networks of the contexts in which they operate is a fundamental aspect of their internationalisation, a process shown to rely on fostering relations with African political elites (Corkin, 2012), non-Chinese companies already active in the market (Pairault, 2020c), as well as Chinese business networks overseas (Liu, 2018).

Moreover, Chinese companies’ (dis)connections to the political economy of China also shape their internationalisation processes. As discussed earlier, the relations of Chinese SOEs with Chinese state actors have become more complex in light of economic reforms geared towards increasing liberalisation (Taylor and Xiao, 2009; Pairault, 2013; Yi-Chong, 2013; Topfer, 2018). During the internationalisation processes of SOEs, the relations between the companies and the state shape – to different extents and in different ways – the activities of SOEs overseas. Indeed, the internationalisation of Chinese companies signifies that “economic, political and cultural social relations, each full of power” (Massey, 1994a, p. 154; see also Allen, 2003) are “increasingly stretched out over space” (Massey, 1994a, p. 154). On the one hand, accessing state incentives can foster the internationalisation of SOEs and contribute to their growing market presence overseas, thus enhancing their business expansion. On the other hand, “the ‘retreat’ of the Chinese state” (Lam, 2017, p. 149) from the oversight of Chinese SOEs’ operations abroad has also given overseas headquarters some room for manoeuvre to establish relations with African actors and pursue business expansion outwith the frameworks of Chinese-funded projects.

Thus, the modalities of interactions between Chinese companies and different African actors are shaped by the relations amongst the Chinese state and the Chinese SOE. Taking labour relations as an example, in Chinese-funded and Chinese-built projects, challenges remain to unionisation and fair working conditions, which echo similar concerns in the Chinese political economy (see

amongst others Cottle, 2014; Oya, 2019). Nevertheless, as Chinese companies become increasingly embedded in the African context in which they operate, they are also able to establish and foster networks with African actors, which contribute to reshaping the activities of SOEs. This means that the encounters amongst a wide array of Chinese and Kenyan actors not only echo previous ‘layers’ of engagement, but also represent the (possible) emergence of new relations. In the case of labour relations, African agency – in the form of local content regulations, labour laws, and negotiation trajectories of civil society organisations and employees – contribute to reshaping labour practices (Oya, 2019; Driessen, 2019; Gambino, 2020a; 2020b).

These examples speak to broader discourses around the ways in which companies – as economic actors – are embedded in the social relations of networks of actors (Granovetter, 1985).⁷ This is true beyond Chinese contractors’ activities in the African context, leading one to question who are the actors and what is the nature of their (power) relations to each other, to networks of actors, and to the broader (social) contexts. Before turning to these questions, a clarification is necessary with regards to the use of images such as ‘actors’ and ‘networks of actors’, which echo the language of Actor-Network-Theory. The works by Latour (1988, 2005) and other Actor-Network-Theory scholars (see for instance Law, 1992; Callon, 1999) have greatly contributed to the mapping and study of complex connections amongst actors. Nevertheless, in this work, the context in which relations unfold and the nature of said relations are not to be considered ‘external’ to the actors and networks of actors, but instead, since actors are embedded in specific contexts, it is necessary to analyse the nature of relations amongst actors and their context. Moreover, Actor-Network-Theory considers human and non-human actors as agents, while my research is rooted in the study of social relations amongst collective and individual (human) actors. I will, however, retain the use of terms such as ‘actors’ and ‘networks of actors’ as they help to both identify and ‘visualise’ said context-specific relations and their connections.

⁷ Although economic sociology debates around embeddedness began with the publication of Polanyi’s (1944) *The Great Transformation*, I rely on Granovetter’s work as it represented a shift in focus of analysis from abstract ‘economy’ and ‘society’, to economic actors’ agency – both collective and individual.

The centrality of embeddedness: making sense of Chinese companies' spatial expansion

Since the 1990s, the Global Production Network (GPN) approach⁸ (Dicken *et al.*, 2001; Henderson *et al.*, 2002) has paved the way for the study of companies' role in the reconfiguration of economic activities in a specific context, the relations of power amongst companies and other actors, as well as in relations to other companies or industries (see amongst many others Coe *et al.*, 2004; Henderson and Navdi, 2011; Baker and Sovacool, 2017; Alford and Phillips, 2018). Having emerged as a response to political economy approaches of the 1980s – which mainly revolved around the role of the state (as highlighted by Glassman, 2011) – the GPN approach is not limited to the study of companies, but can involve the study of other actors, such as political ones. A global production network is defined as “an organisational arrangement, comprising interconnected economic and non-economic actors, coordinated by a global firm, and producing goods or services across multiple geographical locations for worldwide markets” (Coe and Yeung, 2019, pp. 1–2). Thus, in GPN theory, the focus is not only on the mapping of actors and networks of actors – although this continues to be a relevant exercise – but also on actors' “interconnections and their power relationships” (Dicken, 2014, p. 52).

This reframing centres the focus on the ways in which economic activities are shaped by different economic, political, and cultural relations. Through the lens of the GPN approach, the activities of Chinese SOEs in their ‘outward’ journey and the modalities of said processes – in other words the *how* of internationalisation – complement the study of the motives of internationalisation – the *why*. Indeed, much of the literature on Chinese companies' internationalisation processes has relied on concepts and theoretical approaches in the field of international business (Buckley *et al.*, 2007; Child, Lu and Tsai, 2007; Rugman and Li, 2007; Govindarajan and Ramamurti, 2011; Wang *et al.*, 2012; Child and Marinova, 2014; Hertenstein, Sutherland and Anderson, 2015). This strand of literature focuses on the company-specific factors influencing internationalisation, such as size and ownership (see for instance Child and Marinova, 2014), and on country-specific advantages, such as the ‘outward’ push given by the state due to the overcapacity crisis (Niosi and Tschang, 2009)

⁸ The GPN approach builds on insights from the frameworks of Global Value Chain (see for instance Gereffi, 1994; Gereffi and Fernandez-Stark, 2011) and Global Commodity Chain (see for instance Appelbaum and Gereffi, 1994).

and the support of Chinese state incentives (Rugman and Oh, 2008; Luo, Xue and Han, 2010; Rugman, Nguyen and Wei, 2014).⁹

Differently, drawing from key concepts in economic geography and economic sociology, the GPN approach shifts the focus of analysis on the relations of power amongst Chinese companies and the broader economic, social, and political contexts in China and beyond (see amongst others Liu and Dicken, 2006; Henderson and Navdi, 2011; Topfer, 2018). Relating the GPN approach to the study of Sino-African engagement, the concept of embeddedness of economic actors in broader contexts resonates with the notion that Chinese companies internationalise against a background – a ‘backstory’ – of evolving state-business relations. Nevertheless, the concept of embeddedness, which has prompted a wide body of literature, should be clarified further. Building on Granovetter’s (1985) conceptualisation of relational and structural embeddedness – the former representing the relations amongst a pair of actors and the latter the network of relations amongst actors in different spheres (Granovetter, 1992) – Zukin and DiMaggio (1990) proposed further typologies of relations of power amongst actors through the concepts of cognitive, cultural, structural, and political embeddedness, attempting to capture economic actors’ simultaneous embeddedness in different networks.¹⁰ Nonetheless, as Hess (2004, p. 172) highlights:

Zukin and DiMaggio’s classification is indeed useful in breaking down different aspects of the ‘social’ into different mechanisms for analytical purposes and, at its time, certainly provided the most comprehensive, yet coherent, overview of different kinds of embeddedness. However, the four mechanisms they isolate are not really consistent categories [...]. For instance, structural and political embeddedness by large describe the same phenomenon, namely the relations of actors, and there is actually no reason for the implicit assumption that the structural describes only harmonious relations

⁹ The focus on Chinese companies’ internationalisation processes in international business studies has prompted a debate on the extent to which existing internationalisation theory should be adapted to the study of emerging markets’ companies or even Chinese companies specifically (see for instance Alon *et al.*, 2011). Although the degree of ‘successfulness’ of this theoretical endeavour is beyond the scope of this research, it is important to highlight that recent theoretical perspectives call for the inclusion of social sciences concepts such as space (see Deng, Delios and Peng, 2020) and embeddedness (Lattemann *et al.*, 2017) in internationalisation theory.

¹⁰ In business studies, Zukin and DiMaggio’s (1990) work paved the way for many other reformulations of the embeddedness concept (see amongst many Uzzi, 1999; Fligstein *et al.*, 2002; Lattemann *et al.*, 2017; Deng, Delios and Peng, 2020).

between economic actors and the political describes tense relationships between the economic and the non-economic.

To overcome these limitations, what is perhaps the biggest contribution to the embeddedness debate can be found in the economic geography literature, which has long focused on companies' increasingly globalised activities as processes situated in time and space (see for instance Martin, 1994). Initially adopted in the 1990s (see Dicken and Thrift, 1992), embeddedness came to represent a key concept in the 'new regionalism' current of economic geography, which, however, focused on what Hess (2004, p. 174) called an "overterritorialised" view of networks and relations as bounded to a specific geographical scale, which overlooked the multiscale nature of globalisation processes and, thus, the economic activities of MNCs (Pike, Giunta and Lagendijk, 2000; MacKinnon, Cumbers and Chapman, 2002; Bathelt and Glückler, 2003; Hess, 2004). Indeed, the study of Sino-African engagement requires the investigation of a multiplicity of encounters and relations (re)shaping the development of infrastructure projects. As highlighted throughout this introduction, a multitude of actors are involved in these processes, and each of these actors is itself embedded in broader networks of actors (and relations) at different scales.

Thus, it is useful to turn to Hess (2004, p. 176), who suggests that embeddedness "signifies the social relationships between both economic and non-economic actors", which he conceptualises in the three interrelated and evolving dimensions: social, network, and territorial embeddedness. These three characterisations of embeddedness are relevant to the study of the internationalisation processes of Chinese SOEs, in that they imply a multiscale understanding of (social) relations. In her investigation on the internationalisation processes of SOEs in Ghana and Benin, Katy Lam (2017) was amongst the firsts to engage with Hess' (2004) threefold categorisation of embeddedness vis-à-vis China-Africa engagement. First, social embeddedness refers to the "genetic code" of actors, meaning their "societal (i.e cultural, political, etc.) background", which inevitably "shapes their perception, strategies and actions" (Hess, 2004, p. 176, 180).

As discussed earlier, a growing number of scholars have refuted the argument of an overarching and coordinated 'Chinese strategy', bringing to light the diverging interests of the myriad of actors involved in Sino-African engagement (Brautigam, 2009; Taylor and Xiao, 2009; Corkin, 2012; Pairault, 2013). However, very few have thoroughly reflected on the evolving relations amongst the Chinese state and its SOEs – what Hess refers to as "social embeddedness" (2004, p. 176) – and the significance of these dynamics for the internationalisation processes of SOEs (see Yi-Chong, 2014; Lam, 2017). To this end, drawing from key insights from Chinese studies (Lieberthal and Oksenberg, 1988; Lardy, 2002, 2019; Naughton, 2007, 2016; Mertha, 2009; Brødsgaard, 2012,

2017; Mertha and Brødsgaard, 2017), I will explore the ways in which 40 years of market liberalisation economic reforms in China gave birth to a political economy in which state power coexists alongside the increasing power and autonomy of SOEs.

Second, network embeddedness is “the structure of relationships amongst a set of individuals and organisations” (Hess, 2004, p. 177), which refers to the “connections between heterogenous actors, regardless of their locations, rather than restricted to one geographical scale” (ibid, p. 180). In this context, Lam (2017) suggests turning the attention to the managerial activities of Chinese managers in African contexts, particularly in terms of their trust-building interactions with African actors. Nevertheless, in my work, network embeddedness will be explored through the analysis of transnational and multiscalar networks of actors in the context of the projects focus of this thesis. For instance, in the context of growing connections amongst SOEs and Kenyan state and non-state actors, network embeddedness will be explored through the connections state actors in Kenya and the Chinese company CRBC, but also connections amongst the latter and other Chinese SOEs interested in operating or investing in the Kenyan context.

Third, territorial embeddedness refers to the “localised manifestations of networks” (Hess, 2004, p. 180), which “[c]onsiders the extent to which an actor is ‘anchored’ in particular territories”. In her work, Lam (2017) explores Chinese companies’ degree of ‘adaptability’ in the context of operations, investigating the ways in which Chinese SOEs are ‘anchoring’ themselves to African networks and contexts. In Lam’s (2017) study, this focus does not fully capture the ways in which African actors enact their agency and contribute to (re)shape Chinese state-owned companies’ activities, and, to a certain extent, Sino-African engagement. Indeed, Lam’s (2017) understanding of embeddedness speaks to GPN’s conceptualisation of networks as “connect[ing] aspects of the social and spatial arrangements in which [...] firms are embedded and which influence their strategies and the values, priorities and expectations of managers, workers and communities alike” (Henderson *et al.*, 2002, p. 451; see also Coe and Yeung, 2019 on the evolution of the GPN perspective). Nonetheless, such focus on the activities undertaken “*by a global firm*” (Coe and Yeung, 2019, pp. 1–2, italics added) does not capture the heterogenous nature of relations amongst actors, as also suggested by Hughes, McEwan and Bek (2015) and Selwyn (2011).¹¹ This is

¹¹ Selwyn (2011) also underscored a second key limitation of a GPN approach, namely the lack of integration of labour into the framework of analysis (see also Selwyn, 2013). Nonetheless, Coe and Yeung (2019) later highlight that the (re)integration of labour in GNP approaches has been a prolific field of research (see for instance Taylor and Rioux, 2018).

particularly true for the study of infrastructure projects, which not only encompass multiplicity of actors and their multiscalarity, but also multitemporality.

First, the construction industry encompasses linkages amongst several actors in different – yet interrelated – sectors. Indeed, the construction industry is an “industry of industries” (Fernández-Solís, 2008, p. 33), where several sectors, for example in the entirety of the supply-chain of materials and machineries, are needed to undertake the construction process. Second, the construction of infrastructure cannot be equated to the sale of a ‘product’, as infrastructure “are extended material assemblages that generate effects and structure social relations, either through engineered (i.e. planned and purposefully crafted) or non-engineered (i.e. unplanned and emergent) activities” (Harvey, Jensen and Morita, 2017, p. 5). As such, infrastructure can promote ideas of modernity (Harvey and Knox, 2012; Larkin, 2013; Howe *et al.*, 2015) and are conducive to the projection of state power (Scott, 1998) and representation (Arewa, 2016), thus encompassing multiplicity and simultaneously (dis)connecting places, actors, and temporalities (Harvey, 2018).

Third, the development of infrastructure is closely connected to state actors’ decision-making processes, which are often characterised by (political) contestation (see for instance Hönke and Cuesta-Fernandez, 2017; in China-Africa studies see Goodfellow and Huang, 2020). Thus, this thesis focuses on the analysis of territorial embeddedness through the investigation of processes of relationship-building that characterise infrastructure development. Indeed, infrastructure are thus not mere technical objects – although they are still often promoted as technical ‘solutions’ (see amongst others Mitchell, 2002; Mukerji, 2011) – but they are inherently related to the rationales for their provision, ongoing processes of relationship-building and political contestation, as well as the production of uneven development (Carse, 2012, 2014; Harvey and Knox, 2012; Larkin, 2013, 2018; Easterling, 2014; Harvey, Jensen and Morita, 2017).

In this context, although reflections on the multiscalarity of networks and actors’ (power) relations inspired by the GPN approach are fundamental to the study of Sino-African infrastructure projects, it is also necessary to consider the evolution of these networks and the relations amongst actors, as evidenced by the (many) calls for a relational understanding of embeddedness and globalisation processes (Dicken *et al.*, 2001; Amin, 2002; Yeung, 2005, 2018; Lattemann *et al.*, 2017; Deng, Delios and Peng, 2020). In this thesis, I will thus focus on the investigation of networks of actors over time, paying close attention to their evolution. To clarify, the study of Sino-African engagement needs to account for different temporalities – in light of the ever-evolving dynamics in the global economy – and for the relational nature of engagement, whereby economic actors are not only

embedded in networks of (social) relations, but also simultaneously shape – albeit to different degrees – the practices and trajectories of Sino-African infrastructural development.

In conclusion, through the main case study of the port of Lamu in Northern Kenya, but also drawing from other relevant case studies of Chinese-build and Chinese-financed infrastructure in Kenya and beyond, I will capture the evolving nature of Chinese state-owned companies' internationalisation in Kenya, to then draw out key lessons on the evolution of Sino-African infrastructural engagement. Specifically, I will unpack the relations amongst key actors and their embeddedness in the broader social contexts, represented by networks of actors across time and space. This makes it possible to understand the implications, modalities, and outcomes of Sino-African infrastructural engagement without limiting the focus of the study to a specific geographical scale, actor (i.e. the state) or a single temporality. In the remainder of the introduction, I will present the methodological approach and the thesis structure.

1.5 Methodological considerations

Given the need to pay analytical attention to the nuances of both the Chinese and Kenyan – and the broader African – contexts, the embeddedness of actors in a diverse array of networks, and the relational nature of their relations, the research philosophy of this study is guided by a critical realist perspective. This is in line with other studies on Sino-African engagement (see Lam, 2017; Chiyemura, 2019; Zajontz, 2020a; as discussed in Duggan, 2020), as well with studies on MNCs and processes of globalisation of economic activity (see amongst others Coe and Yeung, 2015, 2019; Rees and Smith, 2017). Starting from the work of Bhaskar (1978), and later elaborated by Sayer (1992) and Lawson (1997), critical realism presupposes a layered understanding of reality (Bhaskar, 1978; see also Sayer, 2000), which encompasses difference and change and, thus, is at the core of the concepts developed by Massey. Thus, a critical realist approach to the study of Sino-African infrastructural engagement allows to capture the context-sensitive concepts outlined in the previous section. Nonetheless, as critical realism is not a method *per se* (Yeung, 1997; see also Danermark *et al.*, 2001), it is necessary to delineate a research process informed by critical realism.

In this study, I developed a research process inspired by the most recent developments in grounded theory (Oliver, 2012; see also Hoddy, 2019) and triangulation approach (as suggested by Yeung, 1997). Grounded theory was initially developed Glaser and Strauss (1967), who envisioned

a methodology based on an exploratory approach, thus suggesting that the researcher should begin fieldwork with scarce pre-existing knowledge of theories explaining a phenomenon, to then develop theoretical knowledge and a theoretical synthesis concurrently to the fieldwork research. Nonetheless, as emphasised by critical realists, this approach would side-line the role of theoretical and conceptual knowledge to the fieldwork research process, in other words falling into empiricism (see Danermark *et al.*, 2001, p. 130-137). However, Oliver (2012) shows that, since its conception, grounded theory has evolved considerably. The ‘new wave’ of grounded theory has also shifted from “induction to abduction mean[ing] that grounded theory now typically accommodates researchers’ pre-existing theoretical knowledge” (Oliver, 2012, p. 380).

To “improve the validity and reliability of data collected” (Yeung, 1997, p. 64) and widening the scope of my understanding of the phenomena subject of this study (Olsen, 2004), I complemented the research paradigm with methodological triangulation. In line with the overwhelming majority of research in the social sciences, in order to investigate Sino-African engagement in infrastructural development, this project relied on a case study approach, which allows for in-depth investigation of the *how* and *why* of a phenomenon (Yin, 1994), as well as allowing to delineate a theoretical perspective (Flyvbjerg, 2006). As Flyvbjerg (2011) suggests, a case study approach has the potential to include several sources of data. In my research, document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and observations were selected, as these methods are supported by a critical realist approach (as already suggested by Yeung, 1997). In the next section, itself organised in five sub-sections, I will offer an in-depth overview of the research process, which will deal with cases and method selection, ethical considerations, and limitations of this study.

The research process

In this study, the main case study is the port of Lamu in Northern Kenya, but the research also drew from other complimentary case studies to expand the understanding of actors’ context and relations. These included Chinese-funded and -constructed infrastructure in Kenya, such as the Nairobi-Mombasa Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) or the Berth 19 of Mombasa Port. The case of Lamu port was selected due to its funding and its centrality to Kenya’s developmental agenda. First, in current research on Sino-African infrastructure, the focus has been on Chinese-funded and Chinese-constructed projects (see amongst others Wissenbach and Yuan, 2017; Taylor, 2020), thus raising the need to further the understanding of Chinese companies’ engagement in Africa’s construction industries beyond Chinese-funded projects. The port of Lamu is an excellent case as

its Phase I is funded by the Kenyan government. Second, the location of Lamu port in the Coast and North of Kenya means that the historical trajectories of these and their relations to Nairobi intersect in this flagship project of the country's developmental agenda.

In order to holistically capture the dynamics and processes of engagement in the development of Lamu port, I divided fieldwork research into five different legs, with the longest leg being three months. The methodological approach of making repeat visits to field sites was driven by the necessity to build relationships of trust with participants by 'returning', and, at the same time, to begin analysing data and formulating theoretical concepts, to then return to the field for further investigation. For instance, once the initial findings suggested that Chinese contractors' activities are shaped by both national-level and county-level Kenyan governments, I complemented data collected through semi-structured interviews with a short ethnography of work in the Lamu construction site, thus governmental actors' perspectives were analysed together with observations and informal conversations with construction workers. In the following subsections, I will explore the different phases of the research process involved in this study, which I have organised chronologically to better capture the evolution of the research conducted. To the same end, each section will present ethical considerations, reflections on the data collection process and analysis, as well as limitations of this study.

Pre-fieldwork phase: preparation and reflections on ethical concerns

I began this PhD research with a background in foreign languages and Chinese studies, and, as such, the first phase of the research process was characterised by complementing previous knowledge with key concepts, theories, and methods in the social sciences and African studies. In this phase, I focused on academic literature on China-Africa engagement, theories and concepts in the field of anthropology of infrastructure, and newspaper articles on contestation in Sino-African infrastructure projects. Through this initial appraisal of existing literature, I acknowledged the necessity to focus on the political processes and contestation that surrounds infrastructure projects. Thus, I began delineating a controversy approach (Hönke and Cuesta-Fernandez, 2018; see also Barry, 2013) to the study of Lamu port. In other words, through an initial mapping of actors, I set out to identify controversies amongst actors, through which I expected to gather data on decision-making processes and (re)negotiations.

Another central part of the first stage of research was fieldwork preparation. First, my linguistic background guided me towards reflections on the use of language(s) in fieldwork research. The way and the extent to which information is shared or communicated is strictly connected to Srivastava's (2006) concept of *shared* positionality. She highlights the importance of positionalities as 'currencies' to be shared in order to facilitate communication, suggesting that using other languages in research is not only a choice dictated by the circumstances, but also a conscious one. She relates this argument to Merton's (1972) notion of *insider/outsider*, highlighting the necessity to go beyond this dichotomy and instead consider hybrids or mixes of positionalities (see feminist literature on the topic, for example Stack, 1993). Thus, semi-structured interviews were conducted in a language familiar to the interviewee, either English, Mandarin, or Italian, while Kiswahili was mainly used during observations in the construction site and informal (and simple, due to my limited knowledge of Kiswahili) conversations with fishers in the Lamu community – in addition to interactions in daily life, particularly on the Coast of Kenya.

In the case of my research, *sharing* the positionality of language with the participants was key to accessing both information and the participants themselves, yet it also gave birth to unexpected dynamics. For example, while I was interviewing a Chinese informant in the common room of a ship I was visiting, other Chinese crew entered, and their attention was soon caught by their colleague speaking to me in Mandarin. Shortly, a group of Chinese seafarers had joined the table, which meant the interview was suspended to take part in a Chinese tea ceremony. On another occasion, while carrying out observations at the Lamu construction site, I was asked to interpret from English into Mandarin (and *viceversa*) on behalf of a worker. Although I only stepped very briefly in the role of interpreter, this led me to further reflect on issues of positionality and its relation to language. In this last instance, my interlocutors understood my position of researcher and asked me to take upon a different role for the duration of a necessary conversation they could not have had otherwise, yet other workers who were not directly involved in the research assumed the nature of my role depending on the person I was communicating with, underlining the ever-important necessity to ensure, continuously, that my position of researcher was known and participants' consent was ongoing.

Second, I had also anticipated that some participants might not speak English. This PhD project is part of the "African Governance and Space: Transport Corridors, Border Towns and Port Cities in Transition" (AFRIGOS) Project¹², funded by the European Research Council (ERC) through

¹² The AFRIGOS project seeks to understand emergent patterns of governance along transport corridors, port cities, and border towns in four regions of Africa.

an Advanced Grant (ADG-2014–67085). As such, the research group’s consent form (Appendix I) and the project’s information sheet (Appendix II) were already available in English and French, but I translated them into Mandarin. As per the guidelines of the ERC, written consent was required for formal interviews, thus requiring the informants to fully understand the content of the consent form. This represented a first step in ensuring all interactions and interviews were carried out with transparency – concerning both the motives of my research and the participants’ consent – and appropriate measures were taken not to put participants nor myself at risk. Anonymity was guaranteed through the ERC requirement of obtaining written consent for formal interviews, which specified that names of informants, their organisations, as well as any reference that could identify them would be removed.

Lastly, some of the assumptions I had made on different risks concerning different groups of informants revealed to be informative, thus allowing me to deploy some risk-avoidance strategies I had previously prepared, although, as will become clear in the next sections, this was not always a straightforward process. In the case of officials, two ethical issues I had foreseen arose: potentially illegal practices and the scrutiny of their superiors. In order to avoid repercussions on the informants, I asked non-incriminating questions and through the writing process I made sure that data could not be traced back to individuals’ responses, so to fully protect them from possible retaliations. Concerning other informants, such as community members, businesspeople and journalists, in addition to avoiding possibly incriminating questions, the interviews were mainly conducted in private settings. For interactions with both categories of informants, it was extremely important to establish a sincere and trustful relationship. As I mentioned before, returning to the field several times, instead of carrying out one long period of fieldwork research, was a choice motivated by the need to foster the personal rapports with the informants. In Chinese contexts (both in China and Kenya) this process was facilitated by my knowledge of Mandarin, which helped to establish relationships of trust necessary to access spaces and participants surrounded by much secrecy.

Sampling phase: China (July, 2018) and Kenya (November and December, 2018)

As suggested by Hoddy (2019), grounded theory’s sampling phase of research serves to clarify conceptual categories emerged from the pre-existing theoretical knowledge and review of existing studies. In this phase of research, I had planned to collect data and build a network amongst relevant actors in both China and Kenya. In Beijing, I had planned to carry out preliminary

interviews to gather data on the decision-making processes leading to foreign investment and financing, as well as on the role of the Chinese International Contractor Association (CHINCA) in aiding Chinese contractors operating or interested in operating overseas. I was invited to participate to the 2018 Visiting Programme for Young Sinologists, hosted and funded by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Through this programme, I obtained affiliation in the Guanghua School of Management at Peking University, and began conducting preliminary data collection through semi-structured interviews.

This fieldwork trip was fundamental to the identification of key building blocks of the research on Chinese actors and the context in which they are embedded. First, through textual analysis and semi-structured interviews, I collected the necessary data to map the state and parastate actors involved in the formal process of engagement for Chinese-funded infrastructure projects on the African continent, providing initial insights into their relations. Second, I investigated the role of East African nations, and Kenya specifically, in the OBOR initiative, focusing on economic and political interests, historical connections, as well as Chinese official narratives and blueprints on port engagement. Third, this fieldwork phase provided me the opportunity to familiarise with doing fieldwork research in China (or better, with Chinese actors), a task not well documented by researchers in the field (see Heimer and Thøgersen, 2006).

Building on insights gained from this first leg of fieldwork on the main challenges, namely the Great Firewall, government control, and *guanxi*¹³, I was able to formulate risk-mitigating strategies for the upcoming research in Kenya and the next fieldwork research in China. As often discussed in the media and academia (Economy, 2018; Chestnut, Greitens and Truex, 2020), the government of the PRC has created a firewall, known as the 'Great Firewall', which forbids access to several websites, social media and research engines, among which most foreign newspapers, Twitter, and Google. This firewall can be overcome through the use of a Virtual Private Network (VPN), yet the Edinburgh University VPN is not functioning in China, and the use of non-approved VPN services has been legally persecuted in the past (Yang, 2019). This means that, while conducting research in China, I could only access scholarly literature and other sources through the government-authorised VPN available in Guanghua School of Management. Nonetheless, the use of authorised VPNs raises privacy concerns.

¹³ 关系 - relations

The Chinese government surveillance also extends to the Chinese messaging app Wechat¹⁴ (Sonnad, 2017; Chen, 2018; Lucas and Feng, 2018; Leung, 2019), thus limiting the possibility of receiving news from outside China (either personal or research-related). Second, as content shared on approved media, conversations and web searches are monitored, it is necessary to take appropriate steps not to enter the censorship and surveillance radar. This is ever-relevant due to the undefined position foreign researchers have while in China. No research permit is needed to carry out fieldwork in China, which hinders the legitimacy of the researcher. Not requiring research permits could be seen as a way for the Chinese government to reserve the right to expel researchers, deny visas, and limit researchers' access while in China. In addition, surveillance also has implications for the 'do no harm' research principle, as constant monitoring of conversations – which can be stored for at least 6 months (Ma, 2018) – might affect the informants. No concrete information is available on the extent to which censorship and surveillance monitor Chinese nationals or foreigners, nonetheless limiting political discussions, sharing of opinions on government policies, as well as discussing research findings is a common practice while in China (Chestnut Greitens and Truex, 2020).

Lastly, accessing participants remains the main challenge for researchers working in China or with Chinese actors, where referral remains the main way to access high-level officials and more generally people outside academia. This system of relations, referred to as *guanxi*, further complicates the work of researchers, and my time in both China and Kenya was characterised by a struggle to gain access to relevant Chinese actors. Based on the preliminary fieldwork period in Beijing, I decided to navigate *guanxi* by adopting a bottom-up approach to accessing Chinese individuals working in state-owned contractors. In other words, spending prolonged time on fieldwork in Kenya, I expected to build a network sufficient to be referred to the headquarters of CRBC in Beijing. As I will discuss in more details later, this initial access strategy was not successful, and I eventually had to recur to a top-down approach. Nonetheless, the bottom-up referral approach to access revealed informative for the sampling research in Kenya, where I began fieldwork research in November 2018, after obtaining the research permit through an affiliation at the British Institute in Eastern Africa in Nairobi.

In Kenya, I selected two fieldwork locations: Nairobi and Mombasa. In Nairobi, the main objective of the fieldwork was to gain access to the LAPSSET Corridor Development Authority (LCDA), the government agency regulating and overseeing the development of LAPSSET Corridor,

¹⁴ A substitute for Whatsapp, which is also blocked in China.

including Lamu Port. Nairobi is also where most Chinese companies have their headquarters, and where the Chinese Embassy and the Chinese Economic and Commercial Cooperation Office are located. Accessing Chinese governmental institution in Kenya posed the same challenges that I had encountered during my preliminary fieldwork in Beijing, but this previous research experience had equipped me to navigate obstacles through *guanxi*, and eventually I recruited participants in one of these agencies. In Mombasa, a department of the Kenya Port Authority is responsible for overseeing the construction in Lamu, as well as its strategic planning, and, as such, is often engaging with the Chinese company constructing it. In short, during this fieldwork trip, I worked on creating a network of informants and begin accessing the relevant Kenyan government agencies as well as Chinese actors.

Being in Nairobi allowed me to attend several business fairs on China-Kenya cooperation and capacity building, where I met with Chinese stakeholders in the port industry, who connected me to Chinese shipping and logistics companies in Mombasa. I also attended the Sustainable Blue Economy Conference 2018, where several of the Kenyan agencies relevant to my research were presenting, thus giving me the opportunity to further my network and set up meetings in Mombasa, where most of the maritime-related activities take place. Through these contacts within Kenyan governmental agencies based in Mombasa, in December 2018 I visited the Kilifi landing facility, a private landing facility – a type of pier – where materials are loaded onto four ships to be transported to Lamu. Upon arrival to the facility, I was surprised by the different degree of access that my gatekeeper and I had to the two ships and personnel working there. I could access both ships, but I could not talk to the Kenyan crew alone, while my gatekeeper – a Kenyan national – spent most of the time with the Kenyan crew and did not board the second ship. This difference in access represented a good opportunity to reflect on the complexity of access, and on how my approach of using Mandarin as a *shared* positionality (Srivastava, 2006) resulted in access to both ships, but had also prevented me from interacting with the Kenyan crew without the presence of the Chinese team leaders. These reflections would then become a common theme in the access process for the Lamu construction site, as will be discussed in the next sub-section.

This fieldwork trip was also shaped by events which prompted me to reflect further on my research process. First, the kidnapping of an Italian Non-Governmental Organisation worker in the Kilifi area in November 2018, led myself and my supervisory team to revise and update safety protocols for future visits – particularly to Lamu county, an area subject to attacks by the Somali terrorist group al-Shabaab – by agreeing on methods of communication for when I would visit Lamu county. Second, fieldwork research is a gendered experience (Clark and Grant, 2015). Construction,

ports, investment, and government agencies are male-dominated environments, in which my positionality as a young, unmarried, woman did, at times, overshadow my being a researcher. After yet another incident of sexual harassment in the field, I began leaving an envelope with my contact information at my accommodation. This included my phone number, the name of the restaurant/hotel where the interview was taking place, the phone number of said location, a time before which I intended to return to my accommodation, and the phone number of the Italian consular representative. Looking back, this safety concern often made me doubt my ability to be a ‘good researcher’ (similarly to what Clark and Grant, 2015 discuss; see also Huang, 2016), an aspect I plan to (try to) explore in the future.

Towards the end of the first leg of fieldwork in Kenya, I had built relationships of trust with an array of participants from Kenyan and Chinese state and non-state actors involved in the Lamu port project and the Kenyan infrastructure sector and maritime industry more broadly. I conducted data collection in parallel with preliminary analysis, facilitated by grounded theory’s open coding approach. Loosely inspired by Hoddy (2019) suggestion to deploy *verbatim* and *process* codes (Saldaña, 2009 cited in Hoddy, 2019), the data was analysed according to the interpretation and presentation of the controversy by the participants, also preserving quotes (*verbatim*), and the conceptual categories they are part of, such as ‘funding issues’ or ‘localisation’ (*process*). Through preliminary data analysis, I identified several controversies. First, employment practices of Chinese contractors were being contested in the Lamu port project and beyond. Second, the Kenyan government appeared to be facing delays in the yearly payments to the Chinese contractor for the development of Lamu port, leading to a demobilisation of construction activities. Third, Kenyan ministries were negotiating a modification to the original Lamu port design, a process which involved several Kenyan state and parastate actors, as well as an international financier.

Returning to the field: Kenya, January to March 2019

On the 15th of January 2019, a terrorist attack unfolded in the Dusit D2 compound on Riverside Drive in Nairobi resulting in the killing of 21 victims and the 5 attackers. The attack, carried out by the Somali terrorist group al-Shabaab, resulted in 19 hours of armed operation before the attackers were stopped. As the situation unfolded, I was preparing to board a morning flight to Nairobi. After carefully considering different options in communication with my supervisory team, the insurance team of the University of Edinburgh, and the Italian Embassy in Nairobi, I decided to postpone my departure. As the terrorist threat alarm was raised, I received a communication

from the Italian Embassy in Kenya asking me to release them of responsibility was I to carry out fieldwork in Lamu county beyond Lamu Island. This letter also recommended that I communicated my intentions of visiting the mainland in Lamu county to the Embassy staff, including my accommodation arrangements, contact numbers and plans for my visits. I communicated the same information to my supervisory team before travelling to Lamu county, in line with the agreed safety guidelines. When travelling within the mainland outside the Lamu port area, I organised private transport through the Kenya Ports Authority (KPA) and tried to limit the time spent within high-risk areas.

Once in Nairobi, starting from the controversies identified through the initial analysis of data collected in the previous research trips, I began interviewing participants from the actors involved, in order to investigate the power relations amongst these different actors. Throughout the data collection process, I parallelly continued to analyse the data collected, which highlighted the necessity to further investigate the ways in which the presence of a Chinese contractor in Lamu was (re)shaping the negotiation of controversies. I identified the necessity for methodological triangulation to capture the nuances of relations amongst the Kenyan national and county governments, as well as their respective relations with CRBC. I began reviewing literature on Chinese construction sites in Africa and beyond, whose researchers had deployed ethnographic methods, specifically observations, to the study of labour relations. Thus, I began negotiating access to the construction site.

To be granted permission to access the construction site in Lamu, I submitted a formal request to the LCDA, and once this was accepted, I was referred to a KPA official in Lamu, who facilitated all my visits to the port construction site. Nonetheless, accessing a research space does not translate in access to participants, as it became apparent by the fact my first visit was guided – and limited – by the Chinese engineers I had previously met in Kilifi, who welcomed me in the construction site and put me in contact with some of their colleagues. However, when I enquired on the possibility to talk to Kenyan workers, I was asked to organise another visit and told that it was time for me to go back to Lamu Town. After this visit, I returned to Mombasa, where I continued to conduct interviews with maritime and shipping officials and managers in the private sectors, complementing previous data on the connections amongst the construction and maritime sectors and Kenyan political elites. This part of the research was parallel to a re-evaluation of methodological adjustments needed to access the construction site again.

I concluded that methodological triangulation should involve a multiple-day ethnography of work in the construction site, as this would increase the time spent amongst workers to carry out

observations of their interactions. After a (re)negotiation of access to the construction site, I was granted permission to stay overnight in the construction site, and conduct observations. To this end, the KPA and CRBC selected a Kenyan supervisor to which I was ‘paired’ for the duration of my stay. This ethnographic work produced rich data on several aspects of labour relations, such as the typologies of employment contracts of Kenyan workers, the communication dynamics amongst workers who do not speak each others’ languages, the management structure, and spatial dynamics of the construction site, as well as overarching narratives of workers’ aspirations, career trajectories, and perceptions of Sino-African engagement.

While in Lamu, a rumour amongst elders and fishers suggested that a city was to be built by a Chinese company on Manda Island, mentioned earlier in the introduction. Upon further investigation through semi-structured interviews with state and parastate actors in Lamu, Nairobi and Mombasa, I collected and triangulated data on the proposal submitted to LCDA by CMPort, which resonated with insights from the exploratory fieldwork in Beijing, in which I had investigated Chinese interests in the development of port infrastructure overseas. Therefore, in the last part of this fieldwork trip, I went back to the analysis of the data collected in the first exploratory fieldwork in Beijing and began exploring Kenyan actors’ connections and disconnections from the network of Chinese actors involved in this proposal. In the last weeks of data collection in Kenya, I conducted interviews with government advisors, shipping and logistics industry actors, civil servants in several ministries, and Chinese maritime actors – both private and state-owned. Through further triangulation and data analysis, I planned the next fieldwork trip to China, where, in addition to Beijing, I added Hong Kong – where CMPort is headquartered – to the research fieldwork sites.

Tracing the threads of research: Beijing and Hong Kong, May and June 2019

At this stage of research, I planned to further investigate CRBC’s engagement in Kenya, Lamu port’s relevance to the OBOR initiative – as LAPSET project was added to the list of strategic corridors part of OBOR in April 2019 – as well as CMPort’s proposal for Lamu port operation, which I researched in Hong Kong. As mentioned earlier, in Beijing, I had planned to conduct semi-structured interviews with employees in CRBC’s mother company China Communication Construction Company (CCCC). As I began to interview middle-management I had accessed through referrals from previous contacts established in Kenya, I was told that I could not be put in contact with high-level managers due to the research focus on Kenya. A few weeks before the

beginning of my fieldwork in Beijing, Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta had visited Beijing and supposedly been refused another concessional loan (Mutambo, 2019) to develop the third phase of the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR on the Northern Corridor. The tension between China and Kenya regarding the future of the concessional loan for the 3rd phase of this railway project had a repercussion on my ability to recruit participants within CCCC. Similarly to reflections of other Western researchers carrying out interviews in formal Chinese settings, I also encountered challenges in accessing high-level officials (Solinger, 2006). My initial attempts to gain access to through a bottom-up approach underscored the importance of hierarchy in the realm of *guanxi*, as well as the notion that negotiations for loans take place behind closed doors.

To overcome access challenges, I made use of personal contacts to access private meetings of a newly-established maritime investment fund, where I interacted with former Western head of states part of the advisory board and established a good working relation with the head of the investment fund. Through their references, the head of a governmental OBOR-related think-tank and her husband became my gatekeepers. In addition to facilitating meetings with relevant state actors and CCCC's top management, my gatekeepers invited me to attend OBOR business fairs and business meetings with them. These provided an excellent opportunity to conduct observations with regards to the interactions amongst Chinese state officials and businesspeople involved – to different extents – in OBOR projects. Towards the end of the research fieldwork in Beijing, I had collected data on both CRBC's engagement in Kenya, from which it emerged that the internationalisation process of the state-owned contractor was, at times, contested from within. Moreover, observations conducted in OBOR settings prompted reflections on the extent to which this initiative had gained a prominent place in public discourse.

Due to time constraints, data collected in Beijing was only partially coded before moving to Hong Kong, where I planned to complement data gathered through interviews in Kenya. My gatekeepers' *guanxi* also revealed to be extremely important to gain access to the Hong Kong-based port operator CMPort. Nonetheless, relying on gatekeepers has both pros and cons. On the one hand, having proactive gatekeepers allowed me not only to access informants, but also provided me with the opportunity of carrying out observations in an array of settings. On the other hand, the gatekeepers often planned several consecutive days of meetings, stretching from the morning to the late evening, when they would drive me to my accommodation to pick me up again in the early morning. This resonates with concerns on snowball sampling, as I had limited time to build other networks. Nonetheless, I attempted to mitigate this limitation by also interviewing managers of

international shipping lines, freight-forwarders and other logistics companies in Hong Kong to gather data on risk assessment practices in Chinese maritime engagement.

Following up: Kenya, June and July 2019

Building on the preliminary analysis of data collected thus far, I returned to Kenya to follow up with previous participants with regards to the controversies around labour issues, the politicisation of infrastructure and investigate risk assessment evaluation practices of the Chinese contractor building Lamu port. This last fieldwork trip was thus dedicated to filling the gaps by triangulating collected data with new sources. First, in Lamu, I had already interviewed Chinese and Kenyan employees of CRBC, members of activist groups and officials from the County Government, but I had not yet deepened my understanding of the population's perception of the port development project. While in Lamu, I discussed the port with fishermen and small-business owners, in order to better understand how people not directly involved in the port project experience infrastructure development. While doing so, I also conducted follow up interviews with Kenyan officials and CRBC managers, particularly with regards to labour controversies and consulted historical materials in the archive of Lamu.

Second, due to the reformulation of access strategies through top-down referrals, I relied on the contacts I had gathered in Beijing and Hong Kong to access CRBC Kenya's top managers. The new threads of research I investigated through these interviews were related to the politicisation of infrastructure and risk assessment practices, leading to considerations on the limitations of this research. On the one hand, taking stock of the previously-discussed concerns around discussing sensitive topics with Chinese informants, I needed to be very cautious in bringing up the subject of politicisation of infrastructure with CRBC's management. On the other hand, risk assessment practices are also rooted in considerations regarding the political and business environment of a country, which also include reflections on government stability and threats to said stability, such as terrorism. Third, while collecting data on politicisation and risk assessment mechanisms, I came across descriptions of corruption practices aimed to facilitate a favourable outcome of decision-making processes. This contributed to increase my understanding of the role of Chinese companies in the Kenyan political and business environment, particularly with regards to their strategies to outbid competitors and their (financial) ties to Kenyan political elites. During the data analysis and writing processes, I paid extreme caution in making sure that data discussed cannot be traced back to my interviewees.

Finally, it is important to point to some limitations of this study. Similarly to many researcher working on China-Africa engagement, access to data on Chinese projects poses a challenge. Chinese-funded infrastructure are negotiated behind closed doors and the financing and construction contracts are usually considered private, and thus not published. For instance, after the contents of the contract for the Chinese-funded and -built Nairobi-Mombasa SGR was leaked by the press, Kenyan president Kenyatta pledged to publish the contract to address the growing concerns over the possibility of Mombasa port being appropriated by the Chinese funder in case of payment default. The contract, however, was never published. Similarly, the contract with CRBC for construction and the proposal by CMPort for operations of Lamu port are confidential. Although I gained access to the feasibility and masterplan for Lamu port development, I had to rely on interviewees' accounts of the contract with CRBC and the proposal submitted by CMPort. I triangulated said information with data collected with interviewees at different managerial levels and belonging to different actors, nevertheless, even after careful triangulation, it cannot be excluded that I might have misinterpreted some aspects of the actors' perceptions.

1.6 Thesis structure

The thesis is organised in this introduction, five chapters, and a conclusion.¹⁵ In Chapter 2, I will offer a contextualisation of Sino-African infrastructural engagement through an empirically-grounded investigation of the growing participation of Chinese funders (and contractors) to the development of infrastructure in Africa. First, relying on key concepts in the field of Chinese studies – namely “fragmented authoritarianism” (Lieberthal and Oksenberg, 1988) and “integrated fragmentation” (Brødsgaard, 2017) – I will reflect on the evolution of relations amongst the Chinese state and the business sector, suggesting Chinese state-owned companies operate in an environment characterised by the apparent dichotomy between state oversight and market-driven internationalisation. Second, I will problematise Chinese actors' growing participation to African

¹⁵ Parts of this thesis have been published in Gambino (2020a, 2020b) or are in press (Gambino, forthcoming). Gambino, E. (2020a) *Job insecurity, labour contestation and everyday resistance at the Chinese-built Lamu port site in Kenya*, Asia Dialogue.

Gambino, E. (2020b) ‘La participation chinoise dans le développement des infrastructures de transport au Kenya: une transformation des géométries du pouvoir? [Chinese Participation in Kenyan Transport Infrastructure: Reshaping Power-Geometries?]’, *Critique Internationale*, 89, pp. 95–114.

Gambino, E. (forthcoming) ‘Chinese interests in the development of African Transport Corridors: building the Belt and Road Initiative through Market Expansion?’, in Nugent, P. and Lamarque, H. (eds.) *Transport Corridors in Africa*. Melton: James Currey.

infrastructure projects, highlighting the role of the FOCAC and Chinese geostrategic interests in channelling Chinese financing to Africa's infrastructure.

Third, I will shift the attention to African transport corridors and their recent grouping under the OBOR umbrella, suggesting that Chinese companies' embeddedness in Chinese (political and business) networks serves to foster their internationalisation processes. Fourth, I will explore Chinese actors' financing mechanisms, highlighting the questionable financial sustainability of Chinese-funded infrastructure projects and the resulting implications for African governments, with a particular focus on commercial conditionalities. This section will deal with the engagement process for access to Chinese funding for African infrastructure projects, the majority of which requires the selection of a Chinese contractor. Overall, in Chapter 2, I will argue that construction SOEs' internationalisation processes are shaped by the state support for internationalisation in the form of financial incentives, however, the companies' embeddedness in the country of operation can also impact the contractor selection process for Chinese-funded infrastructure.

In Chapter 3, I will explore the political economy of Kenya's infrastructural development through an analysis of the intersection of different trajectories – such as the relations amongst the political and business elites of Kenya, the country's developmental agendas across time and space, and Kenya's influx of Chinese infrastructure financing and other international financiers. Drawing from the work of Boone (2003) on centre-periphery relations and literature in critical infrastructure studies, the chapter will investigate the evolving relations amongst Kenyan political and business elites through an historical appraisal of the political economy of Kenya's infrastructure, with a particular emphasis on the country's developmental agenda *Kenya Vision 2030* and the increasing infrastructure financing by Chinese actors. In this chapter, I will argue that the historical unequal spatial distribution of resources aimed to the access of agricultural land in central Kenya has resulted in gains of the interconnected political and business elites and a pattern of marginalisation of the Northern regions of Kenya. However, as the focus of Kenya's developmental agenda now revolves around the development of infrastructure – what I refer to as the 'infrastructural turn' – Kenya's political economy is undergoing a reconfiguration of geographies of power. In other words, economic and political gains are now increasingly concentrated around the infrastructure projects and the territories where they are planned to be built.

In Chapter 4, I will build on these findings to highlight the spatiality of Kenya's 'infrastructural turn'. In this chapter, I will rely on key concepts associated with critical infrastructure studies to appraise the imaginaries and contestation associated to corridor development in the historically marginalised Northern Kenya. Then, I will focus on the proliferation of actors and the nature of

their (power) relations to each other and vis-à-vis the development of a transport corridor in Northern Kenya – the LAPSSET Corridor. Specifically, through the analysis of several controversies amongst actors and networks of actors involved in the development of Lamu port, the chapter argues that the proliferation of a diverse agendas is connected to the trend of infrastructure becoming a space for profit-making. Yet, the spatial reconfiguration of resource allocation has also (re)shaped the composition of these networks of actors, thus prompting the emergence of alternative pathways of Sino-African engagement. Here, Boone's (2003) approach towards the study of politics at the margins will be the basis of the analysis of different renegotiations of power within the Lamu county. More precisely, through an investigation on the evolving labour localisation practices of the Chinese contractor building Lamu port, the chapter will discuss a newly-formed connection between the Lamu county government and the Chinese contractor, to reflect on the role of Chinese actors in the process of reshaping of Kenyan centre-periphery relations. On a similar note, in the final section of this chapter, I will also discuss emerging connections between CRBC and Kenyan labour unions.

In Chapter 5, the analytical focus will be on a 'case study within the case study', namely the construction site of the Lamu port project, where Chinese and Kenyan workers are employed by the state-owned contractor CRBC. Echoing the works of Miriam Driessen (2019), Ding Fei (2020) and Ulrikke Wethal (2017), this chapter is mainly based on an ethnographic study of work in the Sino-African construction site of Lamu port. Conceptually, in this chapter I will further draw from Massey's work. I will thus approach the construction site as *place* (as suggested by Sergot and Saives, 2016 with regards to *workplaces*). Massey's conceptualisation of place refers to "the social relations they tie together" (Massey, 1993, p. 65), or better "a global sense of place" (p. 69), as opposite to a definition of place based on geographical boundaries (although Massey herself recognises the latter is necessary for analytical purposes). The chapter will explore labour agency (Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2011) and brokerage (James, 2011) in the context of the Lamu construction site, drawing connections with geographies of power within the construction site and their connections to dynamics outwith the construction site. The chapter will argue that controversies in the construction site and their negotiations represent the intersection of narratives of labour control and job insecurity in the construction site with aspiration of social mobility and development beyond the Lamu port project.

In Chapter 6, I will further explore the internationalisation of CRBC through Chinese-funded infrastructure and non-Chinese funded infrastructure. In this chapter, I will begin by reflecting on the economic and managerial reforms that interested Chinese SOEs since the start of reforms in

1978, highlighting the increasing operational autonomy of SOEs' overseas headquarters. Then, it will explore the evolution of CRBC's embeddedness in the Kenyan political economy of infrastructural development, beginning from the company's activities as a subcontractor in the 1980s, the first Chinese-funded projects in the late 1990s, and the capital-intensive Chinese-funded Nairobi-Mombasa railway in the last decade, as well as other non-Chinese funded projects, such as the Likoni floating Bridge. Through the analysis of the diverse range of activities of this Chinese contractor, as well as insights from other Chinese-funded or -built projects, I will argue that, addition to state incentives for internationalisation, Chinese contractors' spatial expansion is reliant on business scouting, which is made possible by the companies' embeddedness in specific contexts. To this end, I will also speak of companies' relations to Kenyan elites and to other Chinese companies vis-à-vis business expansion.

Lastly, in the conclusion, I will discuss the key findings of this research and connect them to broader debates and trends in Sino-African engagement. Instead of offering detailed summaries of each chapter – which can be found at the end of each chapter – the conclusion will first offer a brief overview of the contents of this thesis, to then focus on three inter-related key findings and their implications for broader debates. First, I will discuss the growing intertwinement of the interests of Chinese actors and those of the governments and elites on the continent. Second, I will focus on the implications of Chinese engagement outwith the confines of Chinese-baked infrastructure for Kenya's political economy. Third, I will reflect on the centrality of embeddedness in different networks to the internationalisation of Chinese SOEs.

Chapter 2

The evolution of Sino-African engagement in infrastructural development: integrated fragmentation and the role of SOEs

Currently, over 10000 Chinese-owned companies are operating across the African continent, denoting the growing economic ties between China and African nations, as well as the ubiquity of Chinese business activities. While only 10% of Chinese-owned companies in Africa are SOEs, these remain the largest in size and revenues, thus continuing to have a prominent role in spearheading the internationalisation journey of Chinese companies (Wang, 2007; Pairault, 2013; Sun, Jayaram and Kassiri, 2017). Due to the connection between Chinese state incentives and Chinese SOEs – which have priority channels to access financial incentives – these companies have often been brushed off as mere geopolitical actors serving the Chinese state. However, Chinese SOEs' spatial expansion in the 21st century is not only linked to state incentives, but it is also related to the renewed focus on infrastructural development across the African continent. In this research, I will investigate the intensification of Sino-African engagement in the infrastructure sector, focusing on the reshaping of power relations amongst Chinese and African actors. In the present chapter, I will start by focusing on Sino-African engagement in infrastructural development to suggest that Chinese state-owned contractors' internationalisation in Africa is supported by Chinese state actors through financial incentives, yet, the fragmentation of the Chinese state means that contractors' internationalisation is also influenced by other dynamics.

This chapter will build the basis for the remainder of this thesis, which will investigate the case of Sino-Kenyan engagement in the infrastructure sector. In the present chapter I will, first, introduce the concepts of fragmented authoritarianism (Lieberthal and Oksenberg, 1988) and integrated fragmentation (Brødsgaard, 2017) to the study of Chinese engagement in African infrastructure to investigate the evolution of relations between the Chinese State and the SOEs. Second, I will scrutinise Chinese actors' growing participation to African infrastructure projects, particularly focusing on the motives and channels through which engagement is pursued and fostered. Third, focusing on African transport corridors and their recent grouping under the OBOR initiative, I will suggest that Chinese companies' embeddedness in Chinese (business) networks can support the advancement of their internationalisation. Fourth, I will discuss Chinese actors' financing mechanisms, their questionable financial sustainability, and the dynamics influencing the

engagement process, such as contractor selection. This last section will highlight the ways in which the diverging agendas of Chinese actors, those of their African counterparts, as well as the contractors' embeddedness in a specific African context influence the contractor selection process for Chinese-funded infrastructure.

2.1 The fragmented nature of Chinese state-SOE relations

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the growing participation of Chinese financiers and contractors in Africa's infrastructural development has prompted critiques on the presumed all-around coordinated 'Chinese strategy' realised through overseas engagement (as discussed in Taylor and Xiao, 2009). Debates around economic statecraft (see Lampton, 2008; Norris, 2016) have highlighted the key role played by financial and economic means in supporting Chinese foreign policy objectives, nevertheless, the different roles of Chinese SOEs overseas have been under-researched. As such, "[b]eing unable to differentiate the Chinese government from its state-owned enterprises [overseas] remains a key barrier in evaluating China's role in Africa" (Lam, 2017, p. 2; see also Pairault, 2013; Yi-Chong, 2014). It is thus imperative to capture the nuances of the multifaceted Chinese governance. The idea of an overarching and coordinated 'Chinese strategy' has been refuted by a growing body of literature on Sino-African engagement, which has highlighted that many actors – and consequently many diverging agenda – are at play (Brautigam, 2009; Taylor and Xiao, 2009; Corkin, 2012; Pairault, 2013).

To overcome these limitations, it is useful to turn to the field of Chinese studies, which has long been investigating (power) relations amongst different Chinese state actors, as well as amongst state actors and the business sector. Within this field, scholars have long been 'unpacking' China, highlighting its multifaceted nature (Yi-Chong, 2013). Starting from Lieberthal and Oksenberg's (1988) fragmented authoritarianism, research has highlights the ways in which the Chinese policy-making and policy-implementation processes are influenced by several different actors due to the fragmentation of a decision-making system that "in spite of its authoritarian nature, [is] not the monolithic top-down state machine that Beijing presents and Western observers perceive" (Hammond, 2013, p. 122). This understanding of Chinese governance as fragmented has been key to investigate how the hold and legitimacy of the central government is retained during decentralisation efforts and national economic reforms began in 1978 (see for instance Heilmann, 2008; Landry, 2012).

Over the past four decades, Chinese leaders have embarked on a development programme based on capital-intensive and labour-intensive manufacturing, heavy industrialisation, and export-led growth (Naughton, 2007; Lardy, 2012). Through bargaining and negotiation, implementing actors are able to shape these policies so to include their own interests. In the words of Mertha (2009, p. 996), “policy made at the centre becomes increasingly malleable to the parochial organisational and political goals of various vertical agencies and spatial regions charged with enforcing that policy”. This is reminiscent of the OBOR initiative, which, as will be discussed in more detail in Section 2.3, has come to encompass several sectors beyond infrastructure. Similarly to what Mertha (2009) discusses with regards to policy-making processes, the lack of coherent and defined guidelines on what the OBOR initiative is and encompasses, brought many provincial governments and other actors – such as the military – to interpret this initiative according to their interests (Sidaway and Woon, 2017; see also Jiang, 2021).

Economic liberalisation reforms have had the “unintended consequence” of fostering the emergence of “a number of powerful state-owned business groups” (Brødsgaard, 2017, p. 39; see Chapter 6). As relations between the state and the SOEs became increasingly fragmented, struggles amongst actors have also increased. In light of the 2007/8 crisis, for instance, bank loans part of the government stimulus package were disproportionately being disbursed to SOEs (Bremmer, 2010, pp. 143–144). These companies were being tasked with undertaking activities in the infrastructure or manufacturing sectors nationally and internationally to support economic recovery, leading to questioning the progress (and future) of the marketisation¹⁶ reforms (see for instance Pilling, 2009). Indeed, although scholars initially suggested that the path towards the liberalisation of the Chinese economy would continue to intensify (Lardy, 2012), after the rise to power of Xi Jinping, the pace of market-based reforms slowed down, leading to a renewed increase in state oversight of SOEs (see Lardy, 2019). Although the impact of the renewed state oversight on SOEs overseas operations remains unclear (and beyond the scope of this research since my case studies predate this shift), it is worth highlighting that SOEs continue to be able to access state support in the form of preferential financial incentives for their overseas activities (see Section 2.4), and that the Communist Party of China currently continues to be able to rotate cadres in high-level positions within SOEs, a practice known as the *nomenklatura* system (see Brødsgaard, 2012; see also Chapter 6 in this thesis).

¹⁶ Marketisation is defined as “the degree of market-based mechanisms development and other institutions in order to achieve more efficient market functioning” (Shi, Sun and Peng, 2012, p. 1225).

As efforts to restructure the Chinese economy have encompassed reforms focused on furthering market liberalisation, the governance structure of SOEs was inevitably also interested by reforms. SOE reforms – in terms of managerial, administrative, and governance structure (which will be discussed in more details in Chapter 5 and 6) – have reshaped the nature of Chinese relations amongst the state and the SOEs beyond that of direct control. Already in the 1990s, one of the key aspects of SOE reforms was to shift the decision-making processes on outputs from the state to the SOEs (Groves *et al.*, 1994), which was paired with the possibility of said companies to retain part of the profits (see Chapter 6). On the one hand, the push towards liberalisation means that SOEs “increasingly have to operate according to market conditions and seek independence from the state” (Brødsgaard, 2017, p. 51). On the other hand, SOEs are led by a “new corporate elite of managers who enjoy [...] high-degree of managerial independence from government agencies” (Brødsgaard, 2017, p. 39). This has translated into increased operational autonomy of SOE – both nationally and overseas (Brødsgaard, 2012; Jones and Zou, 2017; Lin *et al.*, 2020).

In this work, operational autonomy refers to the autonomy of SOEs’ overseas headquarters concerning their decision-making powers and the extent to which SOEs are constrained by the state in said decision-making processes. In line with Verhoest *et al.*’s (2004) conceptualisation of autonomy vis-à-vis the restructuring of public agencies in OECD countries, decision-making autonomy refers to the extent to which managerial and policy decisions can be undertaken by said agencies. In the case of SOEs, the reframing of decision-making powers speaks to the ability of SOEs to participate to international public procurement tenders for non-Chinese funded projects without the involvement of State Council actors (such as the Ministry of Commerce, see section 2.4), as the decision-making processes are increasingly taking place in overseas subsidiaries (see Chapter 6). With regards to the constraints by the state – or ‘policy autonomy’ (Maggetti and Verhoest, 2014) – SOE subsidiaries overseas can only take limited decisions in terms of the deployment of financing mechanisms, speaking to the fact that autonomy is indeed relative and context-specific. This is due to the “constraints on the actual use of decision-making competences” (Verhoest *et al.*, 2004, p. 204), which refer to the extent of supervision mechanisms of the state over the SOEs, the legal status of overseas subsidiaries, the source of SOE budgets, as well as the shareholding and organisational structure of the company (see Chapter 6).

In light of the reframing of the Chinese economy, SOEs are emerging as “state capitalists” whose “increased power rests uneasily with the state’s ability [...] to control them” (Mertha and Brødsgaard, 2017, p. 11). Although “the state is the majority shareholder in key sectors of the economy and dominates many enterprises in the vast hybrid sector between state and private

economy” (Brødsgaard, 2017, p. 52), the apparent dichotomy between state oversight and operational autonomy is further reinforced by the fact SOEs “represent forces and interests that have a fragmented impact on the centralised power system” (Brødsgaard, 2017, p. 51). In other words, the SOEs, although reliant on state support, contribute to the fragmentation of Chinese governance. Thus, state power coexists alongside the increasing power and operational autonomy of SOEs, in what Brødsgaard (2017) terms “integrated fragmentation”.

As will be shown in this chapter – and further explored with regards to Sino-Kenyan infrastructure in the remainder of the thesis – the implications of the integrated fragmentation which characterises the relations between the state and the SOEs (Brødsgaard, 2017) for the internationalisation of SOEs can be observed in Sino-African infrastructure projects. Initially heavily reliant upon the state support in the form of financial incentives – which prompted the ‘moving out’ of overcapacity (Sum, 2019) in the first place – the spatial expansion of construction SOEs now also includes scouting of business opportunities (see Corkin, 2012), generating demand for their services (see also Alden and Jiang, 2019) and the participation to tenders for non-Chinese funded projects. With regards to these emerging engagement mechanisms, the renewed focus on infrastructure construction across the African continent is conducive to increasing Chinese participation to Africa’s infrastructural development agenda.

2.2 The intensification of Sino-African infrastructural engagement

In 2019, the total value of construction projects across the African continent was USD 497 billion, of which over 40% are located in Eastern Africa (Deloitte, 2019),¹⁷ denoting the importance infrastructure have to African governments’ developmental agendas. As already mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, the current infrastructural development push across the African continent is rooted in the idea that infrastructure contributes to economic development. Although the direct connection between infrastructure and economic development remains unclear – particularly in light of the scepticism derived from past experiences of large-infrastructure construction in the 1970s and the resulting (substantial) indebtedness of African governments (see Nugent, 2018) – infrastructure development is once again back on the agenda, and Chinese financiers’ contributions to the development of Africa’s infrastructure cannot be overlooked.

¹⁷ Deloitte calculations only include projects that have broken ground and with a value equal or above USD 50 million.

In 2018 alone, Chinese actors committed around one fourth of the USD 100.8 billion devoted to infrastructure financing across the continent (ICA, 2018a, pp. 7, 54; see table below). These figures fit within the trend of intensification of China-Africa engagement since the beginning of the 21st century. For instance, China-Africa trade has seen consistent increase, with China becoming the main source of imports in 2007 and the main export market for the African continent in 2012 (Calabrese and Tang, 2020). Simultaneously, Chinese foreign direct investment to Africa have also reached a record USD 43 billion in 2017, making China the fifth largest foreign investor on the continent, after France, the Netherlands, the United States and the United Kingdom (UNCTAD, 2019). Already between 2003 and 2011, Chinese policy banks alone offered loans and credit lines to 43 African countries for a total of USD 52.8 billion, most of which went to infrastructure construction (Brautigam and Gallagher, 2014, p. 348).

Table 1: Loan Commitments to Africa's Infrastructure 2012 - 2018 (USD billion)

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
ICA¹⁸ Members	18.7	25.3	18.8	19.8	18.6	19.7	20.2
<i>WB</i>	4.4	4.5	6.4	6.2	4	7.5	7.9
<i>AfDB</i>	3	3.5	3.5	4.1	3.9	3.3	4.5
Non-ICA Members	62.5	65.4	43.6	51.6	41.3	59.5	68.7
<i>African governments</i>	42.1	46.7	34.5	24	30.7	34.3	37.5
<i>Chinese financiers</i>	13.4	13.4	3.1	20.9	6.4	19.4	25.7
Private Sector	8.7	8.8	2.9	7.4	2.6	2.3	11.8
TOTAL	89.2	99.5	74.5	78.9	66.9	81.6	100.8

Compiled by author, sources: ICA, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018a, 2018b

The increasing number of loans disbursed to African nations has both contributed to embittering the debated around the sustainability of Chinese loans (discussed in Section 2.3) and prompted the enhancement and promotion of fora and initiatives to further foster Sino-African engagement. As early as the 1990s, growing China-Africa engagement brought to light the need for an international forum to facilitate multilateral cooperation. Moving away from bilateral coordination was deemed

¹⁸ The Infrastructure Consortium for Africa (ICA) members are G8 countries (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, United Kingdom, United States), the WB, the AfDB, the European Commission, the European Investment Bank, and the Development Bank of Southern Africa.

necessary to address the concerns of asymmetric power between China and single African nations, as well as to channel Chinese investment towards initiatives aimed at continental integration (Alden, 2012). On the one hand, continental integration has been at the centre of Africa's developmental agenda since the early independence period. Already in 1963, the Organisation of African Unity was established to safeguard the continent's political independence and secure its economic development. Africa's integration agenda was then re-launched through the Lagos Plan (1980), which proposed the consolidation of African countries into Regional Economic Communities¹⁹ (RECs). The RECs are envisioned to operate as building-blocks for wider forms of integration, such as the AU's Agenda 2063 discussed in the introduction or the more recent African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)²⁰. This renewed push for continental integration (Bach, 2016) put increasing focus on the centrality of infrastructure to achieve connectivity and socio-economic growth.

On the other hand, China's limited experience in multilateral cooperation was already recognised as a challenge to China-Africa engagement in the last decade of the 20th century (Alden, 2007, p. 27; Samson, 2012; Melber, 2013). Therefore, several African leaders suggested the formation of a platform for engagement with China, referring to other multilateral platforms such as the European Union-Africa Summit or the Tokyo International Conference of African Development (Yao, 2007, p. 263). Within China, scholars also called for the government to further their efforts in providing a platform and a framework for China-Africa engagement (Gao, 1998). These factors, together with Chinese companies' requests for support in entering African markets and the pressure caused by African nations establishing diplomatic relations with Taiwan (Grimm, 2012; see also Alden, 2019 on the relations of African nations with Taipei), all contributed to the creation of the FOCAC. With time, the FOCAC commitments were gradually aligned to the AU's Agenda 2063, which already shared the objective of enhancing connectivity. This became evident during

¹⁹ East African Community, Economic Community of Western African States, Southern Africa Development Community, Economic Community of Central African States, Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, Arab Maghreb Union, Community of Sahel-Saharan States, and Intergovernmental Authority on Development.

²⁰ The AfCFTA is an ambitious framework agreement initiated by the AU with the overarching goal of fostering economic integration and trade cooperation amongst African states after July 2020. The AfCFTA seeks to create the world's largest free trade area with a combined gross domestic product of about USD 2.5 trillion and a market size of 1.2 billion people, by liberalising African trade in goods and services, investment, intellectual property rights and competition policy. By eliminating barriers to trade and investment, the AfCFTA has three complimentary goals: (i) the formation of a single continental market for both goods and services with free movement of people and investment, (ii) the expansion of intra-Africa trade across the continent and different RECS, and (iii) the enhancement of competitiveness within Africa and the support for its economic transformation.

the 2015 FOCAC, when Chinese President Xi Jinping discussed the need for a comprehensive strategic partnership between China and Africa.

Table 2: Key FOCAC Financial Commitments between 2000 and 2018

<i>Year</i>	<i>Commitments</i>
2000	Debt cancellation: up to USD 1 billion
2003	No figures provided
2006	Double aid to Africa by 2009
	Debt cancellation: matured interest-free loans to governments
	USD 5 billion investment in different forms
	China-Africa Development Fund USD 1 billion
2009	USD 10 billion in concessional loans
	USD 1 billion for African small and medium size enterprises
	Debt cancellation: interest-free loans due to mature by the end of 2009
2012	USD 20 billion investment
	China-Africa Development Fund (established in 2006) received a budget of USD 5 billion
2015	USD 60 billion in different forms
	USD 60 million towards peace and security over 5 years
2018	USD 60 billion in different forms
	China-Africa Peace and Security Fund under OBOR

Compiled by author, sources: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 2000b, 2003, 2006, 2009, 2012, 2015, 2018

Since its formation, FOCAC has served several purposes (see for instance He, 2008; Taylor, 2010; Alden, 2012; Li *et al.*, 2012). First, it has been a platform to evaluate the evolution of the relations between China and African nations and put China-Africa cooperation initiatives on display. Second, FOCAC offers the opportunity to set the agenda for the next three years, defining both Chinese and African nations' key projects. Third, in addition to ministerial meetings attended by government officials, FOCAC offers officials and businesspeople several opportunities to carry out detailed discussions over future plans in the many FOCAC thematic sub-sessions. Although financial commitments (see Table 2) witnessed a substantial increase between 2000 and 2018, FOCAC commitments have also reflected the key role played by infrastructure in China-Africa engagement.

Between 2010 and 2018, the African transport sector alone recorded a total of USD 37.4 billion commitments from Chinese lenders (CARI, 2021c). The connectivity infrastructure financing trend, together with the bundling of many transport infrastructure – and the corridor they belong to – under the OBOR umbrella (discussed in the next sub-section), underlines the relevance of connectivity infrastructure to Chinese actors. First, the important role played by infrastructure to China’s development history contributed to the rapid growth of the construction sector. A Chinese slogan used by provincial governments during the 1980s goes “if you want to become rich, build a road first” (要想富，先修路 – *yao xiang fu, xian xiu lu*), and infrastructure construction still remains a key element in China’s development path. From 1992 to 2011, China has used 8.5% of its yearly Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the development of the national infrastructure system (Chen, Matzinger and Woetzel, 2013). China spent more on infrastructure between 2004 and 2008 than it did in the 20th century (Aalders, *et al.*, 2021). The heavy commitment to infrastructure is underpinned by China’s infrastructure-driven development model, according to which infrastructure financing was first directed towards established economic hubs (for instance Shanghai or Chongqing), and then to emerging economic hubs (such as Kunming or Xiamen) (Banerjee, Duflo and Qian, 2012; Clarke-Sather, 2020).

However, the Chinese experience with infrastructure development is not linear and continues to face financial sustainability challenges both nationally and internationally (see for instance Tang, 2020), an aspect which will be addressed further throughout this work. Nevertheless, the Chinese economic development experience is closely linked to infrastructural development. In turn, Chinese construction companies – and particularly SOEs – have developed a set of competitive advantages. In addition to technical capabilities and capacity, Chinese contractors also have relative low costs (see also Chapter 6) for the procurement of machineries, equipment and labour (Low, Jiang and Leong, 2004), and total construction costs (Corkin, 2007). These advantages are highly relevant for the participation to non-Chinese funded international Engineering Procurement Construction (EPC) tenders, as they increase Chinese contractors’ possibility of outbidding competitors. This aspect will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters with regards to the case of Kenya.

Second, the geopolitical significance of some infrastructure should not be underestimated, as the following case of the port of Djibouti and the broader Southern Red Sea region exemplifies. Djibouti, a country which gained independence from French colonial rule in 1977, hosts the largest French military base in Africa, but has consistently looked to deepen relations beyond the French sphere of influence. Across the decades, several other countries – such as the United States and

Italy – established a military base in the port of Djibouti, including China, which inaugurated their first (and only) overseas military base in 2017. Negotiations for the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) base concluded in 2016, but the base had long been in the making. In 2008, China had joined anti-piracy missions in the Horn, and the PLAN had been surprisingly public about the need for an overseas base to support their anti-piracy missions (Kamerling and Van Der Putten, 2011). The Strait of Bab el-Mandeb is one of the world’s most important chokepoints for energy security. As China currently relies on oil imported by the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Aden, the Red Sea region is central to China’s energy security. In the eyes of the PLAN, the military base in Djibouti became a necessity as Chinese diplomatic and economic interests in the region increased, also due to the growing presence of Chinese companies and citizens overseas (Alden and Barber, 2018).

The turning point occurred during the Arab Spring in 2011, when China needed to evacuate over 35 000 Chinese nationals from Libya. Due to China’s then weak security capabilities in the region, they had to rely on Greek ships to complete the rescue mission (Alden, 2018). Unable to protect its citizens and their businesses, China’s security strategy – reliant on Chinese actors “flying the flag of non-interference” – shifted (Alden, 2012, p. 704). The principle of ‘non-interference’ continues to be one of the five principles underpinning Chinese foreign policy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 2000a), but its formulation predates the rapid increase of Chinese engagement overseas. The Libyan case just discussed is only one of the challenges that intensified the debate around the Chinese non-interference principle. In the past decade, scholars and experts in Chinese foreign policy have debated whether the country should continue to adhere or revisit to the non-interference principle in order to effectively protect Chinese (economic) interests abroad (see for instance Alden and Barber, 2018). On the one hand, as noted by Chen (2016) some believe that adherence to the non-interference principle allows China to avoid getting caught up in tight corners. Moreover, national tensions – such as sovereignty over certain territories and security (for instance the South China Sea Region, Tibet, Inner Mongolia, as well as Xinjiang) – could be affected by an official shift in approach towards non-interference (Wang, 2011).

On the other hand, increasing support is being demonstrated for a flexible approach, which would not require to go ‘against’ the non-interference principle²¹. To this end, creative and constructive involvement (Chen, 2016), both of which do not presuppose a drastic change in direction from

²¹ At this stage, it is difficult to evaluate whether support for the abandonment of the non-interference principle is increasing, as the newspaper articles, blog posts, and papers on this topic have been censored by the Chinese government and thus removed from the internet.

non-interference, have gained prominence in Chinese scholarly circles. Creative involvement suggests that China should adjust this policy, while constructive involvement suggests that Chinese involvement should be used as a diplomatic tool (see for instance Large, 2008). For instance, in this regard, the Director General of the Department of African Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Lu Shaye (2012, cited in Chen, 2016) suggested that Chinese engagement in African security can be seen through the lens of constructive engagement, which materialises in Chinese participation to peacekeeping or anti-piracy missions (see Alden and Zheng, 2018). During the FOCAC of 2012, China made its first security commitments to African counterparts, announcing further financial assistance. On the same note, during the 2018 FOCAC, President Xi announced the establishment of the China-Africa Peace and Security Fund, which encompasses 50 security assistance programs under OBOR.

Third, the Chinese state's support to internationalisation initiatives plays an important role in the development of an overseas construction market. As discussed in the earlier chapter, overcapacity and market saturation were key reasons for the internationalisation push, which is heavily supported by Chinese financial institutions. Indeed, the Chinese state recognised the necessity to steer construction industry 'champions' to overseas markets, where, through the deployment of state-backed financial instruments, they could continue their expansion (Sum, 2019; Aden and Large, 2019). These financial instruments (discussed in detail in section 2.4) are now central to the development of the OBOR, thus suggesting that this initiative, and FOCAC, are "part of China's effort to generate demand for its products and services abroad" (Alden and Large, 2019a, p. 338; see also Alden, 2019), in what Taylor and Zajontz (2020) regard as capital accumulation through spatial expansion.

2.3 African transport corridors and the One Belt One Road initiative

In addition to the alignment of the FOCAC commitments to the AU's agenda 2063, Africa's connectivity initiatives have gradually been integrated in the OBOR initiative first presented in 2013. This is particularly true for African transport corridors initiatives. Transport corridors not only involve different systems of transport infrastructure, such as railways and roads, but also non-transport components, such as SEZ or urban hubs (Nugent and Lamarque, forthcoming). The latter is for instance the case for the LAPSET corridor in Kenya, which also envisions the development of resort cities, industrial parks, and manufacturing hubs. This understanding of transport corridors, recently also termed 'development corridors' (ibid) – also used to discuss

LAPSSET corridor (see Lesutis, 2019) – or ‘growth corridors’ – see for instance the case of the South Growth Corridor in Guinea (République de Guinée Ministère des Mines et de la Géologie, 2020) – resembles the latest characterisation of the Chinese-led OBOR umbrella.

At first, the OBOR was referred to as ‘Silk Road Economic Belt’ (丝绸之路经济带 - *sichou zhi lu jingji dai*) and its main aim was to connect China to Europe through a system of land infrastructure to recreate the Tang Dynasty’s Silk Road. Also in 2013, during a visit to Indonesia, Xi Jinping presented the ‘21st Century Maritime Silk Road’ (21 世纪海上丝绸之路 - *er shi yi shiji haishang sichou zhi lu*), a maritime connectivity initiative aimed to increase links between China, South East Asian nations and India. Nonetheless, Chinese exports to these regions, particularly in the infrastructure-related sectors had already witnessed a steady increase during the 10 years leading to the OBOR announcement (Constantinescu and Ruta, 2018). At this initial stage, the OBOR was envisioned to address the Asian ‘infrastructural gap’. Through several refinements, the OBOR has gone from an initiative to promote the development of Asian connectivity infrastructure to a global initiative encompassing projects in a diverse array of sectors from infrastructure to education. The official Chinese narrative states that the OBOR is a global initiative expected to enhance (i) policy connectivity, (ii) infrastructure connectivity, (iii) trade connectivity, (iv) financial connectivity, and (v) people to people connectivity (National Development and Reform Commission, 2015).

On the ground, the OBOR has taken many meanings and connotations. In May 2019, I was conducting observations at an OBOR business fair in Beijing, when I heard a curious exchange between the secretary general of a Chinese government-affiliated OBOR think-tank and the director of a private maritime investment fund. Upon meeting for the first time, the pair began discussing their respective jobs and their involvement in OBOR. To my surprise the think-tank secretary general, an OBOR ‘veteran’, used the Mandarin term for OBOR as an ‘activity’, asking whether the director of the investment fund was ‘belt-and-reading’ (你做一带一路吗? *ni zuo yi dai yi lu ma?*). After that conversation, I began noticing that, differently from what I had observed during my previous fieldwork trip to Beijing in 2018, this formulation, whereby the OBOR is something that is ‘done’, an ‘activity’ (or even a ‘profession’), had become part of the vocabulary of state officials and business-people alike. As the OBOR continues to make headlines and to be the subject of lively scholarly and policy debates, this vignette speaks to the fact that, although no consensus has been reached on what OBOR actually is, what it encompasses, and, in turn, what the implications of being (or not being) part of it are, the OBOR is something ‘to-be-done’. This

speaks to the concept of integrated fragmentation discussed earlier, whereby this initiative is shaped by the actors involved in its realisation.

In a recent Diplomat commentary, Jiang echoed this sentiment, stating that the OBOR is “like a growing adolescent during puberty. It genuinely aims to do things, but rarely contemplate[s] the ‘why’ and ‘how’” (Jiang, 2021). The fog surrounding the OBOR has not, however, hindered its expansion. Nationally, China’s focus on the construction of transport corridors is motivated by the asymmetrical distribution of natural resources and production activities across the territory. Since the 1970s, coal has been transported across China through interregional transport infrastructure systems, known as coal corridors (Chen, Xu and Shen, 2008). In 2009, China became a coal importer, and the necessity to import from Russia and Mongolia arose (Yu, 2010), culminating in the development of the China-Mongolia-Russia economic corridor in 2016. The China-Mongolia-Russia economic corridor is one of the six proposed corridors under the umbrella of the OBOR.

Crossing Central Asia, the OBOR also envisions the development of the ‘New Eurasia Land Bridge’, a railway link through Russia and Kazakhstan towards Europe and the ‘China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor’ linking China to the Central Asian republics, Iran, and Turkey. In South Asia, the OBOR umbrella covers the ‘China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor’, expected to connect China to South East Asian nations. The ‘China-Bangladesh-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor’ is currently the slowest-moving OBOR project in the region, due to the security concerns amongst India and China, which have both attempted to retain their sphere of influence in South Asia through bilateral investment or cross-border infrastructure funding (Wagner, 2016). Lastly, the ‘China-Pakistan Economic Corridor’, expected to run from the Western Chinese province of Xinjiang to Gwadar port in Pakistan is currently also facing security challenges. Gwadar port poses a threat to India’s influence in the Bay of Bengal (Brewster, 2014) and the broader Balochistan regions is experiencing ongoing unrest, as evidenced by the recent terrorist attack in April 2021 (Ni, 2021).

In its initial formulation, the OBOR was envisioned to focus on addressing Asian infrastructural connectivity challenges. Indeed, when OBOR guidelines were published in 2015, African nations had not yet been included in this connectivity initiatives. In the same year, Lin Yifu, Honorary Dean of Peking University National School of Development suggested that African markets could bring significant opportunities to Chinese companies’ internationalisation journey, and should therefore be part of OBOR (Lin, 2015). In the same month, Special Envoy to the AU Zhang Ming met with Dlamini Zuma, then Chairman of the African Union Commission, to sign a

Memorandum of Understanding concerning the development of infrastructure networks across the continent (Xiao, 2019). In 2017, during the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, Africa was referred to as the ‘natural’ extension of OBOR and was formally included in this initiative, with East Africa’s coast as the mooring point.

Currently, there is no official list of OBOR projects nor guidelines on how to determine whether a project is part of the OBOR, suggesting this initiative can also function as a label to attract funding, public attention, or to prioritise projects. During the most recent Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation of 2019, both Kenya’s Lamu port and the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR were included under the OBOR umbrella, together with the broader corridor initiatives they belong to. The LAPSSET transport corridor, which encompasses Lamu port, is now considered one of the “key strategic corridors” of the OBOR (Belt and Road Forum, 2019), even though it was initiated and designed by the governments of the three African countries it is envisioned to connect. The Nairobi-Mombasa SGR, part of the Northern Corridor expected to connect Kenya with Uganda and Rwanda, is now also included in OBOR, similarly to the Djibouti-Addis Ababa Railway, part of the Ethiopia-Djibouti Transport Corridor. This might have also been the case for the (now-suspended) port project in Bagamoyo, Tanzania, as a Senior Representative of the Chinese SOE involved stated that “it was first us, then the Belt and Road, this project was before [...] it was initiated from us” (Interview, Chief Representative, Chinese SOE, Hong Kong, 31st May 2019).

In the case of Bagamoyo Port in Tanzania, the government of President Jakaya Kikwete (2005-2015) – born in Bagamoyo himself – and CMPort had signed a USD 10 billion framework agreement in 2013 (Apolinari, 2017). The Bagamoyo port was expected to address the congestion of the first Tanzanian port, Dar es Salaam, but it was stalled in 2016 following the election of former President Magufuli, whose policy shift led to the Bagamoyo port project being suspended indefinitely. The agreement with CMPort for the development of Bagamoyo port was rumoured to include a clause for the formation of a Joint Venture (JV) with the Tanzanian port authority, which, in the words of former president Magufuli was aimed at “t[ying] our hands in developing Tanga port, which is very crucial for the oil pipeline from Uganda” (cited in The Citizen, 2019). This conditionality resembles the proposal made at a later date to the Kenyan government by the very same company.

Indeed, the CMPort proposal for Lamu was also rumoured to include the establishment of a JV between the KPA and CMPort for upcoming port projects, including on inland waters, such as rivers or Lake Victoria. According to interviewees in a Kenyan state-actor, CMPort was to form a

JV with KPA, with shareholding evolving over time, starting from CMPort 70% - GoK (through KPA) 30% to then shift 10% equity every 10 years (Interview, Programme Officer, State Authority, Nairobi, 5th July 2019). If this was the case, it could take at least 20 years for the Kenyan government to have majority equity in this JV, which, in the meantime, would have the mandate over future port developments in the whole of Kenya (Interview, Programme Officer, State Authority, Nairobi, 28th March 2019). As such, the proposal raised concerned amongst Kenyan state and parastatal actors, who had closely followed the controversy between former Tanzanian President Magufuli and CMPort for the Bagamoyo port project, and are now reluctant to commit to this PPP offer (Interview, Programme Officer, State Authority, Nairobi, 28th March 2019).

To sum up, bundling transport corridors and other infrastructure projects in Africa to the OBOR can serve several purposes. The OBOR is a global initiative which would require capital-intensive commitments over a long period of time, yet through the inclusion of pre-existing projects to the OBOR it is possible to continue its expansion and begin to address financial sustainability concerns. Moreover, the OBOR provides yet another platform to showcase connectivity projects and attract further funding or investment for other components of the corridors, such as operation contracts, SEZs, or urban development projects (Interview, Scholar, Beijing, 25th May 2019). Overall, these trends suggest that when the OBOR was formally integrated in the FOCAC agenda during the 2018 meeting in Beijing, another occasion to showcase the opportunities OBOR could bring to African nations – particularly in the infrastructure sector – materialised. This point will be explored further in the following sub-section, but it will also be a common thread across this thesis.

Chinese companies' embeddedness and their internationalisation

Beyond the discursive inclusion of the Northern Corridor and LAPSET Corridor within the OBOR umbrella, or the inclusion of OBOR in the FOCAC agenda, a trend is emerging whereby the internationalisation of Chinese contractors is fostering the internationalisation of other companies. The latter can be either linked to said contractors – either in the shape of formal agreements of strategic partnerships or the Chinese system of *guanxi*²² – or through networks

²² The term *guanxi* is generally translated into “(social) relations”, as it refers to the systems of relations amongst individuals and groups in Chinese contexts. The notion of *guanxi* has been a key conceptual framework to analyse several aspects of Chinese society (for more on this concept see Yang, 1994). Nevertheless, *guanxi* can also be formed strategically, as this concept also represents “a technique for utilitarian aims and social manipulation”, thus also encompassing “instrumentalist tendency[ies]” (Wu, 2021, p. 29). In other words, relations can, at times, be established and sustained to reach a previously-established objective.

developed within the African country in which they operate. In addition, these companies can be engaged in the construction industry, related sectors, or in another sector altogether. This is the case for components of LAPSET Corridor, particularly after its inclusion within the OBOR umbrella in 2019. Later in this work, I will discuss the additional engagement of Chinese actors along the LAPSET Corridor, as Chinese oil companies and contractors are participating to the development of other corridor components. As just mentioned, CMPort – a subsidiary of the SOE China Merchants Group – submitted a Privately Initiated Investment Proposal (commonly known as unsolicited proposals) to the Kenyan government. Amongst the many aspect of the proposal, CMPort proposed to cover the remaining cost of port construction undertaken by CRBC, as well as the development of a city and industrial park – a type of SEZ (Interview, Head Officer, State Corporation, Lamu, 24th February 2019).

The development of a city and SEZ adjacent to a port infrastructure is an engagement practice that Chinese officials refer to as Port + Park + City Model (港口+园区+城市, *gangkou + yuanku + chengshi*). This engagement blueprint is inspired by the experience of Shekou industrial zone in the 1970s, which is considered the first ‘seed’ of the Shenzhen SEZ (Chen, 2020), which is now often hailed as the ‘template’ of the so-called ‘China Model’ of development. Now also an official blueprint of the OBOR, the Port + Park + City Model encourages Chinese actors to not only participate in port construction, but also to develop a network of related infrastructure surrounding the port (Belt and Road Initiative Portal, 2017). In 2017, CCCC and China Merchants Group – the parent companies of CRBC and CMPort respectively – signed a Cooperation Agreement to develop their international businesses (China Merchants Group, 2017), which suggests increased cooperation between these two Chinese SOEs to construct and operate port infrastructure overseas.

The engagement of CCCC and CMPort in the port Hambantota port project in Sri Lanka discussed below could be considered another example of this strategic partnership, but the modalities of CMPort participation to the Hambantota port should not necessarily be considered as a pattern of engagement, as also suggested by top management in CMPort (Interview, Chief Representative, Chinese SOE, Hong Kong, 31st May 2019). Indeed, the market expansion patterns of this company towards the African continent can also be explained by the increase in demand for port investment in this region. While CMPort is now interested in the operations of the port of Lamu, this has occurred after the suspension of the Bagamoyo port project in Tanzania (see above). At the same time, other MNCs have also demonstrated interest in the same markets, with DP World actively

entertaining meetings with officials in Mombasa (Interview, Senior Manager, State Corporation, Mombasa, 19th July 2019).

The port of Hambantota was funded through a USD 307 mil loan from China Export Import Bank (China Exim Bank) and built by the Chinese SOE China Harbour Engineering Company (CHEC), another subsidiary of CCCC (Abi-Habib, 2018; see also Chapter 6). After seven year of operations by the Sri Lankan port authority the loan contract was renegotiated in 2017, resulting in the partial conversion of debt into equity (Sum, 2019). As a result, around USD 1.1 million of debt was converted into “a dominant equity share” (Abi-Habib, 2018) of Hambantota port, acquired by CMPort together with a 99-year lease period for a nearby land devoted to the development of a SEZ for a USD 1 billion in rent (Sum, 2019). On the one hand, the ‘debt-for-equity swap’ (see Alden and Jiang, 2019) was accompanied by corruption scandals and questionable procuring practice, especially as the pre-selected contractor was presented together with the financing agreements (Abi-Habib, 2018), a common practice in Chinese-funded projects, which will be discussed further in the last section of this chapter. On the other hand, this resolution came under fire as it intensified the debate around the so-called ‘String of Pearls Strategy’, which suggests that Chinese maritime engagement is aimed to the creation of a Chinese maritime network across the Indian Ocean with the final goal of becoming a maritime power (Brewster, 2017, pp. 269–291). According to this line of enquiry, China is seeking to increase its influence in the Indian Ocean through the expansion of its dual-use²³ port network (Yoshihara and Holmes, 2010; Thorne and Spevack, 2017).

Nevertheless, China’s increasing focus on security should not be seen merely through the lens of securitisation, but mainly in relations to Chinese companies’ attempt to further their growth (as also suggested by Alden and Barber, 2018). Particularly relevant to this research is the role of Chinese state-owned contractors in fostering and furthering the engagement of other Chinese companies in the construction sector, and beyond. For instance, the growing engagement in the security field offers a window into how Chinese companies’ internationalisation can unfold (as also observed by Arduino, 2020). The expansion of the OBOR umbrella to African transport corridors and African infrastructure projects signifies that security services will be required in these projects as well. For instance, Kenyan police officers were sent to receive railway security training in China in 2014, in anticipation of the beginning of operations of the Chinese-funded Nairobi-Mombasa SGR (Zheng and Lagat, 2014). Through Chinese partner companies, spanning from

²³ Dual-use refers to a type of port design which makes the port viable for both commercial and military purposes, usually associated with deep-water ports.

contractors to third sector services already operating in the host country, security and intelligence actors can identify possible clients with the goal of expanding their overseas market, particularly within OBOR countries (Interview, Director, Chinese Artificial Intelligence company, Beijing, 13th July 2019). This relates to the significance of strategic partnerships amongst same-sector and different-sector enterprises mentioned earlier with regards to CCCC and CMPort, as well as government-to-government deals.

Concerning the latter, the case of China-Djibouti engagement also offers insights into the interconnectedness amongst Chinese actors in different, yet interrelated, sectors. In addition to hosting the first overseas military base of PLAN, Djibouti-China engagement in the infrastructural sector has prompted reflections on the sustainability of the debt accumulated (Pairault, 2020a), but has also prompted a series of new engagement in other sectors. Currently, it is estimated that Djibouti's debt to Chinese lenders is over 70% of the country's GDP (Chaziza, 2021), as Chinese financing for infrastructure – such as the expansion of the Goubet port, the Addis-Djibouti Railway, and the Doraleh Port – amounts to a total of USD 936 million (CARI, 2021c). Nevertheless, this comes as Djibouti and China have established a strategic partnership to strengthen economic relations through an array of projects (Xinhua News, 2017). These not only revolve around transport infrastructure quickly folded under the OBOR umbrella, but also on the development of related projects, such as a SEZ and a pipeline to transport oil to the port of Djibouti. In December 2020, CMPort signed a USD 350 million deal with the Djibouti state-owned Great Horn Investment Holding for the development of a Port + Park + City project on the model of the abovementioned Shekou in Shenzhen (Nyabiage, 2021). This project is estimated at USD 3 billion as part of the country's developmental agenda *Vision Djibouti 2035* (République de Djibouti, 2016).

In other words, the spatial expansion and business development of a Chinese contractor in a specific country leads to more Chinese companies in the same, related, or unrelated industry also venturing in said country to expand their businesses. To this end, the networks amongst Chinese companies and their relations with state actors, what Lam (2017, p. 6) refers to as “Chinese embeddedness”, are vital. Indeed, the connections amongst companies, here discussed in terms of networks of enterprises, also points to another common thread of this research, namely the relationship between state support in the form of financial incentives and Chinese SOEs' operations abroad. Both these aspects will be elaborated further in the next sections of this chapter to then be explored specifically with regards to the case of Chinese companies in Kenya in the remainder of this thesis.

2.4 African infrastructure “with Chinese characteristics”

Although China has been providing funding to overseas development projects since the 1950s, observers still face challenges in categorising and analysing said financial contributions. Since China is not a member of the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD – whose members reached an agreement on the definition of Official Development Assistance (ODA)²⁴ – the classification of what constitutes Chinese ‘aid’ is ambiguous (Xu and Carey, 2015). In Africa, official Chinese ‘aid’ can include grants, zero-interest loans, debt relief, concessional loans, preferential export credits, export buyer credits, commercial loans, equity funds to support Chinese companies, loans provided through African banks to African small and medium enterprises, as well as shareholding agreements and resource-backed loans. Currently, most of the Chinese finance to African actors continues to be provided through loans, the majority of which are offered by the policy bank China Exim Bank (see figure on the next page).

China Exim Bank loan commitments to African governments amounted to USD 86 billion between 2000 and 2018, while China Development Bank committed USD 37 billion in the same period (CARI, 2021c). The loans offered by various institutions are of different nature. Interest-free loans²⁵ (免息贷款 – *mian xi daikuan*) are offered by the Chinese Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) for projects expected to improve people’s livelihoods, such as irrigation systems, or for the construction of public facilities, such as government buildings or roads, and they made up less than 5% of total loans to Africa between 2000 and 2018 (Acker, Brautigam and Huang, 2020). Interest-free loans have long repayment periods of 20 years, a grace period of 5 years, and, in case of overdue repayments, they can be covered by the debt cancellation programme²⁶, which saw the cancellation of a small total of USD 3.4 billion between 2000 and 2018 (ibid), and is currently taking place again in light of the COVID-19 crisis (CARI, 2021c).

²⁴ Defined as concessional financial assistance provided by official agencies to recipient countries (those in which per capita income is below a specific value) or multilateral development institutions with the goal of promoting the recipients’ economic development and welfare (OECD, 2008).

²⁵ Certain projects expected to improve social welfare can also be financed through grants, usually dedicated to the construction of schools and hospitals, technical assistance and training (including scholarships), and disaster relief (Brautigam, 2009).

²⁶ The debt cancellation programme is part of the debt relief initiative started in 2000. Debt relief can take place in the form of debt cancellation for interest-free loans only, and debt restructuring and refinancing for other types of loans (for more on debt relief see Acker, Brautigam and Huang, 2020).

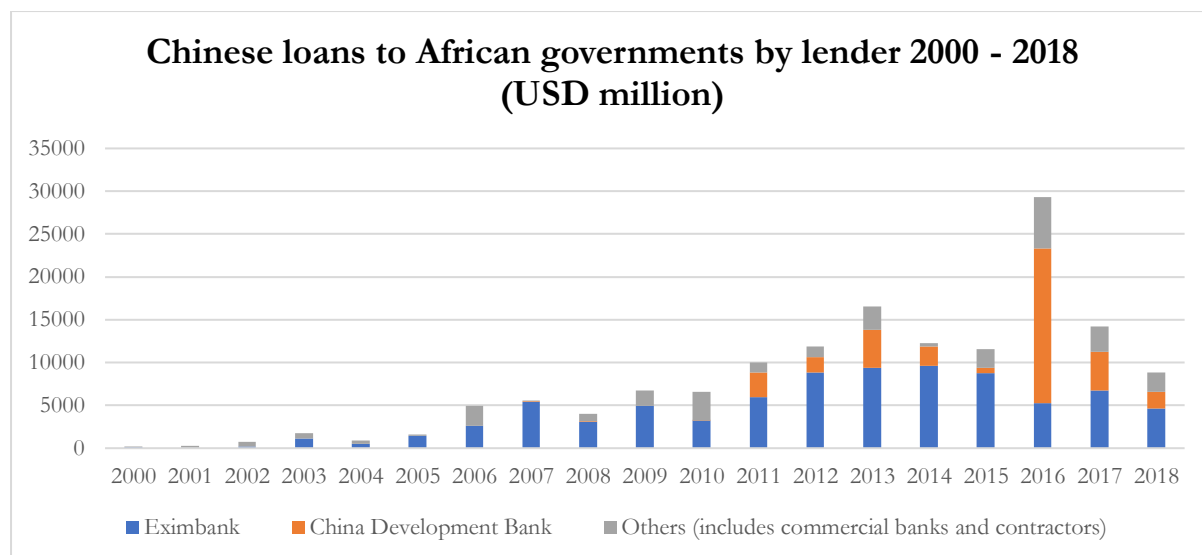


Figure 2: Chinese loans to African governments by lender 2000 - 2018 (USD million), source: CARI loan database, 2021c

Preferential loans are offered through China Exim Bank, namely concessional loans (援外优惠贷款 – *yuanwai youhui daikuan*) and preferential buyer's credit (优惠买方信贷 – *youhui maifang xindai*), a type of export credit. Concessional loans and preferential buyer's credit are both subsidised by the government, but only concessional loans are directly subsidised by the foreign aid budget (Brautigam, Huang and Acker, 2020). Concessional loans require an inter-governmental agreement and currently have a fixed interest rate of 2%²⁷ with long-term maturity (usually 20 years) and a 5- to 7-year of grace period (Alden and Jiang, 2019; Horn, Reinhart and Trebesch, 2019; Morris, Parks and Gardner, 2020). Preferential buyer's credit does not require an inter-governmental agreement, and it refers to a loan covering up to 85% of the total cost of a project implemented by a Chinese company (Brautigam, Huang and Acker, 2020). Compared to concessional loans,

²⁷ The degree in which loans from Chinese financiers are offered at a lower interest rate than market value and the currency denominating these loans are relevant when researching Chinese lending. Although Chinese concessional loans have higher interest rates than the fixed 1.54% for WB loans to similar-income countries (Morris, Parks and Gardner, 2020), the interest rates are lower than market value. Meanwhile, interest rates for non-concessional loans, offered by China Development Bank and Chinese state-owned commercial banks (Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, Agricultural Bank of China, Bank of China, and China Construction Bank) have higher interest rates ranging from 4.5% to 6% (Morris, Parks and Gardner, 2020) depending on the borrower's repayment capacity (Corkin, 2011). Although interest rates are higher for non-concessional loans and export buyer's credit, they are denominated mainly in USD or EUR, differently from concessional loans and interest-free loans, which are mainly denominated in RMB, a less stable currency (Horn, Reinhart and Trebesch, 2019).

buyers' credit interest rates are higher, but remain lower than market value²⁸, maturity and grace period are slightly shorter (Morris, Parks and Gardner, 2020).

Chinese funding is marketed as having 'no-strings attached', as Chinese official narrative suggests that loans from Chinese financial institutions do not imply conditionality. In this sense, Chinese loans are portrayed as being in stark contrast to Western lenders, which, typically rely on conditionalities of 'good governance', environmental protection, and ethical labour practices (see Alden, Large and Mendez, 2020 for a review of shifts within the Western aid landscape). Yet, although Chinese loans might be portrayed as being without conditionality, "China attaches commercial conditions to its loans" (Mohan and Tan-Mullins, 2019, p. 1373), thus relying on "loan-debt contractuality" (Sum, 2019, p. 27). The loan frameworks not only vary according to the funder, but are also tailored *ad hoc* for each project. The case of the Resource-for-Infrastructure (RFI) agreement signed between the Angolan government and China Exim Bank in 2004 to finance the post-conflict reconstruction of the infrastructure system offers a good example. The RFI framework allows governments to access financing for the development of infrastructure "without [...] having to produce sufficient revenues to support its financing" (Halland *et al.*, 2014, p. 31), but instead pledging to provide resources for the repayment. China's deal with Angola was inspired by the 1978 agreement between China and Japan, when Japanese companies developed transport and power infrastructure in China in exchange for oil (Brautigam, 2011b).

The agreement required a fixed price for oil to be exported to China, but when oil prices dropped during the financial crisis of 2007/2008, the Angolan government was forced to borrow again in order not to default on the USD 2 billion loan (Acker, Brautigam and Huang, 2020), further adding to the Angolan national debt. Similarly, a 2010 RFI loan agreement between the Ghanaian government and China Development bank amounting to USD 3 billion was re-negotiated in light of fluctuating oil prices (Mohan and Tan-Mullins, 2019). From Mohan and Tan-Mullins' (2019, p. 1378) analysis, it emerges that the loan conditions "meant that China remained relatively insulated from the risk of non-payment" (see also Chapter 6) while succeeding in entering the Ghanaian oil market, speaking to the long-term outlook often associated with Chinese engagement in Africa (Pairault, 2020b). Similarly, risk associated with funding infrastructure is also mitigated through the stipulation of conditionalities with regards to the acquisition or hiring of Chinese goods and services (see for instance Ehizuelen and Abdi, 2018).

²⁸ Market value is benchmarked with the London Inter-bank Offered Rate (LIBOR).

Indeed, the majority of Chinese loans require the signing party to contract a Chinese construction company without any public tendering processes. For instance, China Exim Bank loans are contingent on at least 50% of the contract content – such as machineries, materials, or goods – to be Chinese (Bräutigam, 2011; Corkin, 2012). It is estimated that 89% of projects with Chinese funding also have a Chinese contractor (Hillman, 2018), with decision-making processes taking place behind closed doors (Zhao, 2011). Nevertheless, as it will be discussed in the following section, the contractor selection process is not linear and often characterised by controversies amongst the many actors involved. Thus, I will now turn to reflections on the diverse array of actors involved in decision-making processes for loan disbursement and contractor selection, as well as their (power) relations.

Chinese-funded and -built infrastructure: engagement process and contractor selection

The processes leading to a Chinese contractor being selected for a Chinese-funded project overseas lacks transparency, further fuelling debates around debt sustainability. I will now scrutinise the engagement process for Chinese-funded and Chinese-constructed overseas infrastructure projects, reflecting the need to ‘unpack’ China in the study of Sino-African infrastructure projects. Within the Chinese state, two parallel institutions coexist: the Communist Party of China and the State Council of the Chinese government. First, within the Communist Party of China, the Politburo is the organ which provides policy recommendations to the Party Leading Small Groups. These groups form concrete policy guidelines and arrangements following the recommendation of the Politburo and the Politburo Standing Committee, to which they report even if they are also directly under the supervision of the Party General Secretariat. The policy guidelines of the Foreign Affairs Leading Small Group (headed by Xi Jinping) are communicated to the Central Policy Research Office, which provides advice and policy drafts to the State Council, thus moving to the realm of the Chinese government.

Within the State Council several actors are involved in overseeing overseas engagement (Figure 3): the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), the Ministry of Finance (MOF), the China International Cooperation Development Agency (CICDA), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), and the MOFCOM. The NDRC focuses on areas related to economic development, currently also in charge of publishing OBOR guidelines (see NDRC, 2015). The MOF approves budgets for foreign engagement and, together with CICDA, plays an important role in deciding which activities will take place. The CIDCA replaced the State Aid Department in

2018 with the goal of reducing inter-ministerial fragmentation and better aligning foreign aid with the state's foreign policy goals, yet the channelling processes for infrastructure sponsoring overseas – and foreign aid more generally – have not evolved greatly since the mid-1990s. In 1995, then Chinese Minister for Trade Wu Yi formalised new guidelines for foreign aid – which also includes concessional loans for infrastructure development – based on the principle that financing should be channelled through already-consolidated aid processes (Brautigam, 2011c). The extent to which CIDCA is addressing fragmentation and competition issues is unclear, particularly due to the recent establishment of this agency and the lack of coherent guidelines for foreign aid, which CIDCA is currently (re)drafting (Rudyak, 2019).

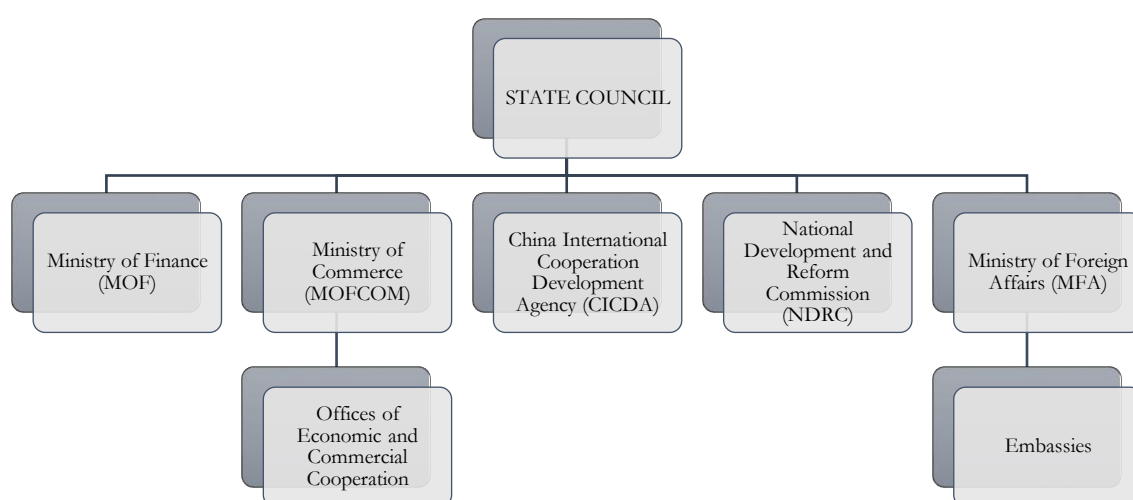


Figure 3: Chinese actors relevant to overseas engagement in infrastructural development (compiled by author)

The MFA has the function of implementing foreign policies, not their formulation, while the MOFCOM develops policies and programmes for economic cooperation in different regions. To facilitate MOFCOM's activities, Offices of Economic and Commercial Affairs are present in Chinese embassies with the role of liaising with Chinese companies' overseas activities while simultaneously remaining parallel to the MFA, to which the embassies respond. The fragmentation of Chinese governance discussed earlier materialises in the tensions between the MFA and MOFCOM. The role of China Exim Bank is at the core of this controversy over diverging principles and objectives. China Exim Bank, subsidised by MOFCOM, is a policy bank, which would imply the reflection of the guiding principles of Chinese foreign policy. Yet, as Taylor (2019, p. 105) suggests, "the way it actually functions demonstrates that profitability and commercial concerns are more important to the institution [China Exim Bank]." In turn, MOFCOM risks undermining the MFA's foreign policy goals (Pairault, 2013; Varrall, 2015). This relates to the previously discussed tension between considering foreign lending as a tool to support diplomatic

aims, or instead as a “market entry tool for Chinese companies’ goods and services” (Corkin, 2012, p. 73).

The Offices of Economic and Commercial Affairs – MOFCOM overseas offices – have pursued opportunities for Chinese businesses, at time hindering “what the local Chinese embassies [overseen by the MFA] have wanted to achieve within specific countries” (Taylor, 2019, p. 105). Officially, Chinese companies and governmental actors should not actively propose projects funded through Chinese finance. This speaks to the (at least rhetorical) importance placed upon the principle of non-interference. Thus, the official engagement process must be initiated by the African government (Figure 4, i). However, this does not translate in a merely reactive engagement, as Chinese companies rely on several networks to identify engagement possibilities. As discussed earlier, partners already operating in a specific market are able to scout possible clients, in line with Lin and Xu's work (2019), which suggest that large SOEs’ activities can foster the internationalisation of smaller SOEs or private companies. In other occasions, feasibility studies are carried out by Chinese SOEs even before the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding, as a result of on-the-ground work by Chinese company representatives. Projects financed by China Exim Bank may be prompted by SOEs active in the territory, or scouted by the bank, the embassies (Yi-Chong, 2014), by Chambers of Commerce (Liu, 2018), and at times, by their network companies which then communicate with SOEs regarding said opportunities (see chapter 4 and 6).

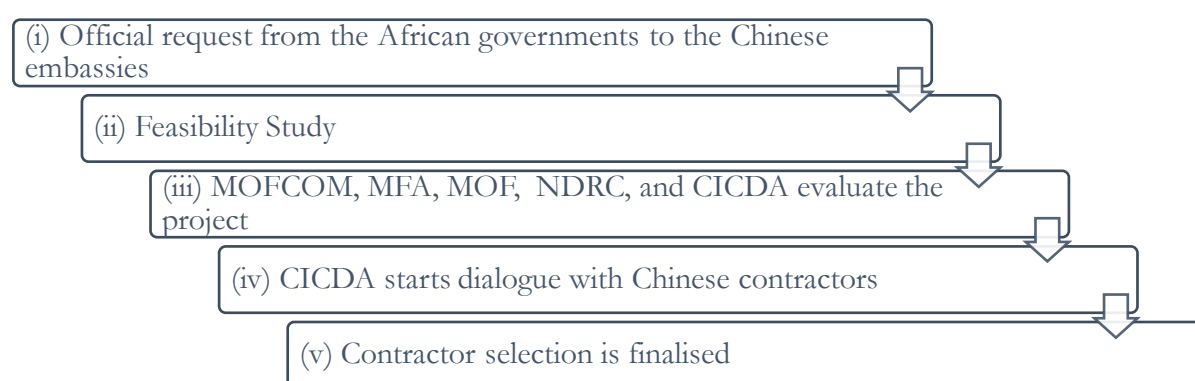


Figure 4: Official engagement process for overseas infrastructural financing (compiled by author)

Regardless, official letters of engagement request entailing funding still need to be submitted by African governments to the Chinese embassy, to be received by both the Ambassador’s office and the staff of the Economic and Commercial Cooperation office. At this stage, official guidelines advise the overseas representatives of the MFA and MOFCOM to assess the project and take relevant further action, such as commissioning a feasibility study (Figure 4, ii), yet “the two offices

do not readily exchange information, as they are working for ministries that may be competing for influence in Beijing” (Varrall, 2015, p. 27). This point speaks to the broader discourses on tensions and conflicts that emerge amongst Chinese state actors at different governance levels, as also evidenced by research on the relations amongst Chinese national and provincial governments (see for instance Lam, 2017, pp. 16–17).

In Beijing, the MFA, MOFCOM, MOF, NDRC and CICDA carry out a further evaluation of the project, focused on the availability of funds and the ‘relevance’ of the project to Chinese foreign policy goals (Figure 4, iii; Interview, Scholar, Beijing, 12th July 2018). As discussed earlier, the ‘relevance’ of infrastructure projects is often linked to their geopolitical and commercial significance to various actors, speaking to their diverging interests. The engagement decision, which needs to also be approved by both the NDRC and the MOFCOM (NDRC, 2014) is then communicated to the embassies, which are expected to coordinate with the relevant African actors. As discussed in the previous section, for the majority of Chinese-funded infrastructure, the selection of a contractor also takes place in Beijing, without public tendering.

Contractors for Chinese-funded projects are selected according to several parameters. First, this process relies on a system of registration of contractor companies certified to operate abroad, through which companies are ranked according to their reputation, size, capabilities and compliance to the standards in the national and international markets (Interview, Deputy Director, Parastatal Association, Beijing, 27th July 2018). This ranking process is facilitated by the CHINCA, which is involved in organising training for Chinese contractors wanting to or already operating overseas, as well as coordinating contractors for overseas projects (see Chapter 4). This organisation is not unique to the Mainland. For instance, the General Chamber of Tanzania Chinese Business helps Chinese SOEs and private companies set up and retain relations with Tanzanian state and non-state actors (Liu, 2018). In the contractor selection process, negotiations are not uncommon (Interview, Scholar, Beijing, 12th July 2018), and companies’ knowledge of and relations to specific contexts, networks and markets – their embeddedness – become extremely relevant in finalising the choice of contractor, as will be discussed further in the following chapters.

Lastly, although the contractor is selected without a public tendering process and behind closed doors in Beijing, this does not imply that the African counterparts are not calling for increased transparency or cannot exercise their agency. Indeed, in the evolving landscape of Sino-African engagement in infrastructure development, the negotiation trajectories of African actors have been an increasingly decisive factor. For instance, as anticipated in the introduction, Soulé-Kohndou (2019) suggests Benin’s civil servants enact their bureaucratic agency in different forms during

contract negotiation for infrastructure with Chinese participation. She highlights that bureaucrats can discriminately determine “the procedure to affect the outcome (viz. the choice of contractor)” (Soulé-Kohndou, 2019, p. 200). Similarly, Zajontz (2020b) suggests that Zambian elites strategically leverage Chinese financiers’ loans to advance the Zambian government’s infrastructure-driven development agenda. In doing so, Zambian elites are also able to profiteer from public tendering processes involving Chinese contractors and – at times – funding. Thus, across the African continent, many amongst leaders, policymakers, and civil society organisations are (re)shaping China-Africa engagement, and, as will become clear in the rest of this thesis, this happens well beyond contractor selection.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I first introduced the key concepts fragmented authoritarianism (Lieberthal and Oksenberg, 1988) and integrated fragmentation (Brødsgaard, 2017) to the study of Sino-African infrastructural engagement. Since the beginning of economic reforms in China in 1978, the relations between the state and its SOEs have evolved greatly, becoming increasingly fragmented. In turn, struggles amongst Chinese state and parastatal actors have increased, echoing to the overseas engagement of Chinese SOEs. Through the lens of Brødsgaard’s (2017) integrated fragmentation, it emerges that Chinese state-owned contractors operate in an environment characterised by the apparent dichotomy between state oversight and market-driven internationalisation. Thus, it is necessary to investigate how these dynamics shape the internationalisation of construction SOEs and their participation to African infrastructure projects.

In the chapter, I proceeded to investigate the growing participation of Chinese financiers and contractors to the development of African infrastructure, which have simultaneously been repositioned at the forefront of the continent’s developmental agenda. Although Chinese loans continue to be only a part of the financing devoted to Africa’s infrastructure development, they have certainly reached staggering figures. Indeed, the multilateral platform offered by FOCAC played a crucial role in fostering China-Africa engagement through its role in agenda-setting, promotion, and channelling of funding and engagement opportunities. Nevertheless, in this section, I also highlighted the relevance of the geopolitical and strategic significance of certain African infrastructure, such as the port of Djibouti, which now hosts an overseas Chinese military base. In other words, several (at times competing) interests underpin the growing engagement in Sino-African infrastructure.

Then, in the third section, I focused on the relationship between the OBOR initiative – deeply rooted in China’s own infrastructure-driven development experience – and African transport corridors. I highlighted how the OBOR has evolved into an umbrella encompassing a diverse array of sectors, geographical locations, and also pre-existing African connectivity initiatives, particularly transport corridors. I connected these trends to the need to further the spatial expansion of Chinese companies – particularly those of the SOEs – in light of overcapacity and market saturation in China. Through an investigation of the recent bundling of African transport corridors under the OBOR umbrella, I suggested that Chinese companies’ participation to these platforms fosters their internationalisation processes. In fact, as the OBOR and FOCAC agendas are aligned with Africa’s developmental agenda focused on regional integration and continental connectivity, the opportunities for Chinese companies’ internationalisation are increasing well beyond Chinese-funded infrastructure. Thus, I suggested that the spatial expansion of Chinese contractors is prompting the internationalisation of companies in other sectors, such as that of security.

Fourth, I explored Chinese actors’ financing mechanisms, highlighting the questionable financial sustainability of Chinese-funded infrastructure projects and the implications for African governments. Specifically, the conditionalities of Chinese loans – presented as ‘no-strings attached’ – were brought to the forefront of the analysis. Currently, most Chinese finance to African infrastructure is channelled through loans disbursed by China Exim Bank, whose contract are decided *ad hoc* and privately, fuelling the debate around conditionality, as they are contingent on the hiring and purchase of Chinese services and goods. The requirement of employing a Chinese contractor for the development of a Chinese-funded infrastructure is extremely common amongst most Chinese lending actors. Thus, the final section of this chapter focused on the engagement process leading to signing an agreement for Chinese-funded and -constructed infrastructure, highlighting the diverse interests of Chinese and African actors involved and the tensions amongst different Chinese state actors.

In conclusion, in this chapter, I focused on the analysis of Chinese SOEs in the (fragmented) Chinese context and of Sino-African engagement processes and mechanisms for Chinese-funded and -built infrastructure. Throughout the 40 years of economic reforms in China, SOEs have gained a prominent role nationally and internationally, where they continue to expand their markets. As such, the relationship between the state and the SOEs has evolved greatly throughout this process, and is characterised by an apparent dichotomy between state oversight and market forces. I argued that construction SOEs’ internationalisation processes are shaped by the state support for internationalisation in the form of financial incentives, however, the companies’

embeddedness in the context of operation can also impact the contractor selection process for Chinese-funded infrastructure. Building on these findings, the next chapter will begin scrutinising Sino-Kenyan infrastructural engagement, starting from the analysis of Kenya's political economy of infrastructural development and its (dis)connections to the growing Chinese participation.

Chapter 3

The political economy of Kenya's infrastructural development: the growing role of infrastructure for the country's developmental agenda and political elites

In the previous chapters, I discussed the intersection of two critical 'layers' of the study of Sino-African infrastructure, namely the growing interests of Chinese actors in the development of African infrastructure and the increasing efforts towards regional integration on the African continent. On the one hand, I highlighted how Chinese actors' interests in infrastructure development – particularly those of state actors – reflect the broader need to support the internationalisation process of Chinese companies, which, in turn, contribute to sustaining the growth (and recovery) of the Chinese economy. With regards to Chinese companies' engagement on the African continent, I discussed the deployment of Chinese financing for African infrastructure – particularly its contractual conditionalities (Mohan and Tan-Mullins, 2019; Sum, 2019) – and the growing participation of Chinese actors beyond their role as financiers. On the other hand, I have underlined the centrality of infrastructure to Africa's development initiatives, which have greatly contributed to the increase in demand for infrastructure financing and construction across the continent.

Building on this intersection of 'layers', I will now turn the attention to the ways in which broader discourses in Sino-African engagement intersect with Kenya's (evolving) infrastructure development trajectories. Across the decades since independence, Kenya's developmental agenda has evolved greatly, and, particularly since the turn of the 21st century, it is increasingly centred around the development of infrastructure. This chapter will focus on the different temporalities of infrastructural development, underscoring the shift from infrastructure development for access to farmable land and agricultural profit to infrastructure as the site for political and economic profiteering. Thus, I argue that, while agriculture remains a core sector in Kenya's political economy, economic and political (elites') gains are now also concentrated around infrastructure projects and the territories where they are planned to be built. A crucial aspect of this trend relates to the spatial patterns of infrastructural development, as Kenya's developmental agenda is now underpinned by the construction of infrastructure in the periphery – the historically-marginalised 'pastoral' North.

In order to clearly build a multitemporal and multispatial analytical narrative, I draw from Boone's (2003) work on centre-periphery relations in African states, which challenged exogenous explanations of institution- and state-building efforts by focusing on political variations towards the peripheries of African states. Through the analysis of different regional case studies in Senegal, Ghana, and Côte d'Ivoire, she shows that the different approaches of African states towards the governing of their peripheries are closely linked to the fact that "rulers operate within different structural or strategic contexts" (Boone, 2003, p. 9), the dynamics of which, she traces to the political and economic trajectories of elites at the margins. Thus, in the present and the following chapter, I will investigate the economic and political relations surrounding the development of infrastructure in the context of centre-periphery relations in Kenya. This chapter will focus on emerging geographies of power vis-à-vis the development of infrastructure, while the next chapter will turn the attention to current development initiatives in the periphery, specifically the Lamu port project and encompassing LAPSET Corridor.

This chapter is structured as follows. In the first section, I will discuss the origin of Kenya's infrastructure system, reflecting on the connections between infrastructure construction and access to farmable land in the Central Region and Rift Valley during the late colonial period and the early independence period. This section will speak to the resulting marginalisation of other regions of the country, such as the Northern part of Kenya. In the second section, I will deal with the increasing role of business elites in the unequal spatial allocation of state resources aimed at infrastructure development and the intersections of this trajectory with external financial assistance from Bretton Woods institutions and Chinese lenders. In the third section, I will highlight the renewed calls for resource allocation beyond the Central Region and Rift Valley in the 1990s, and explore the motives behind the renewed push for infrastructure development, which, from the turn of 21st century, have assumed centre stage in Kenya's developmental and political agendas. In the fourth section, I will focus on the current development agenda of Kenya, Kenya Vision 2030, which is underpinned by the renewed focus on infrastructure development. This section will specifically reflect on the connections between political agendas and infrastructure, setting the scene for the next chapter, which will deal with controversies surrounding infrastructure development in the Northern regions of Kenya.

3.1 Early post-independence period (1963-1978): inheriting colonial infrastructure and the early post-independence resource allocation

After attaining independence from British colonial rule in 1963, the government of the Republic of Kenya, guided by Jomo Kenyatta, inherited an infrastructure system built for the purpose of serving white settlers. Indeed, resources for the construction of infrastructure had been deployed in the areas inhabited or related to settlers' economic activities (Kanyinga, 2016). For instance, the extension of the colonial railway in the 1920s was motivated by the need to facilitate access to farmed land, and consequently increase the flow of exports (see Soja, 1968, pp. 27–47). In other words, the capital accumulation of settlers was supported through access to land (Swainson, 1980, p. 9). Indeed, the agricultural sector represented the core of colonial interests in the country, and, after independence, it has continued to be the backbone of the country's economy, contributing (together with forestry and fishing) an average value added of 31% of the country's GDP between 1963 and 2020 (World Bank, 2021).

In light of the centrality of agricultural activities to the colonial administration (and beyond), the pre-independence infrastructural development patterns already presented a disregard for the pastoral North (see Figure 5 below), which was not being exploited for crop production and thus considered marginal (Odhiambo, 2013). Similarly, the colonial system of governance was focused on retaining centralised decision-making powers with regards to resource allocations, which was enforced and overseen through the division of the colony in provincial administrations, in turn divided into districts, divisions, locations and sublocations. The colonial administration ruled provinces and districts as if the groups living and working there were homogeneous, but, due to migration and the emergence of a Kikuyu middle class of farmers and livestock herders, the socio-economic landscape was evolving quickly (Hornsby, 2012, p. 39).

This shift represented the first step towards the emergence of an educated middle-class of Kenyans – mainly belonging to the Kikuyu ethnic group (Arriola, 2013, p. 42) – who would eventually guide the country “to independence and beyond” (Ogot, 1995, p. 53; see also Arriola, 2013, p. 57). The early independence days represented the starting point of a broader debate emerged in the late 1970s and 1980s, known as the “Kenya Debate”²⁹, which centred around the emergence of Kenyan capitalism. This debate revolved around the possibility of capitalist development to take place in independent Kenya; Marxist and modernisation theorists considered this to be inevitable, while

²⁹ For background works to this debate see for instance Leys (1975), Sandbrook (1975), Langdon (1977), and Swainson (1977).

scholars of dependency theory believed it would not happen in light of the influence of foreign capital in Kenya's development (see for instance Swainson, 1980; Himbara, 1993; Leys, 1996). Particularly relevant to this chapter is the debate surrounding economic development and the distribution of land after independence, a point to which I will return soon.

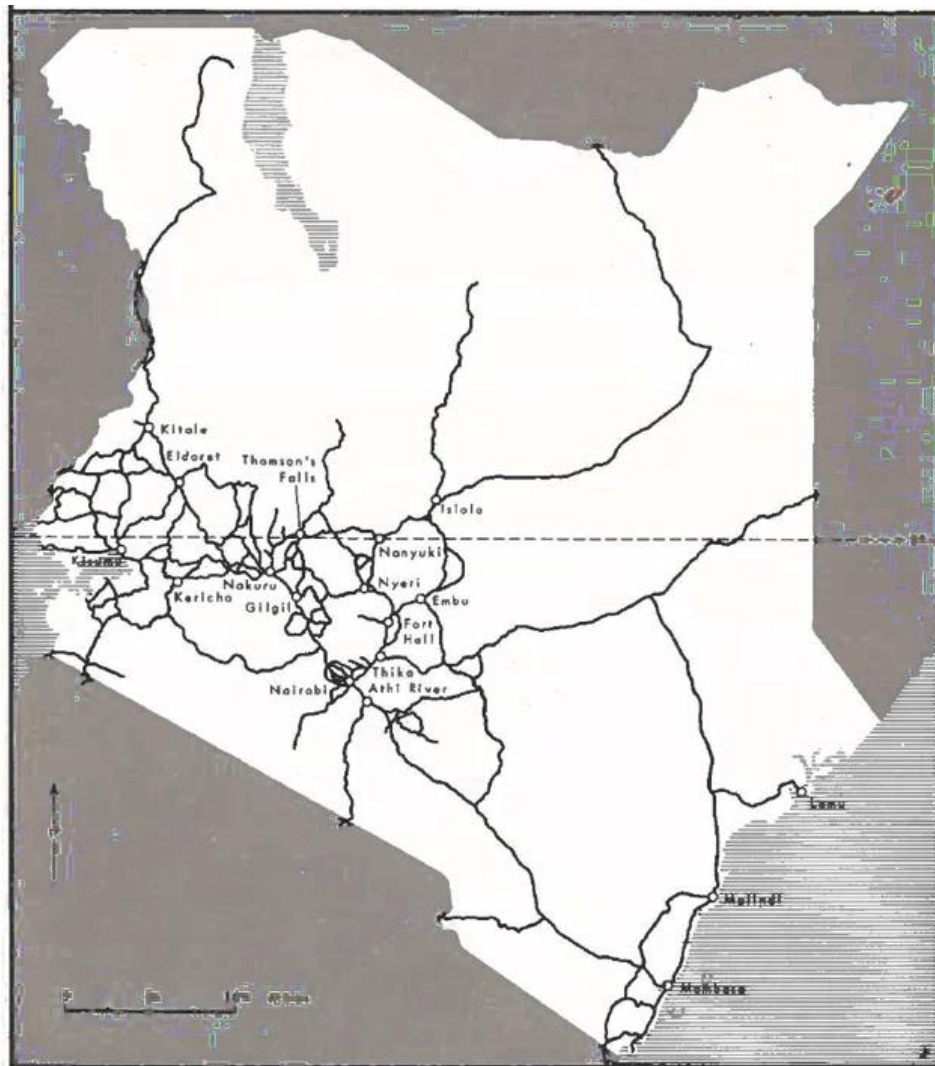


Figure 5: Kenya's Road Network in 1965, source: Soja (1968, p. 33)

In the early independence period, Kenya was characterised by a multiparty democracy, which saw the Kenya African National Union (KANU) in government and the Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU) as opposition. At this stage, the KANU administration identified core goals for the First National Development Plan 1964-1969 (Republic of Kenya, 1964), which revolved around economic growth and equitable allocation of resources (Oyugi, 1994). The realisation of the first development plan required substantial capital, beyond the domestic financial capabilities of the time. Thus, the government also relied on external funding – foreign aid – as a key resource for economic reconstruction in the eve of independence (see for instance Kamau, McCormick and

Pinaud, 2009). During this first stage, around 25% of Kenya's national budget was devoted to the power and transport sectors combined, but the agricultural sector received the largest share of expenditure, amounting to 32% of the national budget (Republic of Kenya, 1964, p. 120).

Against this background, the emerging political elites put emphasis on directing foreign capital to the manufacturing sector – as opposite to the agricultural sector – in an attempt to preserve their exclusive access to accumulation through agricultural land usage (Kaplinsky, 1978a; Swainson, 1980, p. 17). Kaplinsky (1978a, p. 6) highlights that in 1967, FDI to Africa's manufacturing sector accounted for 18.8% of total FDI, while in Kenya they represented 32.4% of FDI. During the administration of President Jomo Kenyatta, "state bargaining" represented "a means by which the multinational subsidiaries obtain[ed] privileges which are then shared with the dominant African class" (Langdon, 1978, p. 198). Thus, the ruling elites were not only focused on retaining their access to surplus generated through farming – for instance Kenyatta (and his family members) began accumulating wealth by granting their relatives or associates unallocated lands and buying farms – but also on gaining a foothold in the other sectors, such as transport. Simultaneously, his allies did the same, "via legitimate and not-so-legitimate activities, using their connections to acquire business, extract commissions and win contracts" (Hornsby, 2012, p. 108). This marked the formation of a political and business elite which had – and continues to have – considerable influence over the allocation of state resources (Swainson, 1980, pp. 173–182). These practices were heavily criticised by KADU factions, which considered them to be opposed to the core objective of equal distribution of resources (Oyugi, 1994).

With regards to relations with China and access to Chinese aid, between 1963 and 1967, tensions between Kenyatta's government and the Maoist regime in China escalated rapidly. Chege (2008a) traces these dynamics to the tensions amongst left- and right-leaning factions of the KANU party. In the early independence period, Kenyatta's faction was determined in their mission to develop the country's cooperation with the United States and European nations, while that of Jaramogi Oginga Odinga – who had led a delegation to Beijing soon after independence – wanted to improve ties with China, particularly in light of the support China had demonstrated for independence movements across the African continent (see for instance Pallotti, 2020). Kenyatta's faction had the upper hand, which resulted in high-profile diplomatic representation coming to halt in 1967. The Chinese embassy in Nairobi describes the relations amongst the two countries in this period as "lowered to be at the *chargé d'affaires*" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 2002, italics added). Indeed, relations between Kenya and China only improved after "Mao's exit from the stage in 1976 and that of [Jomo] Kenyatta two years later" (Chege, 2008a, p. 20).

Politically, Kenyatta had to “absorb an opposition party mounted by smaller ethnic groups” (Arriola, 2013, p. 39) to consolidate his position in power. Tensions around land reverberated to the apex of the political structure (see also Médard, 2010). At the beginning of the 1960s, during the independence negotiations, minority groups represented by KADU had advocated for a constitutional system which recognised different regions – *majimbo* in Kiswahili – of the soon-to-be independent state (Anderson, 2005; Kanyinga, 2016). At this point in time, minority groups were afraid that the patron-client relations that had characterised the colonial era³⁰ would be replicated through power being concentrated in the hands of the most populous ethnic groups (such as Kikuyu and Luo). In addition to political discourses, land was also crucial in the debate around decentralisation. Indeed, a *majimbo* system would have allowed KADU to retain control over the Rift Valley – which encompassed most of the farming lands – even if the competing party, KANU, won national elections (Hornsby, 2012, p. 68). Land was not only central in the *majimbo* debate in the early post-independence days, but, as it will be discussed further in the next chapter, continues to feature in many of Kenya’s current political controversies (see amongst others Boone, 2012; Kanyinga, 2016).

Here, it is central to return to Boone’s (2003) discussion around the state’s approach towards the peripheries. On the basis of the relationship between economic (in)dependence and (rural) social hierarchy, she develops a conceptual lens to explain four different patterns. First, power-sharing is the expected outcome of “a hierarchical rural society in which elites [...] are economically dependent on the state” (Boone, 2003, p. 36). Second, state usurpation of “the power and position” of rural elites who “appropriate their share of the rural surplus directly without relying on the state’s intermediation” (*ibid*). Third, administrative occupation from the centre to the periphery, the latter of which is characterised by a non-hierarchical rural society. Lastly, the non-incorporation of regions characterised by non-threatening rural societies and not of economic interest to the centre (see Boone, 2003, 11-42). In Kenya, the political tensions amongst KADU and KANU factions related to their interests towards the control of agricultural land in the regions considered to be the most productive, and the state approach towards the rest of the country differed greatly.

As early as 1962, the year before Kenya’s independence, the Million Acre Scheme saw the sale of settlers’ land to wealthy Africans (Ogot, 1995, p. 64), mainly belonging to the major ethnic groups

³⁰ Within locations and sublocations Africans were appointed as chiefs to enforce colonial rule and act as an interface with the population. In this period, many locations and sublocations chiefs “took advantage of their new gatekeeping position to acquire land and money” representing “early examples of the use of central authority to acquire local resources corruptly” (Hornsby, 2012, p. 28).

(see also Harbeson, 1973). Throughout the 1960s, state resource allocation favoured the so-called ‘high-potential’ areas, which mainly referred to agricultural lands in the Central Province and Rift Valley of the country (GoK, 1965). During this ‘opening up’ of the Rift Valley, Kikuyu elites generally associated with the Central Province were perceived to be making a move towards land grabbing in the Rift Valley, usually associated to the Kalenjin group (Lynch, 2011, pp. 52–58). In this context, the attempt by Kikuyu elites to appropriate power and resources – mainly land – from the Rift Valley elites resonates with Boone’s (2003, p. 36) model of usurpation, whereby “the centre will choose to usurp the power and position of its powerful rivals, aiming to undercut or even destroy them.” Nevertheless, the role of the national government – and more specifically the ruling elites – in the allocation of resources meant that the relationship between the Kalenjin and Kikuyu elites was meant to shift towards power-sharing, as the Rift Valley continues to be economically linked to the state.

Beyond the Rift Valley and the Central Region, other areas of the country – those considered to be ‘less productive’ – were mostly left unable to access funds or other resources, especially as Kenyatta’s first KANU government had abolished regional administrations soon after independence, marking the end of the first call for *majimbo* (D’Arcy and Cornell, 2016; Kanyinga, 2016; Avidar, 2018). Particularly, the pastoral North – where people’s livelihoods were characterised by a nomadic lifestyle – suffered the draining of resources, which were directed to other areas of Kenya instead (Odhiambo, 2013). This resonates with Boone’s (2003) suggestion that the state is not necessarily attempting to project power in a state-building effort (as suggested for instance by Herbst, 2000), but might as well choose to not incorporate the periphery. The distribution of road construction in Kenya in the 1960s also reflected this trend, as policies were aimed to the development or improvement of main roads, which were primarily located in the Central Province and Rift Valley (Burgess *et al.*, 2010). The lack of developmental initiatives in the Northern regions of Kenya during the colonial era persisted after independence, and relations amongst the communities living in these areas and the newly-independent state exacerbated quickly.

The region between Lake Turkana in the North-West of Kenya and the Somali border in the North-East – referred to as the Northern Frontier District³¹ (see Figure 6 on the next page) – was inhabited by pastoral groups, which included Muslim and non-Muslim ethnic groups. Due to their

³¹ The Northern Frontier District was then divided in the different colonial administration highlighted in the map on the following page, one of which was referred to as Northern Frontier District (see Mburu, 2005, pp. 45–47).

nomadic lifestyle, many of these groups could not be integrated in the processes of accumulation sustaining the colonial rule, which, as mentioned earlier, mainly relied on the agricultural sector. In the eyes of the colonial rule, “there were no outside economic reasons to break the underdevelopment loneliness of Northern Kenya” (The National Christian Council of Kenya, 1972, p. 29). As such, the groups inhabiting the Northern Frontier District remained at the periphery of the colonial accumulation system (Weitzberg, 2016). In the years leading to independence, a political alliance arose amongst most of the groups inhabiting the Northern Frontier District, who began campaigning for secession (see for instance Mburu, 2005; Whittaker, 2012). One year before Kenya’s independence, the British administration had organised a referendum, in which most of the people of Northern Kenya (specifically Garissa, Wajir, Mandera, Isiolo and Marsabit counties) voted to secede into Somalia. Nevertheless, secession had never really been on the cards.



Figure 6: Map of area referred to as Northern Frontier District, source: Weitzberg, (2016, p. 67)

The first government of independent Kenya – supported by Britain – was committed to retaining the entirety of its territory, and, with the support of the Somali government, an insurgency – known as the Shifta war – in the Northern and North-Eastern regions began (Hornsby, 2012, p. 96). By 1966, the Kenyan forces, supported by the British, had the upper hand by adopting a violent and deadly approach towards anyone who was seen or lived in the Northern area of the country, particularly people of Somali ethnicity (Whittaker, 2012). It is important here to highlight the focus on security at this stage, as Northern regions of the country – specifically the Ethiopia-Kenya border areas – were regarded as a buffer zone central to state security (Mosley and Watson, 2016). Having succeeded in controlling the country's border, by the year 1970, President Kenyatta's party had also effectively incorporated opposition factions into the government – now a one-party system (see Widner, 1992) – and the “most politically relevant ethnic groups were represented at the highest levels of leadership in the ruling party and the ministerial cabinet” (Arriola, 2013, p. 39).

The political tensions amongst domestic actors did not deter the Kenyatta's administration from pursuing economic development, which was facilitated by bilateral aid from Western countries and international organisations (Kragelund, 2008, 2011). During the first 10 years since independence, the Kenyan economy grew by an average 6.8% each year (Hornsby, 2012, p. 128). In the 1970s, as the modernisation paradigm gained prominence amongst Western international organisations and financiers, the Kenyan government's Second National Development Plan (1970-1974) was aimed to the expansion of the rural economy (Republic of Kenya, 1970). In this decade, the construction of transport infrastructure – particularly roads – remained a prominent component of the country's developmental agenda, as it was crucial to access farmable land. Between 1968 and 1973, 30% of Kenya's national expenditure was directed to the development of new roads, while, between 1974 and 1979, this figure decreased to 20% (Republic of Kenya, 1974a, p. 345). Nevertheless, as already noted earlier, most of the roads were located in the Central Province and Rift Valley (Burgess *et al.*, 2010), as these were the areas of interest for the state in its efforts to expand the rural economy – and, in turn, access economic gains from the agricultural sector. However, as anticipated earlier, spatial patterns of unequal allocation of resources, which had remained unaddressed in the initial post-independence stage, soon became the centre of political debates.

3.2 Moi's administration (1978-2002): losing control over state resource allocation and the growing role of business elites

Upon Kenyatta's death in 1978, vice-president Daniel arap Moi, who was from the Rift Valley, rose to power. It should be noted that Moi is usually referred to as belonging to the Kalenjin group, which, as Lynch (2011, p. 3) highlights, is not an ethnic group *per se*, but a construct emerged during the late colonial period to refer to several "sub-groups administered as separate 'tribes' by the colonial authority". Nevertheless, as will be discussed now, Moi's presidency contributed to the solidification of the Kalenjin group. President Moi focused on retaining the support of Kenyatta's allies – through an approach termed *nyayo*, translated into "footsteps", which implied following the footsteps of his predecessor (see Widner, 1992). Even during the return to a multi-party system in the 1990s, Moi worked to retain control over political and economic tools – such as finance and banking (Arriola, 2013, p. 42) – that had been fundamental to maintain Kenyatta in power during the one-party rule (Widner, 1992, p. 145; Hornsby, 2012, p. 339). For instance, through regulating and controlling access to financing, Moi could ensure the support of businesspeople, who had also increased their wealth through their political ties. In this regards, he attempted to redirect resources to fellow Kalenjin in the Rift Valley (Chege, 1998) – effectively setting out his own footsteps (Throup, 2020) – and Kenyatta's supporters in the Central Province.

This resulted in further draining of funds expected to be allocated to Northern and Coastal areas, which turned to raising funds through *harambee*, a self-help crowd-funding practice common in Kenya. *Harambee* – translated into "the spirit of pulling together" – had been a prominent feature of Jomo Kenyatta's administration, in an attempt to increase public participation to the development process. According to the formulation of this approach, the government expected to take the lead in development initiatives, such as building schools, hospitals, and supporting business – particularly agricultural – activities (Republic of Kenya, 1974b). Yet, funds to do so were often sourced through *harambee* initiatives. Although it is estimated that, in the 1970s, funds raised through *harambee* made up 10% of the national funds spent for development projects (Thomas, 1987), these funds were also being directed to the 'productive' regions (Widner, 1992; see also Lynch, 2011, p. 109) instead of being distributed equally (Holmquist, 1984). In addition to this, similarly to the previously-discussed Million Acre Scheme, *harambee* also became a way for state officials to profiteer from development initiatives (Lonsdale, 1992).

With regards to relations with China, the Moi administration rekindled relations amongst the two countries, which had gone through a rough patch during the Kenyatta era. In 1978, a Kenyan

ambassador was sent to China for the first time in 11 years, and Moi himself visited the country in 1980 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 2002). Renewed relations between Kenya and China in the 1980s led to increased cooperation amongst the two nations in several spheres, from education to tourism. The strengthening of diplomatic relations also fostered economic engagement with China, which, in turn, was also beneficial for Chinese SOEs in the country (see Chapter 6). At this stage, China and Kenya signed two cooperation agreements, and the Chinese government partially funded the construction of the Moi International Sports centre for a total of USD 2 billion, 48% of which was financed by the Kenyan government (Chege, 2008a). The funding for this project came in the form of an interest-free loan, representing a departure from the loans received in the previous decades from Western lenders. Moi's diplomatic approach to China not only represented a clear shift from the approach of the previous administration, but also an evolution of his own viewpoint.

In the 1960s, Moi had been one of the most critical voices of China's support for independence movements in Africa. Perhaps informed by the Chinese support for the Zanzibar revolution of 1964 (see Bailey, 1975; Sheriff and Ferguson, 1991, p. 243; Pallotti, 2020), Moi suggested that China was plotting a revolution in Kenya. Accusations from Moi – later addressed by the Chinese embassy as “vilification and grave provocation” – resulted in three secretaries of the Chinese embassy being expelled from the country in 1966 (East African Standard, 1966, quoted in Chege, 2008a). Interestingly, high-level executives within CRBC Kenya point to the Kenyan political environment in the 1980s as an important factor contributing to the company's expansion, suggesting that the “stability of Kenya under Moi's presidency” led the company to venture in the country (Interview, Deputy General Manager, Chinese SOE, Nairobi, 5th July 2019). The “authoritarian tendencies” (Lynch, 2011, p. 133) of the Moi administration – particularly in terms of suppression of the opposition and other critics (see also Widner, 1992) – might have created a business environment appealing to Chinese state-owned contractors.

Nevertheless, Moi's time in office was marked by external shocks, such as the drop in oil prices and the beginning of a period of economic crisis in the 1980s. In this context, Moi's attempt to continue controlling resource allocation meant that he had to rely upon loans and foreign aid. As such, he had to implement policies aimed at furthering liberalisation (Arriola, 2013, p. 119), marking the beginning of the SAPs. The principles of economic liberalisation, deregulation, and privatisation had quickly become the pillars of economic policies promoted by the WB and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and were being promoted through the SAPs. Between 1980

and 1996, the government of Kenya signed nine SAPs³² with the WB (all of which included credit from the IMF) envisioned to be conducive to economic stability. As many other recipient countries in the same period, Kenya was in need of financial assistance to pursue its development agendas (see for instance Whitfield, 2008). During the period of SAPs, official development assistance peaked at USD 7.56 billion to then decline steadily since the turn of the 21st century (Chege, 2020).

In 1991, in light of growing civil unrest and critiques to the Moi regime – particularly after the killing of Foreign Minister Robert Ouko (see Cohen and Odhiambo, 2004), the protests led by activist Wangari Maathai, and other corruption scandals – the conditions of the SAPs were revised to highlight the component of ‘good governance’, which referred to the need to curb rampant corruption in the Moi administration (see for instance Husain and Faruquee, 1994; Onjala, 2000). As an instance of this, the notorious Goldenberg scandal implied that KANU had raised campaign funds “through fictitious [gold] export compensation” by the Central Bank of Kenya (Mwangi, 2008, p. 273). Similarly, it was rumoured that before the 1997 elections, during a privatisation initiative driven by the SAPs (Njeru, 2012), the Moi administration had allocated sections of the Karura Forest in Nairobi to political and business figures who could support his re-election campaign (Njeru, 2010). Although the conditionalities associated with the SAPs were directed to almost all sectors in the economy, the extent to which they supported economic growth have been widely questioned (Moseley, 1991; O’Brien and Ryan, 2001; Murunga, 2007). O’Brien and Ryan (2001, pp. 510–511) suggested that, after almost 20 years of SAPs, the results “must be considered disappointing” and that “the economic record has been mediocre”. In addition, they noted that “[the] structural adjustment era failed to create the conditions for a sustained recovery of GDP growth to the levels attained in the 1960s and 1970s” (ibid; see also Mosley, 1991), while, at the same time, poverty indicators increased (Rono, 2002).

In terms of centre-periphery relations, the 1980s and the 1990s were characterised by the re-emergence of the call for *majimbo*, which was influenced by both national discontent and external factors. In the 1980s, decentralisation policies were supported by international organisations, particularly the WB and the IMF (D’Arcy and Cornell, 2016; Kanyinga, 2016). During the SAPs, the idea that centralisation was a leading cause of inequality, marginalisation, conflict, and the ‘lack’ of development gained consensus amongst Braetton Woods institutions. Particularly in regards to

³² The SAPs signed in 1980, 1983 and 1996 were aimed to overall reforms in the national institutions, the SAPs signed in 1986 and 1991 were aimed to the liberalisation of the agricultural sector, the SAP from 1989 focused on the liberalisation of the financial sector, the remaining SAPs focused on the promotion of industry (1988), exports (1991), and education (1992), respectively.

development initiatives – including infrastructure – international organisations argued that without actualising decentralisation, the national government would be unable to distribute resources equally across the national territory (Cornell and D’Arcy, 2014). Figure 7 below shows the evolution of the road infrastructure in Kenya between 1979 and 1992, highlighting the concentration of road development initiatives in the Central Province and Rift Valley of Kenya.

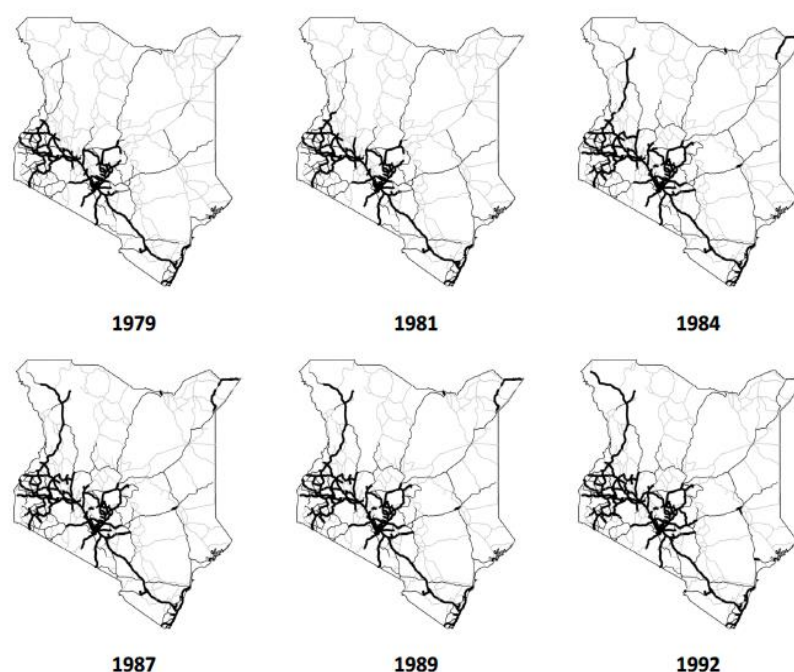


Figure 7: Evolution of Kenya's road network (1979-1992), source: adapted from Burgess *et al.* (2010, p. 24)

During the 1980s, the Kenyan government continued to focus on the construction of minor roads through the Minor Roads Programme (Wasike, 2001; Burgess *et al.*, 2010), but previously-constructed infrastructure was quickly deteriorating. This was evident in the coastal region of Lamu, in Northern Kenya, which has historically been marginalised in the access to resources for infrastructural development, as the state did not choose, at this time, to integrate these ‘remote’ regions (see Chapter 4) in the national political economy, in an echo of Boone’s (2003) non-incorporation. For instance, the landing jetty that leads from Manda island (which hosts the airport) to the channel facing Lamu Town collapsed on several occasions, and delays in allocating resources to repair it caused discontent and distrust in the Ministry of Transport, which had the mandate to select a contractor for this project. The jetty first collapsed in 1986, but four years later a contractor had still not been allocated the contract, and the tourism sector was suffering deeply (Coast News, 1990a). By that time, residents had raised money for its repair through a *barambee* (Coast News, 1990b). As will be discussed in the next chapter, plans for the development of a port in Lamu were

also initiated in the 1980s, but resources were instead channelled to the expansion of Mombasa port.

The process of economic liberalisation continued in the 1990s, and Moi maintained a firm grip over resources, attempting to continue allocating them to his allies (see also Ryan, 2004). By then, his coalition was held together by the distribution of credit and resources through Kenyan state banks, which “had become a mechanism for decentralised corruption that benefitted the politically well-connected” (Arriola, 2013, p. 127; see also Brownbridge, 1998). Part of the liberalisation policies included fostering private participation in the infrastructure sector, as discussed in the 1996 Sessional Paper No. 2 on Industrial Transformation to the Year 2020 (Wasike, 2001). Although the period of SAPs marked a trend towards privatisation of national enterprises, this did not occur for port services in Kenya – such as container terminal operations – showing a countertendency compared to global trends of port privatisation during the 1980s and 1990s (UNCTAD, 2003). In the 2010s, Mombasa port witnessed an attempt to privatise the operation of two container berths, but the tender was cancelled due to reports of fraudulent awarding to a company controlled by an Emirati businessman linked to current president Uhuru Kenyatta (further discussed in Chapter 6).

Going back to Moi’s time in office, although he was struggling to rein in the formation of opposition parties, in 1997 he still won the general elections, albeit with a narrow margin. Mwai Kibaki, then vice-president, came second, receiving most of his votes in the Central Province and Nairobi Area (Hornsby, 2012, p. 614). This was the second multi-party election won by KANU, but the changes brought about by economic liberalisation and the multi-party system were weakening Moi’s ability to channel resources to his allies. His attempts to shift resource allocation – such as land rights (Médard, 2010) – in favour of the emerging Kalenjin elites were not met quietly by those whose interests and economic benefits were being negatively affected (Lynch, 2011, pp. 111-142). According to Arriola (2013, p.167), before the 2002 elections – won by Mwai Kibaki – many “high-profile entrepreneurs abandoned the incumbent and his chosen successor [Uhuru Kenyatta, son of Jomo Kenyatta] in favour of an opposition candidate.” Moi’s choice of nominating Uhuru Kenyatta as the KANU candidate was not supported across the board, and several senior ministers – which included Raila Odinga, son of Jaramogi Oginga Odinga – defected KANU, and eventually joined Kibaki’s opposition coalition, the National Alliance Rainbow Coalition (NARC).

Several other factors contributed to the raising discontent towards Moi’s government, particularly in opposition-controlled regions, such as the Nairobi city council. On the one hand, business

leaders – particularly those associated with the opposition – believed that the government continued to provide obstacles to the development of the business sector, even in light of liberalisation policies (Holmquist, 2002). On the other hand, it had become clear that national infrastructure had deteriorated. Kenya's road accidents per vehicle had become the highest in the world (Hornsby, 2012, p. 645), but roads were not the only infrastructure affected. The 100-year-old railway was partially decommissioned and only ran between Nairobi and Mombasa, while the port of Mombasa became well-known for its costly and slow services, as well as corruption (Lamarque, 2019). By the end of Moi's time in power, the linkages between the political and economic spheres had become evident. Indeed, Arriola's (2013, p. 179) analysis shows the considerable impact the support of prominent business leaders and former parastatal actors' directors had in building Kibaki's coalition, especially as the ruling party was unable to retain control over businesses access to finance. In this context, the proximity of business and political elites and the political shift which took place ahead of the 2002 elections set the scene for the emergence of infrastructure as another important sector – beyond agriculture – in Kenya's political economy, including in terms of elites' profiteering.

3.3 The rise and fall of the opposition coalition (2002- 2007): Kenya's 'infrastructural turn' and the return of calls for *majimbo*

In October 2002, KANU elected Uhuru Kenyatta as its leader, and, on the same day, three opposition parties announced the formation of a coalition party, NARC, led by Kibaki. Even before winning the 2002 elections, Kibaki's coalition was principally held together by the will to defeat KANU, and, after their electoral victory, the deteriorating health of President Kibaki created a vacuum of power quickly filled by competing ministers. Specifically, while Kibaki was choosing his vice-president, historical rifts between the pro-Odinga faction and the Kikuyu members of parliament embittered. The coalition continued to deteriorate as the *majimbo* debate was again at the forefront of political discourses. Once again, the call for *majimbo* was driven by the need to ensure an equitable allocation of state resources, particularly in light of the growing corruption that had characterised Moi's last term (Maxon, 2016). However, the constitutional reforms proposed were not seen by many – both the public and prominent political figures, such as Odinga – as an actualisation of *majimbo*, as they envisioned the formation of districts, but not a comprehensive transfer of powers from the Office of the President to the districts' administrations.

Kibaki's first term was characterised by a series of corruption scandals, which tainted his reputation, especially as his electoral campaign relied on the promise to end corruption. In 2004, evidence emerged of a network of fake companies involved in a procurement contract – the Anglo-Leasing scandal (see Bachelard, 2010) – and an increasing number of questionable procurement contracts were uncovered, implicating both NARC and KANU (Chege, 2008b). The “kleptocratic attitude to state funds” (Hornsby, 2012, p. 725) extended to taxpayers' money, which had been channelled to electoral campaigns through made up procurement contracts, for a total of about USD 700 million between 1997 and 2004. Caught up in corruption scandals and internal fractions, Kibaki's government was slow in delivering the promises of more just allocation of resources, further increasing the marginalisation of communities outside the Central Province and the Rift Valley. Again, the approach by the centre to the peripheries differed depending on the economic and political gains associated with different regions. Nonetheless, during Kibaki' time in office, Kenya's economy had recovered substantially, and economic growth jumped from 3.4% in 2003 to 7% in 2007, tax revenues doubled, many foreign investors set up subsidiaries in the country, and many failing state companies were privatised³³ (Chege, 2008b).

In terms of Sino-Kenyan relations, Kibaki was quick to reiterate Kenya's support for the One China Policy (Xinhua News, 2005), and during a state visit to Beijing and Shanghai in 2005, he negotiated a comprehensive agreement including development assistance in the form of grants, increasing air connections, technical assistance in support of Kenya's industrialisation goals, and equipment supply for Kenya's state-owned broadcasting company. This state visit was not only characterised by high-level political engagement, but also by the fact his delegation included a dozen prominent Kenyan businesspeople, who participated in visits to a Special Export Processing Zone – a type of SEZ – in Shanghai, and discussed future possibilities for economic engagement (Chege, 2008a). In 2006, at the FOCAC Ministerial Meeting, then Minister for Foreign Affairs Tuju discussed Kenya's pursuit of the 'looking Eastwards' policy (see Procopio, 2019, p. 178), underlining China's centrality to Kenya's foreign relations (African Business Magazine, 2011), reminding of similar trends across the African continent in the same timeframe (see Alden and Alves, 2008). Up to 2006, total infrastructure finance from Chinese actors already accounted for USD 870 mil (Chege, 2008a), and the strengthening of diplomatic and economic relations with China contributed to the increase in disbursement of Chinese development finance (see Chapter 6).

³³ Amongst them, in 2006, a Kenyan-South African consortium was given a 25-year concession contract for the operations of Kenya Railway Corporation (Hornsby, 2012, p. 733).

In 2003, President Mwai Kibaki launched the developmental initiative *Economic Recovery Strategy for wealth and employment creation - 2003-2007* (GoK, 2003), which relied on the rehabilitation of the country's infrastructure system, identifying priority projects and calling for participation of international development financiers. This is the moment in which Kenya's 'infrastructural turn' took place, whereby infrastructure projects not only became a central pillar of the country's developmental agendas, but also assumed prominence for the pursuit of economic and political gains. As mentioned in the previous chapters, the centrality of infrastructure to Kenya's developmental agenda is partially related to the resurgence of continental integration initiatives (Bach, 2016) and the renewed focus on infrastructure projects as promoters of development in international discourses (Nugent, 2018; see also Cissokho, forthcoming). The country has participated to the connectivity agenda both at the continental and regional level, as the development of transport infrastructure has become a priority within the EAC (Mathieson, 2016). Kenya was a signatory of the 1991 Abuja Treaty, which established the African Economic Community, the 2000 Constitutive Act of the AU, and it was also one of the first countries to sign and ratify the AfCFTA in 2018 (WB, 2020; see also Chapter 2).

Since the revival of the EAC in 2000, this REC has been the fastest growing regional economy (AfDB, 2019), and has directed considerable efforts towards the reduction of tariff barriers and non-tariff barriers to trade. The latter include restrictions and limitations to trade, which can range from tax-like measures, import bans, time-consuming custom procedures to lack of connectivity, which have been recognised as one of the main factors spoiling the increase of trade volumes across Africa (Shinyekwa and Othieno, 2013, Amoako-Tuffour *et al.*, 2016). For instance, the EAC has focused the harmonisation of custom management systems and the establishment of One Stop Border Posts between Uganda and Kenya to lower waiting times at the border, thus reducing transport times (Soi and Nugent, 2017) and a similar initiative has recently been inaugurated at the border with Ethiopia. In the border town of Moyale, a One Stop Border Post became operational at the end of 2020 as part of the LAPSET Corridor project (TradeMark East Africa, 2020; see Chapter 4).

In addition to these factors, with the turn of the 21st century, infrastructure also clearly emerged as the space where the gains of Kenyan political and business elites – which historically relied upon land allocation – can be realised. Indeed, the coalescing of interests between state elites and transnational capital around infrastructural development highlights the growing centrality of infrastructure to Kenya's political economy. These practices will be discussed in more detail with regards to the case of Kenya and Chinese participation to the country's infrastructure development

agenda throughout the remainder of this chapter and thesis (see Chapter 4 and 6). Here, Boone's (2003) approach to the study of centre-periphery relations continues to be relevant in terms of its focus on the negotiation trajectories and bargaining powers of actors at the margins (focus of Chapter 4), however, the evolution of Kenya's geographies of power vis-à-vis infrastructure calls for a complimentary conceptual lens.

To better appreciate this linkage, it is useful to draw from literature in the field of critical infrastructure studies, which, since the mid-1990s has focused on the analysis of practices and discourses associated with infrastructure. Infrastructure were initially understood as "systems of substrates" (Star, 1999, p. 380) and thus 'invisible' infrastructure linked to material relations – in contrast with positivists understandings of infrastructure as being "out there" (see review by Larkin, 2013, p. 330). However, the understanding of infrastructure as 'invisible', means that they only become 'visible' in light of their breakdown (see Star and Ruhleder, 1996). As such, the study of practices and discourses associated with infrastructure would only be possible in light of an 'infrastructural inversion', which entails bringing to the 'forefront' what is in the 'background' (see Bowker and Star, 2000).

Nevertheless, as Larkin (2018, p. 186) highlights, "[v]isibility and invisibility are not ontological properties of infrastructure; instead, visibility or invisibility are made to happen as part of technical, political, and representational processes." The 'physical' nature of infrastructures lends itself as a political and electoral prompt (see Harvey and Knox, 2015; see section 3.4), as infrastructures are made to become visible in the spotlight of inauguration ceremonies, campaign speeches, and constituency visits. Thus, infrastructure can connect and disconnect places and people, while simultaneously producing and being the product of the surrounding environment (see Carse, 2012, 2014). As such, infrastructure should not be considered as technical objects – even when they are promoted as technical 'solutions' to longstanding connectivity and societal/economic issues (see amongst others Mitchell, 2002; Mukerji, 2011; see Chapter 4) – but are closely linked to political contestation, the different rationales for their provision, and uneven development (Carse, 2012, 2014; Harvey and Knox, 2012; Larkin, 2013, 2018; Easterling, 2014; Harvey, Jensen and Morita, 2017). In turn, infrastructure development is characterised by the coexistence of different agendas and visions, which emerge – and come into conflict – around infrastructure projects (see Chapter 4 in relations to the Lamu port project).

The multi-layered nature of infrastructure is also exemplified by the different ways in which they are realised. Although throughout his time in office (ended in 2013) Kibaki tripled the kilometres of road in the country, in some instances, the construction or maintenance of roads was the result

of local politicians' lobbying and campaign strategies. For instance, in the case of the Isiolo-Moyale road, several KANU local politicians used this road as a platform to point the finger at the NARC government for neglecting the needs of the Northern regions of Kenya (Kochore, 2016). Once again, *majimbo* was at the centre of discussion. After Kibaki's constitutional proposal was defeated in Kenya's first national referendum in 2005, the coalition party split, with Odinga forming the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) coalition – with KANU – which would eventually run against Kibaki in the elections of 2007/2008. During the 2007 campaign, Odinga himself visited the Isiolo-Moyale road just mentioned, taking credit for its refurbishment (Kochore, 2016), speaking to the significance infrastructure had assumed in national electoral campaigns and, as such, the greater political gains associated with infrastructure (see also Manji, 2015).

In the aftermath of the 2005 referendum, Kibaki dissolved cabinet and reshuffled the government, which harmed his already-crippled coalition. The year before the 2007 election, an article based on made-up numbers showed that the Kikuyu-inhabited Central Province was using more national resources than it was contributing (Chege, 2008b). This fuelled the discontent over the perceived Kikuyu dominance of the economy and business spheres, reinvigorating the call for more equitable distribution of national resources across the territory and the actualisation of *majimbo*. While Kibaki's campaign focused on his government's economic results, Odinga ran with the public discontent, and focused his campaign for the 2007 elections around the constitutional reform, promising to realise it within 6 months of being elected (Hornsby, 2012, 755). Following election day in December 2007, Odinga had the lead thanks to his strongholds in the Rift Valley and Western Kenya, but when the results from the Central Province and the Eastern Province came in, his lead narrowed as Kibaki's coalition advanced. The electoral college was delaying the announcement of the winning candidate, and suspicions of election rigging began to spread. Tensions grew and violence erupted once Kibaki was declared winner by a slight margin; during the post-electoral violence over 1000 people lost their lives.

Kibaki appointed the cabinet, but the ODM controlled parliament. In the meantime, international – but also national – pressure was mounting. On February 28th 2008, three months after elections, Kibaki and Odinga reached an agreement, which saw Kibaki remain president and the amendment of the constitution to establish the post of Prime Minister, filled by Odinga. The 2007-2008 post-election violence was a turning point in the history of Kenya's *majimbo*. After the appointment of a constitutional review commission, the coalition government published the final draft in May 2010, passed after an August referendum. The 2010 Constitutional Reform represented an “ambitious and rigorous experiment in democratic decentralisation”, and an initiative to foster the

formation of a cohesive political structure (Subera, 2013, p. 32). This constitutional reform entailed the formation of 47 counties and was accompanied by a devolution of power from the national government to the counties. The goal being equal distribution of resources and power, resources were expected to be allocated with the goal of reducing the inequalities that had characterised the country's centre-periphery relations.

Nonetheless, the degree to which pre-existing patterns of marginalisation and uneven development trajectories have been addressed has been questioned (see for instance Chome, 2015), and, in this thesis, these questions will be addressed further in Chapter 4 with regards to Lamu county. In the next chapter, the discussion on centre-periphery relations and the *majimbo* debate will represent the starting point for the analysis of the politics of infrastructural development in the periphery, particularly focusing on the relations of power amongst the national and county governments, as well as different national government's agencies involved in the development of infrastructure. To this end, the role of infrastructure in promoting imaginaries of the future (Larkin, 2013, 2018) and accumulation – possibly also future accumulation, as suggested by Mitchell (2020) – both of which have been introduced in the present chapter, will be discussed in relations to Lamu port. In order to do so, it is first necessary to further contextualise the push for infrastructural development in Kenya in the 21st century.

3.4 Kenya Vision 2030: infrastructure as a central pillar of political agendas and development initiatives

In 2008, building on the Economic Recovery Strategy discussed earlier, Kibaki's government published the *Kenya Vision 2030*, the national development agenda expected to “transform Kenya into a newly industrialising, globally competitive and middle-income country” by 2030 (GoK, 2014, p. 2). Similarly to the (many) developmental agendas of African nations³⁴ emerged in the same timeframe (see Péclard, Kernen and Khan-Mohammad, 2020; Nugent and Lamarque, forthcoming), the Kenya Vision 2030 encompasses three key pillars recognised to be fundamental for reaching the developmental agenda's goals: economic, social, and political. The economic pillar is based on reaching 10% GDP growth per year and sustaining it until 2030. The social pillar wants to foster and sustain cohesive, just, sustainable, and equitable development in the social sphere and from an environmental perspective. Lastly, the political pillar strives to create a people-centred

³⁴ see for example Tanzania Development Vision 2025.

and accountable democratic system. In order to reach these goals, Kenya Vision 2030 is mainly underpinned by macroeconomic stability, infrastructural development, increased focus on science and technology, land reforms, and security.

As discussed earlier, infrastructure continue to be considered as fundamental for growth and development, and connectivity has become central to the developmental agendas of many African nations (see Chapter 1 and 2; Nugent, 2018). Thus, the Kenya Vision 2030 relies on the development of key large, middle, and small-scale infrastructure projects to foster socio-economic development. This developmental agenda is aimed to the implementation of a vision underpinned by “a network of roads, railways, ports, airports, and water ways, and telecommunications” and, as such, “investment in the nation’s infrastructure will be given the highest priority” (Government of Kenya, 2007, p. viii). Between 2007 and 2016, the share of Kenya’s GDP allocated to the development of infrastructure in all sectors grew from around 4% in 2007 to over 7% in 2016 (see Figure 8). The share of Kenya’s GDP dedicated to Kenya’s infrastructure has recorded the highest increase, growing from just over 1% to over 2% (see Figure 9).

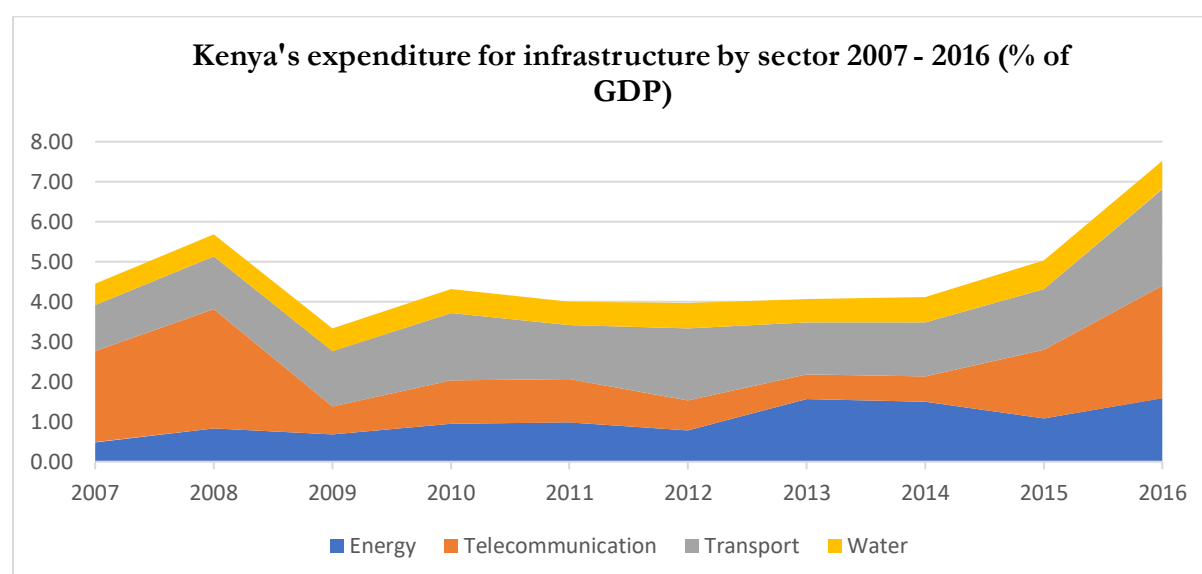


Figure 8: Kenya's expenditure for infrastructure by sector between (2007 – 2016) as percentage of GDP, source: compiled by author with data from Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2008, 2009, 2018, 2019, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017)

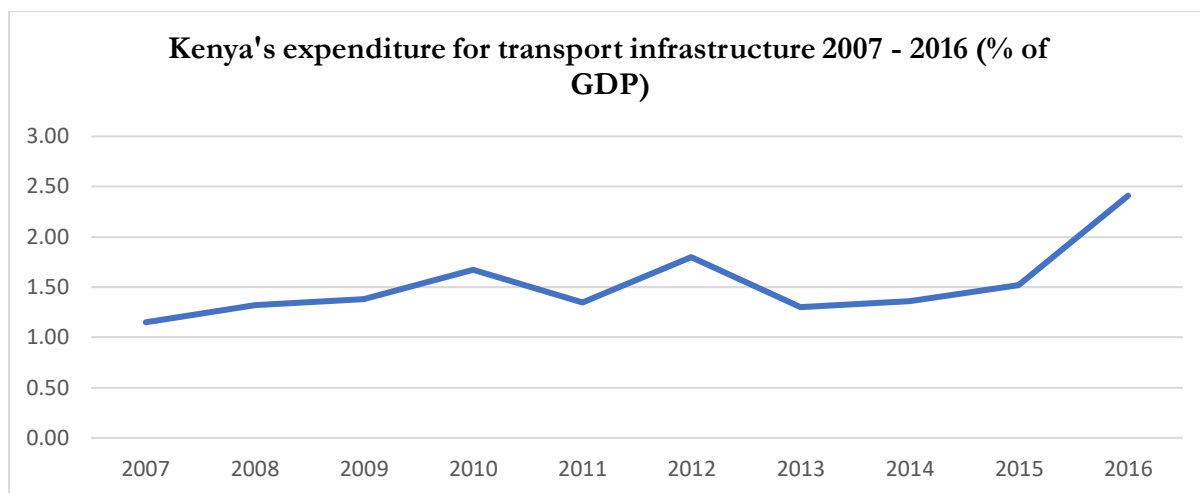


Figure 9: Kenya's expenditure for transport infrastructure (2007 - 2016) as percentage of GDP, source: compiled by author with data from the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2008, 2009, 2018, 2019, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017)

Kenya Vision 2030 is currently being pursued in successive 5-year stages, called Medium Term Plans. Under President Kibaki, the first Medium Term Plan (2008-2012) focused on continuing economic policies of the Economy Recovery Strategy (2003-2007) to revive economic growth and confidence after the electoral violence of 2007/2008, the development of infrastructure, and improve access to education (GoK, 2008). During this period, the agenda-setting phases of several major infrastructure projects began, including the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR and Lamu port, which later became flagship projects of the Kenya Vision 2030. Following the promulgation of the 2010 Constitution, the 2013 general election were the first election under the new devolved system, where county governments of the newly-formed 47 counties were elected for the first time. The second Medium Term Plan (2013-2017) for the implementation of Kenya Vision 2030 was inaugurated by President Uhuru Kenyatta, who won the 2013 elections against the then Prime Minister Raila Odinga. This stage of Kenya Vision 2030 heavily focused on implementing the previously-planned mega-infrastructure projects.

After being elected in 2013, President Uhuru Kenyatta went on a state visit to China (Wissenbach, 2019), demonstrating an interest in deepening relations amongst the two countries. The increasing focus on infrastructure development in line with the Kenya Vision 2030 signified further funding was needed, and Chinese banks did not shy away. The China Africa Research Initiative calculated that between 2014 and 2019 Chinese financiers committed a total of USD 5.9 billion for transport infrastructure in Kenya out of a total of almost USD 7.4 billion total in loans over the same period (CARI, 2021c). In comparison, ODA to Kenya's transport infrastructure amounted to a total of USD 0.85 million in the same period, over a total of USD 15 billion total (OECD, 2020). In Figure 10 below, the Chinese commitments to fund Kenyan transport infrastructure between 2014 and

2017 are compared to the ODA to Kenya's infrastructure. In 2014, the stark difference in Chinese financing is due to the loan agreement signed for the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR, a case to which I will return soon. Nevertheless, as already mentioned in the previous chapter, African governments continue to fund the majority of transport infrastructure projects (see ICA, 2018; see Chapter 2), as it is the case for the Lamu port project discussed in the next chapter.

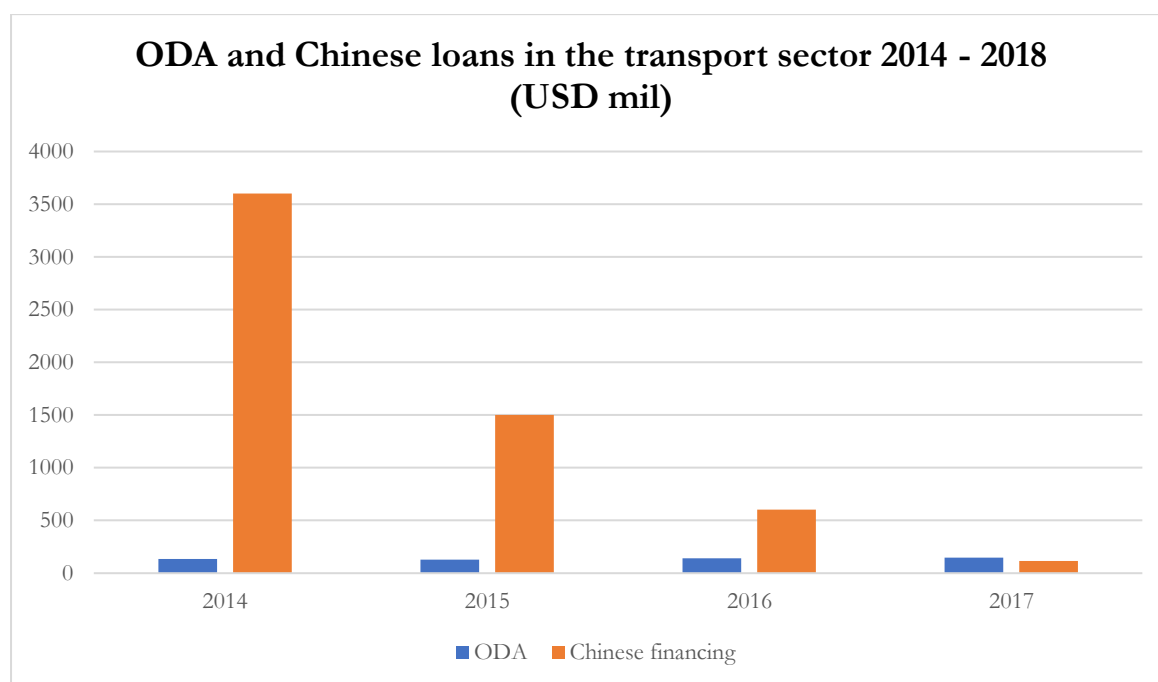


Figure 10: ODA and Chinese loans to Kenya's transport infrastructure 2014 – 2017 in USD million, source: compiled by author with data from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2020) and the China Africa Research Initiative (2021c)

The ‘infrastructural turn’ which has taken place in Kenya after the turn of the 21st century, particularly in light of the increase in national and international financing devoted to the development of infrastructure, has also meant that the infrastructure sector has become a prominent space for the profiteering of political and business elites. The large sums of national and international capital devoted to the development of infrastructure is conducive to lucrative activities (see for instance Amin and Thrift, 2017, p. 123), including corruption. As highlighted by the work of Carmody (2009, p. 1202) in Zambia, the channelling of foreign capital in a specific sector means that “some niches are opened up for a domestic rentier class” (see also the work of Ziso, 2018 on Chinese capital in Ethiopia). Similarly, Sino-African projects have been shown to “create novel linkages to broader accumulative processes” of African elites (Reboredo, 2021, p. 16) and I will now discuss this aspect with relations to the Chinese-financed and -built Nairobi-Mombasa SGR.

The case of the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR

Amongst Chinese-funded projects, the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR – flagship project of Kenya Vision 2030 – stands out as the most expensive project financed by China Exim Bank in the country. The Nairobi-Mombasa SGR Phase I – initially estimated at USD 2.5 billion – was funded by a concessional loan of USD 1.6 billion and a commercial loan of USD 2 billion disbursed by China Exim Bank, but the rise in project costs has yet to be explained, and rumours of corruption are widespread (Wissenbach and Yuan, 2017; Wissenbach, 2019). Within CRBC’s headquarters in Nairobi, the Chinese-funded Nairobi-Mombasa SGR is dubbed the “树大招风” (*shu da zhao feng*) project, a four-character expression literally translated into ‘the tall tree attracts the wind’, which points to the SGR being “a notorious project attracting criticism” (Interview, Senior Manager, Chinese SOE, Nairobi, 5th July 2019). Indeed, the public and media debate surrounding SGR began as soon as CRBC’s participation to the project was made public. Criticism was centred around the selection of CRBC as the contractor, inflated costs, and labour localisation (the latter of which will be discussed in the next chapters).

In 2014, the Public Investments Committee of Kenya observed that CRBC and its mother company CCCC had been barred from participating to WB projects from 2009 to 2017, after engaging in collusion and infringement of procurement regulations during a WB tender in the Philippines (PIC, 2014). Being barred from WB road and bridge projects did not imply that CRBC/CCCC could not carry out projects financed by other actors, nor WB projects in other sectors, but the fact that the company had entered “non-competitive, artificially high bid prices” in the Philippines (WB, 2009) resonated with pre-existing concerns in Kenya’s public procurement landscape. Already in 2003, an internal audit on resource mobilisation within the Kenyan infrastructure sector had revealed that road contractors were engaged in illicit and illegal practices, including profiteering (Hornsby, 2012, p. 709).

In the case of the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR, Kenya Railway Corporation had published a tender for the commissioning of a feasibility study in 2008, which was then quickly cancelled by the Ministry of Transport. In 2009, after the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Kenya and CRBC, the Chinese contractor carried out a feasibility study for the construction of the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR (PIC, 2014). It is believed that the difference in project cost can be explained through the channelling of funds to prominent political and business figures, an aspect which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

In the previous chapter, I also discussed the growing interest of Chinese actors in African transport corridors, and the case of the SGR also fits within this argument. Being a key component of the Northern Corridor, the SGR can be seen as a promoter of regional connectivity, and this aspect emerges in political speeches made by Kenyan leaders. For example, in November 2013, Kenyan president Uhuru Kenyatta laid the first foundation stone of the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR, stating that “the project will define my legacy as president of Kenya”, and also speaking to the significance of this project for the broader region, suggesting that “what we are doing here today will most definitely transform ... not only Kenya but the whole Eastern African region” (quoted in Ott, 2014). Indeed, the Northern Corridor is expected to produce a 1.5% increase in Kenya’s GDP (Senelwa, 2015). As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, traffic in Mombasa port is significantly reduced, which further strengthens the already-dire loan repayment plan, as the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR is generating just over half of the average USD 15 million/month needed to break even (Otieno, 2020a), further threatening the viability of this project.

Indeed, concerns over the feasibility of the Northern Corridor had first emerged in 2016, when Uganda signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Tanzania to run their pipelines through Tanzania to the port of Tanga, instead of through Kenya (Republic of Uganda and United Republic of Tanzania, 2017).³⁵ This brought to light the complex competition dynamics amongst Kenya and Tanzania, which have been competing to improve connectivity with landlocked Uganda (see Lamarque, forthcoming). For instance, both Kenya and Tanzania are developing a transport corridor, the Northern Corridor and the Central Corridor, respectively. In its conception phases, the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR was commissioned after the mutual commitments of Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda to the development of a railway infrastructure along the Northern corridor. In 2019, after Rwanda announced that it would run its SGR to Tanzania, Uganda announced its refurbishment project for the old railway stretching from Kampala to Malaba, instead of building a brand-new SGR (Taylor, 2020), leading one to wonder whether the future of the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR is at stake.

The case of Nairobi-Mombasa SGR is also central to highlight the prominent political role of infrastructure. On June 1st 2017, the SGR – completed two years and a half ahead of schedule (and just in time for elections) – was inaugurated by Kenyatta during his speech to the nation on the anniversary of Kenyan independence, Madaraka day. In this speech, Kenyatta reiterated the relevance of the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR (also known as the Madaraka Express) to Kenya’s

³⁵ This aspect will be discussed further in Chapter 4, as similar concerns also arose in the development of the LAPSET Corridor.

national development and the country's position in the region, and also took the opportunity to bring the country's attention to his candidacy for a second term, less than two months before election day.

Madaraka Express [the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR], Ladies and Gentlemen, is a true living symbol of the journey we are undertaking together. It is the foundation for better incomes for our farmers, manufacturers and other businesses. On it rests our dominance as a regional hub, opening up opportunities for new markets for our goods and services, and letting us compete against other ambitious countries for the manufacturing investment that will bring jobs for our sons and daughters. [...] This is a moment for boldness: henceforth, our politics must be shaped by a desire to take Kenya forward to prosperity for all. Brothers and Sisters, on Monday, I submitted my application to serve you for another term, in preparation for that day in August when the future of your motherland will lie in your hands. (Kenyatta, 2017)

Again, the concrete and 'visible' nature of physical infrastructure – in this case a railway – offers an excellent opportunity for political campaigning (see also Harvey and Knox, 2015). Since the deployment of infrastructure as political and electoral prompts suggests that these projects serve political objectives (see also Van Der Westhuizen, 2007), it also means that their implementation is similarly closely related to political cycles (as also observed by Lakmeeharan *et al.*, 2020). This also speaks to the fact that the prioritisation of infrastructure projects – particularly those funded by the Kenyan government – relates to the agendas (and possible gains) of the political elites and their close business elites (more in Chapter 6).

This trend can be traced to the previous infrastructural boom across the African continent in the 1960s and 1970s, whereby infrastructure projects “generated prestige, personal funds and clients” for African elites “whose authority and legitimacy rested on the display of wealth and the capacity to distribute sinecures” to their associates (Dimier, 2014, p. 137). As Taylor (2020, p. 43) suggests, “Kenya's ruling elites are not motivated to support major investment decisions such as the SGR on the basis of technical or economic arguments but rather on what they can get out the situation”, with “short-termism” as the common thread. This trajectory was already discussed in the previous sections, which highlighted the closeness of business and political elites and the instrumental role of infrastructure to the profiteering of said groups.

As infrastructure development is highly politicised, the stakes for signing financing or investment agreements for their realisation are also high. Specifically with regards to Chinese financing, loans

from Chinese financiers might appear appealing for the ‘lack’ of political conditionalities, yet, the economic conditions for the disbursement of loans remain questionable (see Chapter 2). It is thus necessary to further reflect on the critical conjuncture between Kenya’s ‘infrastructural turn’ and broader Sino-African engagement trajectories. In terms of the internationalisation of Chinese SOEs, constructing infrastructure financed by Chinese (state-owned) financiers contributes to entering a specific market and beginning to build relationships with political and business elites operating in said contexts (see Chapter 6). As such, the availability of state support in the form of access to preferential credit, export buyer’s credit, or subsidised exchange rate conversion clearly plays a role in the internationalisation journey of Chinese SOEs. Nevertheless, as will be shown in Chapter 6, CRBC’s journey in Kenya has not been characterised by the commissioning of Chinese-funded infrastructure alone, but also by the awarding of EPC contracts for non-Chinese funded infrastructure, which is closely linked to the extent to which, over the decades, Chinese contractors have become embedded in the Kenyan political economy of infrastructural development.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the political economy of infrastructure development in Kenya, suggesting that the ‘infrastructural turn’ which took place at the beginning of the 21st century meant that Kenya’s political and business (elites’) gains are now also concentrated around the development of infrastructure. In the initial sections of this chapter, inspired by Boone’s (2003) work on centre-periphery relations, I began building a multitemporal and multispatial narrative of the political economy of resource allocation in Kenya. Specifically, in the first section, I investigated the relationship between resource allocation and the political sphere since the last decade of the colonial era and the death of the first president of independent Kenya Jomo Kenyatta. In doing so, I underscored the relevance of land allocation to the creation of increasingly interconnected business and political elites. This section highlighted the connections between resource allocation to the Central Region and the Rift Valley and the resulting marginalisation of other regions, particularly the Northern regions of the country.

In the second section, I discussed the role of business and political elites in the unequal spatial allocation of state resources, highlighting, once again, the continuity in the marginalisation of the Northern regions of Kenya. The state’s disregard for the ‘pastoral’ North – echoing Boone’s (2003, p. 36) model of non-incorporation – meant that these areas remained peripheral to the patterns of accumulation of political elites at the centre. Moi’s time in office was characterised by external

financial assistance from Western financiers and the associated conditionalities aimed at the liberalisation of the Kenyan economy – the SAPs. Simultaneously, the rise to power of President Moi also represented a shift in Sino-Kenyan relations, which improved substantially. During his time in office, Chinese state-owned contractors began operating in Kenya and infrastructure financing from Chinese actors began flowing to Kenya. However, the economic stagnation in the 1980s and 1990s and the prescription of privatisation reforms under the SAPs affected the ability of the Moi administration to retain control over the allocation of resources, which, in turn, contributed to the formation of the NARC opposition coalition that won the 2002 elections.

In the third section, I explored the context surrounding the ‘infrastructural turn’ in Kenya’s developmental agenda, marked by the publication in 2003 of the Economic Recovery Strategy during Kibaki’s NARC government. Heavily reliant on increasing connectivity, this development agenda marked the beginning of a trend whereby the accumulation processes of political and business elites are realised around infrastructure. Historically reliant on the allocation of land, profiteering is now also linked around infrastructure projects. This resonates with similar findings in critical infrastructure studies, highlighting the relevance of a conceptualisation of infrastructure that accounts for political contestation and accumulation – but also dispossession, as will be discussed in the next chapter. Kibaki’s time in office was also characterised by the renewed call for *majimbo*, which culminated in the 2010 constitutional reform and the formation of 47 counties, a devolution process expected to address the unequal allocation of resources. This aspect will be discussed further in the next chapter, which will focus on the development trajectories of the Lamu county.

In the last section of this chapter, I discussed the conjunction between the continuation of a development vision underpinned by infrastructure development – set out by the Kenya Vision 2030 – and the increasing prominence of Sino-African engagement since the beginning of the 21st century. The increase in resources allocated to the development of infrastructure projects and the financing from foreign actors, particularly Chinese financiers, highlights the Kenyan government’s commitment to the development of infrastructure projects. Nevertheless, in this section, I problematised the connections between political agendas and infrastructure, exploring the case study of the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR. From this example, it emerged that infrastructure has undoubtedly become a key tool for political campaigning and profiteering (and this last aspect will be further discussed in Chapter 6), thus prompting the need to further explore said dynamics.

In conclusion, this chapter investigated the ‘infrastructural turn’ experienced in Kenya at the conjunction of the African continental integration agenda and Chinese actors’ spatial expansion in

the African construction market. The encounter of these two layers has been central to the identification of infrastructure as a site for accumulation practices by Kenyan political and business elites. This argument will be the basis of Chapter 4, which will further discuss the Kenya Vision 2030 in relations to the previously-marginalised Northern regions of Kenya – specifically focusing on LAPSSET Corridor and its component Lamu port – and on the contestation surrounding said infrastructure projects.

Chapter 4

LAPSSET Corridor and Lamu port: emerging controversies in the implementation of the national development vision

In the previous chapter, I discussed the increasing political significance of infrastructure projects and their prominent role within Kenya's current developmental agenda. Under colonial rule, the development of infrastructure was at the forefront of the British Empire's plan for the construction of the *Imperial Link*, a system of infrastructure aimed at consolidating the powers of white settlers and the development of their economic activities (see also Monson, 2009, p. 19), which resulted in a disregard for infrastructure development at the margins. After independence, the strive of political elites to retain control over the allocation of resources perpetuated some of the pre-existing geographies of power, particularly with regards to the non-integration of the peripheries, as these areas were not considered to be (agriculturally) productive (see Boone, 2003). Through an analysis of the evolution of resource allocation patterns and emerging trajectories of infrastructural development, the previous chapter suggested that an 'infrastructural turn' took place at the beginning of the 21st century vis-à-vis Kenya's developmental agenda. The latter is now heavily focused on the development of infrastructure, signalling that accumulation practices of Kenyan business and political elites – and particularly their profiteering – is now also concentrated around infrastructure projects.

With the promulgation of the Kenya Vision 2030, the promotion of development initiatives in 'new frontiers' of Kenya (Mosley and Watson, 2016; see also Elliot, 2016) meant that historically-marginalised regions are now at the centre of the country's development plan. In order to analyse the implications of this shift, which is underpinned by an effort (of the state) towards the integration of the periphery in the economic (and political) life of the nation, it is necessary to reflect on the limitations of Boone's (2003) model of centre-periphery relations. As she also acknowledges, the four typologies of centre-periphery engagement she has defined would need to be revised in light of the different "social configuration" of rural societies in regions characterised by widespread resettlement schemes (2003, p. 327), as it is the case for the periphery of Kenya. Thus, in this chapter, I will continue to retain the focus on politics at the margins, in agreement with Boone's (2003) analytical attention to variations in core-periphery (power) relations.

Nevertheless, as anticipated in Chapter 3, I will directly speak to conceptualisations of infrastructure – and megaprojects, such as transport corridors – as the site for power struggles.

Thus, in the present chapter, I will specifically focus on infrastructure projects planned for Northern Kenya as part of Kenya Vision 2030, to suggest that the devolved political system has brought to light a diverse array of often diverging agendas, while simultaneously not altering the centralised decision-making processes. Amongst the infrastructure planned as part of the LAPSSET Corridor, I will focus specifically on Lamu port to analyse the controversies emerging amongst the several actors involved. The origins of the current project for Lamu port can be traced back to a few years after independence, but echoes of previous promises of infrastructural development, as well as the rich maritime history of this county – what Massey (2005, p. 102) calls “territorial legacies” – can be identified in today’s project.

Thus, I will explore the intersection of these legacies with current development plans for Lamu port, focusing on specific instances of controversy that speak to the proliferation of diverging agendas. In this case study, the landscape of actors is further crowded by the participation of the Chinese contractor CRBC, which adds an additional intersecting trajectory – that of broader debates in Sino-African engagement – to the analysis of centre-periphery relations in Kenya. In this chapter, I will analyse different controversies involving the Chinese contractor building Lamu port and national/county-level actors to question the extent to which Chinese engagement in ‘the periphery’ is reinforcing the reproduction of pre-existing imbalances of power. Through examples from labour relations, I will posit that, while a high degree of centralisation of the decision-making processes for the Lamu port project suggests the reproduction of pre-existing patterns of marginalisation (as the state tries to incorporate the periphery in the national developmental agenda), the presence of a Chinese contractor provided the county government with some room for manoeuvre to negotiate on behalf of the Lamu communities.

The chapter is structured as follows. In the first section, drawing from previous literature on megaproject and infrastructure development, I will discuss the LAPSSET Corridor project in light of the evolving centre-periphery relations. In the second section, I will contextualise the current Lamu port project, reflecting on previous plans to develop a port in Northern Kenya and the initial funding challenges. In the third section, I will introduce the institutional structure deployed to implement Lamu port and LAPPSET Corridor components more broadly: the LCDA. Here, I will discuss the diverging agendas of different national-level state and parastatal actors, namely the Ministry of Petroleum and Mining and the KPA, through the case study of the ‘oil jetty debate’. In the fourth section, I will shift the focus of analysis to the involvement of the Lamu county

government after the 2013 elections, reflecting upon the diverging agendas of national and county governments and those amongst county-level actors. In the fifth section, I will shift the focus on the supply chain for the construction of Lamu port, which will shed light on the negotiation trajectories – and agency – of non-state actors. These last two sections will reflect upon the presence of a Chinese contractor in Kenya, highlighting the instances that point to their embeddedness in the Kenyan context.

4.1 Kenya vision 2030 and the margins: the origins and development of LAPSET Corridor

Beyond its overarching goal of transforming the country into “a newly industrialising, middle-income country providing a high quality of life to all its citizens by the year 2030” (GoK, 2011, p. 9), Kenya’s developmental agenda also envisions that “[b]y 2030, it will become impossible to refer to any region of our country as ‘remote’” (GoK, 2007, p. viii). As discussed in the previous chapter, Northern Kenya has historically been a marginalised space, whose resources have been not only redirected towards the development of regions considered to be ‘productive’, but also drained, particularly in terms of pastoral resources. Northern Kenya is home to agricultural and pastoral communities regarded by the state as ‘backwards’, inhabiting ‘remote’ regions, and often “an inconvenience” (Mosley and Watson, 2016, p. 453; see also Cormack and Kurewa, 2018). In the blueprint of Kenya Vision 2030 dedicated specifically to Northern Kenya – the Kenya Vision 2030 for Northern Kenya and other Arid Lands – the implementation of infrastructure and other developmental initiatives, such as the 2012 National Policy for the Sustainable Development of Northern Kenya and other Arid Lands (see Odhiambo, 2013), is expected to “turn history on its head” (GoK, 2011, p. 12).

This fits within broader discourses on the ways in which development initiatives and the imaginaries they embody “discursively construct the peripheral areas as empty and unproductive” (Mosley and Watson, 2016, p. 455), and thus often exist in a continuum with previous patterns of marginalisation, as it is the case for Northern Kenya (see Chapter 3). Yet, the state rhetoric of ‘opening up’ Northern Kenya, and integrating these regions into “the social, economic and political life [of the country]” (GoK, 2011, p. 12) as part of the Kenya Vision 2030 agenda, represents a shift, at least a rhetorical one, in approach towards the historically marginalised counties. This shift reminds of what Harvey and Knox (2012) observed in Peru, specifically the enchantment associated with infrastructure, which are believed to be able to deliver the development envisioned

by the state. Similarly, in Kenya, the focus on infrastructure’s “transformational power” (Mosley and Watson, 2016, p. 453) – that of realising the national integration agenda and development goals – underpins the infrastructure planned for Northern Kenya, namely the LAPSSET Corridor. Simultaneously, as argued in Chapter 3, this also presents the prospect for profiteering practices and lucrative land grabs in the (previously ‘untapped’) peripheries.

LAPSSET corridor’s slogan *building Africa’s transformative and game changer infrastructure to deliver a just and prosperous Kenya* speaks to the renewed push and focus towards infrastructure as drivers of development, as well as to the increasing prominence of infrastructure in political discourses discussed in Chapter 2 and 3. Being a flagship project of the national developmental agenda Kenya Vision 2030, LAPSSET Corridor is also similarly grounded on the rhetoric of ‘opening up’ or connecting ‘remote’ areas of the country and integrating them in the national economy. The strategy underlining the Kenya Vision 2030 is that investment in infrastructure is key in Northern Kenya, which is now viewed as a new space for development, as opposed to being previously considered ‘empty’ (Mosley and Watson, 2016). Thus, the Kenyan government’s commitment to (financially) kick-start the LAPSSET Corridor project, through the funding of Lamu port mentioned in Chapter 1, was not only motivated by the fact that infrastructure projects are a key pillar of the national developmental agenda, but also by the political need for the implementation of a development (mega)project in previously-marginalised regions of the country.

LAPSSET Corridor encompasses a set of proposed infrastructure projects (see map on the next page), totalling to seven components: (i) roads, (ii) railway, (iii) pipelines, (iv) port, (v) airports, (vi) resorts, (vii) dam (on the Tana river). In the eyes of the government of Kenya, the proposed highways and railway are expected to connect Lamu to Kenyan economic hubs – such as Isiolo – and to the borders of Ethiopia and South Sudan, while the deep-water port in Lamu (Manda Bay) will be the point of connection with global shipping routes and, thus, global capital. Nationally, LAPSSET Corridor is expected to have an impact on the lives of the 15 million Kenyans residing in the Northern regions of the country, improving their job opportunities, while simultaneously ‘linking’ them to the rest of Kenya (LCDA, 2016). Beyond the official governmental rhetoric just discussed, LAPSSET Corridor has been described as a “project in search of a rationale” (Browne, 2015, p. 5), “not interesting” (Interview, Counsellor, State Ministry, Nairobi, 23rd November 2018), and even a “waste of time, waste of money” (Interview, General Manager, Shipping Line, Mombasa, 8th March 2019).

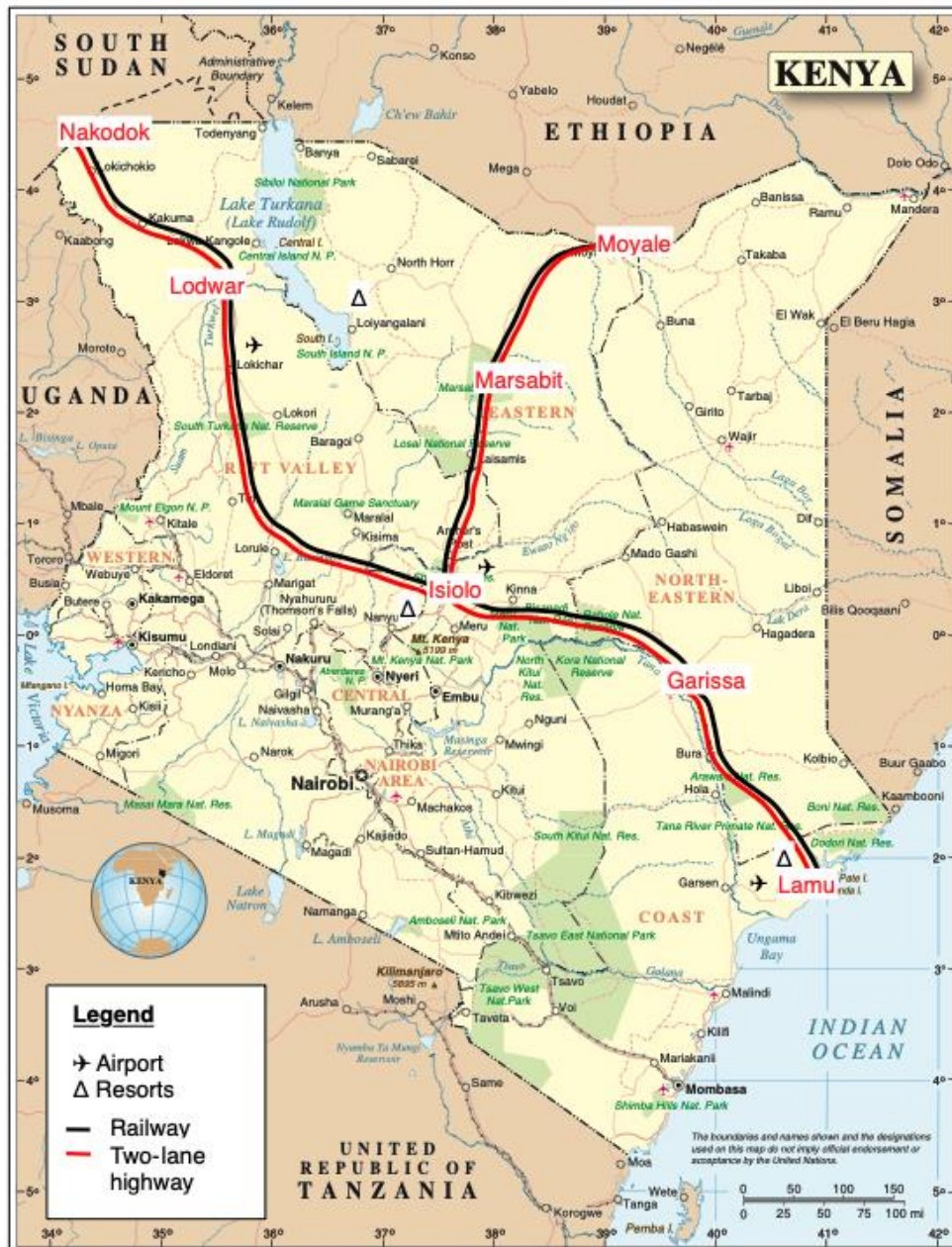


Figure 11: LAPSSET Corridor Map, source: adapted from the United Nations' maps

Nonetheless, since its launch in 2011, LAPSSET Corridor has been at the centre of national and international discourse. The Kenyan government has demonstrated a strong belief in the economic feasibility and the rationale of this project, avidly defending it and tirelessly promoting it on several platforms, including the FOCAC and OBOR. As mentioned in the previous chapters, LAPSSET Corridor has been engulfed by the OBOR umbrella in 2019, and Chinese actors have indeed demonstrated some interest in this project – in terms of natural resource extraction (see Section 4.3) and participation to the construction of additional components (see Chapter 6). Even when the scarce interest from international funders became transparent (see Section 4.2), the Kenyan

government saw this as an opportunity to step up and begin funding some of the LAPSSET Corridor components themselves. This commitment resonates with Hirschman's (2015, p. 25) principle of the 'Hiding Hand', according to which planning actors are often overconfident and overly positive about the feasibility and lack of challenges to megaprojects. Thus, the 'Hiding Hand' is effectively shielding planners from anticipating future challenges – which will require costly adjustments – allowing them to start the implementation and eventually (try to) find creative solutions.

Hirschman (2015) traces this phenomenon to two explanations. Firstly, planners' failure to recognise the non-replicability of a model or project from a different context, thus leading them to be optimistic on its feasibility. At times, this results in decision-making taking place before the feasibility has even been evaluated (as observed in World Bank, 2010). In the case of LAPSSET Corridor, this is related to the close connections with the Kenya Vision 2030, which not only predates the feasibility studies for this transport corridor, but is also underpinned by the 'connectivity' mantra discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. Secondly, Hirschman also recognises the predominance of the technical rationale and narrative (as also discussed by Mukerji, 2011), whereby promoters of development projects present them as if experts have already carried out a comprehensive evaluation and, therefore, have envisioned possible challenges and their solutions.

In short, Hirschman suggests that costs are underestimated and benefits are overestimated. In practice, the benefits are usually lower than expected, while costs are higher, a phenomenon also referred to as the 'paradox of megaprojects' (Flyvbjerg, Bruzelius and Rothengatter, 2003; see also Flyvbjerg, 2014; Flyvbjerg and Sunstein, 2016). With regards to Kenyan megaprojects, Müller-Mahn, Mkutu and Kioko (2021) suggest that they should not only be studied according to their outcomes, but also in light of the symbolism they embody, in an echo of the previously mentioned debates in critical infrastructure studies.

Indeed, the overestimated benefits and underestimated costs should be weighed against the "socio-political tensions that emerge as a result of infrastructural development" (Lesutis, 2019, p. 601; see also Enns, 2019). The regions LAPSSET Corridor encompasses are seen as a 'blank slate' to build on; this idea, in the construction industry, is generally referred to as *greenfield*. Greenfield is a term used to represent projects from the ground up, without previous constraints (Dunning and Lundan, 2008, p. 286). This resonates with Scott's (1998) high-modernism, which is strictly linked to a "rational design of social order" characterised by the necessity to break from the past, to turn the page. Scott (1998, p. 89) adds that "the temporal emphasis of high-modernism is almost exclusively

on the future” as “[t]he past is an impediment, a history that must be transcended; the present is the platform for launching plans for a better future”. In the case of LAPSSET, the past in question is indeed that of centre-periphery (power) relations imbued of marginalisation, evidenced by the non-integration of the margins in the national political and economic spheres. The ‘greenfield narrative’ suggests that planning actors and promoters of mega-infrastructure projects – including transport corridors – believe that “modernity and efficiency cannot be instilled upon old infrastructure” (Hönke and Cuesta-Fernandez, 2018, p. 11). Yet, large-scale infrastructure is often built upon pre-existing (material) projects and narratives.

This aspect was already discussed in relations to the OBOR initiative, which is coming to encompass pre-existing corridors and projects around the globe, functioning as a label rather than a coordinated initiative, but it also emerges in the LAPSSET Corridor. In an analysis of the *longue durée* of connectivity initiatives in Northern Kenya, Enns and Bersaglio (2020) highlight the continuity of colonial legacies of spatial planning, suggesting that current national development plans echo the logics of colonial administrations. Since infrastructure has historically represented as a tool for state power representation (see for instance Scott, 1998), Lesutis (2019, p. 603) points to LAPSSET as a “practice of territorialisation” by the Kenyan state, which is projecting power through infrastructural development initiatives in the periphery (see also Herbst, 2000, p. 75). Nevertheless, the previously-mentioned positioning of Northern Kenya vis-à-vis the country’s political economy in the 20th century highlights the relevance of shifting accumulation practices to this infrastructure project. Simultaneously, it also highlights the relevance of a historical analysis of corridor development plans (see also Aalders, 2020; Chome *et al.*, 2020).

Indeed, LAPSSET Corridor is a ‘not-so-new’ greenfield project. The LAPSSET Corridor stems from the Rail/Road, Oil Pipeline, Oil Refinery, Lamu Port, and Airports (ROOLA) Project, a connectivity initiative of the early 2000s, aimed to making Lamu the gateway from Sudan to the Indian Ocean, partially financed by the New Partnership for Africa’s Development. ROOLA was abandoned due to increasing criticisms directed to the proposed financiers, particularly the government of Kuwait, who was rumoured to have proposed to “finance the project in exchange for [Kenya] ceding control over the allocation of contracts” (Browne, 2015, p. 16). Against this background, the current development vision for the ‘remote’ and ‘to-be-connected’ Northern Kenya are juxtaposed to visions of what the future could hold. As discussed in Chapter 3 with regards to infrastructure as an electoral campaign tool, infrastructure’s ‘visibility’ (Larkin, 2018) is accompanied by their positioning within specific agendas. The imaginaries associated to and created by infrastructural development have been extensively discussed in scholarly literature (see

amongst others Harvey and Knox, 2012, 2015), suggesting that “the provision of infrastructure is intimately caught up with the sense of shaping modern society and realising the future” (Larkin, 2013, p. 332).

As Lesutis (2019, p. 604) highlights, LAPSET Corridor’s goal of connecting Northern Kenya to national – and global – capital instils upon this megaproject a proposed vision of the future, represented by “glossy and shiny building in state-of-the-art future cities.” Beyond the proposed resort cities Lesutis refers to in his work, a metropolis expected to attract 1.25 million inhabitants by 2050 is being planned in the area surrounding Lamu port (Japan Port Consultants, 2011), triggering an increase in land acquisition by elites within and outwith Lamu county (Interview, Advisor, Executive Office of the President, Mombasa, 11th December 2018; Interview, Former County Executive, Mombasa, 14th December 2018; see also Chome, *et al.*, 2020). This example resonates with Elliott’s (2016) economies of anticipation emerging along the LAPSET corridor route (see also Greiner, 2016; Chome, *et al.*, 2020). The ‘opening up’ of the Northern part of Kenya and the imaginaries that come with these processes are not only reshaping space through the construction of physical infrastructure, but also people’s perceptions of their futures (Enns and Bersaglio, 2020) and their identities (Kochore, 2016), an aspect which will be explored further in relations to Lamu port later in the chapter. It is important here to remember that, as much as infrastructure are envisioned to promote ‘connectivity’ and ‘integration’, they also imply disconnection and dispossession.

Indeed, some might “end up being marginalised by the ‘modernity’ to come” (Lesutis, 2019, p. 605; see also Appel, Anand, and Gupta, 2018; Harvey, 2018), echoing Massey’s understanding of power relations as simultaneously encompassing patterns of inclusion and exclusion (Massey, 1993). Here, it is crucial to return to the narrative of enquiry adopted by Boone (2003), which implies focusing on the trajectories of politics in the periphery. For instance, some members of the county government in Lamu argue that the LAPSET Corridor still leaves Lamu people as “mere spectators”, as opposed to participants of development initiatives (Interview, Senior Official, County Government, Lamu, 13th July 2019). This relates to the historical spatial patterns of marginalisation, which are not new in relations to infrastructural projects. As will be discussed in more details later in the chapter, the first proposal of Lamu port was promoted in the 1970s, but never materialised. The promise of infrastructural development lingered in Lamu newspapers long after it had been abandoned, still being discussed in the late 1980s (The Nation, 1988). This unrealised initiative reinforced the unequal geographies of power between the national government

and counties in the periphery, the rectification of which was the main objective of the 2010 Constitutional reform.

As mentioned earlier, the extent to which the formation of 47 counties and the 2013 elections of county governments has addressed marginalisation and unequal allocation of resources remains questionable. Although certain mandates, such as security, have not been devolved, overall, county governments are responsible for the management of the government funds allocated to them by the National Treasury. However, the devolved system has also “created multiple opportunities for a diverse range of actors” (Chome, 2020, p. 4). In other words, the proliferation of state and parastatal actors involved in the development of LAPSET, and specifically Lamu port, has given birth to controversies amongst these actors, while also representing an opportunity for the renegotiation of centre-periphery relations. This means that a diverse array of often diverging agendas, exist amongst national-level (para)state actors, the national and the county governments, and within the county government, examples of which will be discussed in the following sections. Before doing so, I will first contextualise the Lamu port project.

4.2 Contextualising the Lamu port project: 50 years in the making?

The first talks on the possibility of developing Lamu port were in the 1970s, when French consultant Renardet-Sauti identified Lamu as the best location for a second port in Kenya. This report suggested that, due to the lack of connectivity infrastructure in the area, Lamu port should be considered as a long-term project (Renardet-Sauti, 1977). As already mentioned in the previous chapter, funds were instead directed to the expansion of Mombasa port, which did not require further investment in other related infrastructure (Hoyle, 1983). Lamu port was shelved until 2004, when the Integrated National Transport Policy – a government initiative designed to integrate development goals with infrastructure needs (speaking to the actualisation of the ‘infrastructural turn’) – was being drafted. The Kenyan government was focusing on infrastructure as a tool for integrating the national economy further, and Lamu port was revived as part of ROOLA Project to then be abandoned, as mentioned earlier, due to concerns of malpractice (Bremner, 2017).

In 2011, the Lamu port project was re-planned as part of the broader connectivity initiative LAPSET Corridor. The current Lamu port project was envisioned to have 32 deep sea berths (LCDA, 2020) and it is now expected to have a total of 23 deep sea berths of 400 meters length (Interview, Director, State Department, Nairobi, 29th January 2019). As the table below shows,

Lamu port is planned to be developed in two main phases. Phase I, focus on this chapter, includes the completion of berths 1, 2, and 3, and is being financed by the Kenyan government for a construction cost of USD 480 mil.

Table 3: Lamu Port Details

	<i>Components</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Total cost</i>	<i>Funder</i>	<i>Contractor</i>
<i>Phase I</i>	Berth 1	100%	USD 480 million	Government of Kenya (GoK)	CRBC
	Berth 2	95%			
	Berth 3	75%			
<i>Phase II</i>	Berths 4-23	Masterplan currently being developed	tbd	PPPs	tbd

(compiled by author, percentages of completion as of May 2021)

In 2011, the Government of Kenya commissioned the feasibility study for Lamu port and LAPSSET Corridor to Japan Port Consultants. Following the results of the feasibility study, in 2012, the ground-breaking ceremony for the construction of Lamu port took place, and, in 2013 LCDA – the overseeing body holding the mandate for the development of LAPSSET Corridor (which will be discussed in more details later in this chapter) – was established. In 2013, the environmental study for Lamu port Phase I was carried out by the National Environment Management Authority, and the tender for the construction was awarded to the Chinese state-owned CRBC, subsidiary of CCCC. The award of the Lamu port tender to a Chinese contractor highlights a broader trend which sees an increasing number of Chinese construction companies participating in infrastructure development projects not funded by Chinese actors.

In 1995, Chinese construction firms won 20% of WB tenders outside of China, while in 2013 tenders awarded to Chinese firms were 70% of total WB tenders outside China (Zhang and Gutman, 2015); this trend has been observed in Ethiopia (Cheru, 2016), Ghana (Kernen and Lam, 2014), and Angola (Corkin, 2012). In 2016, around 50% of international EPC contracts in sub-Saharan Africa were won by Chinese contractors (Sun, Jayaram and Kassiri, 2017). The growing participation of Chinese contractors to the development of African infrastructure projects suggests that Chinese contractors are moving beyond Chinese-funded projects and are increasingly participating to international public tenders funded by an array of different actors. In turn, widespread concerns of malpractice and corruption – in light of the private nature of the contractor selection process (see Chapter 2) and the pre-existing narratives in the Kenyan

construction sector (see Chapter 3) – in the tendering processes and awarding of construction contracts for Chinese-funded projects are resulting in growing calls for transparency and accountability, a common thread in this work.

Table 4: Lamu port Phase I timeline

<i>Year</i>	<i>Activity</i>
2011	Government of Kenya commissions feasibility study for Lamu port and LAPSET to Japan Port Consulting
2012	Ground-breaking ceremony for Lamu port Phase I construction
2013	LCDA is formed
2013	Environmental study for Lamu port Phase I by the National Environment Management Authority
2013	Tender for Lamu port Phase I awarded to CRBC
2014	EPC contract between LCDA and CRBC signed
2016	Construction of Phase I begins
2018	Tender open for transactional board for Phase II
2019	Berth 1 of Phase I complete
2020	Berth 2 of Phase I complete

(compiled by author)

The EPC contract for Phase I was signed between CRBC and the KPA in 2014, and construction began in 2016. In 2018, LCDA published a tender for the selection of a transactional board, which refers to a group of consultants who are expected to advise the LCDA on Phase II. The table above highlights the timeline for the current Lamu port project. Currently, the LCDA is developing a masterplan for Lamu port Phase II, which includes a detailed plan of the remaining berths. The Phase II berths will then be commissioned through PPP agreements with interested parties, which will be able to ‘pick and choose’ from the masterplan of berths (see Figure 13 on the next page for the complete design of Lamu port).

In the planning of a port infrastructure, the site-bound nature of seaports raises several issues related to either natural features of a specific location or financing, as they cannot be divided into sections, as a road would (Hirschman, 2015, p. 80). This characteristic of ports leads to an increased emotional and political attachment to the project by decision-making and planning actors. For the Lamu port project, this was evident in the early stages of development. In looking for funding for Lamu port Phase I international financiers were approached first. The WB and the AfDB both launched studies to gather information on existing traffic in Mombasa port and predicted demand in Lamu from shipping lines active in the country, both national and international (Interview, Regional Manager, International Shipping Line, Mombasa, 14th February 2019). The Western shipping lines (amongst the most active in Kenya) consulted by said donors disclosed concerns

over cargo demand in Northern Kenya and South Sudan, and the lack of connective infrastructure stemming from the port. Indeed, the tender for the construction of the Lamu - Garissa Road was only awarded by the Kenya National Highway Authority at the end of April 2021, and it will be built by CCCC (Global Construction Review, 2021; see Chapter 6).



Figure 12: Lamu port design, source: Japan Port Consultants (2011)

In addition to the lack of connectivity infrastructure linked to the port, diverting traffic to Lamu after its completion raised concerns amongst shipping line managers, who questioned the demand for this project. Geopolitical factors play a big role in shipping lines' interests in Lamu port. In the early 2010s, when the feasibility study was commissioned to Japan Port Consultants, South Sudan had just gained independence and its political situation was fairly stable, thus driving up the demand for cargo. However, while Lamu port is being constructed, South Sudan's demand is declining due to the government's instability and growing violence in the civil war started in 2013 (Interview, Regional Manager, International Shipping Line, Mombasa, 14th February 2019; Interview, Manager, International Shipping Line, Mombasa, 8th March 2019; Interview, Manager, International Shipping Line, Mombasa, 26th March 2019). As Hirschman (2015, p. 28) suggests "the promise of some sort of utopia is most characteristic of larger-scale undertakings [...] because they are likely to require heavy initial sacrifices", and Lamu port project was no exception.

As mentioned earlier, when the scoping studies appeared inconclusive, the Kenyan government of former President Kibaki resolved to fund the first phase of construction themselves. This decision was guided by the necessity to show commitment to LAPSET Corridor partner countries South Sudan and Ethiopia, and to international financiers alike. Moreover, the desire to overcome the international scepticism brought about by the 2007/8 electoral violence, which was hindering Kenya's position in the region (Browne, 2015), also played a part. Silvester Kasuku, Chief Executive Officer of LCDA stated that “doing the seed investment by constructing the first three berths [is a way to] just break the ground and put government commitment and investment and provide incentives for private sector investors to come on board” (quoted by Jorgic, 2013). This is closely related to the expectations and visions of the future Lamu port is expected to bring, what Larkin (2013, p. 333) calls “the possibility of being modern”. The willingness to self-fund was met with interest by the AfDB to participate in other components of LAPSET (Interview, Senior Economist, State Authority, Nairobi, 23rd November 2018), for instance funding the engineering design and feasibility study of the road between Lamu and Isiolo (LCDA, 2016).

As mentioned above, the EPC contract for Phase I was awarded to the Chinese SOE CCCC through its subsidiary CRBC in 2013. In public procurement, EPC contracts typically refer to Design Build Operate (and Transfer) models (BOT), in which the commissioning actor is the funder (Yescombe and Farquharson, 2018, p. 18). Although the contract awarded to CRBC is an EPC contract, this construction company is currently advancing the necessary funds for construction, and then billing the Kenyan counterpart (KPA) on an annual basis (Interview, Senior Manager, State Corporation, Mombasa, 3rd December 2018; Interview, Deputy General Manager, Chinese SOE, Nairobi, 5th July 2019). This funding scheme is comparable to a ‘pay as you go’ service, but questions remain regarding its effectiveness. The Kenyan government had originally planned to pay in yearly instalments of about USD 100 million, but, with the exception of the first year of construction, the payments were never in full (Interview, Programme Officer, State Authority, Nairobi, 30th November 2018). In turn, the delays in payment led the contractor to scale back construction activities in the 2017/18 financial year (Mwita, 2019a).

The demobilisation involved the downscaling of staff – which impacted the already-precarious employment of the Kenyan workers in the construction site (discussed further in Chapter 5) and meant that Chinese workers were being flown home – the removal of the dredger from the water (a very expensive process), and the halting of piling activities (Interview, Project Manager, Chinese SOE, Lamu, 25th February 2019). The demobilisation of construction resulted in the Kenyan government being presented with a demobilisation fee of KSH 2 billion (approximately USD 20

million) to be paid by KPA. This is not the first example of fees being paid by KPA to CRBC. In January 2019, a track in the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR was found broken after some cargo-lifting operations by KPA staff. The KPA initially denied CRBC's request for a repair fee, after which CRBC brought the CCTV video from the incident, showing KPA staff damaging the railway track. CRBC staff involved in the resolution of this incident suggested that KPA only signed a *mea culpa* once the process of reimbursement was clear, stating that "they [Kenyans] need to be explained to and convinced, then they will sign" (Interview, Project Manager, Chinese SOE, Mombasa, 6th March 2019).

Going back to the KSH 2 billion demobilisation fee for the Lamu port project, parties involved commented that "the president [Uhuru Kenyatta] was very mad" (Interview, Programme Officer, State Authority, Nairobi, 30th November 2018), especially as he had played a key role in advocating for the resuming of construction activities (see Chapter 6). According to an interviewee within a Kenyan state corporation, the delay in payments was due to the upcoming 2017 election, as state funds had been deployed for the development of other infrastructure, such as the rushing of the SGR completion – inaugurated right in time for the elections (as mentioned in Chapter 3) – thus draining Lamu port funds (Interview, Senior Manager, State Corporation, Mombasa, 3rd December 2018). This reinforces two points made in the previous section and chapter, namely the correlation between electoral cycles and resource allocation, and the historical marginalisation of Lamu county – and Northern Kenya more broadly – *vis-à-vis* the national developmental agenda.

4.3 The decision-making actors and their diverging agendas

Notwithstanding the fact that financing concerns predate the commissioning of the feasibility study to Japan Port Consultants, in 2013, the Kenyan government proceeded with the establishment of the LCDA through a Presidential Order³⁶. LCDA has the mandate of coordinating and overseeing the planning and implementation of all LAPSET Corridor components, including Lamu port, in close communication with the relevant actors – which depend on the sector(s) involved – and the Office of the President. The decision-making processes are in the hands of the board of LCDA and comprise state actors – namely the National Treasury, the Ministry of Transport, Infrastructure, Housing and Urban Development, the Ministry of Energy, the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife, and the Ministry of Lands and Physical Planning –

³⁶ Presidential Order Kenya Gazette Supplement No. 51, Legal Notice No. 58, 2013

and parastatal agencies – namely the KPA, the National Environment Management Authority and the National Land Commission. In the case of Lamu port, the decision-making committee for tender evaluation was composed by representatives from the KPA, the Ministry of Transport, LCDA, and National Treasury, which selected the winning bid for the EPC contract for Phase I construction of Lamu port and the construction consultants.

Two tenders were published simultaneously by LCDA: the tender for the construction and that for the construction consultant. In Lamu port, the construction consultant is tasked with developing the design of the port according to the guidelines received from KPA, and coordinating its implementation according to internationally-recognised construction standards. The construction activities tender, as already mentioned, was won by CRBC, which outbid – amongst other international contractors – another Chinese SOE, China Wu Yi. These two SOEs have long been competing in the Kenyan construction market, and these dynamics will be examined further in Chapter 6. In addition to the financial capabilities of the contractor – central to the ‘pay as you go’ repayment scheme agreed with the Kenyan government – CRBC has also, since its first operations in 1984, obtained technical and organisational advantages throughout the 35 years of operations in Kenya, as well as having developed (and sustained) connections with Kenyan political and business elites. In other words, the company’s embeddedness is central to their sustained business in the country, an aspect which will also be discussed in Chapter 6.

In parallel, the consultant Yooshin – a Korean firm – was selected as the Phase I consultant due to their relatively low bid. Interestingly, this choice was also guided by the belief that selecting a Chinese contractor and a Korean consultant would make the supervision of construction work more effective as “those guys don’t like each other” (Interview, Senior Manager, State Corporation, Mombasa, 3rd December 2018). The same interviewee suggested that a Japanese consultant would have also sufficed the purpose, but the degree to which historical tensions between China and Korea/Japan have an impact on the effectiveness – and arguably professionalism – of the employees remains up for debate. During one of my visits to the construction site, the Yooshin project manager handed out his business card, which was printed in Korean/English on one side and Chinese on the other. His connections with China, however, go beyond his business card design, as he undertook part of his tertiary education in Mainland China. Moreover, as will become evident in Chapter 6, Asian construction companies – particularly those from Japan – contributed to the expansion of CRBC’s activities in Kenya during the initial internationalisation stages.

From this initial outline of decision-making actors, it emerges that the institutional structure deployed to coordinate and guide the development of Lamu port – and LAPSET Corridor more

broadly – is highly centralised, as it is often the case with developmental agendas' flagship projects. This reflects a broader pattern of state-led infrastructure projects, which open new avenues for the redeployment of state as the driver of development initiatives,³⁷ but, at the same time, also unveil evolving relations amongst the actors involved (Péclard, Kernen and Khan-Mohammad, 2020; see also Gambino, 2020b). This relates to a growing degree of dynamism being required of the state, which not only has to negotiate national developmental and political agendas, but also the growing roles of the global(ised) market and the diverging trajectories of regional governments – here discussed in terms of counties. To better exemplify such complex dynamics, I will first, in the next sub-section, use the case study of the proposed oil jetty in Lamu port to explore the intersection of diverging agendas of Kenyan state and parastate actors with broader relations amongst national and international actors. Then, in the following section, I will discuss the evolving power relations amongst the county and national governments of Kenya, particularly in relation to the presence of a Chinese contractor.

The 'oil jetty debate'

The design for Lamu port developed by Japan Port Consultants included possible plans for an oil jetty, but this was not expected to be constructed during Phase I (Japan Port Consultants, 2011). When oil reserves were discovered in Kenya's Lokichar basin in 2012, a conversation sparked within the Ministry of Petroleum and Mining on whether to make Lamu the export point, but was initially inconclusive (Interview, Secretary, State Department, Nairobi, 29th January 2019). In 2016, a similar debate emerged within LCDA, which resulted in Lamu port being identified as an optimal location for exports as the port is sheltered by the archipelago and thus presents reduced risks of spillages (Interview, Programme Officer, State Authority, Nairobi, 30th November 2018). This is a key aspect of the 'oil jetty debate', as in the same year, a public tender opened for the relocation of the Mombasa onshore oil storage facility, the Kipevu oil terminal, which, due to Mombasa port expansion, was now too close to other-purpose berths, such as general cargo or container berths (KPA, 2016). Indeed, a berth hosting an oil jetty requires a dedicated fire station in its proximity and that the oil storage facilities be placed at a set distance from other-purpose berths.

³⁷ The motives leading states to assume an increasing role in development – and the ways in which they do so – have been discussed extensively in debates around the concept of developmental state (see Chalmers, 1999) in Africa (see for instance Clapham, 2018 on Ethiopia; Taylor, 2012 debating the developmental state perspective on Botswana).

The LAPSSET crude oil pipeline is planned to run from the Lokichar Basin in Turkana Country in the North-West of Kenya to Lamu, stretching for over 820 km (Fidelis, 2019). The discovery of natural resources in the EAC, and particularly the discovery of oil in Turkana county in 2012, prompted an “appreciation of the need for new pipeline projects” (Nugent, 2018, p. 28) as Kenya “sought to upgrade its infrastructure to capitalise on its earning from transit trade and potential earnings from oil” (Wanyeki, 2020, p. 590; see also Johannes, Zulu and Kalipeni, 2015). In 2016, after Tullow Oil – a British company – and Africa Oil – a Canadian company – carried out the exploration, an agreement was reached between them, the Kenyan Government and Kenya Pipeline Company – a state corporation – over the pipeline construction. Total has then acquired a 25% stake in the oil extraction project, of which 50% ownership is in the hands of Tullow Oil, and the remaining 25% is owned by Africa Oil (Obulutsa, 2019; Smith, 2019). In 2019, ChemChina UK – a subsidiary of the SOE China National Chemical Corporation – won the bid to purchase the first exports of Turkana crude oil, expected to be transported through the planned Turkana-Lamu pipeline (Business Daily, 2019a). Ahead of submitting this bid, managers within the SOE China National Chemical Corporation approached CRBC senior managers to gather information of LAPSSET, speaking to the relevance of networks amongst Chinese SOEs (Interview, Senior Manager, Chinese SOE, Nairobi, 5th July 2019; see Chapter 2 and 6).

The extensive length of the pipeline, and the need to heat the crude oil to allow for its transportation make this project extremely capital-intensive, amounting to an estimated USD 1.1 billion (Kiplagat *et al.*, 2019). As anticipated in Chapter 3, the Ugandan government decision to export oil through Tanzania put a question mark over the economic feasibility of the LAPSSET Corridor, and this particularly refers to the proposed pipeline project. On the one hand, Chinese actors have also demonstrated doubts on the economic viability of oil exports from Turkana County. A high-ranking official from a Chinese State Council actor in Kenya stated that “the Turkana basin is a broken plate”, referring to the fragmented nature of the underground basin, which requires multiple drilling phases and thus increases the extraction cost of the oil (Interview, Counsellor, State Ministry, Nairobi, 23rd November 2018). Consequently, Chinese companies interested in investing in LAPSSET Corridor components argue that only if Turkana oil was exported together with oil from Uganda and South Sudan it would represent a viable opportunity (Interview, Chief Representative, Chinese SOE, Hong Kong, 31st May 2019). Yet, this has not stopped the very same company – CMPort – from submitting a Privately Initiated Investment Proposal to LCDA for the operation of Lamu port, but not without ‘conditionalities’.

Indeed, CMPort's proposal is rumoured to be tied to revenues from traffic in Mombasa port as a revenue stream before Lamu becomes profitable (Interview, Head Officer, State Corporation, Lamu, 24th February 2019). This commercial conditionality reminds of the allegations surrounding the loan agreement for the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR, rumoured to have Mombasa port as the collateral for the loans, which could be appropriated in case of loan default. In 2018, a newspaper article suggested that Mombasa port had been agreed as guarantee in case the government of Kenya defaulted on the loan repayment for the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR (Wafula, 2018), which resulted in public discontent and demands for accountability (Okoth, 2019). Kenyan President Kenyatta stated he would publish the contract of the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR to put rumours to rest, yet, to this day, no contract has been released.

These concerns not only speak to broader debates on the implications of PPPs for African governments (see amongst others Bayliss and Van Waeyenberge, 2017; Zajontz, 2020b), but also imply the "partial transfer of risks to the Chinese companies" (Alden and Jiang, 2019, p. 648). Initial analysis of Chinese overseas engagement suggested that Chinese companies undertake projects in contexts considered 'risky' by other financiers, such as Western firms or international organisations (Ramasamy, Yeung and Laforet, 2012). Yet, Chinese actors do not necessarily have a higher appetite for risk but have been shown to "overvalue the beneficial economic spillover effects of infrastructure projects, while undervaluing the potential harms" (Bataineh, Bennon and Fukuyama, 2018 cited in Alden, Large and Medez, 2020, p. 24). Nevertheless, in light of the evolution of Sino-African engagement, Chinese companies' approach to risk might be undergoing a reframing. Indeed, risk assessment mechanisms are increasingly featuring in project evaluation, as suggested by many practitioners in both China and beyond (Interview, Chief Representative, Chinese SOE, Hong Kong, 31st May 2019; Interview, Consultant, Risk Management Company, Nairobi, 5th July 2019; see also Zhao, 2015 as one of the business voices in China).

On the other hand, returning to the LAPSSET Corridor pipeline, Kenyan state actors argue that the pipeline project makes the entirety of LAPSSET Corridor more viable (Interview, Secretary, State Department, Nairobi, 29.01.19; Interview, Economist, State Authority, Nairobi, 23rd November 2018; Interview, Senior Manager, State Corporation, Mombasa, 3rd December 2018). Their scepticism does not address the construction of the pipeline or oil export plans *per se* (perhaps due to Hirschman's 'Hiding Hand'), but the design and planning of the oil jetty through which the oil is expected to be exported starting from 2022. In 2017, the LCDA, KPA, and the Ministry of Petroleum and Mining began evaluating which type of oil jetty facility would fit the oil pipelines planned from Turkana. The options were a jetty close to Manda Island, a jetty between Ras Tenewi

and Ras Mwana (two coastal locations south of Lamu Archipelago), and a loading jetty at Lamu Port (WS Atkin International and LCDA 2017, p. 66). The latter option was selected, yet, the controversies had only just begun.

This decision sparked another series of inter-related controversies, those of ownership of the jetty, its funding, and location within Lamu port. In 2018, the choice of berth location for the oil jetty became the subject of controversy amongst the KPA and the Ministry of Petroleum and Mining, two of the actors sitting on the LCDA board. On the one hand, the Ministry of Petroleum and Mining wants to use of the three berths currently under construction as part of Lamu port Phase I to host the oil jetty (Interview, Secretary, State Department, Nairobi, 29th January 2019). On the other hand, the KPA wants to dedicate an additional berth to the oil jetty, and distance it from the current construction (Senior Manager, State Corporation, Mombasa, 22.02.19). The KPA argues that converting one of the berths under construction would result in the replication of the Mombasa Kipevu oil terminal situation, whereby the oil jetty would have to be relocated in the future to make space for further port expansion projects (KPA, 2016).

The choice of location, however, is strictly related to the source of funding for the implementation of the oil jetty project. The Ministry of Petroleum and Mining has a time constraint on securing funding for the oil jetty, as it should be completed before the expected export date of 2022 (Interview, Secretary, State Department, Nairobi, 29th January 2019), and the conversion of one of the current berths would allow for timely completion (Interview, Project Manager, Chinese SOE, Lamu, 25th February 2019). The Ministry of Petroleum and Mining plans to secure funding for the conversion through the JV between the Government of Kenya – through the state-owned Kenya Pipeline Company – and the oil MNCs involved in the extraction of Turkana oil. Yet, before this JV can take place, the plan for the oil jetty needs to be finalised. In the eyes of the KPA, the cost of future relocation should be considered as a key factor in the decision-making process. As such they propose the construction of a new berth, for which they have already found a possible funding source. Through the Korean consultant Yooshin currently working in Lamu port, the KPA has entered in conversation with the Korean Government, which offered a loan for the construction of the new berth, which would be designed by Yooshin and built by CRBC (Interview, Project Manager, Consultant, Lamu, 25th February 2019).

CRBC was then being considered for the private commissioning of the Korean government-funded additional oil berth, or, in the case of berth conversion, CRBC would have to adapt to this project change. The choice to not publish a public tender is legally justified by the ‘modification of project’ nature of the oil jetty designs, and the choice of CRBC is clearly dictated by the very-

low, if not virtually zero, mobilisation costs. Similarly, the road contracts awarded to CCCC in April 2021 also speak to the low mobilisation costs, as some machineries and materials can be redeployed from the Lamu port project, an aspect which will be further discussed in Chapter 6. Interestingly, both CRBC and Yooshin's attitudes towards the 'oil jetty debate' have also evolved throughout the months of controversy. When I first began asking about the progress of the oil jetty in February 2019, my questions were met with laughter (Interview, Project Manager, Consultant, Lamu, 25th February 2019) and with a shrug (Interview, Project Manager, Chinese SOE, Lamu, 25th February 2019), while in July 2019, during my last site visit in Lamu construction site, both these actors' representatives appeared to have settled on the prospect of a temporary oil jetty facility in one of the three berths currently under construction.

In addition, the choice of berth and its location is not only reliant on the jetty's funding, but discourses around its ownership are further intensifying the 'oil jetty debate'. Depending on whether the KPA or the Ministry of Mining and Petroleum will sign the contract for construction, the ownership of the oil jetty would vary. As mentioned above, the Ministry of Petroleum and Mining is attempting to receive funding from a JV between the state-owned Kenya Pipeline Company and the oil MNCs involved in the Turkana-Lamu pipeline. If one of the berths was to be converted and the mandate to do so given to the KPA, ownership will have to be shared between them and the Ministry of Petroleum and Mining, which believes the KPA is "looking for something to own... but that's expensive" (Interview, Secretary, State Department, Nairobi, 29th January 2019). Meanwhile, KPA argues that "the oil people [Ministry of Petroleum and Mining and Kenya Pipeline Company] want to take a shortcut, but I'm telling them: build your own berth!" (Interview, Senior Manager, State Corporation, Mombasa, 3rd December 2018). In March 2019, an additional environmental impact assessment was commissioned for the two options left: converting one of the existing berths or building a new berth.

In the same month, the KPA, frustrated with the slow decision-making progress, called for a meeting with all parties involved, namely the Turkana oil consortium, the Ministry of Petroleum and Mining, LCDA, Ministry of Transport, KPA, CRBC and Yooshin. Whether this meeting complicated or simplified the negotiations is unclear, as towards the end of my fieldwork in July 2019, a final decision still had not been made. At that time, the LCDA suggested that one of the berths currently built by CRBC shall be converted in a temporary oil jetty (Interview, Programme Officer, State Authority, Nairobi, 4th July 2019), especially as the CMPort proposal is based upon the assumption one of the first three berths would host an oil jetty (Interview, Chief Representative, Chinese SOE, Hong Kong, 31st May 2019). This is likely to be based upon the information CMPort

has received from CRBC, whose mother company CCCC has been hired by CMPort as their consultants for the Lamu port investment proposal (Interview, Programme Officer, State Authority, Nairobi, 5th July 2019). The connections between CCCC and CMPort speak to the previously-discussed strategic partnership amongst these two Chinese SOEs (see Chapter 2), highlighting the relevance of companies' networks of Chinese enterprises heavily involved overseas. Although Chinese-financed projects and Chinese state financial incentives continue to support companies' internationalisation, the spatial expansion of construction SOEs also supports the scouting of business opportunities (as observed by Corkin, 2012; see also Chapter 6). In the case of CMPort's proposal, CCCC was able to leverage their expertise of the Lamu port project, thus participating to the expansion of a different-sector company.

Lastly, this case has shown that within the state, different agendas coexist and come into conflict, raising multi-faceted controversies in the development of infrastructure projects. The proliferation of actors and agencies around the development of Lamu port and LAPSSET Corridor highlights an understanding of the state as non-unitary, but as a network of actors, each with their own interests and agendas. This is reminiscent of Jessop's (1990, p. 367) conceptualisation of the different ways in which "specific sets of politicians and state officials located in specific parts of the state system" can enact different strategies and negotiation trajectories (see also Jessop, 2010). The 'oil jetty debate' showed that national-level state actors can compete for influence, ownership, and control, and they do so in connection with the broader context of the global economy, here represented by MNCs in the oil sector, Chinese companies, as well as international funders. In the next section, I will proceed in the analysis of controversies emerging around the development of Lamu port, focusing on the intersection of the abovementioned trajectories with debates characterising politics in Lamu.

4.4 The Lamu county government: emerging geographies of power amongst CRBC and Lamu county

So far, the controversies presented in this chapter have mainly been amongst national-level state and parastate actors, thus leading to wonder where the Lamu county government fits within the development of Lamu port. In Kenya, since the 2010 constitutional reform, the newly-formed county government, as well as social and political actors at the local level of governance, have constantly renegotiated their relations with the national government. As anticipated in Chapter 3, the county governments under the new devolved system were elected for the first time during the

2013 general elections. Yet, at this time, the Lamu port project had already been initiated, and thus, the port development was independent from the mandate of the county government. Earlier in this chapter, I discussed the ways in which infrastructure being developed in the North of Kenya have been considered as a tool to incorporate previously marginalised regions within the national development agenda (Lesutis, 2019). Yet, as this section will argue, these dynamics are being renegotiated in light of the shifting power relations emerging from the participation of private or foreign actors, as it is the case for Chinese contractors (see Gambino, 2020b), and the negotiation trajectories of elites at the margins.

A pivotal moment in the national-county government relations with regards to the development of Lamu port was a court ruling of the High Court of Kenya, which in 2018³⁸, ruled that the exclusion of the county government from the conceptualisation of Lamu port was a violation of the new 2010 Constitution, and ordered the government compensation of USD 170 million to fishers communities in Lamu (High Court of Kenya, 2012). This ruling was quickly – and successfully – appealed by the KPA, yet, it was key in recognising the exclusion of the county government and some specific groups within the public (i.e. fishers), pointing to the continuum of marginalisation in centre-periphery relations (see Chapter 3). Lamu County is in the bottom ten counties in Kenya in terms of poverty indicators (Kenya National Bureau of Standards and Society for International Development, 2013), and, as will be discussed throughout this section, controversies which arose during the planning and implementation of Lamu port reflect pre-existing tensions and imbalances of power.

As the case of the Manda Island landing jetty discussed in Chapter 3 already showed, an historical trajectory of power relations imbued with marginalisation can be traced in the relations between Ministry of Transport and the communities inhabiting the Lamu regions. However, as Chome (2020, p. 4; see also Aalders, *et al.*, 2021) highlights, the 2018 ruling brought to light the fact that the Lamu communities were not opposed to the port project, but were concerned with “direct(ing) the project in particular ways that [...] include local interests”, echoing the sentiments expressed by Lamu residents through informal conversations during my fieldwork research. It is important to begin reflecting on the meaning of ‘local’ and its fragmented nature as a category of practice. The majority of the population of Lamu county is made up by Swahili groups. From a historical standpoint, the Swahili people inhabiting Lamu region have a long mercantile history that dates as

³⁸ The case had been brought to the court in 2012.

far back as 1000 AD, at which time Lamu served as a trading settlement for goods between the Arabian Peninsula, East Africa and coastal empires in Asia (Horton and Middleton, 2000, p. 73).

In 1200 AD, Lamu was an important link between the landlocked regions of East Africa and coastal empires in Asia, while in the 16th century, Lamu was central to the gold trade from Zimbabwe, as well as trade to China and the Arabian Peninsula (*ibid*, p. 77, 89; see also Cooper, 1980). In 1644, the Sultanate of Oman waged a war against the emerging city-states of East Africa, which resulted in the Omani establishing their centre of power in Lamu (Romero, 1997, p. 12). During this period, Omani settlers established close relationships with the Swahili upper class and quickly acquired extensive land holdings on the Kenyan coasts. However, when the British banned the slave trade in India in 1843, slave-based commerce, a large sector of revenue for the Omani Sultanate declined, consequently reducing the wealth of the state (Romero, 1997, p. 30). Lamu was then under the influence of the Sultan of Zanzibar, up until it was claimed by German colonisers in 1885 as part of Wituland (Horton and Middleton, 2000, p. 185). In this period, Lamu's importance as a connectivity hub is signalled by the construction of the city's post office, the first in East Africa (Hoyle, 2001), which highlights the port's role as a strategic point for communications with other colonised territories. In 1890 Lamu, together with the rest of Kenya, fell under British colonial rule (Romero, 1997, p. 113). After the further abolition of slavery in 1907, the economic and political influence of the coast – and Lamu's in particular – declined fast, as the British rule shifted to Nairobi and Central Kenya (Curtin, 1983), where white settlers had established their economic activities, as already discussed in the previous chapter. Thus, the Lamu plantations relying on enslaved labour force emptied (Romero, 1986).

Soon after independence, President Jomo Kenyatta inaugurated the Mpeketoni Settlement Scheme to resettle landless Kikuyu people from central Kenya to Lamu county, following the establishment of agricultural enterprises in Lamu (Chome, 2020). At the same time, Lamu indigenous Swahili communities living at the border with Somalia were forced to move South due to increased violence and conflict, but no land was allocated to them (Goldsmith, 2014). The Kikuyu settlers became land owners when the Jomo Kenyatta's government assigned them land rights over what was considered public land, although some Swahili communities consider it their ancestral land (Nunow, 2012). Controversies around land have been at the centre of many debates around state decision-making across the African continent, which have highlighted the importance of understanding the broader contextual dynamics at play (Anseeuw and Alden, 2010). In Lamu county, grievances related to land date back to the resettlement programmes for Internally Displaced Persons started in the 1970s, but echo to today's Lamu port project. When land

repossession to construct Lamu port began, activists and elders representing archipelago communities accused LCDA of “taking land directly from the National Land Commission, without consulting us [the communities]” (Interview, Chairman, Civil Society Organisation, Lamu, 13th March 2019).

Beyond the Kikuyu inhabiting the mainland of Lamu county as a consequence of the resettlement schemes, the major ethnic groups in the county are the Bajun, Sanye, Anweer (also known as Boni), and Orma. Bajun people are the most populous group, traditionally associated with the fishery industry and inhabiting the Lamu archipelago. The Sanye and Anweer groups have historically engaged in mangrove cutting and trade, as well as hunting activities, and their ancestral land and forests are in the coastal region of Lamu County. The Orma people derive their livelihoods from livestock keeping in the areas of the Tana River delta (SaveLamu, 2018). These narratives are relevant as they are deeply rooted in Lamu politics. For instance, the belief that the Bajun community had benefitted the most from the 1970s resettlement schemes, through which they had gained land titles (Chome, 2020), fostered further grievances amongst different ethnic groups in Lamu county. According to a former member of Lamu county government, these grievances were exploited by the LCDA to gather support for the port project (Interview, Former County Executive, Mombasa, 14th December 2018), which was never publicly condemned by Lamu elders.

Politics in Lamu since the 2013 county government elections has reflected the heterogeneous nature and diverse interests of the Lamu communities, pointing, once again, to the need to bring politics in the periphery to the centre of analysis in the study of infrastructure projects. In 2012, Lamu elders and LAPSSET officials formed the LAPSSET Steering Committee with the aim of increasing support for the project (Interview, Secretary, County Government, Lamu, 19th March 2019). This committee was a response to community protests in 2011 and a court case submitted against the national government by Lamu communities mentioned above (High Court of Kenya, 2012). The LAPSSET Steering Committee, however, was short-lived, being dismantled soon after the election of the first county governor of Lamu, Issa Timamy (2013-2017).

As Chome (2020) highlights, this decision was likely motivated by politics, as the sitting members of this committee had been associated with the benefactor – or patron – of his political opponent Fahim Twaha, who would eventually win the 2017 elections. Timamy’s time in office was characterised by struggles with the national government over land allocation for LAPSSET Corridor components, which exposed Twaha as a benefactor of land deeds re-allocation (Nema, 2017). This further embittering in-county resentment, particularly with the Twaha faction, which

had been “edged out of the instruments of local governance” (Chome, 2020, p. 15). Again, land and accusations of exclusion were featuring prominently in political debates.

First, with regards to land, the SEZ planned in the vicinity of Lamu port offers a good example of controversy which reflects on centre-periphery relations vis-à-vis a development initiative. The SEZ planned in Lamu is one of the three SEZs included in the Kenya Vision 2030, under the mandate of the Ministry for Industrialisation. The Lamu SEZ is expected to include an industrial hub (heavy and medium-light industries) and a freight logistics hub (LCDA, 2017). LCDA had begun acquiring land for the SEZ together with the land for the port construction, through the National Land Commission, but the process is yet to be concluded (Interview, Programme Officer, State Authority, Nairobi, 28th March 2019). By March 2019, however, LCDA had already acquired the necessary land for the heavy industry hub and was beginning the acquisition of land for the medium-light industry hub. At the same time, the Lamu county government had begun designating land for the SEZ (Interview, Officer, County Government, Lamu, 18th March 2019). Yet, the land designated for the construction of the SEZ by LCDA and Lamu county government are not the same.

Whether the land occupied by the SEZ is owned by LCDA or by the county government makes a difference in terms of rent and tax revenues, similarly to the previous case of the ‘oil jetty debate’. The SEZ on national government land would mean that companies leasing land to open industries would increase the revenues of LCDA, bypassing the county government. In terms of taxation, the county government would have to agree with LCDA a revenue sharing scheme, similarly to what happens for natural resource extraction.³⁹ The controversies around land for the SEZ – similarly to the land grab in anticipation of the Lamu port development discussed in Section 4.1 (see also Elliott, 2016; Greiner, 2016; Chome, 2020; Chome, *et al.*, 2020; Aalders, *et al.*, 2021) – reflect the degree of expectations on what revenues and benefits infrastructure development projects will bring (see Chapter 3). Here, the possibility of an investment by CMPort – which, as highlighted in the introduction of this thesis, was already a widespread rumour in Lamu Town in March 2019 – brought the SEZ land allocation issue to the forefront. In fact, the proposal included the request for land to be acquired for the Port + Park + City complex (Interview, Head Officer,

³⁹ Revenue sharing schemes are agreements between the national and the county governments which establish the revenue which should remain within the county where resources are extracted. This is a lengthy process, as exemplified by the delays in agreements concerning revenue sharing for the oil extraction project in Turkana county as part of LAPSET (Akiri, 2019).

State Corporation, Lamu, 24th February 2019; Interview, Chief Representative, SOE, Hong Kong, 31st May 2019; see also Chapter 1).

Second, beyond land controversies, expectations of employment opportunities being available for Lamu communities are also the focus of centre-periphery debates. Timamy's (2013-2017) government "youth Marshall plan" (Lamu County, 2013, p. 24), which was expected to boost the job opportunities of Lamu youths, did not reap the expected results. During the planning phase of Lamu port, the national government advertised a training programme for Lamu people, which was expected to train 1000 youths (LCDA, 2013). The courses under the LAPSSET Presidential Scholarship Programme, began in 2013, involved both diplomas and degrees in subjects related to port operations and management, such as Marine Engineering, Port Management, Project Management, and Transport and Logistics. In 2017, the Kenyan Auditor General pointed to the mismanagement of the awarding process, which saw 10 of the Presidential Scholarship awarded to non-Lamu students (Mutai, 2017; Interview, Chairman, Civil Society Organisation, Lamu, 13th March 2019). Soon after, the programme was suspended altogether with only 400 youths enrolled (Cheti, 2018).

In 2017, Twaha emerged as the winner of the county electoral race, becoming the second governor of Lamu. Twaha's government represented a shift from that of Timamy's. On the one hand, Twaha pursued a less confrontational approach toward the national government due to his affiliation with the ruling party in Nairobi. On the other hand, in his role as Lamu county governor, Twaha also faced the necessity to address the growing concerns and demands of his constituency. To mitigate claims of marginalisation and address the calls for participation in the national development agenda, in 2019, Twaha's government initiated a committee – very much reminiscent of the LAPSSET Steering Committee dissolved by his predecessor – aimed at promoting the inclusion of specific (and at times diverging) agendas. This committee is formed by the county government, LCDA, KPA, CRBC representatives, and a handful of carefully-chosen community representatives (Interview, Secretary, County Government, Lamu, 19th March 2019). The inclusion of CRBC in said committee speaks to the increasing embeddedness of this company in the context of operation.

Direct engagement with county-level actors – including non-state actors such as community leaders – brings to the forefront the necessity to investigate CRBC's connections to Kenyan actors. Moreover, the decision to include CRBC in the new Lamu port committee signals the establishment of direct and more formal channels of engagement for county actors – which are not so 'peripheral' after all – to raise their concerns and interests. As I will discuss below with regards to labour localisation, the involvement of CRBC with country governments is not unique

to the Lamu port case, but stems from the company's previous activities in Kenya, specifically the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR construction. Similarly, CRBC's engagement with non-state actors also speaks to previously-deployed controversy mitigation practices, such as the intervention of a labour union in the case of the Kilifi lending facility, discussed in Section 4.5.

Third, going back to the controversies surrounding Lamu port, Lamu archipelago communities argue that job opportunities within the port construction are not available to them. As an instance of this, during my research in the Lamu construction site in the first half of 2019, Human Resources (HR) were only able to identify a handful of employees (out of about 1000 Kenyans) indigenous to the Lamu archipelago (Interview, Officer, Chinese SOE, Lamu, 25th February 2019). Moreover, as will be discussed further in the next chapter, unskilled worker positions make up the great majority of hires within the construction site, with managerial roles being filled by foremen or engineers of Chinese nationality. Indeed, labour relations have been one of the most debated aspects of African infrastructure projects with Chinese participation.

On the one hand, Chinese companies' construction activities on the continent are commonly associated with the practice of bringing the labour force from overseas, thus hindering the chance of African workers to access employment opportunities (Gadzala, 2010; Monson and Liu, 2011; Wegenast *et al.*, 2019), with rumours going as far as claiming that Chinese workers are convicts (Chellaney, 2010). In Kenya, the number of Chinese workers has increased from around 1500 in 2009 to over 8000 in 2019, almost doubling at the beginning of the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR construction in 2015 (CARI, 2021b). Nevertheless, recent estimates show that the number of Chinese workers across the African continent has peaked in 2015 and has declined steadily since then (OCIC and Development Reimagined, 2020). For instance, between 2018 and 2019, the number of Chinese workers across the continent has declines by 10%, from 201058 to 182754 (CARI, 2021b). This trend can also be observed in Kenya, where the number of Chinese workers declined from a record 9131 in 2018 to 8348 in 2019 (*ibid*).

On the other hand, scholars argued that Chinese lending and engagement is contributing to the creation of employment opportunities and to skill transfer (Tang, 2010; Calabrese and Tang, 2020). Across the continent, local employment percentages in Chinese companies ranged from 60% in Angola to 96% in Nigeria in the first decade of the 21st century (Centre for Chinese Studies, 2006). In 2017, a McKinsey report similarly suggested that 89% of workers in the 1000 Chinese companies surveyed were African (Sun, Jayaram and Kassiri, 2017). In Kenya, Kenyan workers were estimated to account for 78% of total workers in Chinese companies in 2015 (Sautman and Hairong, 2015), while a report realised in collaboration with the Chinese companies operating in

Kenya suggests that, in 2018, Kenyan workers make up 95% of total workers in Chinese companies (Kenya-China Economic and Trade Association, 2019).

However, these estimates disregard many nuances of employment practices in Chinese companies. It is important here to reflect again upon the notion of 'local'. To a Chinese contractor in Kenya, any Kenyan is as a 'local' worker. However, Chinese Senior Engineers in Lamu are aware that most of the workers are not from Lamu, but mainly from other regions of Kenya. When asked "who is a local?", officials from the Lamu county government indicate the members of their constituency, while Lamu archipelago residents make a distinction between Lamu archipelago – mainly inhabited by Swahili people – and the rest of the county. Within LCDA, some make a distinction between 'locals' and 'local foreigners', echoing Chome's (2020) discussion on 'hosts' and 'guests' in Lamu county following increased migration to this region.

Particularly relevant to the case of labour localisation in Sino-African infrastructure is the stream of literature suggesting that recruitment and employment practices are closely related to in-country labour laws, contract requirements, and the Chinese company's embeddedness in the country of operation (Kernen and Lam, 2014; Lam, 2017; Oya, 2019). In Lamu, at the beginning of the construction of the port, most of the workers were Chinese nationals. Later on, after the ground work had been set up, CRBC began employing Kenyan workers, hiring more than required by the contract (Interview, Senior Manager, State Corporation, Mombasa, 3rd December 2018). At the time of writing, more than a total of 1200 workers are on the construction site, about 1000 of which are Kenyans. However, overcompensation of percentages of Kenyan workers has not helped mitigate controversies between the national and county governments. On the one hand, LCDA sees the overcompensation over time as a positive, as the percentages of local content stipulated in the contract (75%) are now being respected. On the other hand, archipelago communities in Lamu county still feel marginalised as they do not benefit from the job opportunities created by this infrastructure development project. They voice their discontent to the county government, which is then left to mitigate its position in relation to both its constituency and national government agencies.

With regards to this employment controversy, a strategy already in place during the construction of the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR was deployed by the Chinese contractor CRBC. In the case of SGR, President Kenyatta announced a 40% local content requirement in 2014, which was not reflected in the contract previously signed between CRBC and Kenya Railways Corporation (Wang and Wissenbach, 2019). In the same year, protesters in Voi blocked the highway – vital for the exports and imports through Mombasa – to voice concerns over the scarce job opportunities the

construction of the Chinese-funded SGR had brought to them (Akwiri, 2014). Two years later, protesters from Narok County entered the SGR construction site targeting Chinese workers, some of which were later hospitalised (Kuo, 2016). Chinese-constructed projects tend to stretch across multiple counties, thus raising difficulties in distributing labour opportunities, as for the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR construction. When the construction was finished in one section, the labour force would be retained and they would move to the next section of construction (Interview, Executive, Chamber of Commerce, Nairobi, 20th November 2018). This practice allows the Chinese company to avoid having to train new workers while at the same time respecting Kenyan local content requirements.

After the protests, CRBC began communicating the availability of job openings within the SGR construction to the relevant county government, which would then recommend workers to the company (Njoroge, 2016). This now also happens in Lamu, where CRBC is in direct communication with the county government concerning employment opportunities, so as to receive candidates who were pre-selected by county government officials (Interview, Senior Official, County Government, Lamu, 20th March 2019). This process, although not regulated by the EPC contract, allows for the emergence of new relations between the county government and the Chinese contractor, reshaping pre-existing geographies of power in which national government agencies, such as KPA, would be the only actors communicating with CRBC. As will be discussed further in the next section and then in the next chapter, instances of emerging relations offer a window into the growing role of African agency in (re)shaping Sino-African infrastructural engagement.

4.5 Controversies in the supply chain: the agency of non-state actors in (re)negotiating the employment of Kenyan seafarers

In the case of the Lamu port project, controversies are not limited to those taking place amongst national-level state actors or between state actors and the Chinese contractor. In this section and in the next chapter, I will reframe the discussion around the encounters amongst the Chinese contractor CRBC and different (non-state) actors involved in the (re)negotiations of Sino-African engagement practices. In the next chapter, I will focus on interactions amongst construction site workers, while in the present chapter, I will explore the (re)shaping of employment dynamics in the supply chain of the Lamu port project. The materials used for the construction of Lamu port are sourced in two different quarries, located in Kilifi county – previously used to source materials

for the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR – and Lamu county, respectively.⁴⁰ Gravel and boulder are transported on CCCC ships from the company’s private landing facility near Kilifi bridge (in Kilifi county North of Mombasa) to the Lamu construction site directly. The landing facility in Kilifi became operational in mid-2016 after 3-4 months of construction. Until the end of 2016, there were no Kenyan employees working on the four CCCC ships. The journey between Kilifi and Lamu is between 13-22 hours depending on the weather conditions, and seafarers and officials work in shifts. Each ship hosts about 15-20 crew members, including one captain, several officials and common seafarers, amounting to a total of about 70 staff.

The contract signed between CRBC and KPA for the construction of Lamu port Phase I stipulated a 75% local content requirement, yet at the end of 2018 only three Kenyans seafarers had been hired. This discrepancy can be traced to the flag registration of the CCCC boats, which are registered in Panama. According to international law, ships need to be registered and display the flag of the country of registration. The country of registration can be different from the country of origin of the ship, in a practice commonly known as flag of convenience, a choice guided by a preference in regulations in the country of flag choice. When the four ships were brought from China, Kenya Maritime Authority – the national authority regulating all things maritime – and KPA, did not require a change in flag registration (Interview, Senior Official, State Authority, Mombasa, 10th December 2018). This meant that CRBC did not have a legal obligation to hire Kenyan employees to operate the ships, and thus the company hired Chinese officers, seafarers and captains. With no legal instruments on their side, Kenya Maritime Authority could not enforce the local content requirements, and the Kenya Seafarers Union took the lead in the (re)negotiations with CRBC managers. This represents a departure from what observed by Procopio, whereby Kenyan union leaders negotiating with Chinese companies “relied on legally established protections to resolve the dispute with the Chinese” while simultaneously attempting “to limit inappropriate interference from Kenyan higher-level bureaucrats” (2019, p. 179).

Previous studies on Chinese companies’ activities in Africa have highlighted the central role played by labour unions in negotiating employment conditions and fulfilment of in-country local content requirements (see amongst others Cottle, 2014; Wethal, 2017; Lee, 2018), but relations between Chinese companies and labour unions abroad are still in the making. Chinese companies have often entered conflicts with labour unions for creating a hostile environment to unionisation practices, as shown by Jauch and Sakaria (2009) in Namibia, and also ignoring terms stipulated in

⁴⁰ Unless otherwise stated, this section’s data was collected through observations in Kilifi conducted in December 2018.

collective bargaining agreements, as shown by Akorsu and Cooke (2011) in Ghana. Due to the little capacity of unionisation in China⁴¹, relations with unions are part of the process of embeddedness of Chinese companies in overseas markets. Indeed, Chinese companies operating abroad need to familiarise and negotiate with ‘unconventional’ actors. Chinese-built and Chinese-funded projects in Africa “tend to decrease the rate of union involvement” in the region where the project is being undertaken (Isaksson and Kotsadam, 2018, p. 290), due to a replication of the Chinese environment in which *de facto* and *de jure* unionisation is discouraged, at times also through suppression (Caraway, 2009).

In addition to increasing engagement with labour unions overseas, Chinese parastatal actors – particularly CHINCA – hold training sessions on labour unions’ roles and functions for Chinese companies operating overseas, thus effectively supporting their internationalisation journeys. The training focuses on several aspects of business internationalisation processes, from language support or legal training to familiarisation with international standards and understanding the functioning and bargaining power of labour unions (Interview, Deputy Director, Parastatal Association, Beijing, 27th July 2018). This organisation is not unique to mainland China, for instance, the General Chamber of Tanzania Chinese Business helps Chinese SOEs and private companies improve relations with Tanzanian state and non-state actors with the support of the Embassy (Liu, 2018). In Kenya, the Kenya-China Economic Trade Association, supported by the Embassy, similarly engages with Kenyan actors (Interview, Manager, State Authority, Nairobi, 22nd November 2018). In addition, the negotiations for the employment of Kenyan seafarers in Kilifi marked the first instance in which the Kenya Seafarers Union reached an agreement with a Chinese company, speaking to the evolving relations between CRBC and non-state actors in the Kenyan context.

In 2016, union representatives began meeting regularly with CRBC managers in the Kilifi office to negotiate the inclusion of two Kenyan seafarers. In 2018, a third Kenyan seafarer was also hired as crewmember on a CCCC ship. This example not only highlights the key role unions can have in negotiating for employment opportunities, but also in the negotiation of employment conditions, as the salary of the three seafarers is almost double the national average of USD 180/month (Business Daily, 2019b). The seafarers employed on the ships transporting construction materials to Lamu have undergone training provided by CRBC in several areas, such as a two-day safety training course and a three-month trial period, after which a temporary contract for the length of

⁴¹ In China, Chinese workers cannot join unions or create labour organisation, apart from the state-backed All-China Federation of Trade Unions (Isaksson and Kotsadam, 2018).

the construction can be offered to them. However, CRBC is not directly involved in the selection of seafarers who will undertake the training. Instead, the director of the Kenya Seafarers Union selected the first two Kenyan seafarers himself, personally supervised the selection of the third seafarer, and pays regular visits to them in Kilifi. This involvement suggests that in negotiating the employment of Kenyan seafarers on these ships, the union leader not only acted as a gatekeeper, but also selected these first Kenyan seafarers with the intentions of setting a precedent for future hires.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored the proliferation of interests in the development of LAPSSET corridor and Lamu port. Specifically, I focused on the encounters of diverse agendas, highlighting the ways in which the controversies amongst different actors both reflect pre-existing unequal geographies of power in centre-periphery relations, while also representing a possibility for their renegotiation. In the first part of the chapter, I focused on the LAPSSET Corridor, a flagship project of Kenya's developmental agenda, underpinned by the rhetoric of 'opening up' the 'remote' Northern regions of Kenya. I began by exploring the initial funding challenges and critiques to LAPSSET to highlight the project's political significance to Kenya's developmental agenda, as well as the imaginaries it promotes. Through this analysis, I underlined that as much as infrastructure projects are expected to 'connect' the peripheries to the national economy, they also imply disconnection and dispossession. Here, the centralisation of decision-making processes in the hands of LCDA and its board echoes pre-existing patterns of marginalisation of the Northern regions of Kenya. Yet, in spite of this centralisation, diverging agendas amongst the state and parastate actors persist, and can lead to controversies amongst the different state actors involved.

In this chapter, I focused on several controversies taking place during the construction of Phase I of Lamu port. First, the 'oil jetty debate' spoke to the interconnectedness between funding and ownership of components of infrastructure. The political attachment (Hirschman, 2015, p. 80) to the ownership of the oil jetty envisioned for Lamu port reflects the significance of oil discoveries to the development of the broader LAPSSET corridor. This landscape is further populated by the presence of Chinese actors – such as the contractor CRBC – and the possibility of a subsequent involvement of port operation giant CMPort. Second, in the case of the Lamu SEZ, a controversy arose between LCDA and Lamu county government for the allocation of land for the development of this LAPSSET component as the CMPort proposal was being evaluated. On the one hand, this

case speaks to the continuum of pre-existing relations characterised by marginalisation in centre-periphery relations. On the other hand, this brings to the forefront the connections and disconnections of different actors' 'economies of anticipation' vis-à-vis the development of infrastructure projects (see Elliott, 2016; Greiner, 2016; Chome, 2020; Chome *et al.*, 2020; Müller-Mahn, Mkutu and Kioko, 2021).

Third, the case of local content highlighted that the Lamu county government negotiates a wide array of interests related to Lamu port construction. The necessity of the Chinese contractor to fulfil the commitment made in the contract with KPA with regard to local content requirements reinvigorated long-standing debates amongst Lamu county communities. The percentages of local content are now respected in terms of the number of Kenyan employees – even though skilled workforce remains of Chinese nationality – but some Lamu communities still feel they do not benefit from these opportunities, as virtually all Kenyan workers do not belong to Lamu archipelago communities. To mitigate this controversy, the county government is now in communication with CRBC concerning job openings, and thus actively involved in the recruitment process. This resonates with findings from the oil sector in Cameroon, where Nyiawung (2021) suggest that politicians would recommend workers from their community to the subsidiary of a Chinese SOE, which would then hire them to prevent discontent and critiques.

This example points to the evolving geographies of power amongst the national and county governments, as well as to CRBC's increasing embeddedness in the Kenyan context, the latter of which is evidenced by the re-deployment of practices developed during previous projects. Specifically with regards to the former, this chapter suggests that, even when the presence of Chinese actors is not reframing overall centre-periphery power relations, it can serve to underwrite the agency of county-level actors. As the case of the latest LAPSSET committee established under the Twaha's administration suggests, Lamu county actors can crucially reshape their interactions with both the Chinese contractor and the national government.

Fourth, the case of the seafarers working on CCCC ships to transport materials to the Lamu port construction site suggest that the labour union leader was central to the (re)negotiations of local content practices. The union leader bargained to include Kenyan seafarers in the transport of construction material, offering another insight into the emerging geographies of power amongst CRBC and a range of Kenyan actors well beyond governmental agencies. As CRBC continues their operations in Kenya, these examples show that the company is increasingly gaining on-the-ground experience in the Kenyan context. These dynamics speak to the growing role of a wide

array of African actors in reshaping the implementation of infrastructure projects with Chinese participation. However, as it will become clear in the next chapters, Sino-African infrastructural engagement is not only connected to African actors' agency, but it is also closely connected to Chinese companies' internationalisation trajectories. In the next chapter, I will further reflect on the encounters amongst the 'layers' of CRBC's internationalisation and Kenya's infrastructural development trajectories through an analysis of work in Lamu construction site.

Chapter 5

Lamu port construction site and work^{*place*} relations: an investigation of Sino-African labour relations

In the previous chapter, I explored the evolving geographies of power amongst different actors involved – to different extents and in different capacities – in the development of Lamu port. With regards to Sino-African engagement, I have highlighted that CRBC's increasing presence in the Kenyan market informs the re-deployment of engagement practices from other Sino-Kenyan infrastructure, such as the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR, to the Lamu port project. In this chapter, I will further investigate the encounters between the Chinese contractor and Kenyan (non-state) actors. I will focus on the analysis of workplace dynamics amongst Chinese and Kenyan workers employed in the Lamu port construction site to shed light on the intersection between said dynamics and broader patterns associated with Chinese contractors' overseas activities and Kenya's labour relations. As emerged in the introductory chapter, several scholars have called for an increased analytical focus on African agency in China-Africa engagement (see amongst others Phillips, 2018; Procopio, 2019; Soulé-Kohndou, 2019), highlighting the need to further explore the heterogenous nature of these interactions.

Thus, in order to investigate labour relations in the Lamu port project, I will build on previous works on African agency in Sino-African infrastructure. In this regard, Driessen's (2019) research on Chinese roadbuilders in Ethiopia through the lens of everyday resistance (see Scott, 1985) brought to the forefront the need to go beyond an elite-based analysis of African agency in the context of Sino-African engagement. Her research not only highlighted the ways in which African workers hold their Chinese managers accountable, but also subtler instances of agency, at times expressed through ridicule and defiance. On a similar note, Wethal (2017) borrows the concept of labour agency – understood as the ability of individuals or collectives to advance their objectives of “shifting the *status quo* in favour of workers, even if temporarily” (Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2011, p. 216, cited in Wethal, 2017, italics in original) – from labour geographers to study work dynamics in Chinese-built projects in Mozambique. She analyses the two parallel, yet divided, workplace regimes for Chinese and Mozambican workers in the construction site, suggesting that although Mozambicans express their resentment for poor working and living conditions, they are “locked

in their current situation, with their agency heavily constrained” (Wethal, 2017, p. 399) due to the lack of alternative job opportunities and support from Mozambican institutions.

Wethal acknowledges that the organisation of life and work in the construction site – “the technical and social organisation of the labour process” – and the politics of production – “the political apparatus of production and the institutions that regulate and shape workplace practices” – are inherently interlinked (2017, p. 386). Through these lenses, workplace dynamics are usually defined by the geographical boundaries of the construction site, particularly as the practice of ‘living at work’ is extremely widespread in Chinese-built projects. Yet, this analytical premise cannot fully capture the ‘multiple embeddedness’ of the workplace (Frenkel, 2003), whereby workplace organisation and politics of production echo relations across multiple and related scales and temporalities, nor the differentiated agency of workers (Links, 2021). In this chapter, inspired by Oya’s (2019) call for a multidimensional analysis of African and Chinese (multifaceted) labour markets and political economy to capture the various outcomes of Sino-African labour relations, I propose a study of life and work in the construction site of Lamu port which relies on a dynamic understanding of the workplace. This represents an effort to answer Sergot and Saives’ (2016) call for the insertion of Massey’s conceptualisation of place to the study of work*places*.

Building on a conceptualisation of space as “constructed out of the multiplicity of social relations across all spatial scales”, in which space is simultaneously the “production of the social” and the product of said interactions (Massey, 1994c, p. 4), Massey proceeded in offering a reframing of the concept of place. Countering static and bounded – or, as she puts it, ‘nostalgic’ (see Massey, 1995a) – understandings of place typically associated with locality studies in the late 1980s and 1990s (see for instance Cooke, 1986), Massey considers place as “a particular articulation [...], a particular moment in those networks of social relation and understandings” (Massey, 1994c, p. 5; see also Massey, 1994b, 1994a), or, in short, a “spatio-temporal event” (Massey, 2005, p. 131). In other words, a place is not understood through the distinctions one can draw between a place and what is ‘outside’ of it, but instead “through the specificity of the mix of links and interconnections *to* that ‘beyond’” (Massey, 1994c, p. 5, italics in original). According to this conceptualisation of place, a place not unique *per se*, but its specificity is derived from the relations to broader dynamics and trajectories, in what Massey calls “a global sense of place” (1994a, p. 156).

Sergot and Saives (2016), speaking to scholars in organisation studies, highlight the contribution Massey’s understanding of place can give to studies concerned with multiplicity in the spatialisation of work. Indeed, this concept resonates with recent research on Sino-African infrastructure, such as Fei’s work on Sino-Ethiopian construction sites. Specifically, Fei (2020, p. 9) suggests that the

need arises to attend to relations amongst different actors, places, and scales, which means that the life and work dynamics of the construction site should be investigated through the lens of “relationships and processes emerg[ing] from both within and beyond the construction site” (Fei, 2020, p. 9). Thus, in this chapter, I suggest to research Sino-African construction sites as work*places*, in which the spatial organisation of life and work and the work structures encounter narratives of labour control, social mobility, and development. I will focus on encounters amongst Kenyan and Chinese workers to explore the (re)negotiations of labour controversies in the Lamu port construction site.⁴²

Although concerns over working conditions in the Lamu port project speak to similar findings in Chinese construction sites – and beyond (Jauch and Sakaria, 2009; Akorsu and Cooke, 2011) – across the African continent (Lee, 2009; Giese and Thiel, 2011; Fei, 2020), in this chapter, I will focus on the brokerage of labour controversies (see the controversy approach by Hönke and Cuesta-Fernandez, 2018). Indeed, place is closely related to the “unavoidable challenge of negotiating [the] here-and-now” (Massey, 2005, p. 140), which is at the core of a dynamic understanding of place as characterised by multiplicity (see also Castree *et al.*, 2006). This chapter will argue that the emergence of controversies and their (re)negotiations in Lamu construction site speak to broader trajectories of Sino-African engagement, as well as narratives and patterns of work in China and Kenya. As such, these cases highlight the multi-faceted and context-dependant nature of agency in Sino-African encounters (Links, 2021).

The present chapter is structured as follows. In the first section, I will discuss the spatial organisation of the construction site, which is influenced by the hierarchical managerial structure of CRBC and relies upon distinctions based on contract type and nationality. The second section explores work in the construction site, which is characterised by long working hours, the continuous quest for productivity, and an incentive/deterrent regime. These dynamics will be discussed in connection with narratives ‘beyond’ the construction site, and related to the diverse implications they have for different Kenyan and Chinese workers. In the third section, I will discuss instances of controversy and the figure of brokers in (re)negotiating working conditions, employment opportunities, training, and communication issues.

⁴² Unless otherwise stated, this chapter’s data was collected through ethnographic observations in Lamu construction site in February and March 2019.

5.1 The spatial organisation of Lamu construction site

The construction site of Lamu port is situated North East of Lamu Town, within Manda Bay, a naturally sheltered deep-water location. To reach the construction site, visitors, Kenyan officials and Chinese workers are transported by boat from Lamu town or the Manda Airport jetty to a landing jetty within the construction site. The map below shows the position of the construction site, as well as the route just described. The necessity to use boats to reach the site is due to the current lack of road links to the port, as discussed in Chapter 4, and to the security concerns in the area.



Figure 13: Lamu Town and Lamu Port Construction site (adapted from Google Maps, 2020)

Lamu construction site is located about 85 km South of the Somali border, within an area considered a hotspot for al-Shabaab terrorist activities. For instance, the United Kingdom Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office advises against all but essential travel in the regions bordering Somalia, apart from Lamu Island and Manda Island, which should only be reached by air (Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office, 2020). Road transport is highly advised against, as busses and cars are considered targets for terrorist attacks. In January 2020, two busses were attacked in Lamu county, the passengers and the driver of one of these busses were asked to get off, and those who could not recite the Muslim Shahada – the declaration of faith to Allah – were shot dead (Iganza, 2020). Three men were killed, amongst which a casual labourer working

in Lamu port construction site (Makokha, 2020). In addition to repeat attacks to civilian buses (see for instance BBC, 2014), al-Shabaab also targets security forces, with road-side bombs, such as the attack in May 2017, which killed eight people (Akwiiri, 2017). In 2014, al-Shabaab militants attacked the town of Mpeketoni, on the coast of Lamu, killing 48 people (Adams, 2014). The continuous terrorist threat led the Kenyan government to close the Kenya-Somalia border in Lamu county in June 2019 while intensifying security operations (Kazungu, 2019).

In early 2020, the construction of Lamu port was halted for several days after another terrorist attack in the area. On January 5th, Al-Shabaab militants attacked the Manda Bay airstrip, which serves the joint Kenya-United States naval and air force base Camp Simba, killing three Americans part of security operations (The Economist, 2020). As a response, an internal memo circulated amongst CRBC employees on January 7th, stating that the construction site would be closed until Monday 13th January, and the 1000 Kenyan workers – including casual labourers – were placed on leave until construction activities resumed (Mwita and Cheti, 2020). Chinese workers and the majority of Kenyan workers remained in the compound waiting for construction to resume (WeChat conversation, Senior Manager, Chinese SOE, 4th February 2020). Similarly, during the current COVID-19 pandemic, workers who live on the premises continue to do so, and contact with those outside the (sanitised) construction site have been reduced to the minimum possible (WhatsApp conversation, Programme Officer, State Authority, 15th July 2020).

The construction site is gated, as it is common for construction sites worldwide. The gated construction site comprises the compounds, the headquarters (HQ) and the construction area (see Figure 14 below). In addition to a fence, the perimeters are patrolled by security guards subcontracted and (re)trained by CRBC, whose activities are monitored by Chinese heads of security through CCTV cameras. The heads of security at Lamu construction site are young Chinese men who have completed at least two years of military training in the People's Liberation Army (Interview, Human Resource Official, Chinese SOE, Lamu, 14th February 2019). Employing former members of the military or the police is a common practice in the security industry globally, yet, until 2010, Chinese national laws required Chief Executive Officers of Chinese security companies and subcontractors to be former People's Liberation Army or police members (Arduino, 2020). Indeed, a recent study on Chinese private security involvement in the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR highlighted the deployment of security practices similar to those of the People's Liberation Army (Zheng and Xia, 2021). The office of the heads of security can be found in the foremen's compound (2B in Figure 14), where they occupy an office equipped with air conditioning and screens showing images from all CCTV cameras.



Figure 14: Map of Lamu port construction site (as of July 2019, drawn by author)

Through direct oversight over guards' activities on the perimeters, but also activities of other workers through CCTV, Chinese security officers contribute to a multifaceted system of managerial control over the labour force. This is amplified by the practice of 'living at work', as social and working lives mainly take place within the gated boundaries of the construction site. 'Living at work' is a common practice in the construction industry – see for instance similar cases in Argentina (Del Aguila, 2018) – and it continues to be a prevalent practice in the Chinese construction industry, both nationally (Pun and Smith, 2007; Swider, 2015) and internationally (Wethal, 2017; Fei, 2020). Fei (2020, p. 2) draws parallels between spatial organisation within mining compounds in Apartheid South Africa and workers' dormitories in China, highlighting that although having different origins, they both “offer important insights into the mobilisation of spatial techniques to achieve managerial control over labour”. Specifically, the proximity of the worksite and the living facilities allows employers to have continuous and direct access to the labour force and simultaneously oversee employees at all times.

In Lamu, the spatial organisation of living arrangements is strongly influenced by the hierarchical management structures regulating the construction site. The figure on the next page offers a visual representation of this hierarchy, which sees Chinese managers and engineers overseeing the work of Chinese foremen and Kenyan supervisors, the latter of which do not directly oversee the work of Kenyan manual labourers. This hierarchical organisation of the construction work applies to both Kenyan and Chinese workers (similarly to what observed in Ethiopia by Driessen, 2019), and, as will be discussed later, suggests that Chinese and Kenyan workers alike can (re)negotiate employment conditions. At the time of research, no management position was held by Kenyan workers and only a handful of them were supervisors. Similarly to the findings of other researchers (Corkin, 2012; Auffray and Fu, 2015; Brautigam and Hwang, 2019; Driessen, 2019), opportunities for professional growth offered to Kenyan workers remain scarce. As mentioned earlier, the site employs around 1200 people, about 1000 of which are Kenyan employees. This suggests that although the 75% local content requirement included in the contract signed by CRBC and KPA is fulfilled, most Kenyan workers continue to be manual labourers.

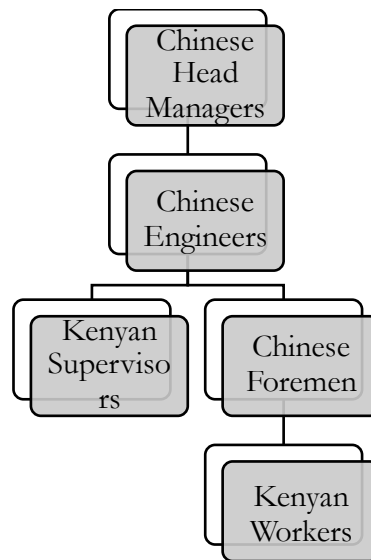


Figure 15: Management structure in Lamu port construction site (compiled by author)

The spatial organisation of living arrangements not only reflects workers' role within the company, but is also influenced by other factors, such as nationality and contract type. The spatial division between the accommodation of Chinese and Kenyan workers is demarcated by gated walls, and access is not always reciprocated. Moreover, as will be discussed later in this chapter, Chinese foremen are accommodated in portable site accommodation blocks, whose temporary nature ironically echoes that of their employment contracts (see section 5.3). Both the spatial organisation and work structures within the construction site are influenced by relations and processes that can be traced well beyond life and work in the construction site, and this will be a common thread throughout the chapter. The figure below offers a closer view of the area or the construction site hosting the living compounds, made up of three (dis)connected spaces.

The compound Area 2⁴³ hosts Chinese workers, who are housed according to the position they hold in the construction site. Single rooms in the brick accommodation facilities (2A) are allocated to Chinese managers and engineers, while beds in a 2-person room in the portable site accommodation blocks (2B) are allocated to Chinese foremen. Both these accommodation types are equipped with air-conditioning, but only the brick accommodations have private sanitary facilities, located on the balcony. Although 'private', only the toilet offers the privacy of a door, while the shower and sink are visible from the outside. Some residents on the ground floor, and all the (very few) female managers employed in the construction site, have engineered creative ways to increase their privacy, such as colourful shower curtains, collections of 'upcycled' leftover

⁴³ It should be noted that Area 1, 2 and 3 are not the given names of the accommodation areas, but have been chosen by the author to facilitate the depiction of the spatial organisation of the construction site.

construction materials, and laundry lines. When visitors stay overnight, they are provided a room in the brick blocks, and I imagine many of them must have showered crouching down, as I did, in lack of a curtain of some kind.

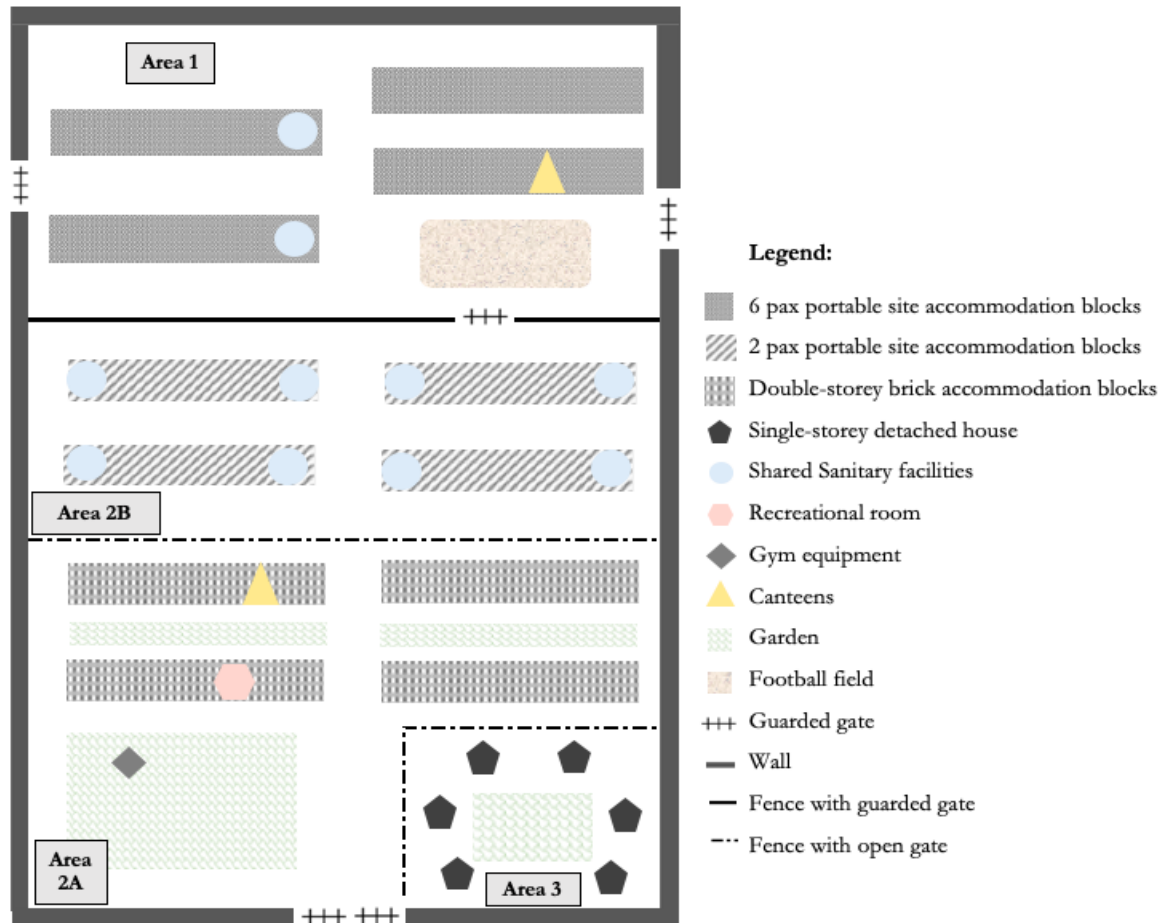


Figure 16: Lamu construction site living compound (drawn and compiled by author)

Chinese foremen housed in accommodation blocks in Area 2B share sanitary facilities located at the extremities of each block, but with considerably fewer colleagues than within the Kenyan workers' compound. Within compound areas 2A and 2B, the Chinese canteen offers breakfast, lunch and dinner free of charge, as well as spaces dedicated to indoors and outdoors recreational activities. For instance, on the ground floor of one of the brick blocks there are pin pong tables, while gym equipment and a badminton net can be found in the front garden. Compound area 3 houses the employees of the Korean consultancy firm Yooshin. This area of the camp is quite different from the rest, as it is made up of six single-storey detached houses. The two Korean managers of Yooshin Lamu office reside in this area, and so do the two Kenyan engineers employed by this consultancy firm. One of these houses is reserved for the KPA Lamu supervisor, and another one hosts a recreational space where the very few residents of this area can play pool

and spend their free time. Yooshin employees and the KPA supervisor are also offered three meals per day free of charge, but they can also make customised requests to the cooks and have food delivered to their offices or accommodations.

Compound Area 1 houses most of the Kenyan workers. In this area housing facilities are portable site accommodation blocks without air conditioning or internal sanitary facilities, which are instead located in a dedicated block and shared amongst hundreds of workers. Each room within this space was designed to host 6 workers, but more people stay there while waiting for a job opening. Workers from other regions of Kenya make their way to Lamu in search of employment, but upon arrival they often have to wait for a job position to be available. During my observation in the construction site, a newly-arrived jobseeker talked about his decision to leave Nairobi after “everyone was talking about LAPSET”. As discussed in the previous chapter, most of the Kenyan workers within the construction site are not from Lamu archipelago, but instead from the mainland in Lamu county or from upcountry Kenya. The jobseekers make use of the same facilities, such as the sanitary blocks and the Kenyan canteen, as employed residents.

Differently from Chinese employees and residents of Area 3, those living in Area 1 pay for each meal they buy from the canteen, and do not have access to the canteen located in the Chinese managers’ brick accommodation blocks in Area 2B. On the contrary, Chinese workers have access to the compound where Kenyan workers reside, and often make their way to the small shop located in Area 1. The shop mainly sells snacks, cigarettes, alcohol, and toiletries, and was opened by a group of jobseekers who realised their entrepreneurial goals instead of waiting for employment as construction workers. The presence of a shop also speaks to another aspect characteristic of living at work, whereby workers carve out spaces for recreational or business activities (Fei, 2020), but also develop support networks, which will be discussed further in the next section. The limitations of Kenyan workers’ mobility go well beyond access to the canteen, extending to several aspect of their work and recreational lives. Differently from the gym and recreational facilities available in Area 2 and 3, here workers turned a grassless open space into a dusty football field.

In addition to their accommodations being separated by guarded gates, Kenyan and Chinese workers’ commute to the construction areas also differ greatly. The distance between the housing and the furthest construction area is approximately 2.5 km. At the beginning of every shift, Chinese workers make their way to the construction areas by car, as several vehicles (and drivers) are available to them, as do Yooshin employees. For Kenyan labourers, CRBC has deployed one bus, which goes back and forth from the gate near the Kenyan workers’ compound to the construction

area, making several stops along the way (see Figure 14 for the bus stops). The shuttle service was introduced to reduce commute time and consequently the chances of workers being late. Although the bus facilitates the commute of some workers, one bus alone cannot meet the needs of all the employees commuting to the construction area, and many make their way on foot to avoid delays.

Oftentimes, reporting late to work can result in employment termination, offering a first insight into the high job insecurity faced by Kenyan labourers. In the mornings, I noticed a very orderly queue at the bus stop, overseen by a Chinese foreman standing on the other side of the road. Amongst commuters, a silent agreement allows supervisors to jump to the front of the queue and sit in the front seats of the bus, which are considered to be the best. A worker in the queue recalled that, when the bus was first introduced, arguments were very common amongst commuters, with some ending in physical fights. CRBC engineers resolved to positioning a foreman on the other side of the road to prevent fights and issue ‘fines’ – in the form of suspensions – to those who jump the queue or are involved in fights. This reflects the constant strive of Chinese contractors to improve productivity through the use of different types of deterrents and incentives, such as financial bonuses, or through the reframing of organisational processes, as it was the case for workers’ commute.

5.2 Work in Lamu construction site: aspirations of social mobility and job insecurity

The work in the construction site is ongoing throughout day and night every day of the week, and is organised in two shifts. Each shift lasts for about 11-12 hours including breaks, but overtime occurs almost daily according to the season and previous delays in construction. Weather conditions have a great impact on the work in the construction site. During the first years of construction, heavy rains forced CRBC to suspend construction work twice, and the delays accumulated in 2016 have been slowly absorbed through overtime work. The second major delay was caused by the suspension of works in 2018 due to lack of funding (discussed in Chapter 4). The delays in payments from the Kenyan government had a concrete impact on the workers, which saw their shifts reduced and no overtime available during the demobilisation period. Many Kenyan workers lost their employment due to demobilisation, but Chinese managers arbitrarily retained those workers who could easily train new employees once the construction resumed at full speed.

The shifts begin early in the morning, around 6:30-7:00, and workers break for lunch at 11:30 to avoid the hottest hours of the day, thus prolonging the work until 18:00-18:30 in the evening, not accounting for overtime. Several roles exist in the construction site and workers within different roles work side by side for the duration of their shifts. Salaries of Kenyan workers depend on the role and range between 60 and 200 KSH/hour (about 0.60-2 USD/hour). At the lowest end of the salary range (60 KSH/hour) are the manual labourers, a low-skill position which supports the other roles. Electricians are paid 80-120 KSH/hour (about 0.80-1.2 USD/hour) depending on their previous working experience. Supervisors, who oversee the work carried out in a specific section of the construction site are paid 125 KSH/hour (about 1.25 USD/hour). Machine operators receive the highest salary of 200 KSH/hour (about 2 USD/hour), but only two positions of this kind are available in Lamu construction site. Carpenters and masons – cement experts – receive an hourly salary of 70-75 KSH/hour (about 70-75 USD/hour), with the exception of one mason who receives a salary of 120 KSH/hour (about 1.2 USD/hour) due to his previous working experience in another CRBC construction site.

The differences in salary are not only linked to the previous experience within Chinese companies' construction sites, but also on the type of employment contract and the arbitrary suggestions of Chinese foremen, who supervise teams of 10-12 Kenyan workers. In terms of contracts, most Kenyan employees within Lamu construction site have (i) temporary contracts with subcontractors, (ii) casual labour contracts with CRBC, (iii) temporary contracts with CRBC. In the first case, CRBC subcontracts companies specialised in procuring labour force, but the company still decides workers' salaries. Casual labour contracts with CRBC entail reporting to work when requested by the foreman or team leader. These contracts do not have a set length and are mostly unwritten, a common practice in Chinese-built infrastructure in Africa (Lee, 2018, p. 84). Similarly, a study comparing Chinese and American firms' employment contractual coverage shows that more than half Kenyan employees working in Chinese companies do not have a contract of employment (Rounds and Huang, 2017). Temporary contracts with CRBC last for a minimum of 3 months after a 3-day trial, and workers enjoy salaries in the higher end of the spectrum.

Requests to increase the salary of Kenyan workers by 5 to 10 KSH/hour can be submitted by Chinese foremen to the CRBC headquarters in the construction site. Raises are often offered as an incentive to retain talent who is highly valued by Chinese foremen, but does not translate into a promotion to a managerial role. For instance, Bonny⁴⁴, a Kenyan supervisor, wanted to further

⁴⁴ All names provided in this chapter are pseudonyms.

his career by starting his own construction company. His direct Chinese manager, upon hearing about Bonny's plans, submitted a pay increase request to increase Bonny's salary from 125 KSH/hour (about 1.25 USD/hour) to 135 KSH/hour (about 1.35 USD/hour) to try to convince him to delay his business plans. Both Bonny's technical and communication skills were valued greatly in the superstructure at Lamu port. As will be further discussed later in the chapter, Bonny plays a central role in mediating controversies arising between Chinese foremen and their Kenyan team members.

The 'virtue' of *chiku nailao*

The long working hours, the quest for improved productivity, and the incentive/deterrent regime represents the materialisation of the Chinese 'virtue' of 吃苦耐劳 (*chiku nailao*). This four-character expression encompasses two concepts. First, 吃苦 (*chiku*) "eating bitterness", from 吃 (*chi*) "to eat" and 苦 (*ku*) "bitter". The Chinese idiom *chiku* refers to a life and work ethic characterised by enduring hardship, discipline, and self-sacrifice in the hope of a better future. Second, 耐劳 (*nailao*) "hard-working", from 耐 (*nai*) "to be able to endure" and 劳 (*lao*) "labour". The concept of *nailao* is expressed on a daily basis through the more colloquial expression 努力工作 (*nuli gongzuo*), translated into "work(ing) hard". Thus, the four-character expression *chiku nailao* refers to the notion of 'biting the bullet', which is not only embedded within the management structure in the construction site, but also in the labour relations dynamics in China.

As Driessen (2019, p. 158) suggests, Chinese workers' *ku* (bitterness) is not limited to the hard work itself – especially as Chinese workers are now increasingly employed in overseas construction sites as managers or foremen – but represents a "newly developed flavour inherent in their marginal position in an increasingly affluent China." China's economic reforms not only transformed the relations between the Chinese state and Chinese SOEs overseas (see Chapter 2 and 6), but had a significant impact on people's lives. In the 1990s, the restructuring of SOEs reshaped the geographies of production within China, whereby the coastal regions saw rapid industrialisation and urbanisation (Cai, 1999). In turn, temporary migrant workers from rural areas began to move to the cities to work for construction projects or work in the manufacturing industry (Swider, 2016). For instance, in 2003 alone, rural migrant labourers amounted to 114 million people (Zhan, 2005, p. 13). In turn, the income gap amongst workers in rural and urban areas widened (Biao, 2014) and, to this day, migrant workers continue to face a high degree of instability due to the

household registration system, also known as *hukou* (户口). This system is a means of population and movement control, which entails the assignation of urban or rural status to individuals according to their place of birth, effectively limiting the access of rural-based individuals to urban-based welfare systems (i.e. schooling and healthcare) (Cai, 2003).

In other words, the work on construction sites in Africa is a ‘bitterness’ that Chinese workers are ready to ‘eat’ in the hope of social mobility in China (Driessen, 2015, 2016; see also Lee, 2018, p. 100; Driessen, 2019, p. 159; Schmitz, 2020; Wu, 2021, p. 12). Higher salaries in overseas construction projects are often a decisive factor for Chinese migrant workers, who can provide prospects of social mobility for their families (Driessen, 2015). State-owned contractors also incentivise workers to go to Africa through the disbursement of an allowance (补助 - *buzhu*) for “hardship and bitterness” (艰苦 - *jianku*), known as 艰苦补助 (*jianku buzhu*), which is calculated on the basis of employees’ ranking within the company and the assessment of a “region’s level of development and standard of living” (Wu, 2021, p. 13). In addition to being a way to earn higher salaries, state media often glorify the work of Chinese companies in Africa, thus contributing to them obtaining respect at home (Driessen, 2019, p. 17). For instance, in Lamu, the construction workers have been discussed in Chinese media, specifically China Radio International (Yang, 2019), as “筑梦人” (*zhu meng ren*), translated into ‘dream builders’, a media representation quickly promoted by CRBC’s mother company CCCC (2019). Lastly, *chiku* (“eating bitterness”) also becomes a crucial part of workers’ identity. This is closely related to the ‘bitterness’ that comes from Chinese workers finding themselves in a limbo of “permanent temporariness” (Swider, 2016, p. 139), as they are neither connected nor disconnected from their home networks and the communities in their place of work. Yet, *chiku nailao* has a different meaning for Chinese managers and Chinese foremen.

In Lamu, most Chinese managers are young, male (with a few exceptions), single, recently-graduated engineers, while foremen have perfected their skills through years of experience over formal education, and are generally older married men. Although both managers and foremen are employed temporarily in the construction site, engineers have a permanent contract with CRBC (see also Swider, 2015). Foremen are employed on a project-basis, which means they will soon have to look for other employment opportunities. Nevertheless, Wu (2021, p. 14) suggests that after taking part in construction projects in Zambia, some workers might decide to remain there with the prospect to, in the long-term, migrate again towards “higher-status places”. Nevertheless, during construction projects, workers’ movement is restricted by the company, similarly to

Driessen's (2019, p.104) example of Chinese migrant workers in Ethiopia being unable to make plans to visit China since the contractor was holding workers' passports. CRBC's employees within the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR operations also reported similar travel restrictions in informal conversations, and some of them had not visited China for over two years. For Chinese engineers, however, overseas projects represent a steppingstone within CRBC. For example, an engineer who had worked in Kenya in 2016 described his journey of "slowly coming home" from Kenya to the Hambantota port project in Sri Lanka, and next a bridge construction in Suzhou, China (Interview, Senior Engineer, Chinese SOE, Beijing, 20th May 2019).

The incentive/deterrent regime

In addition to their temporary employment, Chinese foremen are also embedded in the incentive/deterrent regime. In Lamu, foremen compete to complete sections of construction on time and up to standards to enjoy financial benefits in the form of bonuses. In turn, their Kenyan teams work under stressful conditions, being pushed to work harder and faster, or face repercussions, such as suspension or termination of employment. Job insecurity translates into an environment of uncertainty, in which workers fear repercussion if they were to openly criticise and defy the hierarchical management structure or question their working conditions. In addition to the hierarchical management structure, the arbitrary decision-making of Chinese foremen and managers (see Driessen, 2019, p. 106) also contributes to sustaining the high degree of job insecurity. The arbitrary decision-making powers Chinese managers have in the construction site has a considerable impact on the relations between Chinese and Kenyan workers, similarly to relations observed in other contexts across the African continent (see for instance Giese and Thiel, 2011, 2014). As mentioned before, Kenyan workers are mainly employed in non-managerial positions, meaning that their work is organised and overseen by Chinese employees.

The hierarchical managerial structure described in the section 5.1 is also reflected within the HR department, where Chinese HR officers oversee HR processes. The HR officers are located in the headquarters of the construction site (HQ in the construction site map in Figure 14), and comprise two offices: China HR and Kenya HR. Three Kenyan officers work in Kenya HR, and their office is subordinate to China HR, which employs two officers (Interview, Human Resource Manager, Chinese SOE, Lamu, 15th March 2019). This means that when a controversy arises in the construction site is reported to China HR – and I will soon discuss how this is not often the case

– Kenya HR merely has a communication role, as their officers are the ones directly engaging with Kenyan workers. One officer in Kenya HR described the decision-making process as follows:

If the problem is not resolved in the pit [the construction area], then it comes to the HR office. But things are not fair. The Chinese supervisor will give a reason to China HR, who will believe him and the person who has an issue has to go home. They call China HR before the worker reaches the headquarters, and there's nothing else that the local HR can do. Once the decision is made by China HR it is final, we [Kenya HR] can't do anything. We went head to head with them at times, but it doesn't help at all. When we go to China HR, we know the decision has already been taken. (Interview, Human Resource Officer, Chinese SOE, Lamu, 15th March 2019)

Controversies related to labour issues are very common in the construction site; Kenya HR have faced hundreds of workers who have lost their employment (Interview, Human Resources Officer, Chinese SOE, Lamu, 15th March 2019). Earlier, I discussed the different types of contract Kenyan workers building Lamu port have, namely temporary contracts with subcontractors, casual labour contracts with CRBC, and temporary contracts with CRBC. The type of contract also influences the role CRBC Kenya HR has in negotiating for employment retention, which is particularly fruitless when it concerns workers hired through a subcontractor. However, the lack of bargaining power of Kenya HR is not the only factor influencing the high job insecurity in the construction site, where communication issues hinders the daily interactions between Kenyan and Chinese workers. As I will now discuss, this office is by far the only actor involved in the renegotiation of workplace dynamics of the construction site, where individuals take on the role of brokers.

5.3 Instances of controversy: the brokering of labour relations

As highlighted by literature in political anthropology, brokerage emerges in “settings in transition” (James, 2011, p. 318) and brokers “shape the interactions amongst actors who have unequal power relations and diverging interests” (Koster and van Leynseele, 2018, p. 803). Brokers were initially considered as mediating figures acting as an interface between marginalised, powerless or silenced communities and state power and market forces, but brokers also encompass seemingly contradictory qualities as individuals, such as rent-seeking behaviour and moral drive (Mosse and Lewis, 2006; James, 2011). For instance, Raeymaekers (2014, p. 25) explored the brokerage of traders in a context characterised by the “modernising colonial practices and active resistance

against (post)colonial rule, [...] formal political regulation and informal accumulation, and [...] local dependencies and global economic engagements”, highlighting the ambiguity of their role as brokers, since they embody both capitalist ideology and simultaneously suffer “its exploitative logic”.

In her work on Chinese roadbuilders in Ethiopia, Driessen’s (2019) shows how labour controversies – particularly the contestation of termination of employment – are mediated through the township-level courts, *wereda* courts, which have become the “*de facto* mediators in relations between the Chinese employers and Ethiopian labourers” (2019, p. 150, italics added). These courts act as brokers at the interface of Chinese and Ethiopian actors, practices and discourses, and negotiate relations amongst them, becoming a way for Ethiopian labourers “to keep their Chinese managers in check and to improve wage levels, employment conditions and contractual procedures” (Driessen, 2019, p. 132). Although in the case of Lamu construction site controversies are mainly mediated by individuals, it is clear that the figure of the broker should be seen as “one who activates the continuing interplay between apparently irreconcilable discourses and practices” (James, 2011, p. 335). Here, I will now present several vignettes of controversies, highlighting the intersection between labour dynamics and their connections to broader trajectories and discourses ‘outwith’ the construction site.

At the beginning of a morning shift, I followed Bonny – a Kenyan supervisor – to the construction area, where several issues had arisen during the night shift. Some of the work carried out the day before by a Kenyan manual labourer named John had been washed away during the pump cleaning process taking place every night. This meant that the cement could not be poured into place before John, helped by other team members, had redone yesterday’s finishing work. The Chinese foreman was checking closely and pushing John to increase his working speed, as the work had already been delayed by two hours. Once John had finished, the Chinese foreman approached him and shouted to “go home, home, go!”. Hearing these shouts, Bonny, approached the Chinese foreman to enquire about the issue that, so far, was leading to John being fired. The Chinese foreman blamed John for the delay and had made the decision to fire him. Bonny was attempting to negotiate an alternative solution before the incident was reported to the headquarters, at which point John’s job would have been beyond saving.

John, who had left Nairobi with a cargo clearance diploma hoping that working in the construction of the port could open opportunities for future employment in the operations of Lamu port, was standing a few steps behind Bonny waiting for a verdict. Bonny and the Chinese foreman

communicated – as workers do continuously during daily construction activities – in a mixture of gestures, English, Kiswahili and Mandarin words. Eventually, Bonny and the Chinese foreman reached an agreement whereby John was allowed to return to the site the day after, but he was suspended without pay for the day. Bonny’s intervention and negotiation were key in de-escalating a controversy that could have costed John his job and livelihood. Later, Bonny explained that while talking to John, he was “pretending to be on the side of the Chinese, so that he [John] learn[ed] his lesson”. This suggests that Bonny can deliberately – and temporarily – assume different identities to sustain his brokering strategies (see Mosse and Lewis, 2006), which, however, rely on precarious communication.

Communication issues are extremely common in Chinese-built projects. The language barrier existing between Chinese and Kenyan workers cannot be underestimated and continues to play a role in daily encounters. Most Chinese foremen do not speak English upon arrival in Lamu construction site, where the languages most used for communication between Chinese and Kenyan workers in the construction site are Kiswahili, Mandarin and English. Amongst Kenyan workers, who come from different areas of Kenya, Kiswahili and English are the most common spoken languages, while amongst Chinese workers Mandarin is the language of communication. Everyday interactions between Chinese and Kenyan workers are complicated by the language difference, but the effort to find a communication strategy is constant from both Chinese and Kenyans. Bonny, who has daily interactions with several Chinese workers, points out that Chinese foremen arrive from China without any knowledge of the English language, and during the first few weeks on the construction site they familiarise with the ways in which workers communicate.

For example, I observed an attempt at communication between a Bonny and a Chinese foreman who had just arrived from China. Bonny was asking the Chinese foreman if he needed him to call four extra workers from the accommodation as there was extra work to be done. The Chinese foreman only spoke Mandarin, and Bonny was speaking in English to him. After a few failed attempts, Bonny asked me to translate the question for him, in order to have a definite answer and go on with his work. To give a further insight on interactions of this kind, I relay a first-person narrative from my fieldwork diary. In this extract, I discuss the interactions that lead Bonny to renegotiate the termination of employment of John.

[Bonny] is trying to reach the Chinese foreman at the end of the structure, where he is smoking a cigarette with another Chinese worker. We arrive and [Bonny] greets him with a 早上好 [*zǎoshang hao*, good morning in Mandarin], the worker smiles. [Bonny]

points at the superstructure, the Chinese foreman points at a Kenyan worker and says “no work!”. There is an issue. The Chinese foreman says “他 [ta, Mandarin for he/him] go home!”, he is still pointing at the worker. (Fieldwork diary entry, Lamu, 15th March 2019)

Bonny has learnt a few words in Mandarin. He knows greetings and words such as “no” and a few numbers. Chinese workers have also made similar efforts, learning English words such as “tomorrow”, “no”, or “okay”, which they often pair with the exhortative 了 (le) particle to make up “okay 了”. Since the English vocabulary of Chinese workers is quite limited, Kenyans often use incorrect grammar structures or make up new ways of expressing themselves. For instance, instead of saying “the day after tomorrow”, they say “tomorrow tomorrow”, which Chinese foreman understand because they are familiar with the word “tomorrow”.

Non-verbal communication, such as gestures, is also key in communication amongst Kenyan and Chinese workers. Non-verbal communication ‘codes’ are negotiated within the construction site during everyday work, which makes these forms of communication almost unintelligible to outsiders. The vignette below relates to the central role non-verbal communication plays in the organisation of the work. Here, my fieldwork notes describe Bonny’s communication with a Chinese foreman concerning the upcoming visit by the engineers of the consultant Yooshin.

[Bonny] points at the area with a circular movement, then lifts two fingers to his eyes to signal “to look” and then he lifts four fingers and says “at four”, the Chinese foreman nods. [Bonny] then points further away, the Chinese foreman says “不 [bu, Mandarin for no], later.” [Bonny] explains to me he had asked the Chinese foreman if it was okay to have the consultant come to inspect at 4, then he had asked him if the section behind was also ready, and the Chinese foreman had said no, that will be done later. (Fieldwork diary entry, Lamu, 15th March 2019)

As mentioned earlier, upon arrival in Lamu construction site, Chinese foremen spend a few weeks adjusting to the communication mechanisms on the construction site. In the initial phase of construction in 2016, translators had been hired by CRBC, but they had only worked in the construction site for a couple of months before being moved to another site. Amongst Kenyan workers, rumours have it CRBC’s decision was guided by the need to “protect their secrets” (Interview, Construction Worker, Lamu, 17th March 2019), suggesting that smooth communication is not a priority to the contractor. Against this background, Chinese engineers also

step in the role of brokers when controversies arise. Due to their higher ranking within the hierarchical management structure and their knowledge of English, Chinese engineers are in the position to not only mediate, but also overrule decisions made by Chinese foremen. For instance, the controversy taking place between a Kenyan worker, Matthew, and his direct supervisor, Chinese foreman Mingzhi, offers an excellent example.

Matthew, a 25-year old carpenter, had returned to work after a work-related injury, but Mingzhi did not want him to be part of his team anymore. According to Mingzhi, Matthew had been given 2 days of medical leave, but had not reported to work for a total of 5 days. Matthew was not contesting the length of his leave, but stating that it had taken longer to recover, and that he had returned to work as soon as possible. As a discussion was taking place amongst Mingzhi, Matthew and Bonny – who was inspecting that area of the works when the controversy sparked – a Chinese engineer, Xuefeng, arrived. Xuefeng joined the discussion, listened to Bonny's summary of the issue, and quickly relieved him of his negotiating role. Xuefeng phoned a fellow engineer working in another section of the construction site and suggested to transfer Matthew to his team. The transfer was not justified. Instead, Xuefeng explained on the phone that he did not know what had happened but that it was nothing serious. Then, Xuefeng addressed the foreman Mingzhi to explain the solution, and pointed Matthew in his colleague's direction.

Engineers' managerial status in the construction site means that the foremen's authority does not extend beyond their construction area. As brokers, engineers are thus able to select information to be communicated, omit details, or only offer enough context to facilitate the resolution of the problem. Conversely, defiance of the hierarchical management structure could have considerable impact on foremen's project-dependant employment contracts, but this does not mean that engineers are the only Chinese workers involved in the (re)negotiations of workplace dynamics. As discussed earlier, food provision differs for Chinese and Kenyan workers. Unlike Chinese employees, who are provided with food by CRBC, Kenyans have to buy theirs from the canteen, but during the long shifts in the berth construction area they cannot do so because of the 2.5 km distance between the pit and the canteen. Both Kenyan and Chinese workers in this area of the construction site use their breaks to rest in the shade, as temperatures can be as high as 37° C. According to CRBC regulations, when overtime work is carried out food has to be provided (free of charge) to Kenyan workers as well. Therefore, even on days when no overtime is needed, some Chinese foremen make use of this regulation by discreetly adding one hour of work to their Kenyan team, who are then provided with food without incurring any additional charge.

This example highlights another aspect of living at work, whereby the construction site also becomes a space for social connections, as also suggested by Fei (2020). Amongst Kenyan workers, social relations are often not limited to the recreational sphere, and extend to the mitigation of practical challenges in their work, echoing Riisgaard and Okinda's (2018) findings in Kenya's smallholder tea farms. In order to mitigate the high job insecurity that characterises work in the construction site, Kenyan workers' networks serve several purposes in a continuum with broader trajectories beyond the reality of Chinese construction sites (as suggested also by Oya, 2019). Historically, labour relations in Kenya have been characterised by the cultivation of personal and collective relations to patrons, within groups of workers and amongst unions (Sandbrook, 1972; Henley, 1976), or amongst migrant workers in tea plantations (Adagala, 1991). Similar dynamics can be observed in today's Kenyan construction industry. Subcontractors and gang leaders – in a continuum from the gangs of dockworkers in Mombasa port during the colonial era (Cooper, 1987, pp. 44–144) – still play a role in the recruiting and supervising of workers in construction sites. Amongst Kenyan contractors, subcontracting or hiring a gang leader – the distinction amongst which seems difficult to make (Mitullah and Njeri Wachira, 2003) – to provide workers, and at times supervise the construction, continues to be a common practice.

Gang leaders primarily operate in Kenya's informal construction sector, which comprises “unregistered and unprotected individuals and small enterprises that supply labour and contribute in other ways to the output of the construction sector” (Mitullah and Njeri Wachira, 2003, p. 13; see also Wells and Jason, 2010). As highlighted by the study of housing projects in Nairobi, gang leaders are “usually artisans of many years of experience, good reputation and good contacts with potential clients who lead a group of skilled and non-skilled men who usually work together” (Mitullah and Njeri Wachira, 2003, p. 20). Their role of brokers in workforce provision translates into financial benefits (similarly to what discussed in James, 2011), as they earn higher wages than the workers or receive commissions directly from the client, while simultaneously contributing to the formation of a network amongst workers (Mitullah and Njeri Wachira, 2003).

The formation of networks means workers have “a form of social capital” which “act[s] as insurance for the comparatively poor urban workers who do not have any form of formal insurance” (ibid, p. 21). This aspect of the practice of labour contracting is particularly relevant to the workplace relations in Lamu construction site, as networks amongst workers serve several purposes. First, Kenyan workers keep track of the job opportunities arising within the construction site, so to report them back to those who have recently arrived in Lamu and are lodging in the Kenyan housing facilities waiting for employment. Second, newly hired Kenyan workers' training

mainly takes place through interactions with colleagues and extends beyond the short training period – usually three days – required to obtain an employment contract. This happens during working hours, where team members work side by side for prolonged periods of time. Third, as highlighted through the vignettes featuring Bonny, the brokerage of workplace controversies is crucial to the mitigation of the high job insecurity that characterises work in the construction site. As mentioned before, during the demobilisation of construction, these were the workers that CRBC sought to retain.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I analysed workplace dynamics in the Sino-African construction site of Lamu port. In order to fully explore the embeddedness of workplace dynamics in multiple (social) relations beyond the interrelated concepts of workplace organisation and politics of production, I argued for the inclusion of Massey’s dynamic understanding of place in the study of *workplace* relations (see call from Sergot and Saives, 2016; see also Fei, 2020). Thus, in this chapter, I focused on the exploration of labour relations amongst Chinese and Kenyan workers in the Lamu port construction site, suggesting that the labour controversies arising – and their negotiation dynamics – not only offer a window into the heterogeneous nature of China-Africa interactions, but also speak to broader trajectories outwith the construction site. Specifically, I argued that echoes of power relations in labour relations in both China and Kenya encounter narratives of social mobility, labour control, and job insecurity in the spatio-temporal ‘moment’ of the construction site.

I first discussed the spatial organisation of the construction site, where disconnected spaces reflect workers’ role within the company and hierarchical management structure, but also nationality and contract type. This section argued that the spatial organisation of life and work in the construction site is embedded in Chinese contractors’ constant struggle productivity, which set the scene for the investigation of work dynamics in the construction site. In the second section, I discussed the working conditions, such as length of shifts and pay, highlighting the high job insecurity that characterises Kenyan workers’ daily activities. I related the long working hours, the quest for improved productivity, and the incentive/deterrent regime to the Chinese ‘virtue’ of *chiku nailao*, in which both Chinese and Kenyan workers have become embedded in. The hope for social mobility ‘at home’ pushed Chinese workers overseas, but *chiku nailao* has a different meaning for managers and foremen. Mainly due to the difference in contracts – since managers have permanent contracts while foremen have temporary ones – foremen are often in a limbo of “permanent

temporariness” (Swider, 2016, p. 139), while overseas projects are a stepping stone in the career advancement of managers.

The competition for incentives amongst Chinese foremen and their arbitrary decision-making contributes to the insecurity faced by Kenyan workers, who are employed in non-managerial position. When controversies arise and are reported to HR, the hierarchical management structure also reflects upon the room for manoeuvre – or better mediation – of Kenya HR. This means that controversies reported to the construction site headquarters result in loss of employment for Kenyan workers. On a daily basis, controversies are negotiated within the site, through the intervention of brokers. In the third section, I offered examples of said controversies and brokerage. First, I discussed the negotiation over the termination of employment of a Kenyan worker, and the brokering of a Kenyan supervisor which resulted in a temporary suspension. This example offered insights into the role of language and communication mechanisms with the construction site, while also speaking to brokers’ strategies in negotiations.

Second, I discussed the negotiation over the termination of employment of a previously-injured Kenyan worker, which was initially negotiated by the same Kenyan supervisor, and later by a Chinese engineer. This case spoke to the hierarchical managerial structure, whereby the arbitrary-decision making of Chinese foremen can be overruled by Chinese engineers. However, some Chinese foremen can deliberately defy company regulations to supply food free of charge to their Kenyan teams, highlighting the construction site as a place for forging social relations. In a similar fashion, Kenyan workers support each other in different ways, for instance through networks aimed to skill transfer. These networks are relatable to historical trajectories of labour relations within Kenya, particularly the brokering by figures such as subcontractors and gang leaders in the construction industry.

In conclusion, this chapter argued that daily negotiations of *workplace* dynamics represent the encounter of labour control and job insecurity with aspirations of social mobility and workers’ relations within and outwith the construction site. In other words, labour controversies in the construction site speak to connection of this *workplace* to pre-existing geographies of power beyond Lamu port construction site. In the (re)negotiations of labour practices, both Kenyan and Chinese workers can act as brokers. On the one hand, the negotiation trajectories of Kenyan supervisors are connected to the long-standing roles of patrons – or ‘gang leaders’ – in the Kenyan labour context. On the other hand, the incentive/deterrent regime in which both Chinese and Kenyan workers are embedded is connected to the shifting social dynamics in the Chinese political economy. Nevertheless, the agency enacted by workers is inherently context-dependant (Links,

2021). With regards to the Chinese contractor, the (re)negotiation of labour practices is closely linked to the embeddedness of Chinese actors in broader networks. This last point will be further explored in the next chapter, which will focus on the embeddedness of the state-owned contractor CRBC in Kenya to draw out key aspects speaking to the wider landscape of China-Africa infrastructural engagement.

Chapter 6

'The political economy of Chinese state-owned companies' internationalisation: embeddedness and business expansion

The previous two chapters explored different aspects of Sino-African infrastructural engagement by focusing on the diverging agendas and negotiation trajectories of an array of Kenyan actors. Building on the main points emerged from the analysis of the context underpinning the spatial expansion of Chinese lending and state-owned companies (see Chapter 2) and its intersection with the growing prominence of infrastructural development in Kenya's political economy (see Chapter 3), I have focused on the controversies emerging amongst the actors involved in the development of Lamu port and the broader LAPSSET Corridor. Through insights from the controversies emerging around the development of infrastructure projects in Northern Kenya – and specifically Lamu county – Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 scrutinised both the agency of state and non-state actors in relations to Kenya's national government and Chinese contractor CRBC and broader debates in Sino-African infrastructure projects. In the present chapter, I will further explore the evolution of relations amongst the Chinese state and SOEs operating overseas to analyse the relevance of Chinese companies' embeddedness to their internationalisation processes.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, differently from the disbursement of infrastructure financing, the decision-making process for participation in EPC international tenders does not require the direct participation of Chinese State Council actors, but it can take place within the overseas branches of Chinese SOEs. Although geopolitical considerations and relevance of connectivity initiatives – such as LAPSSET corridor – to Chinese state actors should not be overlooked, there are other dynamics at play. Chinese SOEs have undergone several decades of reform processes, which have inevitably reshaped their relations with the Chinese state. Simultaneously, increasing overseas activities meant that Chinese SOEs are increasingly embedded in the political and business contexts in which they operate. In turn, the engagement of Chinese actors in the development of African infrastructure is also shaped by different moments of encounter with African actors – and their agency.

Thus, in the present chapter, I will scrutinise CRBC's internationalisation in Kenya and the key role played by the company's embeddedness in different networks to the business expansion

trajectories of state-owned companies. Specifically, I will suggest that the spatial expansion of Chinese state-owned contractors in Africa – initially reliant on Chinese state support – is now closely linked to companies' business expansion through non-Chinese funded projects, which are scouted through companies' networks. The operational autonomy derived from the evolution of relations amongst the Chinese state and the SOEs operating overseas has given branches abroad some room for manoeuvre to pursue business expansion. The embeddedness of Chinese contractors in different networks – such as the business and political elites in Kenya or Chinese enterprise networks – is central to the pursuit of business opportunities for market expansion.

This chapter is structured as follows. First, I will continue to explore the evolution of the relations between the Chinese state and the business sector, with a focus on construction SOEs, suggesting that overseas branches pursue business expansion through international EPC contracts not funded by Chinese actors. Second, I will discuss the intersection of CRBC's spatial expansion and the increasing disbursement of loans to Kenya's infrastructure, highlighting the early-day internationalisation trajectory, underpinned by a trial-and-error approach, sub-contracting gigs, and Chinese-funded projects. Third, I will discuss CRBC's participation to international tenders, highlighting the relationship between opportunities for (political and financial) profiteering by Kenya's elites and the company's business expansion, the outbidding of other competitors, as well as the connections to networks of enterprises.

6.1 Chinese SOEs venture overseas

Before 1978, Chinese overseas projects – then known as foreign assistance projects – were undertaken by specialised units within relevant state ministries, which represented the building blocks of the first Chinese SOEs. Amongst SOEs, the construction sector was the first to obtain permission to participate to overseas projects due to the international experience these companies had gained during the Mao Era, as well as the development of the global construction market (Lardy, 2012). Four newly-formed SOEs were granted permission to operate overseas in the late 1970s: (i) the China State Construction Engineering Company which stemmed from the State Construction and Engineering Bureau – later incorporated into the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development; (ii) the China Civil Engineering and Construction Corporation which stemmed from the Ministry of Railway; (iii) the China National Complete Plant Import and Export Corporation, which stemmed from the Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations – later grouped under the ministry of Commerce; and (iv) CRBC, established in 1979, which stemmed from the Ministry of Transport.

At this stage, the great majority of Chinese companies were both state-owned and state-operated (Ma and Lu, 2010). Industrial and manufacturing activities were planned by the national or provincial governments, and a Communist Party of China secretary was assigned to each SOE to supervise their activities (see for instance Lam, 2017). The operations of SOEs were under the directives of government agencies, which were in charge of all aspects of company operations, including their strategy and human resources. All profits were transferred to the government, which also supplied credit to cover the financial losses of SOEs (Lin *et al.*, 2020). Private ownership was not yet recognised, but communities at the provincial or sub-provincial levels could collectively own small enterprises. Although private ownership was legalised by the government of Deng Xiaoping – who rose to power in 1978 – in an initial push towards marketisation, SOEs remained market leaders. In 1985, SOEs still amounted to 65% of Chinese companies, collectively owned enterprises to 32% and private companies to 3% (Kang, Shi and Brown, 2008).

Over the last 40 years, the Chinese government has implemented several reforms with the goal of improving SOEs' profitability, which had implications for their relations to political institutions. The low performance of Chinese SOEs in the pre-reform period was mainly attributed to the economic deterioration resulting from the Cultural Revolution and SOEs' policy burdens, such as social welfare or hiring requirements to reduce unemployment. In order to increase performance, SOEs were allowed to retain part of their profits for the first 5-year period until 1983, when a 55% taxation scheme substituted the fixed profit remittance (Lin, Cai, and Li, 1998). The planned economy was not significantly altered by these initial reforms, but the SOEs obtained “a limited degree of operating autonomy” with regards to the allocation of funds for business expansion (Lin *et al.*, 2020, p. 37; see also Groves *et al.*, 1994). The search for autonomy was further pursued through a restructuring of the managerial system of SOEs, known as the Contract Responsibility System (Koo, 1990), according to which SOE managers were deployed on the basis of 3-5 year contracts. The Contract Responsibility System, however, still relied on financial incentives being dispensed on the basis of the fulfilment of government targets, and the short-term contracts implied managerial rent-seeking and goal-oriented planning (Lam, 2017, p. 41).

In 1996, the policy of “grasp the large, let go of the small” (抓大放小- *zhuā dà fàng xiǎo*) was adopted to further push the marketisation agenda. This meant that the Chinese government would retain ownership over large SOEs in key sectors, such as construction, telecommunication or energy, while many other SOEs underwent privatisation, closure, transfer to the provincial

governments, agglomeration or corporatisation⁴⁵ (for a detailed account see Garnaut *et al.*, 2005). The agglomeration process resulted in the formation of business groups, also known as ‘central enterprises’ (中央企业 – *zhongyang qiye*), which, to this day, continue to have full access to preferential credit lines and are supervised by the State Assets and Administration Committee⁴⁶ (SASAC) of the State Council, established in 2003 (see for instance Naughton, 2015). Nevertheless, as many SOEs now part of business groups were already operating overseas, the companies’ search for autonomy was not halted by these agglomeration processes.

A further push for reforms took place in the 21st century, which, initially, saw an rapid shift towards a mixed-ownership managerial structure (Miao, 2014), with non-state directors being required to join the boards of central SOEs. In the case of publicly-listed SOEs – whether on the Hong Kong, Shanghai, or other stock markets – market forces can influence the national and international development of the businesses (Lin *et al.*, 2020). In addition, the selective (and intentional) regulation or deregulation of different sectors within the Chinese economy suggests that a multiplicity of actors at different governance levels – which often have conflicting agendas (Aken and Lewis, 2015) – are participating in the regulatory environment, thus reducing the direct control of SASAC over the SOEs (Pearson, 2005; Hsueh, 2011, p. 3; Jones and Zou, 2017). For instance, Downs (2007, p. 50-51) suggests that, although Sudan was not on the list of markets SOEs were encouraged to enter at the end of the 20th century, China National Petroleum significantly expanded their market and activities in this country. This suggests that the Chinese state’s oversight over central SOEs diminishes when they are operating overseas (as also noted by Pairault, 2013).

The marketisation reforms implied the intensification of the agglomeration processes, with key and strategic sectors’ business groups increasing in size. In the decade between its establishment and 2013, the number of SOEs under the supervision of SASAC decreased from 200 to 113 (Lardy, 2019, p. 109). For instance, in 2005, CBRC and CHEC were merged into what is now CCCC (see Figure 17). This corporate restructuring meant that over 600 enterprises were integrated to form the business group CCCC. The agglomeration process brought competitive advantages to CCCC, as the company’s subsidiaries include a network of suppliers of machineries and materials, as well as consulting services (see Chapter 4), leading to the company’s growing power in China’s political economy (see also Zhang, 2021). Nevertheless, the high number of firms

⁴⁵ Corporatisation meant that, although majority ownership would still be in the hands of the government, the governance system of the SOEs would be restructured with the goal of increasing their profitability (for a complete review on the corporatisation of Chinese SOEs see Zhang (2008).

⁴⁶ For more details on SASAC, see for instance Naughton (2008) and Wang, Guthrie and Xiao (2012).

merged to form CCCC does not represent a departure from the focus on the infrastructure sector and related services, which remain the main sector for CCCC and its subsidiaries.

Since the late 1980s, when the first Chinese business groups emerged, they have expanded and diversified in the same or related field (Hahn and Lee, 2006), differently from the very diversified Korean (*chaebols*) and Japanese (*keiretsu*) business groups that had inspired the formation of Chinese business groups in the first instance (Lee and Woo, 2002). High state shareholding is often identified as a deterrent to the diversification of Chinese business groups' activities (see for instance Hahn and Lee, 2006; Zhao, 2010). In this sense, CCCC's agglomeration is closer to Granovetter's (1995) broad conceptualisation of business groups, which encompasses both diversified and non-diversified business groups. The focus of this chapter's analysis is similarly rooted in exploring the evolving state-SOE (and thus business groups) relations vis-à-vis their processes of internationalisation. Thus, the next sections of this chapter will explore the internationalisation of CRBC in Kenya to then highlight the relevance of Chinese construction SOEs' embeddedness in different networks to their internationalisation process.

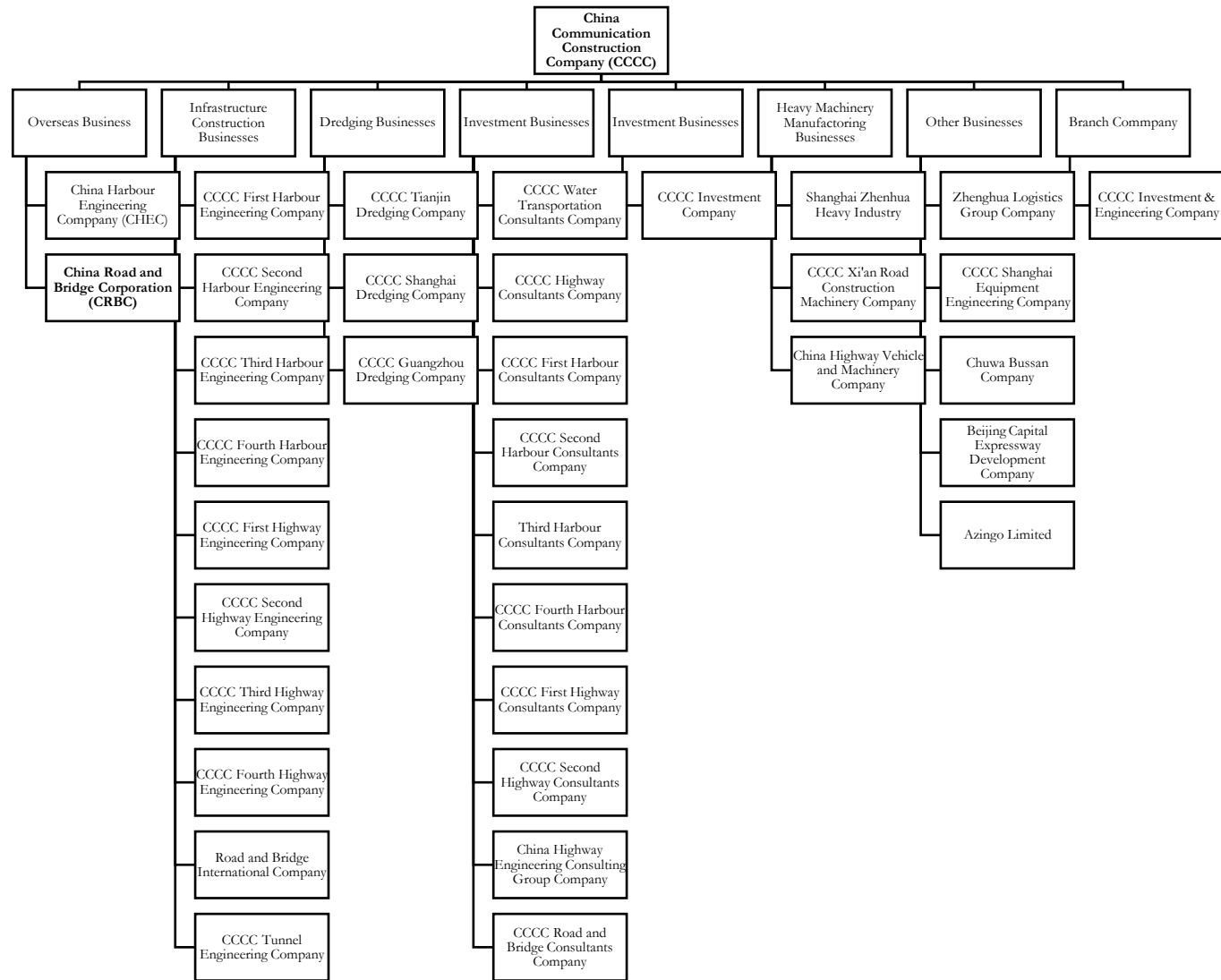


Figure 17: CCCC organisational chart, source: CCCC, 2020

6.2 Early-days subcontracting and Chinese-funded infrastructure

Already in December 1984, years before the internationalisation push given by the Chinese government through the Going Out Policy (see Chapter 1 and 2), CRBC opened an office in Nairobi (Lu, 2016). Reflecting on the 35-year journey of CRBC in Kenya, a high-level executive stated that initial operations in Kenya were guided by the need to “survive” in an environment characterised by fierce international competition (Interview, Senior Manager, Chinese SOE, Nairobi, 5th July 2019). In the initial internationalisation stages, the company’s market expansion in Kenya was guided by a trial-and-error approach. Between 1984 and 1996, CRBC was mainly sub-contracted for sections of roads, particularly by other Asian companies, such as Korean and Japanese contractors that had been operating in Kenya for longer (Interview, Senior Manager, Chinese SOE, Nairobi, 5th July 2019). Differently from present-day partnerships with non-Chinese companies, collaborations between CRBC (as sub-contractor) and Japanese and Korean contractors were not formalised during the bidding stages or through contractual agreements. This resembles initial engagement patterns of Chinese and French contractors in Francophone African countries, whereby “French and Chinese firms operated on the same projects but without formal ties” (Pairault, 2020c, p. 1).

For CRBC, the small-scale sub-contracting projects were fundamental to overcome the lack of legitimacy typically faced by Chinese SOEs in their initial internationalisation stages, such the “liability of newness” and “the liability of foreignness” (Lam, 2017, p. 5). Entering a new market presents challenges related to the knowledge of said market, as well as the political ties necessary to compete in an increasingly busy business environment. As will be discussed further in the coming sections, Chinese companies have identified several approaches to mitigate the initial lack of legitimacy, such as reliance of business networks and groups (Lam, 2017), personal *guanxi* (Wu, 2021), or business associations overseas (Liu, 2018). Simultaneously, as it is also the case for Sino-French ‘partnerships’ in Central and West Africa (Pairault, 2020c), participation to infrastructure projects with international companies was also fundamental to becoming increasingly embedded in the African market in which they operate.

Within CRBC Kenya, middle managers expressed the importance of learning from well-established Asian contractors – particularly Japanese contractors – who had already operated in the Kenyan market. The involvement of foreign MNCs in the Kenyan market has been traced back to the early 20th century, and, by 1945 at least 15 foreign businesses had been established (Swainson 1980, p.64). In the 1970s, Kenya was one of the main destinations for investment by MNCs from the

US, but these declined steadily in the 1980s, while the engagement of Japanese and European companies continued to intensify, including in the construction sector (Nzomo, 1994). In turn, this provided CRBC with the opportunity of working with Japanese contractors – some of which had been key players in China’s own development experience – on several infrastructural development initiatives in Kenya (Interview, Senior Manager, Chinese SOE, Nairobi, 5th July 2019).

One manager interviewed, however, expressed their bitterness towards their company’s governance, which he described as “stiff” (Interview, Engineer, Chinese SOE, Beijing, 17th May 2019) – perhaps due to the closeness between Beijing decision-making and CRBC’s activities in Kenya at the time, thus pointing to the initial limited operational autonomy. Instead, he described Japanese contractors’ approach as being more flexible and demonstrating a better understanding of Kenyan society. He referred to the Western Ring Road in Nairobi built in 2006 as the most recent example. This Ring Road was built through assistance from the Japanese International Cooperation Agency in 2006, and it was originally expected to have four lanes. CRBC’s manager noted that “the Japanese lobbied the local government to change the plan” (ibid) and adapt the design to have a two-lane road with wide sidewalks for pedestrians and two open ditches for rainwater, reflecting the needs of commuters in the area. This example points to the significance of companies’ embeddedness in the context of operation and the relevance of connections with Kenyan actors.

For CRBC, the internationalisation process – although at times contested from within – took place project-by-project, through the establishment of a network within the Kenyan political sphere, learning the ropes of ‘doing business’ in the country, as well as improving the company’s technical capabilities according to internationally-recognised building standards, commonly used in the Kenyan construction industry. Here, it is useful to turn again to findings from research on Sino-French engagement in Central and West Africa. Pairault (2020c, p. 2) suggests that the engineering standards of French engineering and procurement firms reflected the expectations of African governments, thus African governments drove the “division of labour” amongst Chinese and French companies. This way, French companies would undertake design and technical tasks, while Chinese contractors would undertake heavy-duty construction work. This speaks to the findings discussed in Chapter 4, whereby Kenyan state-actors selected a Korean consultant for the Lamu port project to oversee the construction.

In addition to the requirements set by African governments – which will be discussed further in the next section for the Kenyan context – and non-Chinese ‘partners’, Chinese contractors also have to comply to China’s own regulations for overseas contracting. Before Chinese contractors

can participate to full-construction tenders overseas, they have to be awarded the Main Contractor Licence⁴⁷ by the relevant Chinese state actors. In the case of CRBC Kenya, the company was awarded said certification in the 1990s, similarly to other Chinese SOEs operating in other African nations in the same period, such as Benin and Ghana (Lam, 2017, p. 18). In the second half of the 1990s, CRBC was awarded the construction contract for the WB-funded Mtito Andei - Bachuma Gate national road A109, part of the Northern Corridor (WB, 1995). This road section represented the first contracting tender won by CRBC, a pivotal moment in CRBC's Kenyan operations, which paved the way for the construction of an increasing number of projects, funded by a diverse array of actors.

The table on the next page offers an overview of key Chinese-funded infrastructure projects in Kenya since 2000, all of which have been constructed by a Chinese contractor. Before the end of Moi's term in 2002, CRBC carried out the construction of the Chinese-funded Gambogi-Serem highway as part of an economic cooperation grant negotiated during Moi's presidency. Then, throughout the 21st century, the Kenyan government has increasingly looked towards Chinese funders as partners to push their developmental agenda forward (see Chapter 3), which, in turn, meant increasing opportunities were available to CRBC. This was particularly true during the push towards infrastructural development given by the "Economic Recovery Strategy for wealth and employment creation, 2003-2007" (GoK, 2003) and the later Kenya Vision 2030 (GoK, 2007), which relied on the rehabilitation of the country's infrastructure system, identifying priority projects and calling for participation of international development financiers.

Against this background, Chinese-funded infrastructure contributed to CRBC's business expansion by providing the company with several opportunities of engagement with Kenyan state and non-state actors at different stages of the life of infrastructure. For example, in 2009, CRBC was commissioned – without public tendering process (see Chapter 2 for decision-making process for Chinese-funded infrastructure) – to construct the Nairobi Northern and Eastern Bypasses, built between 2009 and 2014 (see Table 5). The Nairobi Northern and Eastern Bypasses had a total value of almost USD 80 million, with 15% being funded by the Kenyan government and the remaining 85% by China Exim Bank (Muhoro, 2010). These projects were central for CRBC's further establishment in the Kenyan construction market, as the company completed their first

⁴⁷ The Main Contractor Licence allows Chinese construction companies to participate to overseas EPC as the main or sole contractor. Initially, the Main Contractor Licence could be awarded by the Ministry of Commerce to construction SOEs that had already obtained the highest-grade qualifications in China. Before 1999, most of construction SOEs did not have the Main Contractor Licence but worked as subcontractors (Zhao and Shen, 2008).

joint funding project. The commissioning of most Chinese-funded projects to CRBC relates to the debate around state support to Chinese SOEs internationally discussed in the Chapter 2, yet as anticipated in Chapter 3, this cannot guarantee the survival into an overseas market. As Lam (2017, p. 49) highlights, Chinese SOEs market entry does not translate into long-term presence in the country unless they ‘learn the ropes’ – in other words, the norms and practices (see for instance Herdt and Olivier de Sardan, 2015) – of specific markets and socio-political contexts (see Section 6.3).

Table 5: Chinese-funded infrastructure projects in Kenya (2000-2018)

YEAR	PROJECT	VALUE (USD)	CONTRACTOR
2001	Kipsigak – Serem - Shamakhokho Road (Loan 2)	6 million	China Wu Yi
2002	Kipsigak – Serem - Shamakhokho Road (Loan 3)	6 million	China Wu Yi
2009	Nairobi Eastern and Northern Bypass Highways	80 million	CRBC
2009	Nairobi - Thika Highway	156 million	China Wu Yi, Sheng Li, & Sinohydro Consortium
2011	Sotik - Ndanai - Gorgor Road	22 million	China Railway Group
2012	Nairobi Southern Bypass	156 million	CRBC
2014	SGR Phase I: Mombasa - Nairobi (commercial loan)	2 billion	CRBC
2014	SGR Phase I: Mombasa - Nairobi (concessional loan)	1.6 billion	CRBC
2015	SGR Phase II: Nairobi - Malaba (Sub-phase I: Nairobi - Naivasha)	1.5 billion	CRBC
2016	Kibwezi - Mutomo - Kitui - Migwani Road Upgrade Phase I	225 million	Sinohydro
2018	Nairobi West Ring Road Project	170 million	CRBC
2019	Nairobi Expressway Project (toll)	599 million	CRBC

(compiled by author)

In turn, increasing engagement meant that CRBC also became the protagonist of several controversies, particularly in relations to the compliance with Kenyan regulations, corruption, and the localisation of activities. The fulfilment of in-country regulations is often debated when it

comes to Chinese-funded and constructed projects (see for instance Oya, 2019). As I discussed in the previous chapters, lack of transparency in carrying out scoping and feasibility studies, the private nature of the contracts, the non-competitive bidding practice for contractor selection, as well as a track record of questionable adherence to labour laws are at the centre of public opinion and political discussions concerning Chinese contractors overseas, and CRBC Kenya is no exception.

The case of the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR stands out as the private nature of contractor selection for Chinese-funded projects, as well as the questionable adherence to in country public procurement regulations (see Chapter 3). CRBC had carried out a feasibility study after the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Kenya and CRBC in 2009, before the funding was agreed upon, in what the Public Investments Committee called “a standard requirement for Chinese-funded projects to establish the feasibility themselves before involving their treasury and banks” (PIC, 2014, p. 8). In the Kenyan market, Privately Initiated Investment Proposals – also known as unsolicited proposals – do not require a public procurement process, but can directly go to the negotiation phase (GoK, 2013, p. 341). According to Kenyan laws, unsolicited proposals need to include 50% original components compared to the infrastructure projects already in the ‘to-do-list’ of the government (WB, 2017, p. 45). Nevertheless, the cases of the oil jetty discussed in Chapter 4 and the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR discussed in Chapter 3 suggest that this is not always the case. In the case of the oil jetty, the project was already part of the feasibility study undertaken by Japan Port Consulting in 2011, while the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR was already a key component of the national developmental agenda before the bilateral agreement with China Exim Bank was signed.

It is not surprising that the correlation between rumours and accusations of corruption and malpractice are widespread in light of unsolicited proposals, as was the case for the SGR (see Chapter 3; see also WB, 2017a, p. 48). According to the WB (2017, p. 46), the “gap between policy and practice appears to be [due to the] lack of public-sector capacity to initiate, develop and procure large infrastructure projects”. However, research on Sino-African engagement in infrastructural development also suggests that lack of public procurement processes does benefit (at least some) African actors. For instance, discussing road development in Zambia, Zajontz (2020b) highlights that the intersection of Chinese financing mechanisms – particularly the private nature of contracts and lack of public tendering processes – and the Zambian governance of infrastructure projects is conducive for the profiteering of Zambian political and business elites. He traces the “gap between policy and practice” (WB, 2017, p. 46) in Zambian public tenders to

a “systematic bypassing of transparency norms and competition standards”, thus “reinforc[ing] ‘not so public’ procurement processes characterised by informal, highly personalised negotiations between Zambian political elites and Chinese enterprises” (Zajontz, 2020b, p.2).

In the next section, I will explore these aspects with regards to the Kenyan context. I will explore the practices of carrying out feasibility studies and submitting unsolicited proposals – although not unique to Kenya – discussing the implications for Kenyan elites and the country’s developmental agenda, as Chinese contractors might be able to influence the prioritisation of infrastructure projects, thus generating demand for their services (as also suggested by Corkin, 2012 for the case of Chinese contractors operating in Angola).

6.3 Participation in EPC tenders: outbidding the competition

Currently, foreign construction companies can only participate in Kenyan public tenders if they have obtained the relevant certifications⁴⁸, issued by the National Construction Authority (NCA). The NCA was established in 2011, but its origins can be traced to the early independence period. In 1967 the National Construction Corporation of Kenya – a state-owned company under the oversight and control of the Ministry of Works – was founded⁴⁹ to support African contractors in the construction industry, which, at the time, was dominated by British and Indian firms (Magari, 1987, p. 45; Bakuli, 1994). At this stage, the National Construction Corporation could engage in construction, training, financing, contract awarding, production of materials (such as cement), and contractor registration in an effort to improve the participation of African contractors to the development of the country’s infrastructure. The National Construction Corporation already involved a registration and certification system (see below for the present one), but, before the company was dissolved, no African contractors had been registered in the highest category (Magari, 1987, p. 58). Indeed, in 1986, the National Construction Corporation was dissolved due to

⁴⁸ To obtain or renew the qualification (which needs to be done on a yearly basis), CRBC has to provide evidence of sound financial accounts, ownership of equipment, an updated portfolio of completion certificates and ongoing projects, curriculum vitae of technical staff and senior management, as well as proof of presence of technical staff relevant to the type of construction work.

⁴⁹ The founding of the National Construction Corporation of Kenya was assisted by the Norwegian Agency for International Development through the provision of funding, as well as technical assistance of a Norwegian construction firm (Magari, 1987, pp. 45–46).

mismanagement, in that the corporation was disbursing over 30% of loans without security guarantees (Magari, 1987, p. 89).

As the challenges faced by African contractors persisted, the NCA was formed in 2011 with similar mandates, such as contractor registration, compliance with national construction laws, and training. Currently, the NCA issues qualifications on a scale from 1 (unlimited contract value) to 8 for each type of construction work, namely specialist contractors, building, and roads and civil works. Foreign contractors need to submit a new application for each project they undertake in each category of work (NCA, 2020). For instance, the 2011 Mombasa Berth 19 Expansion Project, financed by the Government of Kenya for a total of USD 60 million, represented the first port project carried out by CRBC in the country – as well as the first port expansion project in Kenya since the 1980s. Participation in this project meant that CRBC could obtain the NCA1 qualification for port infrastructure, which qualified the company to also participate in the tender for Phase 1 of Lamu port. Currently, CRBC has been awarded tenders under all the three types of construction, and has thus obtained the highest qualifications in all of them (Interview, Manager, State Authority, Nairobi, 6th February 2019).

Table 6: Key EPC contracts awarded to CRBC (2005-2021)

YEAR	PROJECT	FUNDER
2006	RD 419 Project (Lanet - Nakuru - Njoro) Maji Ya Chumvi-	GoK 20%
	Miritini Road	WB 80%
2011	Mombasa Berth 19 Expansion Project	GoK
2013	Lamu port Phase 1 (Berths 1-3) Project	GoK
2018	Kipevu Oil Terminal Project	GoK
2020	Nairobi Municipal Water Supply and Drainage Project (tender won with Athi Water Works Development Agency)	WB
2020	Likoni Floating Bridge Project	GoK
2021	Lamu - Ijara - Garissa Road	GoK
2021	Hindi - Bodhei - Basuba – Kiunga Road	GoK
2021	Ijara - Sangailu - Hulungho - Road	GoK

(compiled by author)

The table above shows the key EPC contracts won by CRBC between 2005 and (April) 2021, which add to the Chinese-funded projects listed in Table 5, signalling a strong market presence of this company. The growing participation of Chinese contractors in Kenyan EPC tenders was met

with resentment by other companies operating in the country, particularly Kenyan competitors. Concerns over entry into the Kenyan construction market mainly revolve around the scale and financial capabilities of Chinese contractors, considered too large to allow for fair competition with Kenyan businesses (Interview, Executive, Chamber of Commerce, Nairobi, 20th November 2018). Although foreign contractors cannot participate in tenders below USD 0.5 million, or tenders only open to national contractors, Kenyan construction firms have demanded increasing protection from Chinese contractors. Competitors argue that Chinese companies' bidding practices are driving local contractors towards severe financial losses, to the point where, in 2018, a member of the Kenyan Parliament stated he would propose a bill to prevent foreign contractors to participate in government-issued EPC tenders valued less than USD 1 million (Otieno, 2020b).

Even in light of NCA qualification and Kenya's public procurement laws, the President Delivery Unit⁵⁰ noted that Kenyan contractors, at times, sell their EPC contracts – the majority of which are tenders not open to foreign contractors – to Chinese construction firms at a lower price (Mwita, 2019b). This practice does not represent a subcontracting contract *per se*, but it is not unique to Kenya's tendering environment (see Blundo, 2006 on public procurement in West Africa). With regards to Chinese contractors, Zajontz's (2020a, pp. 127–128) findings in Zambia suggest that EPC tenders or sub-tenders awarded to Zambian businesses – often in a bid from the government to foster national contractors – are sold, at a lower price, to Chinese companies. The Chinese Embassy in Kenya disregarded the involvement of Chinese companies in this practice, but did not exclude that “some local contractors could give their contracts to other companies” (cited in Mwita, 2019b). However, profiteering is not only specific to the sale of EPC contracts, but was described by many interviewees as a common occurrence in Kenya's tendering processes. I will now discuss these practices in relations to different infrastructure projects in Kenya.

The conjunction of CRBC's embeddedness and political (elites') profiteering

As anticipated in the earlier chapters, concerns over inflated projects cost surround many public tenders in the infrastructure sector. In the context of Sino-African infrastructure, the Kenyan government-funded Kipevu oil terminal in Mombasa, already mentioned in Chapter 4, and the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR, discussed in Chapter 3, offer excellent examples. In the case of the

⁵⁰ The President Delivery Unit was established in 2015 and it is a branch of the Office of the President tasked to improve the coordination of national flagship projects, monitor and evaluate the progress of said projects, and report to the President of Kenya.

Kipevu oil terminal, after opening a public tender for the USD 150 million project in 2016 for the expected ground-breaking in 2017, the tender was only closed in 2018, with CRBC being awarded the project at a cost of USD 400 million, a gap currently under review by the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Committee of Kenya (Achuka and Ahmed, 2019). Nevertheless, this should not be considered as either a new practice nor one unique to Chinese companies or the construction sector. Already in the 1970s, a report from the International Labour Organisation (1972) showed that foreign MNCs operating in Kenya's manufacturing sector were often linked to a practice known as 'transfer pricing' – a form of invoice manipulation. For instance, an Italian company active in Kenya since 1971 was found to have inflated the cost of old machineries by up to 100% (Kaplinsky, 1978b cited in Nzomo, 1994). In a more recent example, the Italian company CMC di Ravenna was accused of raising project costs for the development of the Itare Dam by USD 608 million (Reuters, 2019). Kenya's Minister of Finance Rotich remains under investigation on corruption charges related to this project, which has thus far been halted and the machineries auctioned.

The case of DP World offers another prominent example of MNCs' engagement in Kenya's political economy, and specifically speaks to the interconnectedness between political figures and development projects. In 2014-2017, the KPA opened a tender for the operation of two berths in Mombasa port, to then withdraw it after complaints from international shipping lines over fraudulent awarding. Mombasa port is currently being operated by the Kenyan state corporation KPA – although Maersk, Mediterranean Shipping Company, and Grainbulk are *de facto* operators of a combined total of 5 berths – against a worldwide trend towards port privatisation (UNCTAD, 2003). In 2014, KPA attempted to privatise the operations for two of the port's berths, but, according to the complainants, the tender was altered while the bidding phase was underway, and companies who had previously submitted a bid could not revise their proposals (Interview, General Manager, Shipping Line, Mombasa, 8th March 2019).

Rumours within international shipping lines and officials in KPA itself suggest that the tender was withdrawn to avoid international shipping lines challenging the choice of DP World in court (Interview, Regional Manager, Shipping Line, Mombasa, 14th February 2019; Interview, General Manager, Shipping Line, Mombasa, 8th March 2019; Interview, Senior Manager, State Corporation, Mombasa, 26th March 2019). One of the interviewees described this tendering process as a "political game", where "the people who were supposed to win the bid won it" (Interview, Senior Manager, State Corporation, Mombasa, 26th March 2019). The bid by DP World – an Emirati company based in Dubai – was briefly selected as the winning bid in 2016, and, in the run-up to

the 2017 elections, opposition leader Raila Odinga accused President Kenyatta of having exchanged the operation contract for a loan disbursed by the United Arab Emirates (Barasa and Ahmed, 2017; Kenya FreePress, 2017).

As discussed in Chapter 3, the relations between the business sphere and the Kenyan state have evolved greatly. In the late colonial period, businesses had become central for Kenya's emerging political parties, as they facilitated the party's national reach and ability to grapple power from the colonial administrations. Soon after independence, Jomo Kenyatta's government mediated business elites' access to capital through "financial reprisal regimes" (Arriola, p. 20), effectively reducing the structural influence of businesses and increasing that of the state as the allocator of resources. In Chapter 3, I briefly discussed Moi's electoral campaign, during which he made use of funds to undermine Kibaki's coalition-building efforts in the Central Province. This represented a shift in the use of campaign contributions, which instead of being "used to compensate those members of Parliament whose constituencies or districts lost resources through changes in public policy", and began being used as a means "to generate factions" (Widner, 1992, p. 143).

Indeed, during Moi's government, credit from Kenya's state-owned banks was directed to his allies to secure political support (Arriola, 2013, pp. 98–99), but his failure to preserve the alliance with the Kikuyu business elite resulted in several of them offering support to the coalition formed by Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga in the 2002 elections. As already discussed, former President Kibaki's alliance with Odinga was short-lived, as a small Kikuyu circle – referred to as the "Mount Kenya mafia" (Hornsby, 2012, p. 711) – was entrusted with ruling over Kenya's political sphere, and played a fundamental role in mobilising their Kikuyu constituency to secure Kibaki's second term in the very contested 2007-2008 elections (Badeji, 2006, pp. 238–253; Hornsby, 2012, pp. 753–770). What emerged from the analysis of these dynamics is the fact businesses have historically developed in cooperation with political figures, a trend that continued after political and economic liberalisation (see Arriola, 2013).

With regards to Chinese contractors, a senior manager of a Kenyan state-owned corporation spoke directly of their engagement with prominent Kenyan political figures, suggesting that during election campaigns ministers contribute to raising funds for the ruling party's re-election campaign, which are collected from companies that have been awarded major projects in the past. The interviewee provided an example concerning the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR.

The Minister for Transport says they [the ruling party] want a contribution, but it doesn't come out of their pockets. The minister goes to Kenya Ports Authority or

Kenya Railways, and says “who have you given business to?” [Kenya Ports Authority or Kenya Railways answer] “These companies”. Then, the Minister goes to these companies to ask for contributions. So, if the company is big enough it sends the contributions directly. CCCC definitely does, all of them do. Because they have been given SGR [...] SGR Phase 1 was overquoted, where do you think the money went? In someone’s pockets, a politician, the big boys. (Interview, Senior Manager, State Corporation, Mombasa, 19th July 2019)

This suggests that Chinese contractors can – similarly to non-Chinese MNCs – make use of their political and business networks to find prospective projects and further the company’s business expansion. For instance, in 2008, the year before the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between the government of Kenya and CRBC, a well-known business figure in Kenya, Jimi Wanjigi, was reportedly attempting to prompt then newly-appointed and long-time friend – now turned political opponent (Maombo, 2021) – Raila Odinga to support the plans for a railway by connecting the Kibaki-led coalition and the then director of CRBC Du Fei (Wafula, 2017). It might not be such a surprise that, in 2009, then Minister of Transport Chirau Ali Mwakwere – a close ally of then President Kibaki – visited China and, during the trip, identified the company CRBC as a good fit for the SGR project (Omondi, 2020).

Later in the same year, Mwakwere represented the Kenyan government in the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding discussed earlier (Wafula, 2014), which meant CRBC was ready to conduct a feasibility study. This feasibility study was presented in 2012 with an estimated project cost of USD 3.4-3.8 billion, which differed from the USD 2.5 billion the Kenyan Ministry of Finance had requested to the Chinese government in 2010 (Wissenbach and Yuan, 2017). Yet, the initial construction contract had been awarded to CRBC in 2010, to then be cancelled as “Kenya Railways Corporation had initially used a wrong procurement method, direct procurement, but this was corrected with its termination and substitution with the Government to Government transaction” (PIC, 2014 p. 10).⁵¹

⁵¹ In chapter 2, I discussed the common contractor selection practice for Chinese-funded infrastructure, whereby the contractor is selected in Beijing behind closed doors. In the case of the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR, the Court of Appeal of Kenya ruled in June 2020 that the signing party, Kenya Railways Corporation, violated the national public procurement law by single-sourcing the construction contract to CRBC (Nyabiage, 2020). Nevertheless, government-to-government agreements do not require the publication of an open public tender according to Kenyan procurement law (WB, 2017b).

At this stage, the contract was rumoured to only involve construction (not the funding), while, in the aftermath of the transfer to Angola of then CRBC director Du Fei in 2012, the project appeared to have stumbled upon some controversies. Specifically, as discussed by Otele (2021), the design for the railway had been changed from electric to diesel and the project was now expected to be funded by China Exim Bank. According to media reports (see for instance Wafula, 2017), the project was renegotiated by the incoming directors of CRBC Kenya and their political contacts. Although difficult to prove with certainty, market expansion of CRBC following the change in company leadership of 2012 might indeed suggest the evolution of networks from businesspeople such as Wanjigi to officials – such as the Deputy Minister of Transport, the Minister of Transport, and the Minister for Devolution and Planning, in addition to President Kenyatta himself. In addition to these figures featuring the company's news side by side with its managing directors (see for instance CRBC, 2020b; 2021a; 2021b; 2021c), senior management within the Chinese contractor's Kenyan headquarters also suggested that, since the change in company leadership, the company is working with the Kenyan government and according to the government's timelines and priorities (Interview, Deputy General Manager, Chinese SOE, Nairobi, 5th July 2019).

Although this railway project is commonly associated with President Kenyatta (the SGR broke ground during his first term in office), the agreement for the project was signed in prior to the 2013 presidential elections. As anticipated in Chapter 3, this railway quickly became a key pillar of Kenyatta's political agenda. During the 2017 electoral race, CRBC completed the construction of the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR, giving incumbent candidate Kenyatta the opportunity to organise a public opening ceremony and attempt to raise consent in opposition stronghold Mombasa. Yet, incumbent candidates are not the only ones 'collecting' support and contributions for their campaigns. For instance, opposition leader Raila Odinga was rumoured to have received campaign funds during the 2013 elections by construction company China Wu Yi⁵², a subsidiary of Chinese SOE Fujian Construction Engineering Corporation (Mosoku, 2015).

Earlier in the chapter, Table 5 listed the Chinese-funded projects carried out by Chinese contractors, including China Wu Yi. Competition amongst Chinese contractors is common in Kenyan EPC tenders (Interview, Executive, Chamber of Commerce, Nairobi, 20th November 2018), as already mentioned in Chapter 2. Yet, it should be noted that the last Chinese-funded

⁵² China Wu Yi's most notable project was the EPC tender for the modernisation of Nairobi's Jomo Kenyatta Airport, financed by the Kenyan government and the WB in 2006 (Chege, 2008a).

project commissioned to Wu Yi was in 2009 suggesting that CRBC has become the ‘go-to’ contractor for Chinese-funded projects. This highlights another aspect of the internationalisation of Chinese state-owned companies, namely the possibility that company’s efforts to establish themselves in a new market do not pay off (see for instance Dahles, 2010 on the embeddedness of failure in private enterprises in China). In the case of Wu Yi, the selection of CRBC for the construction of the SGR meant that the company had to look beyond Kibaki and his close political allies. Nevertheless, the rumoured contributions to Raila Odinga’s campaign suggest that this company attempted to build a network with the opposition party, which, however, did not succeed in winning the elections of 2013.

This case from the Kenyan context resembles the case of the Shanghai Construction Group in Ghana, which, after building the stadiums for the African Cup of Nations in the first decade of the 21st century was not commissioned to build other infrastructure projects. According to Lam (2017, p. 29) this company’s “business connection with the Ghanaian government appears to have been lost when the opposing [...] party took office in 2009.” This not only points to the centrality of establishing and sustaining networks with the political sphere, but also the necessity “to balance and maintain relationships with all of the political parties, not only those in power for the moment” (Lam, 2017, p. 55). This underscores the relevance of electoral cycles to the development of infrastructure projects, as discussed in Chapter 3. As current Kenyan President Kenyatta approaches the end of his last term, CRBC’s current networks might be put through yet another test. In light of the recent ‘reconciliation’ amongst Kenyatta and Odinga (Campbell, 2018) suggests that, perhaps, there will be opportunities to sustain relations with the incoming government even in light of a new administration.

The political networks CRBC has built over the years and the support the company has provided prominent political figures certainly play a central role in sustaining the company’s business activities, as they are a key aspect influence the decision-making process for contractor selection (see Chapter 2). Through these well-established networks, CRBC constantly scouts prospective projects, gaining insights from politicians and engineers, similarly to Corkin’s (2012, p. 477) findings in Angola, where Chinese companies “attempt to manufacture demand for their services through connections with local politicians”. An interviewee suggested that Chinese companies “are like sleeper cells, they maybe come five years in advance, just to see what they can do [...] they do their homework, so by the time you turn around they have the feasibility study” (Interview, Senior Manager, State Corporation, Mombasa, 22nd February 2019).

Thus, Chinese companies' practice of carrying out feasibility studies before funding has been sought can influence the prioritisation of infrastructure projects. For instance, in May 2020, CRBC began construction of the Kenyan government-funded Likoni Floating Bridge project for a total of USD 13 million (Mwakio, 2020). This floating bridge is a temporary infrastructure project expected to address overcrowding issues on the Likoni ferry – currently the only way to cross the channel South of Mombasa town – that were exacerbated by the curfew imposed as part of the country's fight to contain the outbreak of COVID-19. This project was proposed by CRBC after the company completed a feasibility study (CRBC, 2020), and it is being constructed while plans for a permanent bridge continue to be delayed (Makena, 2020).

On the same note, the Nairobi Expressway Project, a 27 km road project stretching from Mlolongo to Jomo Kenyatta International Airport, broke ground in 2019 after CRBC negotiated the first Built Operate Transfer (BOT) Project in Kenya through a PPP agreement between CRBC and Kenya National Highways Authority. The Nairobi Expressway PPP presupposes a 30-year contract length, with 3 years being devoted to construction and the remaining 27 to operation (Centric Africa, 2020). Through the collection of toll payments from what will be the first toll road in the country, CRBC will recover the funds for construction, resonating with the shift towards investment – as opposed to contracting alone – identified by Alden and Jiang (2019; see also Pairault, 2018 on the difference between investment and lending). Nevertheless, it is clear that the financial capabilities of CRBC to advance the funds necessary for construction or mobilise Chinese state-backed capital – as the case of the SGR suggested – also play a substantial role in the company's business expansion.

The financial capabilities of CRBC and the company's lower mobilisation costs

The financial capability of contractors remains an important factor in the selection process for EPC contracts, and it was key in the award of the Lamu port tender to CRBC. The competitive bidding prices by CRBC can be connected to several factors. First, there is the contractor's ability to advance funds for construction. As discussed in Chapter 4, the National Treasury disburses funding for Lamu port Phase I as the Kenyan government failed to secure funding from international actors. CRBC is currently advancing the necessary funds for construction, and then billing the Kenyan counterpart on an annual basis (Interview, Senior Manager, State Corporation, Mombasa, 3rd December 2018; Interview, Deputy General Manager, Chinese SOE, Nairobi, 5th

July 2019; see Chapter 4). Nevertheless, as discussed in Chapter 4, questions remain regarding the national budget allocation to this project.

In August 2018, President Uhuru Kenyatta visited the construction site of Lamu port, in what the press called an “impromptu visit” (Omondi, 2014). At first glance, this visit might seem a routine inspection of a national infrastructural development project. Since CRBC had demobilised construction due to delay in repayment from the Kenyan government (see Chapter 4), the need arose to channel funds to the Lamu port project. Soon thereafter, President Kenyatta’s visit to the construction site can be explained by the need to prompt CRBC to continue pre-financing and resume construction, but also by the need to ‘champion’ Lamu port and raise confidence in the rationale for its construction, and push the National Treasury to inject a new round of funding.

Second, the competitiveness of Chinese contractors’ bids has also been traced the lower profit margins compared to non-Chinese bidders. For instance, in 2007, Burke estimated that Chinese contractors’ profit margins in Africa were considerably below 10%, compared to around 15-20% of non-Chinese contractors operating in the same region. Nevertheless, on a global scale, Chinese contractors’ profit margins have averaged at 3.4% between 2006 and 2016, while, in the same period, Chinese SOEs profit margin have averaged at 2.4% (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017). As Campos *et al* (2019) highlight, in the same timeframe, the average profit margin of the largest 5 construction companies in China – all of which are state-owned – averaged at 2.4%, only slightly lower than the top 5 construction companies from the United States (2.5%) and Scandinavian companies (3%), but higher than European companies (1.5%), as shown in the figure below. Due to the scarcity of (recent) data on profit margins of construction companies in Africa, it is difficult to establish with sufficient certainty whether Chinese contractors are sacrificing profits to pursue market expansion. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that CRBC is undoubtedly relying on its past experience and familiarity with the Kenyan market to win EPC tenders.

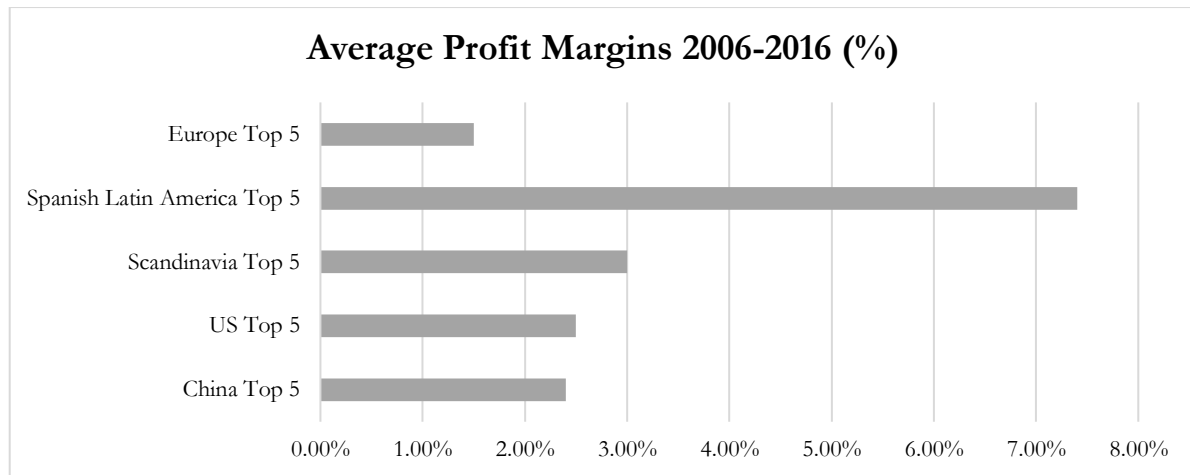


Figure 18: Average Profit Margins of construction companies by region 2006-2016, source: Campos et al. (2019)

Third, the long-standing in-country operations contribute to CRBC's competitive bids, as it decreased the total cost of construction. Because of CRBC's widespread activities across Kenya and infrastructure-related sectors, the company has mobilised machinery, equipment and materials several times in the past 35 years of operations, and can now do so at a lower cost. For instance, when Lamu port construction entered the full-regime phase in late 2016, CRBC mobilised equipment and machineries – including vehicles – from the SGR construction project, which was then coming towards completion (Interview, Senior Manager, State Corporation, Mombasa, 3rd December 2018). The same applies for materials sourced within Kenya, as mentioned in Chapter 4 with regards to the quarry in Kilifi, which had been used for the sourcing of materials for the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR and later the construction of Lamu port. In addition, in Chapter 5, I have also discussed the presence of Chinese skilled labour in the construction site. Some of the Chinese technical personnel currently working in Lamu port had previously worked in other CRBC projects, to then be 'redeployed' to the Lamu port project. This further reduces mobilisation costs by cutting international airfares and visa fees for Chinese workers (Interview, Human Resources Officer, Chinese SOE, Lamu, 25th February 2019).

Against this background, Kenyan contractors maintain that Chinese contractors' low bids are impossible to match – and this might just be the case for Western contractors alike. On the one hand, Chinese contractors' low prices partially derive from state-issued export credits (discussed in Chapter 2). On the other hand, low bids – at times 40% lower than non-Chinese competitors (Sun, Jayaram and Kassiri, 2017, p. 30) – can also be traced back to the relative low supply-chain and labour costs faced by Chinese contractors. Indeed, Chinese machineries are less expensive than those manufactured in Western countries (Zhao and Shen, 2008). Moreover, in light of the agglomeration processes that took place through SOE reforms in China discussed earlier (see also

Zhang, 2021), CRBC's mother company CCCC now fully owns several subsidiaries at different stages in the supply-chain, such as vehicles, materials, and machineries supply. A Kenyan state corporation manager referred to this phenomenon suggesting that "they [CCCC] own everything, they even own the company that makes cranes, they have subsidiaries that do everything" (Interview, Senior Manager, State Corporation, Mombasa, 19th July 2019).

Nevertheless, it is important to further reflect on the intersection between the internationalisation of Chinese state-owned companies and their connections to networks of enterprises. At the beginning of the chapter, I explored the evolution of SOEs-state relations with regards to contractors' internationalisation trajectories (see also Chapter 2). Currently, CCCC's organisational model sees CRBC and CHEC as the two subsidiaries – out of a total of about 40 – participating in overseas projects and establishing overseas headquarters (see Figure 17). CRBC and CHEC have about 60 overseas branches in total (CCCC, 2020), in line with the rapid establishment of Chinese firms overseas. For instance, in 2017 alone Chinese firms established 3400 companies in Africa, most of which are in Zambia, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa, Ghana, Uganda, and Angola (Ministry of Commerce of the PRC, 2018). The presence of growing numbers of liaison offices and company branches overseas contributes to the increase 'distance' between overseas offices and the headquarters in Beijing.

As suggested for Chinese overseas engagement in the oil sector by Downs (2007) and echoed by several interviewees in the maritime infrastructure industry and the Chinese academy (Interview, Chairman of Belt and Road Investment Fund, Beijing, 18th May 2019; Interview, Chief Representative, Port Operation Company, Hong Kong, 3rd June 2019; Interview, Scholar, Beijing, 23rd May 2019), as the internationalisation processes of SOEs intensified, it quickly became apparent that the government lacked information fundamental to sound decision-making (Lam, 2017, p. 16). As discussed in the earlier sections, due to growing competition amongst SOEs and their increasing embeddedness in overseas markets, the coordination between the government and the companies – or, better, the state oversight of SOEs – decreased. In turn, the companies' operational autonomy increased. It is useful here to return on the key relevance of political or economic priorities of the Chinese state, such as the geostrategic significance of specific infrastructure projects or the necessity to overcome the overcapacity crisis (Chapter 2).

The operational autonomy discussed in the present chapter does not necessarily signify excluding these priorities as factors determining the operations of SOEs, but instead a reflection on the disconnection between headquarters – and policy-implementation processes in Beijing – and decision-making processes within overseas headquarters. On the one hand, state oversight is more

difficult when SOEs operate abroad, as the relocation of decision-making processes strengthens the autonomy of overseas branches (see also Pairault, 2013; see Chapter 2). On the other hand, the *nomenklatura* system – according to which SOEs directors are generally appointed by the Communist Party of China⁵³ (Brødsgaard, 2012) – suggests that SOEs’ overall strategies do not drastically diverge from those of the state. Paraphrasing Pairault (2013), SOEs are neither an army of disciplined soldiers under a unified command, nor a stampede of soldiers left to their own devices.

This chapter has shown that Chinese SOEs’ overseas operations are closely linked to their ability to establish and foster networks in the country in which they operate. Nevertheless, the case of the LAPSSET Corridor also speaks to other emerging trends in Sino-African engagement, namely the ways in which the spatial expansion of Chinese companies fosters further participation of Chinese actors. On the one hand, the recent awarding of another component of the LAPSSET Corridor, namely the Lamu - Garissa Road valued at a total of USD 166 million, to CRBC (Global Construction Review, 2021), highlights that African transport corridors are conducive to Chinese contractors’ spatial expansion (Gambino, forthcoming). On the other hand, the further interest of other Chinese companies in this corridor – in terms of oil exports (see Chapter 3) and port investment (see Chapter 1 and Chapter 4), suggest that the presence of Chinese contractors can also foster the engagement of other companies in related or unrelated sectors, as suggested in Chapter 2. This is closely linked to the fact that Chinese state-owned contractors are part of broader networks of enterprises, to which they can be connected through formalised strategic partnerships or in light of personal *guanxi*.

Conclusion

The participation of Chinese SOEs as contractors for non-Chinese funded projects across the African continent calls for further analysis of the engagement trajectories of said contractors. In this chapter, I specifically discussed the participation of Chinese construction SOEs in international EPC tenders, focusing on the case of CRBC Kenya. I began by further exploring the

⁵³ In addition to directors being nominated by the Communist Party of China, the Chinese law requires the managing director of Chinese SOEs designated as ‘central enterprises’ – such as CCCC and CMPort alike – to also hold the position of head of the company’s party committee. In the case of CMPort, for instance, the managing director Miao Jianmin had previously served as an alternate member of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and now oversees CMPort’s party committee (Lyons Jones and Veit, 2021).

relations between Chinese construction SOEs overseas and the Chinese state, highlighting the different engagement process for participation in international EPC contracts. Differently to the decision-making processes discussed in Chapter 2 for Chinese-funded infrastructure, the participation in EPC tenders by Chinese contractors relates to the company's relative operational autonomy resulted from over 40 years of SOE reforms, which have not only consolidated the power of business groups vis-à-vis China's political economy, but also resulted in decision-making powers for non-Chinese funded projects shifting to overseas headquarters.

Nevertheless, the participation of CRBC in international EPC tenders is also closely related to CRBC's embeddedness within the Kenyan business and political contexts. As discussed in the previous chapters, the evolution of the political economy of Kenya's infrastructural development has been reframed around several competing agendas. In turn, CRBC's long-standing operations in the country means that this contractor has become increasingly embedded in the Kenyan market and the networks of (often interconnected) political and business elites. In this chapter, I have explored this process through an analysis of the evolution of CRBC's operations in Kenya. In the 1980s, through the initial participation in infrastructure development projects as sub-contractor, through which CRBC was able to get a foothold in the Kenyan market. During the initial stages of internationalisation, CRBC began establishing a political and business network in the country, but also with regards to Chinese national requirements for contractors operating overseas.

Following initial engagement, the construction of Chinese-funded infrastructure was fundamental to CRBC's business expansion in Kenya. Through the construction of Chinese-funded projects, CRBC underwent another central aspect of their internationalisation process, whereby the company faced considerable public scrutiny with regards to questionable compliance to public procurement and local content requirements. As already discussed in Chapter 3 with regards to the Chinese-funded Nairobi-Mombasa SGR and in Chapter 4 and 5 with regards to local content, similar critiques have been directed to Chinese and non-Chinese contractors alike. However, the trajectories of malpractice and profiteering of Kenyan political and business elites vis-à-vis infrastructure projects discussed in this chapter (see also Chapter 3), highlight that CRBC's connections to political elites is extremely relevant to the company's business expansion. On the one hand, initial linkages with prominent Kenyan political figures appear to have been crucial in sustaining the pressure posed by the competition with other companies – amongst which China Wu Yi. On the other hand, the networks built by CRBC – which now prominently feature Kenyan politicians and government officials – might reveal to be fundamental to the company's long-term survival, particularly as the 2022 national election approaches.

In the third section of this chapter, I discussed different factors underpinning the outbidding of CRBC's competitors in international tenders for non-Chinese funded projects, which are related to both the company's embeddedness in the Kenyan political economy of infrastructural development and the financial capabilities CRBC derives from previous engagement in the Kenyan market – also through Chinese-funded projects. First, through connections with Kenyan political and business networks, the company can constantly scout projects, as well as propose initiatives, thus also possibly influencing the prioritisation of infrastructure projects. Second, the financial capabilities of CRBC allow the company to advance funds for the construction of infrastructure projects, thus gaining a considerable competitive advantage. Third, through the mobilisation of previously-deployed machineries, quarries (see Chapter 4), and labour force, CRBC can submit competitive bids.

Finally, this chapter circled back to the networks amongst Chinese companies, either in the form of business groups, or personal *guanxi*. I first reiterated the connections between the operational autonomy of Chinese SOEs overseas and the Chinese state's geopolitical priorities, to then speak to companies' broader networks of Chinese firms. Specifically, I highlighted the ways in which the embeddedness of construction SOEs in networks of Chinese enterprises and business groups fosters their ability to pursue further spatial expansion. Nevertheless, throughout this analysis, I have also highlighted that internationalisation is not a straightforward process, and might not reap the expected results, as was the case for China Wu Yi. In addition, Kenyan actors continue to strategically negotiate the further participation of Chinese actors to the implementation of the national developmental agenda, enacting their agency during different moments of Sino-African infrastructural development.

Conclusion

On the 20th of May 2021, Lamu port welcomed its first two commercial ships. In the inauguration speech, President Kenyatta discussed the centrality of the Lamu port project to Eastern African connectivity and to the (further) linking of Kenya to the global economy. He then addressed the key role played by the LAPSSET Corridor in ‘unlocking’ the potential of the Northern regions of Kenya. He stated that “a new chapter unfolds, today, in the development and transformation of Lamu”, and that “[m]arginalisation... you don’t want that word ever again” (Kenyatta, 2021). The socially-distanced crowd cheered as Kenyatta told all those who doubted the feasibility of this project that they “can stop wondering, we are here!” (ibid), suggesting that, after a long journey, what was a dream is now a reality. It would have not been farfetched to imagine that after promising LAPSSET partner countries that Lamu port would be operational by June 2021, Kenyatta would inaugurate this project when only one of the three berths is actually operational. With two more berths to be completed, an oil pipeline to be implemented, a port operation proposal to be signed, and the Lamu-Garissa road to be built, LAPSSET Corridor is still far from bringing about the transformation it promises.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Kenyatta’s speech only marginally addressed another central aspect of LAPSSET Corridor development, namely the increasing participation of Chinese actors. Indeed, different Chinese state-owned companies are involved in most of the ‘soon-to-be’ components of this African transport corridor. First, CRBC was awarded the tender for the construction of Phase I of Lamu port. Second, ChemChina won the bid for the first oil exports from the proposed Turkana-Lamu pipeline. Third, CRBC’s mother company CCCC was awarded the tender for the construction of the Lamu-Garissa road. Lastly, CMPort continues to negotiate a multi-sectoral investment proposal with the Kenyan government for a Port + Park + City project in Lamu. The inauguration of Lamu port’s first berth might signal that a “new dawn” (Kenyatta, 2021) is upon LAPSSET. Yet, this will unfold against the background of increasing participation of Chinese SOEs to the development of Kenya’s connectivity agenda.

Throughout this thesis, I have addressed the internationalisation of Chinese state-owned companies in the context of the political economy of Sino-African infrastructural engagement. The aim of this research was to analyse the (power) relations amongst Chinese and African actors involved in the development of Sino-African infrastructure projects. To do so, I explored the intersection of different ‘layers’ of economic activities in the context of Sino-African infrastructural development, reflecting on how previous narratives and practices (re)shape current encounters.

On the one hand, since Chinese state-owned companies are inherently connected to the Chinese state, I set out to investigate the extent to which the evolving state-SOE relations influence the overseas market expansion of said companies. On the other hand, I set out to explore the ways in which the engagement trajectories of African state and non-state actors are influenced by the multiple – and multiscalar – dynamics of the political economy of Africa’s renewed focus on infrastructural development.

I focused on investigating each of these layers in relation to the development of infrastructure projects with Chinese participation. I explored the dynamics unfolding amongst – and being reshaped by – the many Chinese and African actors involved in Sino-African infrastructure projects. Drawing from the main case study of the Kenyan government-funded Lamu port in Northern Kenya, I have suggested that the process of internationalisation of Chinese state-owned companies in the African infrastructure sector – initially contingent on Chinese state financial incentives and Chinese-funded projects – is now heavily reliant on market expansion through non-Chinese funded business opportunities. The scouting of said opportunities is facilitated by Chinese companies’ embeddedness in different networks, both in terms of political and business elites in the context of operation and of broader networks of Chinese enterprises.

In the remainder of this conclusion, I will discuss the key findings of my PhD project and reflect on their relevance to broader debates on Sino-African engagement. First, I will discuss the growing intertwinement of the interests of Chinese actors and those of governments and elites on the continent. Second, I will focus on the implications of Chinese engagement outwith the confines of Chinese-baked infrastructure for Kenya’s political economy. Third, I will reflect on the centrality of embeddedness in different networks to the internationalisation of Chinese SOEs.

Chinese engagement in Africa’s infrastructural development: towards the intertwinement of Chinese interests and African elites’ agendas?

The proliferation of Sino-African projects and the ubiquity of Chinese companies on the continent have prompted a lively debate on the significance and implications of the increasing presence of Chinese economic actors for African nations, the global economy, and the international arena. As discussed in the introduction of this work, Chinese economic engagement overseas is closely tied to Chinese national interests, such as the need to sustain the national economy or the country’s energy security. China’s presence in Africa is often regarded in a zero-sum logic, according to

which this engagement is part and parcel of the country's 'grand strategy', and thus an effort to displace Western counterparts and directly challenge the neoliberal paradigm promoted by the Washington consensus.

This understanding of Sino-African engagement brings to the forefront the discussion around the extent to which Chinese development financing and assistance have come to represent an attractive alternative to many African governments and leaders. In this thesis, I have focused on several trends that help to explain the current positioning of Chinese lenders and companies in Africa's infrastructural development landscape. On the one hand, at the beginning of the 21st century, the internationalisation of Chinese companies prompted by the Chinese state to address the national overcapacity crisis (Sum, 2019) coincided with a renewed focus on infrastructural development across the African continent. The regional and continental integration agenda (Bach, 2016) and international organisation's rekindled confidence in the potentialities of infrastructure (Cissokho, forthcoming) played a key role in their repositioning at the centre of African developmental trajectories and thus the rise in demand for infrastructure financing (Nugent, 2018; see also Péclard, Kernen and Khan-Mohammad, 2020).

On the other hand, while the conjunction of these two layers created the conditions for growing Sino-African engagement in the infrastructure sector, the modalities of said engagement have been crucial in sustaining the spatial expansion of Chinese economic actors. The non-conditionality of Chinese loans, for instance, highlights that the principles of non-intervention and non-interference can represent a welcome break from the policy prescriptions associated with financing from Bretton Woods institutions. Chinese financing – at least at a first glance – appears to only require subscribing to one condition, namely the One China Policy. Yet, a burgeoning body of literature has pointed to the commercial conditionalities associated to Chinese loans – such the need to hire and contract Chinese goods and services (see for instance Mohan and Tan-Mullins, 2019; Sum, 2019), countering the rhetoric of 'no strings attached'.

Reflections on the extent to which financing is indeed disbursed without conditions or contributes to increasing debt levels are crucial in evaluating the impact of Sino-Africa engagement, but I suggest that it necessary to 'ground' these discussions in specific contextual dynamics to provide additional insights on why African leaders are drawn to engage with Chinese actors. While the lack of conditionalities might be appealing to some, these configurations can, depending on specific political economic contexts, be temporary or unstable. For instance, China-Angola relations are witnessing a reshaping due to the severe economic crisis caused by the drop in oil prices from 2014 (Corkin, 2017) and the stepping down of former President Dos Santos in 2017 (after 38

years). Indeed, new president João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço, quickly “sought to diversify its international ties, arguably at the expense of closer ties to China” (de Carvalho, Kopinski, and Taylor, 2021, p. 9). The negotiation of a loan facility with the IMF suggests a shift towards the reframing of the country’s economic policy with the aim of fostering sustained recovery, and thus a move away from infrastructure-driven post-war reconstruction efforts.

Differently, the case of Kenya suggests an alignment between the interests of the Kenyan government (and economic elites) and those of Chinese actors engaged in the development of the country’s infrastructure. In this thesis, I have scrutinised the evolution of Kenya’s of infrastructural development vis-à-vis the growing participation of Chinese financiers and contractors in the development of infrastructure projects. Specifically, I showed that the ‘infrastructural turn’ that took place at the start of the 21st century in Kenya’s political economy – whereby infrastructure has become an important site for elite accumulation and political campaigning – has contributed to the increase in Sino-African engagement. In 2003, former President Kibaki promulgated the Economic Recovery Strategy, effectively putting infrastructure at the centre of the country’s development agenda. In turn, infrastructure projects gained significant political prominence, becoming key ‘campaign tools’ and sites for elite profiteering. As highlighted in Chapter 4 and 6, similar trajectories have persisted in the current Kenyatta administration, which has been characterised by the implementation of major infrastructure projects under the country’s developmental agenda Kenya Vision 2030. In the case of the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR, for instance, the political significance of infrastructure was evident in the use of the railway inauguration to promote President Kenyatta’s re-election campaign.

Infrastructure was also discussed as the site for the profiteering of elites. As national and transnational capital is channelled to infrastructural development, these projects increasingly become the site for lucrative activities, at times on the margins of legality. In Chapter 3 and Chapter 6, I discussed several examples of infrastructure projects surrounded by whiffs of corruption. Although not unique to Chinese-funded projects, these practices become visible when unexplained increases in loan amounts from Chinese lenders make the front pages of all the major national newspapers and are often used as evidence of China’s ‘debt trap diplomacy’ by policymakers in Africa and beyond. Also in the case of the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR, research points to the fact that the increase in project cost is likely to be connected to Kenya’s elites tendencies to make decisions based on “what they can get out the situation” (Taylor, 2020, p. 43).

Thus, the findings of this project suggest that infrastructure development – including with Chinese participation – is closely connected to and influenced by patterns of elite profiteering, electoral and political cycles, as well as political agendas. African actors can legitimise what are often costly and exploitative practices through the construction of narratives of ‘flows’ and ‘connectivity’ underpinned by the potentialities associated with infrastructure. This suggests that the intertwinement of the interests of African governments and elites with those of Chinese actors can foster further Sino-African engagement. In a nutshell, engagement with China – even in the form of revisiting or halting previous agreements, as was the case for former Tanzanian President Magufuli – can be leveraged by African elites to increase their reach across society and the economy.

The proliferation of (diverging) agendas around the development of infrastructure projects: Chinese participation and evolving geographies of power

In the previous section, I highlighted the interconnectedness between the (political) agendas of the Kenyan government – and elites – and the interests of Chinese economic actors. While these dynamics are evident in the context of China-Kenya relations – particularly in light of the media and policy attention it receives – they are far from being the only manifestation of Sino-Kenyan encounters. Chinese companies are increasingly engaging with actors beyond the national government and parastatal agencies, especially due to their increasing embeddedness in different networks (see next section). As such, in this work, I have investigated the operations and activities of the Chinese SOE CRBC in relations to pre-existing – albeit evolving – geographies of power in the context of Kenya’s political economy. Specifically, this refers to centre-periphery relations characterising the case of the Lamu port project and broader LAPSSET Corridor.

In this thesis, starting from Chapter 3, I highlighted the historical trajectories of unequal (spatial) allocation of resources that have characterised Kenya’s political economy since the late colonial period and the ways in which they have continued to feature prominently in subsequent political debates. I began by analysing the evolution of the transport infrastructure system since independence, highlighting how the allocation of resources for infrastructure development – and other development initiatives alike – continued to be concentrated in areas considered agriculturally productive. This meant that the regions considered to be ‘less productive’ would not be the focus of infrastructural development projects, since political and economic gains were concentrated around the access to and usage of agricultural land.

In the late 1990s, the debate around addressing the unequal allocation of resources resurfaced but was quickly set aside in light of a reorganisation of political factions, which culminated in the formation of an opposition coalition. As the economic liberalisation policies under SAPs had hindered Moi's ability to channel funds to his allies and supporters, many prominent business and political figures defected the KANU party after the outgoing president selected Uhuru Kenyatta as his successor. The newly-formed NARC coalition gained the support of many business and political figures – speaking to the interconnectedness between these groups (Arriola, 2013) – and won the 2002 elections. This coalition, however, was short-lived and, similarly to the previous administrations, was characterised by unequal allocation of resources to the peripheries on the basis of the little economic and political gains associated with each region. Thus, Lamu county and the other Northern regions of Kenya continued to be peripheral to the interests of 'the centre' – Nairobi.

As mentioned in the previous section, infrastructure gained more and more political and economic significance and, in turn, so did the spaces in which these projects are being built. Considering the increasing focus on 'connecting' the north of Kenya, infrastructural development is also a spatial process. The promotion of connectivity initiatives – such as the LAPSSET Corridor – in historically-marginalised spaces gives birth to a renegotiation of relations amongst different state and non-state actors across multiple scales. In Chapter 4, I scrutinised the narratives underpinning this corridor, which is rooted in the rhetoric of 'opening up' the Northern regions of Kenya, which have long been considered as 'remote' and 'empty' (Mosley and Watson, 2016). As such, the development of infrastructure projects in these spaces represents a (at least rhetorical) shift from the previously-discussed patterns of marginalisation. Nevertheless, as also suggested by Elliott (2016), Greiner (2016), Chome (2020), Chome *et al* (2020), and Aalders *et al* (2021) the anticipation of infrastructural development has given birth to a proliferation of actors – often with diverging agendas – who are competing for the gains the LAPSSET Corridor project is expected to bring.

National-level state and parastate actors compete for influence, ownership, and control over the infrastructure projects planned in the periphery. Through the case of the 'oil jetty debate', I explored the connections amongst common narratives in megaproject implementation (see Flyvbjerg, 2014), which are often dictated by an attachment to the imaginaries they promote (Larkin, 2013) and to the political and economic gains that can be derived from their realisation. This last aspect was further explored through the case of the SEZ adjacent to Lamu port. The negotiations amongst the national and county governments around land allocation for this SEZ are reminiscent of the pre-existing patterns of dispossession, but simultaneously also speak to the

expectations of different Lamu county actors. Indeed, within the county, civil society organisations, different political factions, and the broader public are attempting to (re)shape development projects conceived at the centre to include their (often diverging) interests.

In the study of the Lamu port project and other infrastructure with Chinese participation, it is important to remember that the (re)negotiation of controversies is related to both the political trajectories of specific African actors and the broader patterns of Sino-African engagement. Inevitably, infrastructural development encompasses foreign and private actors, such as Chinese contractors and financiers. In this thesis, through the analysis of labour relations, I suggested that the encounters amongst Chinese and African actors not only resonate with broader trajectories of labour control, aspirations of social mobility, and development, but also imply the (possible) emergence of new practices. As such, several different actors outwith the national-level state actors are increasingly involved in the shaping of Sino-African engagement, as highlighted by the growing body of literature on African agency.

For instance, in Chapter 5, I introduced Massey's (1994a, 1994c, 2005) conceptualisation of place to the study of work^{place} dynamics to capture different aspects of labour relations. Based on ethnographic observations carried out in the CRBC construction site of Lamu port, I showed that the day-to-day (re)negotiations of workplace dynamics are to be understood through their connections to what is 'beyond' the construction site. The controversies in Lamu port are mediated by different individuals, who act as brokers depending on their managerial roles and personal identities. For instance, the ways in which Kenyan workers, as brokers, (re)negotiate labour dynamics is reminiscent of the long-standing figure of 'gang leaders'. In addition, the incentive/deterrent regime in which workers are embedded stems from the 'virtue' of *chiku nailao* ("eating bitterness"), speaking to the shifting social dynamics in the Chinese political economy. Thus, I suggested that the construction site is closely connected to pre-existing geographies of power well beyond the physical boundaries of the construction site. As such, agency is not only enacted by an array of actors – in other words, multifaceted – but it is also profoundly contextual (Links, 2021).

In another key example, in Chapter 4 I highlighted the centrality of county politics to the understanding of Chinese participation to Kenya's infrastructure development agenda. Through the case of local content, I highlighted the ways in which the county government of Lamu can negotiate different aspects of the implementation of Lamu port. While local content requirements were respected in terms of the percentages of Kenyan workers hired as per the contract between CRBC and KPA, Lamu residents still felt as if they were not benefitting from this infrastructure

project. Indeed, virtually no Swahili people were employed in the construction site at the time of research. This prompted discussions around the historical trajectories of centre-periphery relations, which had left Northern Kenya out of key decision-making processes, even for projects being developed in the region.

Before the first county election in 2013, the LAPSSET Corridor Steering Committee had represented a platform for national-county government engagement, but, soon after the formation of the first county government, this forum was dismantled due to party politics (see Chome, 2020). In the aftermath of the 2017 county elections, won by a candidate with close ties to the ruling party in Nairobi, a direct line of engagement between representatives from the county and national-level state actors – in the shape of a discussion forum on the development of LAPSSET – was established once again. This time, the Chinese contractor CRBC is a formal member of this committee, which I traced back to the engagement patterns of the company. Indeed, similarly to other projects by the CRBC in Kenya, such as the SGR, and other companies in other African contexts – see Nyiawung (2021) in Cameroon – the Chinese contractor had previously engaged directly with the county government to address discontent around employment practices.

The current direct (and more formal) engagement of this Chinese contractor with county-level actors, which also include community leaders, suggests that the presence and activities of this Chinese SOEs have contributed to fostering the room of manoeuvre of Lamu vis-à-vis the national government in Nairobi. Although Chinese engagement does not translate in a reframing of unequal geographies of power in centre-periphery relations, it plays a role in underwriting the agency of local governance actors. Different state and non-state actors in Lamu county are gaining room for manoeuvre in their efforts to shape projects characterised by very centralised decision-making processes according to their interests and agendas.

Making sense of the internationalisation trajectories of Chinese SOEs: the centrality of companies' embeddedness in different networks

Over the past 15 years, large amounts of infrastructural investment and funding – both private and public – have been directed towards the African continent. In the port sector alone, recent estimates suggest total investment reached over USD 50 billion between 2004 and 2019, a figure about 13 times that of the period between 1990 and 2004 (Maury et al., 2020). Along with the increase in port investment, the maritime industry – and particularly the shipping sector – has

witnessed a consolidation through mergers and acquisitions. These shifts have been deeply influenced by state and corporate strategies, which have contributed to the reshaping of geographies of circulation (ibid; see also Danyluk, 2017). In Kenya, as discussed in Chapter 4, the discovery of an oil basin in Turkana led to an “appreciation of the need for new pipeline projects” (Nugent, 2018, p. 28), leading the state to ‘upgrade’ existing port infrastructure – exemplified by the Kipevu oil terminal in Mombasa – and plan the construction of oil export facilities in the brand-new port of Lamu with the goal of capitalising on earnings from oil (Wanyeki, 2020).

In terms of corporate strategy, Danyluk (2018) explores how Maersk, diverted some of their trans-pacific routes towards the Suez Canal as its width allows them to use larger ships, thus allowing for more cargo traffic. As a response, Panama pushed forward its own – very expensive – canal expansion plan. The development of maritime infrastructure – but this is also the case for other infrastructure – thus appears to be part of a broader contest between states, regions, and cities to attract transnational capital and foster development. As Danyluk (2018) and Lamarque (forthcoming) suggest, the logic of competition has led to the adoption of (entrepreneurial) accumulation strategies across multiple scales. Within East Africa, these trends materialise in the competition for the completion of transport corridors, the development of railways, the modernisation of port infrastructure, as well as the construction of brand-new ports.

Against this background, it is not surprising that the competition landscape is also crowded with corporate actors interested in gaining foothold into what is, for the most part, a public sector. Indeed, most of the agencies part of the governance systems for infrastructure on the coast of East Africa are not privatised – see for instance the Kenya Port Authority or the Tanzania Ports Authority – and thus appealing to MNCs in the sector. In addition, as highlighted in Chapter 3 for the case of Kenya, governments continue to spend great amounts on infrastructural development to fill the ‘infrastructure gap’ and move towards industrialisation. As such, it is not surprising that Chinese SOEs and other MNCs are competing for market share in Kenya and beyond. As this work focused on Chinese SOEs, the remainder of this section will focus on drawing out the key distinctive feature(s) of these companies’ competitive strategies. Specifically, I will discuss the centrality of networks to these companies’ market entry and business expansion journeys.

In contrast with an understanding of Chinese companies overseas as being part of a coordinated and coherent ‘grand strategy’, I started from the premise that the relations amongst the Chinese state and its SOEs are characterised by an apparent dichotomy between state oversight and operational autonomy. I introduced the concept of integrated fragmentation (Brødsgaard, 2017) – inspired by Lieberthal and Oksenberg’s (1988) fragmented authoritarianism – to the study of

Chinese companies' internationalisation in Africa. Throughout this work, I have strived to capture the complexity of Chinese engagement in Africa's infrastructural development by highlighting the ways in which Chinese companies are embedded in different networks of actors and contexts. Here, I will highlight three key aspects emerged from this analysis, namely the connections and relations of SOEs to (i) state financing, (ii) networks of SOEs and business groups, and (iii) networks in the context of operations.

First, Chinese-funded projects have proven fundamental in the spatial expansion of Chinese companies. In this thesis, I have highlighted the relevance of Chinese-funded infrastructure projects for the internationalisation of CRBC. Although this SOEs had been already operating in Kenya in the 20th century, it considerably increased its reach in Kenya's market after 2000, when Chinese financing increased (see Chapter 6). Research findings from other African contexts, such as Lam's (2017) work in Benin and Ghana, resonate with this point, thus speaking to the centrality of SOE-state relations to their internationalisation. This reminds one – albeit marginally – of the trajectories of European aid in the early aftermath of decolonisation, whereby, under the guidance of former French colonial administrators, the newly-formed Directorate General for Development and Cooperation of the European Economic Community was heavily influenced by “a patronage system whose key elements were personal trust and mutual loyalty” (Dimier, 2014, p. 209). During the 1960s and 1970s, European aid was linked to the requirements of technical assistance and contracting of European firms – commonly referred to as tied aid.

These conditionalities bear similarities with the current commercial conditionalities linked to Chinese financing, yet, in the case of European aid in the 1960s and 1970s, tenders were open to companies from all member states, while, as discussed extensively in this work, Chinese-financed projects only rarely involve a tendering process. Nevertheless, as Dimier (2014) shows, most of these infrastructure tenders were won by French contractors, a pattern she traces to the familiarity of French companies with specific West African markets. In the case of Chinese companies, as highlighted in my work by the case of China Wu Yi in Kenya (discussed further below) and by the case of the Shanghai Construction Group in Ghana by Lam (2017), state-backed projects are not guarantee further market expansion. Even in sectors considered strategic by the Chinese state – such as construction or telecommunications – state incentives and funding are not the only factors influencing the companies' outward journeys. This speaks to one of the key dynamics explored in this work, whereby the long-standing presence of Chinese SOEs in the Kenyan market has seen these companies undertake different types of projects, which have paved the way for further market expansion.

Second, the ‘scouting’ of possible future projects is closely linked to companies’ systems of *guanxi* (“relations”) with companies within the same business group, as well as other SOEs. In this work, I spoke to the increasing presence of Chinese companies along the LAPSSET Corridor route, whose other components have been awarded to the SOE building Lamu port and, in the case of resource extraction, to the Chinese SOE ChemChina. This suggests that African transport corridor routes are conducive to the further spatial expansion of Chinese companies. Moreover, in Chapter 2, I also introduced the case of CCCC and CMPort, the latter of which submitted an investment proposal to the Kenyan government for the Lamu port project, currently built by a subsidiary of CCCC. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, these two companies signed a strategic partnership in 2017 and CMPort hired a subsidiary of CCCC as consultants for the investment proposal for Lamu port. This suggests that Chinese SOEs can scout projects through ‘partner’ companies, whether they are in the same sector or not.

Third, Chinese SOEs are increasingly embedded in the context in which they operate, and, as such, they are part of networks of relevant actors that can support their pursuit of business expansion in different ways. While Chinese-funded projects have been crucial to establishing CRBC in the Kenyan market, these have also represented an opportunity to establish networks with political and economic actors and gain increasing (relative) operational autonomy for further market expansion. For instance, in Chapter 6, I discussed the case of the Kenyan government-funded and Chinese-built Likoni Bridge, a project initiated by CRBC. Knowing that the priority of the development of a bridge as an alternative to the ferry had increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, the company conducted a feasibility study to be presented to the relevant Kenyan state authority. The project was accepted and funded by the Kenyan Treasury, which supports the point that the networks built by CRBC foster their sustained operations in the Kenyan market. In addition, this also leads to questions of whether this engagement pattern is prompting a reframing in the allocation of resources by the Kenyan state, an aspect that should be investigated as the topic of future research.

As Chinese state-owned companies are thus increasingly ‘rooted’ in the context of operation, they engage with different state and non-state actors, gaining valuable experience – and arguably competitive advantages, such as lower mobilisation costs – which might, in turn, support their business expansion. For instance, in this thesis, I showed how key lessons and business advantages developed by CRBC through over 35 years of engagement with Kenyan actors – particularly in terms local content – often inform subsequent Sino-African interactions. In the case of the Nairobi-Mombasa SGR, for example, CRBC began engaging with county governments to mitigate

labour localisation controversies emerging during construction (Njoroge, 2016). A few years later, as mentioned in the previous section, the same contractor has established a direct line of engagement with the county government in Lamu.

Overall, overseas headquarters of Chinese SOEs engage with different political and economic actors in the context of operation and their embeddedness in the political economy is crucial for the pursuit of market expansion outwith the confines of Chinese state-backed finance. This is particularly relevant as loans from Chinese financiers are decreasing and the emergence of a trend whereby SOEs are shifting towards equity projects – effectively becoming investors and operators of African infrastructure (see Alden and Jiang, 2019). This means that the pursuit of business opportunities outwith the state incentive paradigm is taking place across different avenues that, in the long run, are likely to lead to further embeddedness in the context of operations. This might prompt SOEs to be inclined to retain assets gained through non-Chinese funded projects. In light of the recent slowing down of market-based reforms during Xi Jinping's administration (Lardy, 2019; Chapter 2), however, China's political economy is witnessing a shift towards renewed state oversight (see for instance Naughton, 2019; Pan, Zhang and Wu, 2020), which could have an impact on SOEs' (relative) operational autonomy overseas.

To conclude, in this thesis, I focused on drawing a complete picture of the 'backstory' of current Sino-African infrastructure projects, highlighting different temporal and spatial layers of engagement. Starting from the rumours surrounding the port of Lamu, I have shown that this project speaks to previous 'rounds' of Sino-African engagement and, simultaneously, encompasses narratives and imaginaries associated with Kenya's development vision. The analysis of the different instances of Sino-African engagement leading to the inauguration of Lamu port showed that there is more to the internationalisation of Chinese state-owned companies than initially meets the eye. Indeed, I have argued that a central feature of Sino-African infrastructural engagement is the market expansion of Chinese SOEs through non-Chinese funded projects, which are emerging in light of companies' growing connections to different political and business networks. As such, the internationalisation of Chinese SOEs is linked to both the companies' (dis)connection to the Chinese state and their engagement with political and business elites in the context of operation. In this regard, I suggested that the previous experiences in the construction of Chinese-funded infrastructure and the understanding of the politicisation of infrastructure in African contexts contributed to the solidification of SOEs' market position through the fostering of networks with African elites.

While Chinese state-owned companies' pursuit of market expansion beyond Chinese-funded projects in Africa does not represent an overhaul in Sino-African relations – particularly in light of actors' differentiated positioning in the global economy – this trend certainly speaks to the evolution of Sino-African economic engagement. As the first berth of Lamu port begins operations, observers are still torn on what the future holds. Due to the slow-moving progress of other components of the LAPSSET Corridor, Lamu port is still confronted with the possibility of becoming a 'white elephant'. Nevertheless, the realm of possibilities might just rest on the emerging trajectories discussed in this thesis. Since Lamu port has prompted the participation of an array of Chinese actors to the LAPSSET Corridor, this trend could prove to be conducive to its development. To understand whether this project will bring about the much-anticipated transformation of Northern Kenya, then, it is crucial to closely watch how the 'new friendship' between Lamu and China unfolds.

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Appendix I: AFRIGOS Consent Form

AFRICAN GOVERNANCE AND SPACE: TRANSPORT CORRIDORS, BORDER TOWNS AND PORT CITIES IN TRANSITION (AFRIGOS)

Confidentiality and Informed Consent Form

To gather the necessary information we need the participation of individuals such as yourself. You are entirely free either to participate or to decline to participate, and do not need to give any reason for declining to participate. If you choose to participate, we guarantee that:

1. Your participation will be kept entirely anonymous. You will never be named in our publications or in anything else we say or write, and we will take great care to make sure that you cannot be identified indirectly, unless you give us prior and explicit consent to do so. No document or electronic record containing your name will ever be passed to anyone out with the research team without prior and explicit consent.
2. Nothing will ever be attributed to you in any of our publications or in anything else we say or write, unless you expressly give us permission to do so.
3. You can cease to participate at any time you choose. In particular, if we are interviewing or observing you, you can terminate the interview or observation at any point. You do not need to give any explanation for doing so.
4. You are perfectly free to decline to answer any question we ask you, if you so choose. You do not need to give any explanation for doing so.
5. If you so choose, we will be happy to send you early 'working paper' versions of our intended publications, and we will welcome any comments you have on them.

On behalf of the AFRIGOS team, I guarantee that the above conditions will always be met.

Signed: [AFRIGOS Researcher]

I am over 18 Years Old. I agree to participate in the AFRIGOS study. I have had the contents of this message translated for me and I agree to participate in the AFRIGOS case-study. I agree to the data collected being transferred outside the European Economic Area if necessary for research purposes.

Signed:

Date:

I agree to my name being used in research outputs.

Signed: [participant]

Signed [Witness]

Date:

Appendix II: AFRIGOS Information Sheet

AFRIGOS Information Sheet

AFRIGOS (African Governance and Space) is a five-year research project funded by the European Research Council to understand emergent patterns of governance along transport corridors, port cities and border towns in four regions of Africa. For more details, please see our project website:

http://www.cas.ed.ac.uk/research/grants_and_projects/afrigos/afrigos_team

The team is led by Professor Paul Nugent, who holds a chair in Comparative African History at the University of Edinburgh. Others in the team are Dr Wolfgang Zeller (Senior Researcher, University of Edinburgh), Dr Jose-Maria Munoz (Lecturer in Africa and International Development, University of Edinburgh), Dr. Sidy Cissokho (AFRIGOS Research Fellow), Dr. Hugh Lamarque (AFRIGOS Research Fellow), Dr. Isabella Soi (Affiliated researcher from the University of Cagliari) and a doctoral student (Elisa Gambino).

AFRIGOS seeks to better understand the process of 'respacing' Africa. The latter is reflected in unprecedented levels of investment in physical and communications infrastructure and transport corridors. It can also be seen in the outsourcing of many functions to hybrid and non-state agencies in the fields of Customs, Immigration and security. AFRIGOS poses the fundamental questions about whether and in what ways 'respacing':

- (i) forges technologies and techniques of governance that are conducive to the free flow of people and goods rather than generating obstacles in alternative guises.
- (ii) results in urban and border spaces that are more effectively and responsively governed rather than providing a setting in which new and existing challenges are entrenched.
- (iii) and takes into account the needs of populations whose livelihoods are premised on mobility and informality.

The project is multi-scalar and involves semi-structured interviews with officials at the international agency and governmental levels as well as with officials and local populations who live in border towns or who travel and transport goods along the transport corridors that connect port cities with the interior. The project also involves participant observation and less formal interactions in order to better understand how ordinary people experience the changing face of border management in their daily lives.

The primary output of our research will be academic articles and books, but we also seek to engage with those who are stakeholders, whether these be transporters' associations or bodies seeking to reduce the barriers to the free flow of people and goods. It is a commitment of the team to make their findings as widely available as possible. However, our paramount concern will be to respect the confidentiality of participants in the study. No paper documents or electronic records containing participants' names or details will ever be disclosed to anyone outside of the AFRIGOS research team without prior and explicit permission, and we will ensure that all documents and electronic records are kept in secure conditions.

May 2018