8 When the Road Came

Remoteness, Mobility, and Social Change among Youth in Kaasa, Ghana

Lina Adeetuk and David Butz

Adeetuk, L., & Butz, D. (2023). In P. Vannini (Ed.),*Mobilities in Remote Places* (pp.103–115). Routledge.

Kaasa is an agricultural community of about 920 inhabitants in Builsa North District, Upper East Region, Ghana. Apart from two elementary schools, Kaasa has few services or facilities. Electricity is not available, and health care, secondary education, and markets are all 10–15 kilometers away. The district has only one major road and a few feeder roads, including the Kaasa–Zogsa Road, which was constructed in 2017 to connect Kaasa and its twin community Zogsa to the district's road network and capital Sandema. Before 2017 locals relied on a narrow footpath, which was poorly maintained, intersected by a stream, and impossible to navigate by motor vehicle. The path's condition impeded access to health care, education, markets, and other economic activities. Recognizing these difficulties, the local assemblyperson launched an appeal through the district assembly, which resulted in the construction of Kaasa–Zogsa Road.

Our goal in this chapter is to examine how young adults from Kaasa understand the implications of this new road for themselves and their neighbors three years later. We draw from semi-structured telephone interviews conducted in 2020–2021 with 15 Kaasa residents ages 18–36 years to describe the ways they experience their lives as affected by the road's construction and related changes to mobility and accessibility.[1] Although the interviews represent the road in strongly positive terms, they also reveal what respondents perceive as significant differences among villagers' capacity and inclination to exploit the road's mobility affordances. Individuals with pre-existing assets and skills, including those obtained from a capacity-building program offered in tandem with the road-building project, were understood to be the most advantaged. Gender, age, marriage, educational background, skills, and parental concerns were also described as important. Our study is one of few to examine the differential implications of road construction *within* remote, global South communities (see Butz & Cook, 2020; Cook & Butz, 2011; Dalakoglou & Harvey, 2012; Gurung, 2021; Hettige, 2006) or to focus on the experiences and perceptions of African youth (see Porter et al., 2007; Porter & Turner, 2019). The chapter begins by briefly describing the road-building project and associated skill-development interventions, before overviewing seven themes Kaasa youth emphasized while discussing the road's implications for themselves and their community. We then frame differences in implications among Kaasa residents in terms of Kaufmann et al.'s (2004) idea of mobility capital. The chapter

DOI: 10.4324/9781003321163-11

ends by considering how the road's construction differentially affected Kaasa youths' understandings of their community and themselves in terms of remoteness.

Building the Road

The Kaasa–Zogsa Road was constructed through the Ghana Social Opportunity Project (GSOP) as a Labor-Intensive Public Works (LIPW) initiative. The GSOP is a World Bank-funded development program, administered by the Ghanaian government to provide seasonal employment and income opportunities to poor rural households. One of its initiatives is the LIPW, in which low-skilled individuals from poor areas are employed to maintain or improve local physical infrastructure. Construction took about a year and employed approximately 150 people, primarily to clear vegetation, fetch water, crush stones, and handle gravel. Recruitment targeted women and the poorest villagers. Most individuals registered as laborers were women. Youth in their teens and early 20s were ineligible to register, but many worked using their parents' or other adults' registration details; the construction project was briefly a significant source of low-wage employment for Kaasa youth.

The construction project was followed closely by another program implemented by GSOP, the Japan Social Development Fund (JSDF), which offered business and skills training, start-up funding, and coaching to the poorest beneficiaries of the LIPW initiative. Respondents associate the two projects closely, stressing that the implications of the road's construction were intensified and differentiated by the JSDF intervention. Those who received JSDF support to establish ventures that could benefit from the road are understood as among the most advantaged by it.

Experiencing the Road

Improved Mobility

Study respondents cited improvements in daily mobility as the road's most important implication for their everyday lives, crediting enhanced mobility with improving their educational, employment, or marriage prospects, and strengthening their family and community position. Most other themes stem from the central benefit of improved daily mobility, which has two main dimensions: reliability and speed. Respondents emphasized that the new road allows travel within and beyond Kaasa with little delay or anxiety, regardless of time or season. The road's capacity to handle motorized vehicles has reduced travel times, thereby improving access to farmland, neighboring communities, schools, health centers, and markets. Young people repeatedly emphasized how quick and reliable it has become to get around. Lamisi, a junior high school student, offered some examples:

> Going to the farm used to keep long, by the time I get there, they have finished the day's farm work, so I get insults for not making it on time, but now

> that there is a road, I go to the farm on time. It is the same when going to school; by the time I get to school, I also got beaten by my teachers for not coming to school early, although they knew the road is bad.

Improved access to health care was represented as an especially important benefit of faster, more reliable, and more comfortable mobility. Accessing distant health services was nearly impossible before the road's construction. Now ambulances easily access Kaasa, and other motorized vehicles can be used to transfer patients to hospital.

Despite young people's satisfaction with the new road's mobility affordances, some also feared an increase in road accidents and noted a rise in "social deviance" associated with mobility improvements. Specifically, they feared that the speed and reliability advantages that make travel easier for villagers also enable livestock theft by non-locals. Worries about theft may indicate more general anxiety about changing interactions with the outside world, manifested here as easy access to the community by unscrupulous non-locals. Some respondents' calls for security guards may foreshadow a changing approach to social regulation in Kaasa. A second form of "social deviance" respondents associated with increased access to fast and relatively cheap transport along the new road is what they perceive as (other) young people's unnecessary "gallivanting," especially at night, which they insist has resulted in unwanted teen pregnancies and other social ills. Others were skeptical of these claims, noting that young people acted irresponsibly even before the road was constructed.

In summary, respondents agreed that the new road enables faster and more reliable mobility, with mainly positive implications for daily life. Nevertheless, some worry that mobility has become more difficult to regulate, which raises concerns about the social and moral comportment of community youth, and the dangers of less constrained access to Kaasa by outsiders.

Increased Social Interaction

A principal benefit respondents associate with faster and more reliable access to mobility is the expansion of social interactions and connections, including improved communication with friends and family, easy access to communities with electricity to charge mobile phones, expansion of social networks, easier participation in social gatherings and sporting events, and better marriage prospects. In a community where few households own private vehicles, these benefits are reliant on informal commercial transport services—mainly motorized tricycles (called "candos" or "motor kings")—which are relatively inexpensive and increasingly plentiful.

Younger respondents in particular placed a high value on the road's usefulness for keeping cell phones operational. As elsewhere in Africa (Porter et al., 2012), cell phones have become important social resources for Kaasa youth, despite the challenge of keeping them charged in a village lacking electricity. Many young people in Kaasa travel frequently to better-serviced neighboring towns principally

to keep their phones charged. Respondents like 18-year-old Lamisi talked enthusiastically about the advantages of reliable cellular connectivity:

> Now that they have constructed the road, it has helped and we can go to Guuta or the market to charge our phones and after charging, you can play music and make calls with the hope that even if the battery runs low even in the night, because there is a good road, you can easily go and charge your phone. And this has made me happy because when you look at the songs, when you are working and you are listening to music, it makes you feel happy … Also, the calls, maybe you are there and your mother or your father or your friend lives far away, and I need help from the person there, reason being that I'm here, when I charge the phone, I can use it to call the person to help me with money and I will use that money to help myself and all this brings benefits.

For these young people, dependable virtual connectivity depends on physical mobility and constitutes a key benefit of the road's construction. Although many youths rarely travel beyond their district, they nevertheless perceive the road as bringing the wider world closer and reducing the effects of remoteness by allowing them to keep their phones operating.

Another implication of the road for social relationships relates to young men's success in attracting spouses. Several respondents complained that women from other communities had been reluctant to marry Kaasa men, because of the village's remoteness. Evidently, this perception changed with the road's construction to the benefit of local men's marriage prospects.

As exemplified by their discussion of mobile phones, improved marriage prospects, irresponsible gallivanting, and even unsought teen pregnancy, young people in Kaasa used the speed, reliability, and relative affordability of road-based travel to sustain and extend their social networks and manage interpersonal relationships across a wider spatial field. This capacity for expanded social interaction relates closely to other implications highlighted by respondents, as discussed below.

Employment and Income Opportunities

The road's implications for income and employment were key preoccupations for study participants, who credit it with providing greater access to skills training, enabling income through trading goods and agricultural produce, increasing the efficiency of farming, and offering employment opportunities in a transformed transportation sector.

In a regional context of high self-employment, many respondents think that learning a specialized skill or trade is key to economic success. This requires travel to larger centers, which is easier now that the road exists. Another way young people earn income is through buying and selling goods during the off-farm season. Some youths are now travelling several hours by vehicle to Fumbasi's large market or to other closer market centers, either to purchase consumer goods for sale to fellow villagers or to market local farming or foraging produce.

In addition to facilitating transportation of produce to market, the road was credited by some respondents with helping to increase agricultural productivity and efficiency, mainly by enabling greater mechanization, especially access to farmland by tractors. Not all respondents viewed these changes to farming positively; some suggested an increase in mechanization reduced demand for seasonal farm labor, which had been an important income source for young people. Several also noted that farmland and fruit and nut trees were destroyed during road construction, with negative implications for their family's agricultural income.

Shortly after the road's completion, several young local men purchased motorized tricycles, with which they are earning a good income by transporting passengers and cargo within and beyond Kaasa. These commercial motorized tricycles account for much of the speed and reliability respondents associate with road-based mobility, so their availability is highly valued. At the same time, they replace more labor-intensive ways of transporting things that had previously provided income for larger numbers of youth. Lamisi, whose brother is a tricycle driver, described another way that these vehicles disrupt established patterns of income and labor:

> At first, some people used to farm, but now that there is a road, some people have saved money to buy a motor king, which they will use to be transporting people and when it's time to farm, it becomes a challenge. It's like they now get lazy with the farming, and the motor king has taken all their time. If they do not ride the motor king, they will not be alright. My own brother rides one, and when it is the rainy season, it is always a fight, especially if it's market days because someone can tell him to go and load things; when he goes, by the time he returns, it's dark, and you can't tell him to go and farm in the night. When it is the next day, he will do the same; that is what he does till the season is over.

Although respondents were sensitive to the road's varied implications for income and employment, most felt its overall effect was to generate more and better possibilities for young people to earn money. Indeed, they spoke of youths who had returned from urban areas or abandoned plans to migrate there, because of local income opportunities enabled by the road's construction.

Reconstitution of Spare Time

As discussed, young people emphasized that the road makes it easier for them to move around freely, expand and intensify social networks, and, for most, improve income-earning opportunities. Many suggested these benefits inspire significant changes to how they use spare time. According to this narrative, youth previously spent much of their time "idling" at home or with friends in the village, because the lack of a decent road or reliable footpath plus parental concerns about safety prevented them from travelling farther afield to do more interesting or productive things. Nineteen-year-old Apaawen's experience is a case in point:

> When there was no road, if I want to go somewhere, my parents will not allow me to go because they think I might get missing, and so it has made it in such a way that when you wake up in the morning, you will just be at home except on school days when you are going to school, or else you will be at home the whole day … but now with the construction of the road, it allows me to go to different communities, learn new things.

Apaawen focuses on combining free time and new-found mobility to develop his capabilities. Other respondents emphasized new opportunities to use free time to improve their economic situation, mostly through small-scale trading. Several expanded their reflections about "idleness" into observations of increasing "motivation" more generally among young people. They think youth are working harder since the road's completion, inspired by the success of those who first purchased motorized tricycles or developed other ventures to exploit the road's affordances. The road is understood to be a resource for various types of self-development and therefore a source of motivation. Awenboro expresses this perspective well: "The construction of the road has made us committed and given us the zeal to work, and every youth can go and work to earn a little something to bring home to help their parents and their household."

Claims that the road has been a mechanism for transforming idleness into productivity indicate a shift in how young people understand themselves, their capabilities, and their ambitions. The mobility and accessibility afforded by the road has given many young people in this remote community a greater sense of agency and a more positive outlook on their futures.

Social Stratification

When respondents were asked how changes associated with the road's construction affected relations with peers, several suggested social divisions among youth had expanded, despite increasing opportunities for social interaction. They felt that young people from wealthier families, including those who had purchased motorized tricycles, were disproportionately advantaged in terms of vehicular mobility, which increased social and economic differentiation among youth and created conditions for bad feelings. Apaawen expressed this sentiment:

> Some will be like "I have a motor king and I have this and that, and you don't have" … and because these people are traveling to different communities and regions all the time, when they go and come, how they talk and think becomes different from us. So, all this, because of where he has been to, when he comes, the way he will behave, you that have not been there if care is not taken there might be an argument that will separate you two.

Thirty-five-year-old Awenate, a farmer and former assemblyperson, concurs that the road's construction has contributed to social divisions among youth, but attributes this less to relative advantage than to individuals' willingness to work hard:

> It happens in every community; once someone sees the friend developing, there is a tendency for jealously and division, but what the road has done it has rather opened opportunities so if you work hard, you will get something.

Others disagree that social divisions increased with the road's arrival, arguing that these have always existed and ultimately all community members benefit from the road.

As with themes discussed above, youths' varying perspectives on social stratification reflect the road's differential implications for differently positioned individuals. Awenate, a successful farmer who benefits materially from the road, is sanguine about its implications for social division in Kaasa. Apaawen, who sees some of his peers derive greater advantage from increased mobility, experiences the road as enabling greater social stratification.

Joining the Modern World

Prominent among respondents' narratives is a feeling that the road's construction has made them part of modernity and the Ghanaian nation. There are two closely related aspects to this: satisfaction in belonging to a community that government and NGOs considered worthy of a road, and which now has one; and the wider perspectives, new experiences, and greater access to outside goods afforded by enhanced mobility and accessibility.

In terms of the former, 30-year-old Ateng expressed a widely shared sentiment that "due to the construction of the road, we felt that the government and NGOs are now aware of us, and we are part of Ghana." Others used more personal language, as exemplified by 21-year-old Anagzuk:

> Sometimes they will tell you that you are not even from Ghana, because for your friends to come to your place, it is very difficult so they would count you as not part of Ghana. But because of the road, we are now known and counted as part of Ghana … So, for me personally, I am happy because my friends can't insult me again.

In terms of the latter, respondents emphasized that increased mobility and accessibility have made them more current in their thinking and more connected to modern times and have exposed them to products, technologies, skills, experiences, and tastes that were not previously accessible. According to 18-year-old Talata, "it must help me to see many new things like cars, motors and the different kinds of machines I have never seen before."

Akaawen summarizes respondents' consensus that the road's construction and associated mobility contributes to a sense of modernity:

> Now we are also "guy" [modernized], but initially we were villagers, we were like our "old, old fathers" who lived in the forest, but now we are better

> than our fathers because they were villagers and did not have a road, but now Kaasa is a town.

New Infrastructural Development

One post-road development that helps youth feel connected to the modern world is the construction of new physical infrastructure in Kaasa, especially educational facilities. Many respondents are students or parents of young children, for whom improved access to education is an important benefit. The district assemblyperson described the difficulty of schooling before the road's arrival:

> Zogsa did not have a school. It's recently [after the road] they got a kindergarten, so the children from Zogsa used to come to Kaasa. Also, Kaasa did not have a Junior High School; it's recently that we got one. So formerly students from Kaasa, once they complete their primary school, used to go to Seniesi Central or Guuta. And it was a problem unless the child relocates over there because if you want to travel daily from either Zogsa or Kasaa to Guuta or Seneisi Central, it won't work unless a family is wealthy enough to provide a bicycle.

Youth respondents emphasized improvement in their educational prospects with the provision of a junior high school in Kaasa, less absenteeism among teachers who commute from afar, and easier access to schools and libraries outside the community. Respondents think this combination of improved schooling in Kaasa and easier access to facilities further afield increases attendance and inspires youth to stay in school longer. Some suggested that more committed involvement in formal education has reduced early marriage and teenage pregnancy.

In addition to improving access to education, the road enabled locals to drill new boreholes, thereby increasing the availability of water for household and agricultural use. The recent construction of a flour mill makes it more convenient to process locally produced grain. Moreover, respondents were excited that electricity poles had been transported to Kaasa, anticipating it would soon be connected to the national electricity grid. That these infrastructural developments provide youth with a sense of modernity, in addition to their material affordances, is well-captured by Talata:

> We do not have lights … but after the road construction, they have started bringing electrical poles into our community. First, we did not know what they call cando, but now we know what cando is, now we know the different machines. Also, because of the road, they came and built a school in Zogsa. Aside from the school building, a lot of people were afraid to go to school, but now because of the new road people, a lot of people, are able to go to school and don't even get late.

Differential Mobility: Access, Competence, Appropriation

The themes discussed above do not offer a complete account of the Kaasa–Zogsa Road's social implications for local youth, but they do hint usefully at the narratives young people mobilize to represent their experience. Apart from "increasing social stratification," themes frame the road's effects in self-evidently positive terms, yet with appreciation that villagers experience these benefits differentially. In this section we employ the concept of "mobility capital" (Kaufmann et al., 2004), to build a deeper understanding of some of these differences. Mobility capital refers to the *capacity* of a person to be mobile and conceptualizes this capacity as a resource individuals can deploy to achieve social benefit. According to Kaufmann, mobility capital has three constitutive aspects: access, competence, and appropriation. These offer a rubric for appreciating the differential implications of the road's construction.

Because it serves both pedestrians and vehicles the Kaasa–Zogsa Road enhances virtually all community members' *access* to mobility. Respondents claim everyone finds it easier to get around than before, but those with money to buy or hire motorized transport are able to travel farther, faster, and more conveniently, with beneficial implications for farming, marketing, and trading activities, as well as for accessing public facilities, charging phones, and sustaining social networks. Employed young people in their late 20s and 30s, especially men, are frequent motor vehicle users, while youth in their teens and early 20s have limited access to motorized transport, owing substantially to lack of money. Several respondents suggested this financial gap in access to transport services was widened by JSDF training and funding initiatives, which targeted an older cohort of community members. Perception of danger was also a prevalent theme in respondents' comments about access to mobility. The consensus seems to be that the new road is safer than the old footpath in terms of being bitten by scorpions or snakes, encountering ghosts, or being abducted into marriage. Conversely, vehicle accidents are increasingly understood as endangering passengers and pedestrians, and parents worry about the social and reputational risks of allowing their children to travel without supervision. Respondents complained that parents' fears imposed constraints on their access to travel along the road, despite their own feelings of safety; unmarried girls in particular feel limited in access to mobility by fearful discourses of "teenage pregnancy" and "promiscuity." In their experience, autonomy is an important aspect of mobility access. Gender, age, marital status, and other social differentiators play into mobility autonomy, often in correspondence with financial resources, to the disadvantage of young people and especially unmarried girls, in terms of accessing education, social networking, and employment.

Girls and young women are also disadvantaged in relation to the second aspect of mobility capital: the *competence* to utilize mobility access. Many of the practices that most effectively translate access to mobility into social advantage—trading, marketing produce, operating vehicles, hiring commercial transport—require competencies that are unevenly distributed among community members, in

part because they are understood to be more obtainable by and appropriate for some groups than others. For example, young men are more likely than their female counterparts to have skills to maintain and drive a motorized tricycle, and several were able to parlay these into lucrative transport businesses soon after the road's construction. Young women are discouraged from gaining such skills as it is considered disreputable for them to join the male world of commercial transport and unlikely they could gather resources to obtain a vehicle. Other competencies associated with vehicular mobility are similarly withheld from young women and youth more generally, who are often understood as incapable of negotiating its challenges and temptations safely or respectably. Respondents emphasized that adults' lack of trust in their judgment and competence significantly impede their access to mobility.

Several respondents observed that the JSDF initiative was an important generator of income-earning competencies and material support for its beneficiaries, some of whom used JSDF skills training and support to establish small trading or production ventures that benefit from newly available vehicular mobility. Youth in their teens and early 20s were excluded from this opportunity, which contributes indirectly to mobility deprivation. Other villagers targeted by the program, including young people in their late 20s and 30s, used the combination of a new road and access to skills training to modernize farming operations, establish transport businesses, or scale-up trading operations. Thus, the JSDF facilitated an overall increase in capacity for mobility, while also contributing to greater differentiation by gatekeeping access to new income-earning competencies.

The third aspect of mobility capital—*appropriation*—also figured prominently in respondents' narratives. Appropriation addresses how people interpret and act upon access and competence—how they evaluate, select, and use specific mobility options for particular purposes. Access to given mobility options and competence to exploit them are unlikely to yield social benefit unless individuals have reason and motivation to translate the potential for movement into mobility itself. Young people in Kaasa have no shortage of "projects" for which to appropriate the road's mobility options, although for some the range of available projects is limited by a continuous lack of cash-in-hand and other social constraints on access and competence. The perception that young women, in particular, are unsuited for specific sorts of mobility projects influences *a priori* their access to mobility as well as opportunities to develop competencies and gain recognition for them.

Although respondents acknowledged these uneven constraints on appropriation, their accounts emphasize individual attitude as the main differentiator between those who have and have not benefitted from the road. In this telling, road construction income, the JSDF program, and the finished road together produce a field of opportunity centered on the road's affordances, which some people had the "sense" to exploit. In respondents' accounts, the road and associated projects made people feel included in the nation and modern world and nurtured in many the necessary motivation to appropriate the road's affordances. This developmentalist interpretation, in which those without the sense to adopt the appropriate attitude are left behind, is well-articulated by Azumah:

> So even if there is a road and you don't have the sense to use it, it won't help you because if you are sitting down while there is a road, it won't make a difference that there is a road in your community, but those who have the sense will get up, go to Sandema and trade, others will also go to Chiana market and Navorongo market to trade and come back … Just imagine you are taught a skill to use as a source of livelihood and you are sitting down; some people are just sitting, they are not making use of what they learned while others are seriously using it to make money.

To summarize, the Kaasa–Zogsa Road's construction enhanced the mobility capital of most Kaasa residents, by offering greater *access* to both pedestrian and vehicular mobility. Those with pre-existing assets, those who contributed paid labor to the road's construction, and those involved in the JSDF program were better positioned to exploit vehicular mobility, because of their greater access to cash-in-hand and relevant *competencies* and skills. These individuals were also best situated to *appropriate* road-based mobility in support of personal or household projects, although in respondents' opinions these advantages were less important than individual attitudes for determining who exploited the road's mobility affordances most effectively. As a group, youth are disadvantaged by their relative poverty, lack of mobility autonomy, and actual or perceived lack of competencies, despite their enthusiasm for mobility and eagerness to appropriate it for economic, educational, or social purposes. This was more clearly the case for younger respondents, and especially for unmarried or recently wed young women, for whom constraints on road-based mobility are greatest.

The Kaasa–Zogsa Road and Remoteness as Disposition

As a small rural backwater, distant from Ghana's urban and administrative heartland, beyond the reach of most government services and poorly connected by transportation and communications infrastructure, Kaasa is "remote" by almost any absolute or relative measure (see Bocco, 2016). Indeed, this condition of remoteness, as diagnosed by the Ghanaian government and experienced by locals, provided the rationale for constructing the Kaasa–Zogsa Road. Our conversations with young people in Kaasa indicate that this new road has been successful in reducing the community's remoteness in terms of connectivity, accessibility, and opportunities for extra-local interaction, with effects they understood mainly as beneficial. These findings are not surprising; they are commensurate with a preponderance of literature on road construction and accessibility (e.g., Kuklina & Holland, 2018; Van de Walle, 2009).

In this concluding section we focus briefly on a less common observation that regardless of the extent to which their own lives were "mobilized" materially by the road, many participants have come to understand and represent themselves as less defined by—less subjectivated to—the condition of remoteness than previously. That is to say, the road's construction inspired a change in participant's self-identity, in terms of claiming modernity as a subject position, feeling stronger membership in

the Ghanaian nation, and practicing themselves as less remote, for example by using their "idle time" more productively, experiencing greater motivation and ambition, and imagining ways to appropriate road-based mobility to their advantage.

These findings suggest that in addition to describing a relative geographical positioning that shapes people's social and geographical relationships, remoteness can also be understood as a disposition or attribute of the self. Among study participants, remoteness as an aspect of subjectivity was coded negatively, as a source of embarrassment, a disgrace, or a moral flaw. These sentiments emerged most strongly when young people reflected on outsiders' changing perceptions of them or criticized acquaintances who failed to exploit opportunities for self-advancement afforded by the road, but they also subtly informed other aspects of their interview responses. Remoteness was framed as a shameful aspect of the self as well as a social and geographical circumstance external to the self. We read this critical attitude towards (ostensibly former) subjectivation to remoteness as an indication of Kaasa youths' *continuing* subjectivation to developmentalist discourse, in which remoteness is associated with backwardness, deficiency, and irrelevance. In other circumstances (e.g., the overdeveloped global North), remoteness may be framed as a positive aspect of identity, a laudable distancing from the hyper-connectedness of modernity (Vannini, 2011), but this is not the case among Kaasa's youth nor we imagine among most people who are not remote by choice.

It is important to emphasize that this disassociation from remoteness as an aspect of self is more available to some young people in Kaasa than to others because some are more able to practice or imagine practicing modernity, connectedness, and mobility than others, according to various axes of social difference described in previous sections. Young unmarried women, in particular, may find it difficult to shed remoteness as a disposition, because of their relatively constrained access to the social and material possibilities of road-based mobility. In this sense, remoteness is a descriptor not only of differential geographical positioning among places but also of differential social and identity positionings among people within places.

The three interrelated aspects of mobility capital discussed above are helpful for understanding this differentiation. The capacity of youth in Kaasa to shed the habits and disposition of remoteness depends in part on their access to mobility and to alternative ways of imagining their future. For some young people, actual or perceived access to road-based mobility is an antidote to remoteness as identity. For others who lack the competencies to exploit road-based mobility, or whose possibilities to access mobility are constrained by social expectations or lack of resources, remoteness is more likely to remain intrinsic to their self-understanding. In these cases, remoteness as an aspect of self operates as a constraint on the appropriation of mobility in a manner that is related but not equivalent to geographical remoteness.

Note

1 Interviews were conducted in Buli and translated into English by the first author. The district assemblyperson and road construction supervisor were also interviewed.

References

Bocco, G. (2016). Remoteness and remote places: A geographic perspective. *Geoforum*, *17*, 178–181.

Butz, D., & Cook, N. (2020). *Road construction, mobility and social change in a Wakhi village*. Brock Digital Repository. http://hdl.handle.net/10464/14863

Cook, N., & Butz, D. (2011). Narratives of accessibility and social change in Shimshal, northern Pakistan. *Mountain Research & Development*, *31*(1), 27–34.

Dalakoglou, D., & Harvey, P. (2012). Roads and anthropology: Ethnographic perspectives on space, time and (im)mobility. *Mobilities*, *7*(4), 459–465.

Gurung, P. (2021). Challenging infrastructural orthodoxies: Political and economic geographies of a Himalayan road. *Geoforum*, *120*, 103–112.

Hettige, H. (2006). *When do rural roads benefit the poor and how: An in-depth analysis based on case studies*. Asian Development Bank.

Kaufmann, V., Berman, M., & Joye, D. (2004). Motility: Mobility as capital. *International Journal of Urban & Regional Research*, *28*, 745–756.

Kuklina, V., & Holland, E.C. (2018). The roads of the Sayan mountains: Theorizing remoteness in eastern Siberia. *Geoforum*, *88*, 36–44.

Porter, G., Blaufuss, K., & Acheampong, F.O. (2007). Youth, mobility and rural livelihoods in sub-Saharan Africa: Perspectives from Ghana and Nigeria. *Africa Insight*, *37*(3), 420–431.

Porter, G., Hampshire, K., Abane, A., Munthali, A., Robson, E., Mashiri, M., & Tanle, A. (2012). Youth, mobility and mobile phones in Africa: Findings from a three-country study. *Information Technology for Development*, *18*(2), 145–162.

Porter, G., & Turner, J. (2019). Meeting young people's mobility and transport needs: Review and prospect. *Sustainability*, *11*(22), 6193.

Van de Walle, D. (2009). Impact evaluation of rural road projects. *Journal of Development Effectiveness*, *1*(1) 15–36.

Vannini, P. (2011). Constellations of ferry (im)mobility: Islandness as the performance and politics of insulation and isolation. *Cultural Geographies*, *18*(2), 249–271.