Calculating Care:

Working Out Ways Through (Economic) Insecurity in a

Ouagadougou Market

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature:

Date:………28/08/20
Abstract

Drawing on 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork, this thesis traces the everyday practices of vendors at a neighbourhood market in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, as they calculated their way through uncertainty. As intensifying political and economic insecurity refracted into their businesses and moral worlds, traders had to reorient themselves to increasingly unknowable futures. The emotional and cognitive efforts of their calculative practices became heightened and more visible, illuminating what they cared about, and reflecting their changing scope of agency in exercising this care.

This thesis responds to an urgent need to understand the work that people do to keep body and soul together in the absence of demand for their (paid) labour. There is a rich body of literature that considers how global configurations of resources and power depress valuations of labour across raced, gendered and geographical axes, resulting in a paradox of intensified work for those without access to stable, paid employment. However, the experiences and expertise of the vendors at Marché Collé illustrate a form of work that has been underexplored in academic work thus far.

This thesis focuses on the emotional and cognitive practices through which people direct their labour and deploy their resources to meet needs and aspirations, and mitigate threats. I have called this labour ‘calculating care’, and I argue that the complexity and amount of this work a person has to do corresponds to the (under)valuation of their labour, and body, through socially constructed inequalities. Throughout this thesis, I illustrate what this work does, the expertise it requires, and the toll it takes.
Acknowledgements

To all of those I sat with at Marché Collé: it feels overwhelming to try to articulate the contribution of your investments in this project. It’s the whole project. I have anonymised you throughout but it feels especially weird not to name you here. I hope that this thesis captures a fraction of the wit and warmth you brought to the market every day. Thank you for welcoming me and for teaching me so many things. It was an honour to get to spend so much time with you, and thinking about you as I wrote this all down. I can’t wait to see you all again soon, hopefully very soon.

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3 “Il faut gérer le pauvreté, et ce qui est dans ta coeur”
4 “Elle a totalement perdu”
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Several of the below pictures were taken by Jacques – a key interlocutor in this research project - and are marked as such here and in the thesis.


3.2 View from Jacque’s bench of François’s table with his scales, sponge and knife on top, and water kettle below for cleaning (Taken by Jacques, cropped by me).

3.3 A run of closed stalls on the interior of the market on a Sunday morning.

4.1 Jacques fixing a shoe – his bowl of tools is at his feet and the deep freeze for François’s fish is in the back room behind him.

4.2 Man dancing by charging station. (taken by Jacques)

6.1 Clothes hanging on Diane’s forecourt, and a water-cooler in the bottom left corner for neighbouring vendors. By the end of my fieldwork, the trellis behind her had been replaced by a metal wall enclosing the forecourt behind her.

6.2 Dusty glasses on a table and bright scarves hanging on Diane’s forecourt.

6.3 Ousmane looks down the road towards his own stall from Jacques with a sachet of water in his hand (taken by Jacques).

6.4 View from Diane’s forecourt across Ousmane’s through to Maman’s. Taken on a Sunday morning when Maman’s wooden table is empty. The stall on the far side is partially blocked by small shelves and short piles of stock, and was fully enclosed by a metal grid enclosing the forecourt by the end of fieldwork.

6.5 Jacques at his stall before the new forecourt structure was erected next-door.

6.6 Contrasting picture Jacques took of a client in the same spot a few months later, in the shade cast by the new green structure next door.
This thesis sets out to chronicle the work of calculating care I witnessed at Marché Collé, a neighbourhood market in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. It is concerned with the work vendors did there, managing an increasingly unmanageable exposure to insecurity through daily practices of care and calculation, waiting for stability, and investing in the meantime. I argue these mutually constitutive practices – of care and calculation - are critical to understanding the vitality and vigilance vendors embodied in keeping body and soul together at the edge of tenable livelihoods.

What people care about and who they care for animates and orients calculative practices. In turn, intricate, responsive calculative practices configure how people deliver care through their distribution of labour and other resources. The goal of this research is to shed light on these interlaced practices, illustrating and advocating for the analytical and political potential of viewing calculating care as a type of work in and of itself. As well as a form of infrastructural labour that underpins the distribution of resources, I suggest these practices themselves constitute a considerable proportion of the unvalued work the poor do, as they figure out how to deal with difficulties in accessing resources and disproportionate exposures to uncertainty. The empirical specificity of this research, namely the increasing scarcity and unknowability that characterised vendors’ experiences at this Burkinabè market, sheds light on what this work looks like, what it does and what it costs.

This project is based on fieldwork undertaken in 2017/2018 – a time when Ouagadougou's market traders were managing dramatic change both in meeting their immediate needs and in reimagining their futures. Since the 2014 uprising, the needs articulated by Burkina Faso’s public had gone unfulfilled. Although the popular mobilisation successfully deposed Blaise Compaoré after 27
years in power, the regime that replaced him had not been able to meet the high expectations Ouagadougou’s population held in the wake of his departure. Hopes for some form of a state that aligned with the principles of Thomas Sankara, the country’s socialist president from 1983-1987 who named the country Burkina Faso, ‘the land of the upstanding man’, had animated the rebellion. However, the Sankarist parties had not succeeded in the following elections, with Compaoré’s former Prime Minister, Roch Kaboré, becoming president. With neither the stifled stability of Compaoré’s tenure, nor the revolutionary potential of Sankara’s short period in power, Kaboré’s regime has overseen a creeping hold of terrorism, compounding and compounded by further decreases in economic flows from abroad and fraying state services.

Against this backdrop of macro crisis and insecurity, this thesis traces how a group of vendors calculated their way through uncertainty at Marché Collé, a neighbourhood market a few kilometres from Ouagadougou’s city centre. The market is anonymised here. I chose the pseudonym Marché Collé based on participants often saying they were collé (stuck) at the market, but also to reflect the “stickiness” of affect that tethered people to their livelihoods and lives there (Ahmed, 2014, p.92).

This particular neighbourhood market is relatively large and has a more robust physical structure compared to other “yaar” or more physically improvised markets nearby. An interior courtyard includes small open spaces for fruit and vegetable sellers, a section of tall counters for butchers, and forecourts with lock-up spaces for vendors who predominantly sell fabric, clothes and home goods. The perimeter of the market is lined with larger forecourts and lock-up rooms, occupied by businesses such as bike and scooter repair shops, hardware shops, tailors, salons, tea kiosks, cobblers, haberdasheries, and vendors selling supplies for other traders such as plastic bags and salon consumables. Outside the official edges of the market, vendors open up tarps of second-hand clothes and handbags under parasols beside the parking sites each day. Many women sit on sections of fabric near the gates into the market’s courtyard, selling oranges that they skin and
poke with a knife until their juice can easily be squeezed out by thirsty passers-by. Ambulant traders also sell drinks and snacks to traders and, increasingly, traders without stalls also walk through the market with durable goods.

The main language at the market is Mooré - the most popular language in the city - but many traders who have migrated from the west of Burkina Faso speak Dioula or other languages from around the country. The colonial language is French, which is sometimes spoken in groups who do not have much of an overlap in other languages. As with the rest of the country, most of the vendors at the market are practicing Muslims, and the majority of families are polygamous. However, there are also a significant amount of Christian vendors, including several of those who are at the centre of this research.

There are several similar markets in the areas that encircle Ouagadougou’s city centre, and many of them host a range of traders who moved from the city centre after a fire destroyed the central market in 2003. These markets act as intermediate sites between what is available in the city centre and smaller local markets. As such, they perform a dual purpose – clients from the neighbourhood come frequently to get food, but others also come from neighbouring areas to shop the wider range of goods they can get here than they can locally. Or they used to.

Over the year I spent at Marché Collé, vendors increasingly lamented the lack of circulation at the market. Anticipating patterns of demand in the immediate future and the longer term is a vital part of vendors’ livelihoods, and public expectations of the government’s capacity to maintain or recreate stability drove people towards or away from the market. Such contingent, speculative information had to be constantly folded into the present of vendors’ everyday market decisions. These calculations needed to be particularly careful as margins for error reduced after months of skeletal sales. Burkina Faso’s private sector is relatively underdeveloped compared to its neighbours, and the importance of state salaries for the buoyancy of the economy was ingrained.
into the everyday discourse of the market over the period of fieldwork. The plausibility that the state could afford to maintain salaries was undermined by increasing evidence of the government’s lack of capacity to fulfil its promises. Even without this threat coming to fruition, its existence lingered and intensified in the shadows, contouring consumers’ and vendors’ levels of confidence.

As smaller local markets weighted more towards everyday items, they were not quite as sensitive to the stuttering political crisis as Marché Collé. The wide diversity of experience of vendors at this particular market reflected the extent to which their specific offerings remained affordable or essential. A skeletal level of activity remained – basic food, the fixing of bikes and shoes, the supplies that these businesses needed like plastic bags, oil, threads. Sales of more luxurious items like shoes and clothes, or meat and fish, became very slow. The annual rhythm of religious and cultural celebrations that had historically animated the market through the year, with extra money spent on outfits and celebratory food, tapered off. In the meantime, a dependable, lumpy rhythm of outgoings still had to be maintained, in particular school fees due to a lack of free education brought in by Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). More broadly, this group of vendors articulated the charge of maintaining and creating lives and livelihoods when the government did not have capacity to care about them.

At the heart of this study is a group of vendors along one half of one street along the edge of this neighbourhood market, and those who congregated there to eat, pray and chat with them throughout the day. This group of traders had different types of businesses, which shaped their experience of the economic downturn. They also had a diversity of economic means, which made waiting out the decrease in their sales more or less affordable. Their varying experiences illustrate the different ways that macro-level crisis refracts into the lives of people with different repertoires of resources and responsibilities.
Here are some of the people you will meet later in the thesis:

Huguette ran a tea kiosk at the market, and lived in the courtyard behind it with her family of five children. Her husband, a veterinarian, covered the fixed outgoings of the household but her income from the stall paid for everyday groceries, fuel for the shared moto, fixing what needed to be repaired, and the children’s day-to-day needs. Her husband stayed in the town he worked in through the week while Huguette minded her children and maintained the family home alongside her business. Towards the end of the year I spent at the market, a young woman named Sadia came from the countryside to live with the family, to help Huguette with both stall and home. As two of her older children moved into adulthood, Huguette and her family were weighing up what opportunities they could afford to support, and what threats couldn’t afford to neglect, as criminalisation, and increasingly radicalisation were salient threats for under-employed adults. Even as a relatively wealthy family, choices needed to be made about who could progress to training or university first while the other waited.

Jacques, a cobbler, fixed shoes and footballs across the road from Huguette’s stall. In his late thirties, Jacques had not yet been able to afford to complete building his own home and so he lived with his mother, his brother and sister-in-law, and their children who were now teenagers and young adults. Although his business was not very profitable, people still needed to get shoes, and sometimes footballs, fixed, and his skill maintained a solid customer base. As such, the downturn at the market had not impacted his business in the same way as some of his neighbours. Jacques’ stall faced Huguette’s tea kiosk, and he was good friends with Huguette’s 20-year old son Christian. He was very paternal to the children and teenagers who lived around his stall in houses that bordered the market and often hosted groups spanning generations to speak in the afternoons and on weekends.

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8 All participant names are pseudonyms to maintain anonymity.
Traoré, an older vendor and close friend of Jacques, sold fabric on the interior of the market. Traoré hired two young men to work with him on his three adjoined stalls inside the courtyard, and owned another fabric shop outside the market that his eldest son managed for him. Traoré had been considering marrying his fourth wife but this plan was on hold while the market and the country were, in his words, “not functioning”. His relative wealth buffered him from some of the more immediate recalibrations those around him were forced to make. However, as with other wealthier vendors, he was concerned about an acute crisis becoming chronic, as his livelihood could not weather a continuation of economic constriction. He could, however, use the resources he had to pivot his business and was considering what options might work, but ultimately his inability to read stood in the way of the most obviously profitable possibilities- opening an Orange mobile money kiosk. Traoré was called “Le Vieux” by those we mutually knew at the market but asked me to call him by his family name rather than that. As such, I have included an analogue here by referring to him by a pseudonym surname.

François, a fishmonger, sold frozen fish from the same stall as Jacques. François shared the rent with Jacques, and held his stock in a large deep freeze, branded with the name of the Burkinabé beer, “Brakina”. His sign, along with a table, weighing-scales and knife, marked out his space in front of the stall’s forecourt, although he did not generally sit on the benches that lined the concrete slab, which remained Jacques’ domain. He usually followed the shade as the sun moved throughout the day, maintaining a line of sight to his sign and table but chatting with different groups of friends in different spaces in the morning and the afternoon. His business was very slow, as many customers scaled back their budgets and weighted more towards using dried fish, or just vegetables and grains in their cooking. However, given that his product was frozen, he did not face as much pressure in managing low demand as butchers on the inside of the market courtyard, many of whom would bring what was left in the afternoon to nearby intersections, trying to sell cuts of fresh meat to commuters before they spoiled in the sun.
Diane sold premium used clothes and homewares. Diane was the only key interlocutor in this research who was not originally from Burkina Faso, having moved to Ouagadougou from the Côte d’Ivoire. She did not speak much Mooré, the predominant language in the market and the city, and her Burkinabé husband worked in Canada, and came home once a year at Christmas. As such, she had a less dense social network in the city than her neighbours. Although Diane had close friends at the market, particularly her neighbouring stallholders Ousmane and Maman, and her husband’s employment could cover their main outgoings, she was struggling to manage the competing demands of her business and her family, and her sales of premium second-hand clothes had been hit hard by the protracted crisis. While she was less financially vulnerable than others, her physical, social and affective resources were threatened by her untenable workload and she was struggling to access the other women’s labour that was necessary to be in two places at once.

Ousmane sold plastic bags and pineapples from the stall beside Diane. Plastic bag sales were relatively robust, as they were used by most other vendors. Pineapples were less in-demand, but the teenage girls who made juice would buy leftover stock for slightly cheaper, and so Ousmane was somewhat buffered against the volatility of the demand for the fruit from wealthier clients. Ousmane’s stall was a central space for people to gather, especially around prayer time as he held prayer mats for a group of around 10 men in his back room, and also filled and held a large plastic yellow water container on his forecourt for the men to wash together before prayer. He was very active in backstopping different activities that kept the market together, such as standing in if the parking monitor was late, giving people lifts to and from the market, and helping other traders to mend or amend their stalls. This mobility was facilitated by his neighbours and friends Maman and Diane who watched his stall while he moved around.

Maman, an older trader with a stall on the other side of Ousmane to Diane, sold spices and dried condiments. Many vendors sold smaller ranges of these goods inside the courtyard, but Maman’s larger stall and storage space allowed her to offer a broader variety and a space for clients to sit.
and stay for a while. Originally from Burkina’s second city, Bobo, she spoke Dioula which was also Diane’s first language. Although she understood French and Mooré well, she did not speak much of either and so her client base was weighted towards Dioula-speakers. Maman is a broad kinship name to call an elder woman rather than using specific first names, which should only be used by those of the same generation. As I and the participants who I spent time with who knew her well, all called her Maman, and this does not undermine her anonymity, I have referred to her as Maman throughout.

You will also meet the groups of people who worked and lived near these vendors, and whose lives and stories are threaded through theirs. However, these individuals are not foregrounded as much as the main protagonists through the thesis and so they will be introduced as we meet them through the thesis.

This group of vendors spent six or six and a half days a week at the concrete and metal structures along this 100m stretch of red earth. This ethnography traces the everyday practices with which they navigated national upheaval, individually and collectively. Despite a dramatic erosion of customers and purchases over time, the market was upheld through vendors’ continued investment in its tenability, animating it every day and holding its structure together socially and materially. Crises unfurl through big shocks but also through the “everyday disasters” that introduce change into lives and livelihoods. Their impacts are mitigated and challenged through individual and collective everyday practices of patching continuity and world-(re)building (Ibañez-Tirado, 2015). This research makes visible the work that traders were doing in (re)orienting themselves as an acute crisis became chronic, in both overarching ways and within the myriad everyday calculations that need to be made by self-directed entrepreneurs.

This project was inspired by my experience with an International Labour Organisation (ILO) financial inclusion initiative (a leading development orthodoxy of the current moment) in 2013/4,
where I worked as technical assistance within a Ouagadougou micro-savings organisation whose product targeted the city’s vendors. I came back to Burkina three years later, interested in understanding more about traders’ financial management practices as both a site of skill and a form of moral expression within complex livelihood strategies. I gained illuminating insights around vendors’ financial expertise and how their financial management practices were contested and value-laden through this experience. I also began to see how their work in managing their finances was inextricably enmeshed within their broader practices of care and husbandry. Through an intimate account of stallholders’ practices of calculation and care at their most fine-grained, this thesis seeks to understand the multiple scales of attunement and response required to ‘get by with what one has’ in a rapidly evolving landscape of threats and opportunities. Precisely calibrated day-to-day investments ensured everyone had a working bike or a lift to get to and from the market, shoes and stalls that held together around them, and bodies and souls that could sustain and secure best possible futures. The calculations that directed these investments in continuity and reproduction were vital to traders’ capacity to find and implement foothold solutions, to patch and reimagine the physical, social and affective resources to tack a path into new futures. Vendors reconfigured their physical resources, their money, time and energy but also, in a broader sense, their understanding and investments of themselves and their possibilities. By refocusing on these investments, from the granular to the holistic, I began to see their calculative practices as practices of care; the minding and remaking of what makes one’s moral world. Marché Collé’s vendors made precise calculations to distribute and perform care; care animated and directed their calculations.

This thesis draws on over 12 months of fieldwork at Marché Collé to understand the work of reorientation that saturates marginal livelihoods, tracing the investments that these vendors made in their survival and their futures. The research contributes to debates around the existential, aspirational and political struggles within precarious work outside wage labour, and the social and

9 “On se débrouille avec ce qu’on a” – “We get by with what we have” / “One gets by with what one has” is a widely used phrase, and will be revisited in Chapter Three.
moral work of making a living when there is little market demand for one’s labour (Meagher, Mann and Bolt, 2016; Millar, 2018; Ferguson and Li, 2018; Mbembe and Roitman, 1995). More specifically, it lays bare the calculative practices within this work, as a form of emotional and cognitive labour whose complexity and cost compound with exposure to the unknowable. Critical scholars offer rich insights into the processual and contingent nature of calculative practices and the nuanced expertise it requires (see Lave, 1988; Bowker and Star, 2000; Ballestro 2015). These findings counter dominant suppositions in development paradigms about the bounded and clear choices the poor make in allocating their resources. I seek to further this focus on expertise and contestation, exploring calculative practices as high-stakes work central to both survival and reimagining. In order to render such work visible, and to foreground what animates it in relation to the specificity of individual experience, this thesis engages with the rich feminist literature on less visible forms of care work (Tronto, 1993; Mattingly, 2010; Louw, forthcoming). I also engage with the concepts of articulation work and anticipation work to understand the forms of labour that makes collective, creative work possible in Science and Technology Studies (Star and Strauss, 1999; Adams, Murphy and Clarke, 2009).

Beyond understanding the specificity of experience and expertise of Marché Collé’s vendors, I also link these findings into broader debates around how calculative practices and care work are felt and expressed. Moreover, I use these empirical insights to illustrate how the concept of ‘calculating care’ can contribute to broader ideological and material struggles around the work of managing poverty and attendant exposure to uncertainty more broadly. In doing so, the ethnography presented here seeks to respond to the following questions:

- What calculative work goes into maintaining moral worlds and the resources that sustain them in times of intensifying uncertainty?
- What practices of care sustain everyday life socially, economically, and affectively?
• How could viewing practices of care and practices of calculation as mutually constitutive further understandings of the scope of cognitive and emotional work required to manage vulnerability?

The work of calculating care depends on identifying and acting on individual and collective “margins of manoeuvrability” (Massumi, 2002, p. 212), to deploy resources towards securing best possible futures. Rather than calculating with known parameters, to known ends, we must take into account that people “aren’t necessarily orienting to a known world” when making decisions about how to manage their resources (Tooker and Maurer, 2014, p. 26). In Chapter Three, I describe how vendors narrated unfolding macro insecurity and an increasingly unknowable future in relation to how it reverberated in their own lives and livelihoods. The heightened state of flux and increasingly marginal nature of vendors activities at Marché Collé rendered particularly visible the work of understanding their own resources, opportunities and threats as a non-trivial part of their calculative practices. While Chapter Three introduces how vendors attuned to and processed the uncertain information they need to make decisions, Chapter Four examines how they responded to this information through calculative practices, constantly recalibrating parameters of vigilance and vitality in their decision-making. From footballs that cannot be replaced to illnesses that cannot be treated, relationships with clients that cannot be strained to desires to start families that cannot be fulfilled, this chapter considers what constitutes an unaffordable exposure to loss. I explore how vendors calibrated and articulated this exposure and how their calculations deftly responded to these evolving limits. Outlining the margins of what is and feels (un)tenable offers a vital entry point to understand what people care about and, crucially, their sense of agency to act out this care. As the thesis unfolds, we will see how vendors were required to make such judgements in ever tightening circumstances, highlighting the qualitative shift in their cognitive and emotional efforts of everyday calculation as insecurity escalated.
These calculative practices were richly entangled within the social and moral fabric of the market and the households that mutually sustained it. Chapter Five examines the less visible work that underpinned the market, encompassing the reproductive labour that facilitates vendors’ presence at the market. More specifically, it focuses on the layer of calculative work required to (re)distribute attention, energy and physical presence between reproductive labour and the labour of maintaining market livelihoods. I show that the unpaid labour of young women and teenage girls was required to support even the most fleeting mirage of an empowered woman entrepreneur; an image that has become the archetype of the development imaginary, both resourceful and adequately resourced through access to markets. Meanwhile, we see how the physical, emotional, and cognitive work of managing an unmanageable load of responsibility can result in exhaustion of potential solutions, and ultimately in exhaustion for the people trying to make ends meet. Subsequently, Chapter Six examines the social, embodied rhythms of the vendors that held together the plausibility of this market’s future, their livelihoods within it and their lives outside its edges. Exploring the practices of care that contributed to the generative and fragile sociality of the market, I show how the micro-spaces of intimacy and the broader “affective commons” nourished one another, creating a social infrastructure of the market that can bend without breaking in spite of challenges to its economic tenability (Berlant, 2012, p. 77). "Workplaces are life places” and this understanding of the market as a space of dense sociality shaped vendors’ calculations in deciding whether and how to persist there (Bolt, 2015, p. 5).

At its most general, the empirical findings from this research offer rich counternarratives to development imaginaries of ideal subjectivities, which romanticise and responsibilise market vendors in the Global South, lauding their dynamism while problematising their lack of financial planning. Seeking to illuminate the broader scope of efforts that sustained this market, this thesis argues that calculative labour is an onerous and complex part of work, central to managing the overlapping forms of oppression the poor must deal with, while also remaking moral worlds. The
conceptual tools that help to see and describe the work of calculating care will be introduced in more detail in the literature review forming the second chapter of this thesis.

The remainder of this introductory chapter is devoted to the specific methodology chosen and the process through which it evolved during the research project. Methodology goes beyond research methods to incorporate a “grander scheme of ideas orientating researchers’ work”, and reflects “the sets of values the researcher brought to the study, why it took a particular form and how the interpretation has developed” (Payne & Payne, 2004, pp. 150-151). As with many ethnographic projects, my research unfolded differently to how I expected. The rest of this chapter traces the evolving ethical-intellectual imperatives that determined the shape it took, and provides a grounding in the field-site and relationships within which the representations in the ethnography were created.

**Research Strategy, Methods and Ethics**

How do we learn about each other? How do we do it without harming each other but with the courage to take up a weaving of the everyday that may reveal deep betrayals? How do we cross without taking over? With whom do we do this work? The theoretical here is immediately practical.

- Maria Lugones (2010, p. 755)

The fieldwork underpinning this project was a 12-month ethnographic study spanning from March 2017 to March 2018, with a follow-up trip to Ouagadougou in November 2018. During this period, I spent time with market vendors at Marché Collé - a large neighbourhood market several kilometres from Ouagadougou city centre. The vendors I spent the most time with all worked along a short strip of road lining the edge of the market, or moved there from their stalls within the main market courtyard to socialise and pray during the day. My decisions - what to do, when,
and how - unfolded based on what was emerging socially through these daily rhythms. In this chapter, I will elucidate how that looked and felt in practice, and how this shaped the knowledge created.

However, in order to contextualise the ethnography that follows, I will firstly explain how this project came about through my own engagements with different development interventions and forms of knowledge production. These experiences of knowledge production and practice, and the dominant discourses of poor economics that informed them, shaped my research. As such, the first section of this chapter outlines my positionality in arriving at this disciplinary and geographic field of study, and how this shaped the project and its aims.

The second section will go on to detail how I co-created data with the vendors I knew, tracing how my research strategies and relationships with key participants and the broader market informed one another. I chronicle how my evolving understandings of what consent, participation and reciprocity meant in relation to this public space of work and dense sociality reshaped the day-to-day ethnographic practice through reflection on the ethical implications, but also through the intellectual openings these reflections prompted.

This leads to an interrogation, based more heavily on the second half of fieldwork, of viewing displacements of attention as an ethnographic opening into how people invest themselves in one another and their relative projects at the market. By foregrounding the noisiness of the market, and the continual patterns of rupture and recapture of attention this required of vendors, I increasingly focused on the fine-grained texture of shifting possibilities and responses. This section details how such micro-level shifts in participants’ attention contoured the felt limits of what knowledge could and should be produced and shared in this research. The final section explores the challenges of balancing ethics of representation with the ethical considerations of everyday
interaction. I also include here a reflection on the process of reconfiguring my relationship to the field as I wrote up the thesis.

**Getting to the Field: Situating Expertise and Reconsidering Investments in Savings**

The roles and institutions through which I came to this project provided me insight into the constellations of actors and imperatives that make up the financial inclusion assemblage (Schwittay, 2011), and the opportunity to see how this specific microcosm of the international development paradigm is performed. I saw what was invested globally in the narrative that people can and should manage the risks they and their family are exposed to through formal savings and insurance tools, through a sequence of experiences in finance, development and their intersections. Starting with early work in actuarial practice, I moved through economics training focused specifically on the financial behaviour of the poor and interventions that seek to shape it, followed by experience embedded as ILO-funded technical assistance within a Burkinabè micro-savings organisation. However, coming closer to the context within which the imagined subjects of financial inclusion actually practice financial management, I witnessed rich counternarratives to the models of financial behaviour I had been learning about. I saw how such models were not just incomplete but rather seemed to be inaccurate, obfuscating the holistic, political nature of poverty and the expertise of those managing it.

In the “Will to Improve”, Li describes "rendering technical", the process through which the complex problems of inequality are articulated according to "available" technical expertise (Li, 2007, p. 7). This expertise shapes, and is in turn shaped by, the “intelligible field” of depoliticised problems and solutions development is oriented towards, ultimately resulting in the behaviour of the poor being problematised rather than the structural caused of poverty (Ferguson,1994, p. 60). For me, seeing first hand and being part of this process of ‘rendering technical’ began at Yale’s economics department, a key recruitment site for the World Bank that is at the forefront of Randomised Control Trials (RCTs) in development research. I came to development, from earlier
work in actuarial finance, hoping to translate quantitative financial skills and experience attuned to
the insurance clients and providers in the Global North to the poor in the Global South. This
specific Masters programme in International and Development Economics was originally
established to train civil servants from developing economies in the 1950’s. However, the
programme had become increasingly focused on RCTs since the early 2000’s as these research
instruments ascended to the status of “gold standard” among funders (Abdelghafour, 2017), with
many students going on to work as research assistants on projects using RCTs before embarking
on their own development economics PhD.

In parallel to these studies, my first exposure to a development research environment was through
reviewing the outcomes of RCTs, particularly focused on the poor’s financial behaviour, interning
at Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA¹⁰, specifically with IPA and Yale’s joint Global Financial
Inclusion Initiative, sponsored by Citi Foundation). In the case of financial inclusion, these studies
related primarily to whether and to what extent people could be incentivised to use financial tools
to manage their poverty, and the impact of these engagements. Highly influential to development
paradigms, the tenets of behavioural economics that underpin RCTs frame how the poor manage
their resources. Reflecting neoclassical economics’ expectations of bounded self-interest for
oneself and one’s nuclear family, this disciplinary orientation codes behaviour outside of this
narrow frame of care and calculation falling into “behavioural biases”, “social constraints” or other
“market failures” (Karlan, Ratan and Zinman, 2014). This focus on biases in the economics
literature reflects an abundance of interest in understanding the ‘aberrations’ that cause people to
act in ways that appear to be against their interest based on neoclassical models. However, the
models themselves remain relatively immune from any meaningful revision through attributing
any deviations from their predictions to social and behavioural ‘market failures’.

¹⁰ IPA and its sister organisation Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), both focus on RCTs evaluating the
impact of interventions at the microeconomic level in the Global South.
The epistemic community this training and experience was embedded within generally interprets the lack of formal financial services for the poor in developing countries as a need for them (Schwittay, 2011). This in turn results in research projects intending to understand sustainable (/profitable) tools and interventions that incentivise the poor to save more. As one of the research assistants contributing to a white paper, co-authored by IPA founder Dean Karlan, and titled “Savings by and for the Poor: A Research Review and Agenda” (Karlan et al., 2014), my role involved reviewing and synthesising results from the RCT literature on anything to do with savings behaviour in the global south. This experience showed me the financial and ideological investments made in the idea that the poor should be saving more, but also how the actual data on the behaviour and experience of the poor challenged the assumptions that formal savings were something the poor needed or wanted. The review paper ultimately maintained a commitment to the promise of savings but also acknowledged in its conclusion that “remarkably little is known about which behavioural biases actually drive savings behaviour, and how different biases interact with one another” (ibid., p. 72). Ultimately, the calculative practices of the poor in determining whether to save their scarce resources in formal and semi-formal mechanisms deviate from the expectations of standard economic models in ways quantitative researchers could not explain.

This was how I first arrived in Burkina Faso in 2013, to learn on the ground about financial inclusion through a fellowship with the ILO’s Microinsurance Innovation Facility11, embedded as technical assistance in a Ouagadougou agency that sold micro-savings and microinsurance products to the city’s market vendors. The ILO is a key player in the more “ambivalent politics” of non-credit forms of financial inclusion, with interventions and partner support programmes aimed more at subject formation and long-term change than the more profitable and directly market-oriented programmes of microcredit expansion (Bernards, 2016, p. 606). My role was to

11 Since renamed the “Impact Insurance Facility”
facilitate scaling up the provision of the organisation’s product by recommending ways to make the project profitable. It had been a loss-making Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) project for a decade, supported by the parent company (one of Burkina’s leading insurers) and through funding and technical assistance by the ILO.

However, what I learned from and about the market vendors targeted by this product countered the fundamental underpinnings of financial inclusion discourses. The research and practice I had been immersed in revolved around the idea that better calculations could be facilitated and shaped through intervention. These interventions included access to accounts, but also behavioural prompts such as reminders, account labelling and other commitment mechanisms\(^\text{12}\), reflecting the assumption that the poor were sub-optimally calculating in their everyday lives without their behaviour being modified. In contrast, what I saw was that these vendors’ calculative practices reflected precise and responsive investments in their physical, social and moral worlds, in many cases prompting difficult ethical decisions and disappointments.

These difficulties were not due to an absence of tools, but an absence of money, combined with a complete saturation of exposure to risks. The vendors who invested in the microinsurance / micro-savings product were offered life insurance, paid out to their family in case of their death. However, they remained exposed to risks like fire and theft, and many of them articulated a desire to be insured against such risks. Such incalculable vulnerabilities remain untransferable in contexts where the state does not have sufficient resources to limit risk for financial providers. Financial tools only allowed for vendors to transfer bounded, knowable risks that did not depend on resourced state services like police. Meanwhile, the lack of access to healthcare meant that most

\(^{12}\) Commit mechanisms are designed to make savings (or other)commitments more salient to people - reminders usually involve text messages to account-holders; account-labelling allows savers to name their accounts (e.g. health emergency, school fees) to make saving feel more compelling and make drawing down for other reasons less likely); ‘Hard’ commitment mechanisms are much less common and usually entail a saver being penalised with a fee should their behaviour diverge from what they pledge or not being able to access their funds.
customers reported saving for school fees or building their business or home, and then having to draw down funds for illness or injury (of themselves or their family or friends).

I began to query the framing of knowledge and expertise that obfuscated the lived realities of financial management, perpetuating this mismatch between vendors’ needs and the solutions being experimented with and rolled out. The limits of what could be seen and understood about these vendors’ actual expertise was limited by funders’ preferences for replicable models, constraining what forms of knowledge and expertise are understood and validated. The type of financial capability lauded in the financial inclusion paradigm and incentivised through intervention is based on models from insured and generally higher-income populations in higher-income countries. These understandings of financial expertise are based on the assumption of knowable and manageable risk exposure, rendering them inappropriate when mapped onto people who live in poverty and are exposed to disproportionate levels of uncertainty. This limited framing of what can be understood as ‘financial expertise’ reifies the conception of skill ascribed to those afforded with more power. In doing so, this blinkered focus reinforces politics of skills that continue to undermine the everyday “tactics” through which people with fewer resources respond to the (in)actions of those they are necessarily exposed to (De Certeau, 1984, p. xix).

The behaviour recognised as skill in the financial inclusion paradigm is that which is most legible as expertise in centres of narrative authority in the Global North. This is typified in the title of Collins et al.’s seminal “Portfolios of the Poor” (2009), a presentation of financial diaries with 250 families in Bangladesh, South Africa and India. The poor families’ financial management practices presented in this text were validated by highlighting their similarities to the practices of professional portfolio managers who manage (and profit from) risk professionally, mostly in metropolitan areas of the Global North. Portfolios of the Poor remains a popular sourcebook, framed as showing the poor’s own perspective on their finances compared to the institutional focus of other popular texts in the dominant paradigm (Kelly, 2013). Although economic ethnographers
have long been exploring means of exchange and value storage through a wider lens, considering
the symbolic and substantive significance of monetary practices in specific cultural contexts, the
‘balance sheets’ and ‘cash-flow statements’ of poor households presented by Collins et al. gave
these practices legibility and credibility within the hegemonically positivist paradigm.

However, even these accounts, framed as showing the ‘voice’ of the poor, reflect a consistent
surprise at the innovation and skill of poor people in understanding and responding to scarcity
and disproportionate risk exposure of poverty. The coupling of calculative practices of portfolio
managers with those of poor people through terminology like ‘portfolio’ and ‘speculation’ veils
the huge disparity in the personal stakes between these two very different exercises. People living
in poverty are exposed to disproportionate risk rather than choosing a lucrative occupation
managing the resources of others and, crucially, they cannot afford to lose (Clarke, 2010). The
work of calculating in scarcity is necessarily socially and morally negotiated, and takes into account
a broad range of investments beyond what may look like financial management to people coming
and asking about monetary transactions (Guyer, 1997). For example, savings mediated through
reciprocal lending with friends and family are the most common form of financial transaction in
many developing countries but this form of sharing is often reduced to ‘informal insurance’ in the
economics literature (Rutherford, 2001, p. 3). These practices certainly diversify the risk of loss,
for example through fire or theft, and also create barriers to temptation. However, such tacit or
explicit arrangements to help after ‘shocks’ that decrease households’ income or increase
expenditure also express and reinforce more expansive linkages of solidarity (Rosenzweig & Stark,
1989). Networks of reciprocity underpin risk-sharing relationships but cannot be reduced to a
proxy for, or be seen as a demand for, a formal financial instrument like insurance.

In starting this thesis, I set out to find what could not be seen or said through the broader politics
of knowledge production within which calculative practices are framed in the financial inclusion
assemblage (Schwittay, 2011). I chose to learn about vendor’s calculative practices through first
getting to know about their livelihoods and lives more holistically through a market ethnography, with the aim of nesting financial diaries within the ethnography, in order to contextualise their holistic investments and the calculative practices that mediate them within “the messiness - the desperation and aspiration of life lived” (Biehl & Locke, 2010, p. 337). This focus on everyday life involves a centring of quotidian practices, viewing what may be seen as mechanical and contextual as rather being responsively calibrated and deployed to map onto the needs of the moment (De Certeau, 1984). This experience allowed me to see the forms of calculative expertise needed to hold body and soul together; expertise obfuscated by the models of economists or product designers which frame and incentivise contextually irrelevant capabilities. What is acknowledged as a skill, by whom, is inextricably linked to the value placed on different bodies; for example, the presentation of sewing as naturalised or lower-end work due to its legacy of being done more by women, and learned outside of the scope of capitalist production (Collins, 2002; Prentice, 2015). However, work does not get any easier or less skilled just because it is undervalued and hence relegated to being classed as “unskilled” by structural forces (Bolt, 2015).

Crucially, this thesis argues that the undervaluing of certain forms of work, and reciprocally bodies, creates less visible calculative work that is required to manage the effects of such undervaluation. These axes of undervaluation result in saturations of skilled, exhausting work in the bodies of those whose skills are minimised and rendered less visible, as they try to manage the scarcity and vulnerability this leads to. My methodology started, then, with unlearning the models I had been schooled in and working with; to see them as a frame of power-knowledge which could be obfuscating true experience and expertise. My earlier experience with Ouagadougou’s market vendors taught me how the path-dependent expertise developed through my time working through these sites of narrative authority left me ill-equipped to understand the lived experiences of the poor in proliferating uncertainty. Returning to the city three years later, I was curious to find new ways of seeing and describing the processes of financial management, letting insights “emerge from experience” (Guyer, 2004, p. 158).
Reciprocal Investments: Micro-spaces and Ways of Knowing at the Market

That was how I arrived at Marché Collé in March 2017 - a neighbourhood market in a “mixed neighbourhood” combining both residential and commercial spaces, a site that my former employers had once served with their micro-savings product but no longer did. Aware that each form of reciprocity positions us in the field (Mosse, 2014), I decided not to take my old employers up on kind offers to introduce me to their clients and other vendors at one of the many markets they collected at in the city. The fact that Marché Collé had no regular collectors of any formal micro-savings organisation also served to show me what the reality was for workers just at the edge of what was profitable to serve – the boundary between financially “included” and “excluded”. Similarly, the moment of fieldwork overlapped with the introduction of mobile money to the areas around the market, enclosing it over the year. Thus, temporally, it was also at the boundary of the increasingly prominent form of financial inclusion in Sub-Saharan Africa through mobile technology13.

Initially, I had planned to split my time between markets at several sites. But I fast realised there was an abundance of diverse experiences and work across the small stretch of road at the edge of Marché Collé where I had started to build up connections. I pursued threads and themes that came up with participants elsewhere in the market and the city, but my concentration remained on everyday life on this 100m run of stalls, and how the circulation of news, rumours, and clients there refracted unfolding events outside the market’s perimeter. Learning how the vendors I knew at this very small site invested their time, attention and intention in and with one another made visible the dense sociality and everyday intentions that shaped their calculative practices.

13 By the time I returned for a post-fieldwork visit eight months after leaving (in November 2018), two “Orange” mobile money agents had set up in the market – one on the stretch of road where this project focused.
Through prior experiences at Ouagadougou’s markets, both as a customer and for research, I knew it could be overwhelming for me and confusing for vendors were I to navigate the market without being able to communicate clearly why I was there. Making my overarching research project clear felt too nebulous to explain to all of the many vendors who would ask what I was looking for when walking through the narrow lanes of the market, and so I also depended on grounded everyday plans to position myself and break any potential expectations of buying more than I knew I would. Having specific intentions for earlier trips allowed for processes of informed consent and inclusion to build up over time. Even though I fast honed my focus on one specific corner of the market, and explained my research project to those I spoke to in more detail, having some more legible and bounded micro-intentions (language-learning, shopping, eating or getting a drink) still made it easier to get into the rhythms of the market over these first few months.

Through the inclusion this granted me, I gradually learned what forms of reciprocal investments underpinned the general, incidental interactions and the closer relationships between vendors at the market. I started out with two places where I would spend time each day, at different points along the spectrum of public-private spaces that shaped the market. The first was a tea kiosk on the corner of the road where I could come and get a tea or sandwich and sit for some time, chatting to the owner Huguette and her customers, and learning about the market from a relatively public position. The second was a group of neighbouring stallholders 50m down the road – Diane, Ahmed, Ousmane and Maman – whose generous welcome reflected the role of their base as a social space without many barriers to entry for people to spend time (see Chapter Six). I had planned to recruit a female market vendor to teach me Mooré. After I met Diane on my first trip to the market, her warm and relaxed welcome put me at ease so I asked her if she would have the time to teach me. Originally from the Cote d’Ivoire, she didn’t speak Mooré and passed the request.

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14 Mooré is the most widely spoken indigenous language in Ouagadougou. My fieldwork was carried out in French mostly. I learnt enough Mooré to greet people, to shop and have small conversations that allowed me to learn about the market more broadly beyond key participants.
to her neighbours Ahmed and Ousmane who said they would help, and I began coming there regularly. The range of their offerings allowed me to get a better understanding of the economic scale of offerings on the edge of the market: Ahmed’s transport business moving large items and wholesale purchases and Diane’s second-hand clothes stall were higher cost and aimed primarily at larger business-holders and government workers with salaries, while their neighbour Maman’s condiments stall and Ousmane’s plastic bags and pineapples were everyday low-cost inputs for other vendors and juice-makers as well as wealthier clients.

These locations gave me immediate, clear reasons to be at the market. This allowed me to develop relationships with participants and a base of knowledge about how the market worked. I built up a broader network of connections and my own routes and rhythms, alternating between observing and being swept away by the rhythms of others (Lyons, 2016). I spent time visiting some of Maman, Diane and Ousmane’s friends at their own stalls and got to know people gradually by passing them every day between bases, and greetings turning into more concrete check-ins and elaborations. After a few months, Jacques, a cobbler at the end of the road whose stall faced onto Huguette’s kiosk, had become another key participant and his stall another social space that became central to my time at the market. Another central space for this research developed more gradually around a haberdashery shop whose elongated, covered forecourt punctuated the road between Diane/Ousmane/Maman and Jacques/Huguette. As a covered section, with limited visibility and a group of younger sellers working inside, this space had a distinct sociality based on being with one another and hosting visitors inside the opaque shades that blocked it from the road.

Through experiencing different levels of inclusion within these different groups in this area, I came to see how the broader sociality of the market was underpinned by micro-spaces of reciprocal investment, and how forms of participation in these “nested communities” shaped experiences and identities (Smith, 2013, p. 203). Often these groupings were neighbouring stallholders but they
also included constellations that converged to eat, pray, or chat together from across the market. Due to the relatively sprawling nature of Ouagadougou, workers in the city tend to stay at their place of work to eat and sleep at midday, as the petrol for the journey home is often more expensive than buying takeaway food. ‘Coser’ing is a term used by interlocutors to describe the more deliberate, closer types of conversations they would have with friends and family, distinct from the incidental sociality of interactions with acquaintance. This form of sharing was not part of my experience immediately but, after some time of visiting and learning and chatting at both these spaces, closer participants started to share their more specific, personal challenges and aspirations, or make fun of me as they did of one another, and I came to participate in and get some insight into the “practices of intimacy” that made up market life (Orrico, 2005). Being included in these practices with closer participants allowed me to understand more about their lives through richer conversations. Moreover, the ways people talked about who they would coser with and why (not), and what part this played in their lives, allowed me to see how deeper relationships and the spaces that facilitated them were delineated from, but also underpinned, the general market sociality.

As they spent their full days at the market from 8.30am to 6pm six days a week, and often a half-day on Sunday, vendors learnt about most of the unfolding news from outside the market with and through one another. Sometimes the radio would hum in the background at certain stalls but only at very quiet moments where stallholders were alone, which were few and far between. Most of the vendors at that point did not have a smart phone. One or two newspapers would make their way from group to group throughout the day along this section of the market. News was read and shown amongst friends and neighbours, analysed for meaning as it landed, travelling by word of mouth in between. Analysis and stories circulated in concert with this, shaping perceptions of what these threads meant for the country and for vendors’ everyday decisions about their livelihood, given that expectations about the government’s capacity to manage unfolding events drove customers to or away from spending money at the market.
Hoping to understand both heterogeneity of these experiences and the broader structural factors that shaped them, I focused attention on the affect, or the “angle of [vendors’ and groups’] participation in processes bigger than themselves” (Massumi, 2015, p. 6, emphasis my own). I explored how different individuals and collectives related to the social, moral and economic processes of world-(re)building at the market, but also the broader unfolding of the country’s security and associated economic crisis, based on the vendors’ own perspectives and repertoires of resources. I knew my core focus was vendors’ own responses rather than the political economy they were responding to, and that a complete and objective truth is not available (Barron, 2013; Haraway, 1998). However, at the start of the fieldwork especially, I would sometimes try to trace the truth of a story through the composites of convergent and divergent information across different groups and news from other sources, becoming frustrated if I couldn't nail down a coherent story about what was emergent. Ultimately, I came to see these knots and multiplicities as a way to understand the complexity of work that vendors were doing to co-create specific communities of knowledge and discussion that shaped their own understandings (and vice versa) in the absence of a knowable set of parameters for calculating their way into their future.

I had envisioned being more of a practically ‘useful’ participant observer. But, as I learned more about the market, I came to understand participant observation in terms of the networks of reciprocity that animated and shaped the majority of vendors’ daily activity. As noted by Clarke in her market ethnographies, participant observation with vendors often means helping out where an unskilled pair of hands can undertake tasks usually considered appropriate for children, getting more complex as competence and trust grows (Clarke, 1994, p. 22). I could and did help with simple tasks like setting up and folding down stalls at the start and end of day, shaking the dust out of dried produce or rearranging displays of stock, but this type of physical market work was sparse in light of the ebbing market demand. A focus on participating through the limited ways I could help vendors with their day-to-day routines ceded to understanding participation in terms
of the maintenance and patching of market morale and daily life that took most of vendors’ attention.

From the outset, early experiences with Diane, Ousmane and Maman oriented me to how to participate respectfully in these relationships, while also intellectually shedding light on how the market and the micro-spaces that make it up were held together. I had planned to pay for the time of a language teacher and so much of my early conversations with Ousmane centred on this, with him insisting I didn’t pay him. That was echoed by Diane, who advised me to keep bringing food to share, even if no one wanted to have any most days, or other small tokens but to give up on the idea of paying for language lessons or other research help with Ousmane. In the absence of feeling like I could contribute materially in those first few months, I used to buy pineapples from Ousmane and things like bissap (hibiscus flowers) or chogo (tigernuts) from Maman’s dry goods stall nearly every visit and second-hand clothes from Diane every now and then. However, often Maman would give me over double what she should for the price, or sometimes would give me little extra gifts of small amounts of either on days I visited, and then Diane gifted me an outfit. When I asked about a dress hanging up at Diane’s stall a few days later, with the implication I may buy it, she laughed and said. “You don’t always have to buy something… you don’t always have to give. I wanted to give you a present”15. The linking of my purchases to Diane’s gift reflected the wider sociality of transactions in a saturated market, and prompted me to think about how different forms of investment could be reciprocated.

Reciprocity is always a contingent, dynamic process of negotiating intangible and tangible investments based on shared understandings of needs and capacities (Härkönen, 2014). Over time, I learnt to adapt my understanding of reciprocity and participation to respond to what was relevant to individual and collective relationships, partaking in the processes of fixing by contributing when

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15 “Il faut pas toujours à acheter quelque chose… Il faut pas toujours à donner. Je voulais te faire un cadeau.”
unexpected forms of costly care came up - an injury, a broken piece of equipment or wear to a stall – or for moments of pilgrimage, celebration or festivals. As Millar writes in her ethnography with catadores (informal rubbish collectors) in Rio de Janeiro, reciprocal giving is often fundamental to livelihood strategies and moral worldbuilding outside of wage labour; participating in these material forms of support can be part of understanding the practices and imperatives that shape the livelihoods we research (Millar, 2018).

The ways vendors supported one another materially were enmeshed with all the ways in which their mutual investments at different levels held together the moral, social and material fabric of the market. Although I gave small payments to Jacques and Huguette for more formal bounded interviews I had with them in non-market time, and offered this to anyone I spoke to at length, most of the reciprocity happened in this more responsive, enmeshed way. I was often conflicted about the limits of this, for example in letting moments creep by where people I knew and cared about, who were actively trying to help me, were struggling to pay school fees. However, I ultimately decided not to contribute towards school fees, suspecting that it could get complicated quickly in terms of how visible that would be to others and how it could knit into future expectations that I didn't know I could fulfil based on other ‘sponsorship’ relationships being referred to as long-term arrangements.

“There is a Place [for you]”: Displacements of Attention at the Market

As anthropologists, we do not “access” a site as a whole but witness and participate in the set of relationships between individuals and collectives that make a place, creating new tethers and affecting others through the different intensities of investments we make (Candea, 2010). Many methodological works on anthropological fieldwork concern themselves with how to gain access and trust in communities of others. However, more critical discourses prompt us to continually reflect on and respond to what we are learning about what we may be animating, or displacing in our research relationships (Smith, 2013). Doing social science is intimate work, its success marked
by moments when we are “really in peoples’ lives” (Tuck and Yang, 2014, p. 234) with all the privilege and responsibility that implies.

An unanticipated dimension of the emotional work of the research was my constant attempt to be in a “right” form of relationship with the people I encountered at the market, be they closer participants or acquaintances. Each new connection brought another new layer of new connections in terms of people that person knew, or those I would pass on the way to go and see them. Being tethered to their stall and the routes they made around the market shaped vendors’ days and lives and was an important dimension to keep in mind as I exercised my relative freedom of movement within the same spaces, and outside them. As markets are spaces that people can enter into freely (Masquelier, 1993), I reflected frequently, especially at the start of fieldwork, on what I could or should require of myself in determining a level of collective consent of a group of people who were “coincé”, cornered in the market and who my mobility and privilege felt very visible to.

With those we research, but also those we interact with in order to be in the sites we research, we need to be careful “not to infringe uninvited upon the 'private space' (as locally defined) of an individual or group” (ASA, 2011, p. 5). Although we can enter markets freely, how public or private their constituent spaces are is spectral, and contingent on who wants to occupy them, and for what purpose. This is particularly true for a white researcher in Sub-Saharan Africa who embodies and signals certain privileges and continuities with violent histories – the potential for gain or loss with my presence was an unavoidable dimension of how I was encountered.

These considerations concretised and layered onto the concerns I had taken into account when applying for ethical approval through the university before fieldwork. Although my research plan adapted to what unfolded, my ethical choices reflect what I had mapped out in applying for ethical approval, with adaptations to respond to the evolving context. I had planned to pay for formal
interviews, which I did, although these formed a much smaller portion of the research than what I had anticipated. With other participants, who contributed less formally, I ended up helping financially in small ways when problems came up which reflected the same principles of ensuring “fair return should be made for their help and services” in ways that honoured their preferences and the forms of reciprocity I witnessed there (ibid., p. 6). I knew before fieldwork that written consent would not be appropriate based on the literacy levels of the likely interlocutors, and so had anticipated consent to be oral. I understood informed consent as “a process, not a one-off event” (ibid., 2011 p.5) based on an open dialogue about the research and its aims throughout. Those who are included in this thesis were very aware of my intentions, and we talked about the research and their involvement in it often. I was also attuned to any possible material mismatches in understandings about what it meant to be involved in the research. For example, due to the economic situation, visas to Europe were understandably of interest to some people I knew well, or less well, at the market. As I knew it was not plausible for me to be able to help with that, I tried to be sure to have open conversations about such things, even if they had only been touched on obliquely. Similarly, when some participants would say how they were glad that this research would show people how hard their lives currently were, and potentially mobilise help for them, I would speak about the incremental form of knowledge production and action I anticipated this research contributing to, without the likelihood of immediate, localised consequences.

Even when I sought to be explicit about my research intentions, I was cognisant of divergences between what may be assumed and what was possible in terms of how helpful I could be, through the impact of this research or otherwise (Tuck and Yang, 2014). Based on my evolving understandings of the social and moral world of the market, I tried to be as externally clear and internally reflective about the edges of my capacity for reciprocity in a way that felt respectful and sustainable. I became more cautious about getting to know people, foregrounding any potential sense of dissonance in expectations in order to come closer to shared understandings where possible. This resulted in purposely focusing on a smaller centre of core relationships, and seeking
to understand a respectful level of lighter touch engagement with another larger group of people with whom I would actively engage. By keeping the group of participants I spent time with small and geographically close, I invested in the interconnected set of partial perspectives I would come to engage with, which also allowed the research relationships to become part of this web, contextualising one another.

Within these core relationships, I focused on understanding and responding to as clear an idea as I could ascertain of what people were investing in the research relationship. For example, as one of the first people I spent consistent time with, I was conscious both of Ousmane vouching for me and of the associations he and others may draw from this. “You will know Europe”, one of Maman’s clients said to him within my first few weeks. Ousmane himself asked me about visas, sometimes - a lot of people did - and I tried to be as clear as I could. My European friend was at the time trying to move back home with her Burkinabè husband and I would explain how protracted, uncertain and expensive that process was, even in that scenario, in order to try to illustrate the lack of feasibility (even when internally questioning if and how this could work).

I only encountered three or four other Nassara (white people) at the market during the year of fieldwork, and my presence as a white researcher sometimes prompted vendors to articulate diverse perspectives on Nassara as both threats and opportunities. One moment in which the double-sided nature of this felt particularly clear was when I was sitting with Mariam, a hairdresser, one morning when a friend of hers who ran a tea kiosk on the other side of the market came by. They joked about me being with Mariam, her friend saying how she had her own Nassara client. Mariam hit back that her friend’s Nassara was a terrorist and they both laughed. This tension, where an association with someone white represented both access to opportunity and a threat, came through time and again in different ways throughout my fieldwork. As well as being

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16 “Tu vas connaitre Europe”
associated with asymmetrical capital-labour relations between Burkina/Africa and the Global North, unnamed white individuals in Burkina were often referred to in stories about Burkinabè elites close to the former president Blaise Compaoré, and particularly to the assumed perpetrators of Sankara's murder and later blood crimes of the regime.

The history, and current realities of colonial extraction of resources, labour and knowledge understandably translated into hesitancy on the part of some participants. The “very real social legacy” of structural violence was most explicitly acknowledged with one vendor who came to be much more involved in this research after some time at a distance (Fairhead, 2016, p. 25). I got to know Jacques after two months of pleasantries every day and no apparent interest from him in me or my research, when he suddenly started to ask more about me and my plans. He later told me that he had been wary of white people and so thought he should be prudent in deciding whether to “coser” with me after observing me for some time. The fact that I stayed around for so long, and continued to come back every time I promised, built trust in unanticipated ways with him and other participants. The vendors I knew well often connected this with the fact that I was not French (I am Irish). Had I been French, many suggested both implicitly and explicitly, the relationship would have felt more extractive. Ousmane told me later in the year that he wouldn’t have been comfortable to say yes to my original ask of learning Mooré with him if I had been French, but also said I wouldn’t have wanted to learn Mooré or stay for as long if I was French. As an example, he put it to me that a French person would have wanted to come and film for two days and never come back.

Learning about how my race and nationality formatted my presence also had implications for how I documented data. Vendors and their clients sometimes connected notebooks and recorders to espionage rather than research or journalism. The case of Sankara’s death had been reopened since the insurrection, and its assumed connections to European intelligence emphasised the possibility of some security connection in a way I hadn’t expected. This meant I recorded little at the market,
and wrote down only phrases that felt marked as particularly salient that I feared I wouldn’t remember – aware of the shifts in dynamics that prompted. Drawing attention to these tools can be a helpful way to keep the research relationship in sight (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995), but doing this in a public space felt different given the security and surveillance implications.

Instead, I recorded voice-notes as soon as I returned home, and marked my daily route round the market on a template map of who I had seen and talked to. Often, such forms of planning and reflecting served to show just as much about the density and diversity of investments negotiated at the market as they did about the actual everyday events and perspectives I had observed. I sometimes found it challenging to actually pinpoint the moment my attention had been shifted by someone or something new coming into the frame, bringing to the fore how saturated this one corner of a market was with threads of information and intentions. Documenting and tracking where I intended to place my attention and where it actually went led me to focus on the displacement inherent in researching (at) a noisy public site, where participants were often navigating emergent and competing claims on their time, energy and attention.

My attempt to capture what displaced my attention, and what my own presence was displacing, became a frame through which I sought to enter the reality of the market as a site of “relentless displacement” (Rose, 1991, p. 112). This focus began as a way for me to reflect on issues of consent and became an ethnographic opening. For example, as Ousmane had been volunteered as my Mooré teacher, I was attentive to how I could gauge his interest in this beyond his kind acceptance of the role. Sometimes he would be singing prayers from his small illustrated book when I arrived but, when I asked if I was interrupting and should come back, he would say that’s just what he does in the moments he has no clients or visitors, and he’d motion to his bench for me to sit down – “Il y a un place” – just as he would do if clients or friends arrived and seemed to want to linger.
“Il y a un place” – “there is a place (for you)” – marked the invitation of a host prompted by someone’s arrival and interest in having their attention. This to-and-fro of negotiating attention, of the request for a place and the provision of one, happens all day every day in different ways, and represented so many forms of investments, of money, time, energy, of oneself. After a few weeks of noticing how much was required of Ousmane’s attention (see Chapter Six), I realised how little time he must have for his prayers or for any pause really, and teaching me a language didn’t seem like an appropriate thing to layer into that given the density of the demands he juggled. I signed up for Mooré classes at an evening school and practiced with him sometimes, in between all of the other things that he did at his stall. In a broader sense, I began to pay attention to how the shifts in attention of vendors – the interlacing of response and intent – represented different forms of investments in relationships, projects and identities, and ultimately came to see calculation as the work of mediating these investments, encompassing but also transcending financial management.

Refusal and Response: Pivoting Ethnography in a Cornered Market

The ethical and intellectual focus on the meaning of displacement in relation to reciprocal investment became a core ethnographic focus, reshaping my understanding of how vendors managed their attention and other resources. It also meant that I shifted from my original plan of nesting financial diaries within the ethnography, to a more holistic approach by which I sought to understand more deeply vendors’ socio-economic life-worlds and how financial decision-making sat inseparably within them. I focused on more responsive understandings of how participants calculated on a minute-to-minute basis based on a rapidly changing external environment and their own personal intentions and repertoires of resources. This focus allowed me to capture the complexity of the interrelated projects of managing poverty and maintaining moral worlds, defying persistent narratives in ethnographies of the poor that “the only concern of the poor ought logically to be survival and financial improvement” (Fonesca, 2006, p.28, quoted in and translated by Millar (2018)).
Proponents of decolonising methodology foreground the need to centre refusal, both in the narratives and representations we as researchers are willing to perpetuate in academia, and in responding to the edges of what knowledge the people we work with want to speak about (Zavala, 2013; Simpson, 2007; Cameron, 2015). My original intention to nest financial diaries within ethnographic methods would have required both participants and I to maintain and return focus to the production of diary data throughout punctuated market days. I tried to start diaries with one participant – Jacques – six months into fieldwork, which was my intended start date for them. However, given what I had learned about the market, I had become conscious of the potential that they would feel disciplining, even if I employed a more open and holistic orientation to build up the financial from vendors’ broader considerations. Jacques was very direct and I trusted he would not be likely to participate out of politeness. We met a few Sundays in a row, intending to tentatively start the diaries while the market was a bit quieter than other days, but there were still visitors and clients lingering in the market’s slow off-day rhythm. Even on slow days, rarely did 90 seconds go by without a visitor or passing vendor stopping for a quick chat at Jacques’ stall, a favour being asked, an ambulant seller or someone begging who needed to be acknowledged and conversed with, or a friend coming to coser for longer.

Being attentive to what diverted attention, and then what emerged afterwards, deviated from the linear continuity of what could have been traced had I tried to continually return our attention to what we had spoken about before interruptions. Focusing instead on how thoughts and feelings emerged on the other side of displacements rendered visible what topics and framings failed to be residually held and returned to, in relation to what had made itself immediately relevant, and what was now of note. The constant interruptions and calls for attention that permeated market interactions reflected the external context he and other vendors were responding to; meanwhile, what he sought to return to and hold onto through these shifts illuminated an internal set of aspirations and concerns.
Refusal is not just a ‘no’ or, as in this case, a lack of ‘stickiness’ of the topic through disruption but rather a “redirection to ideas otherwise unacknowledged or unquestioned” (Tuck and Yang, 2014, p. 239). Whether expressed through evasive or generic language or the allowance of certain themes’ consistent displacement without recapture, a lack of sustained engagement with specific topics and framings are openings, showing what people are more compelled and comfortable to share. Understanding consent in relation to what participants were interested in investing their attention in, rupture and recapture became a helpful way to sift and sort different areas of relative relevance.

As Audra Simpson asserted in her seminal work on ethnographic refusals, the moments where lines of enquiry do not bear fruit “speak volumes” about both the participants’ lives and the frames of power-knowledge that frame what gets focused on in research (Simpson, 2007, p. 78). We can reflect these learnings and respect the ethical ramifications thereof by performing ethnography “pivoted upon refusal(s)” (ibid., p. 73).

In this case, I pivoted this project by removing the diaries from the plan and solidifying an interest in the constant work of reorientation needed to mediate the overlapping projects and intentions that were made manifest at the market every day. This orientation reflected my initial impetus for the research – to put financial management practices within their relevant context of aspirations and struggles – but did so in a much more granular way. I sharpened my focus on the real-time process through which informational, social and affective connections were built up; the ‘background’ of the market within which decisions were made became an animated and dynamic framing of the perspectives and experiences of shifts and in-betweens. I could then see these flows of bodies and stories, and vendors’ processing thereof, as the actual process of calculation and its dialectical relationship with its emergent context rather than as methods-with-interruption.

My efforts to maintain focus on what was ‘financial’ through this experience with Jacques reinforced a central thread emerging through the rest of the ethnography: becoming attuned to
what vendors’ responsive work was shaped by *in the moment* was more relevant than listening out for threads of specific themes re-emerging or trying to recapture moments already moved out of to get more ‘complete’ truths. This focus on the fine-grained details as processual rather than contextual resonates with Massumi’s treatment of affect and micro-perceptions: following Deleuze, Massumi hones our focus onto “momentary cuts” and interruptions and the shifts in felt potential that affect and reflect them (Massumi and McKim, 2009, p. 4). Paying attention to everyday affect in this way allows us to hold a frame for the “microshocks that populate every moment of our lives”, and through which the world around us refracts into our personal frame of meaning- and decision-making (Massumi, 2015, p. 53).

Practically, this meant I concentrated on the set of possibilities and imperatives facing individuals and collectives, bearing in mind what may have been foregrounded or shifted at specific moments through exposure to what was circulating. I have found two terms exceptionally useful as short-hands for explaining this, which I will use throughout for precision. Although I will draw on and seek to contribute to the broader conceptual tools and literatures covered in the literature review in Chapter Two, I employ these two terms as co-constitutive practices that together helped me to see and describe ‘calculating care’ at a granular level. The first is to “make oneself living” (mahamelona in Malagasi), which Cole writes about in reference to the aspirations and livelihood practices of Madagascar youth (Cole, 2018). According to Cole, this phrase encapsulates the orientation to livelihoods as “ways that enable themselves to achieve valued forms of personhood” (ibid., p. 96), reflecting how personhood and livelihoods are inextricably linked. Such ways of making oneself living “involve the whole person, and comprise the whole of social life” (Ferguson and Li, 2018, p. 13). The second is “margin of manoeuvrability” which Massumi describes as the sense of “where we might be able to go and what we might be able to do in every present situation” (Massumi, 2002, p. 212).
Microshocks, bad and sometimes good, intensify for all in times of crisis, but how these ruptures or shifts shape experience and expertise is determined by how they relate to individual’s own capacity “to achieve valued forms of personhood” (Cole, 2018, p. 96). Both of these terms – ‘margins of manoeuvrability’ and ‘making oneself living’ - are inherently affective, placing primacy on the felt experience of what is enabled and impinged upon structurally within micro-level experiences. However, I bear in mind the Euro-centric genealogy of affect theory and the need for it to be deployed carefully in light of the biases this has resulted in and can potentially reinforce (Gunew, 2009, 2016; Muñoz, 2006). I took points of intensity (as perceived by me) as prompts to pay attention, but sought to ground the accounting of these intensities in material, social and embodied struggles in how I represent them. The terms ‘margins of manoeuvrability’ and ‘making themselves living’ offered frames for these grounded representations while maintaining an affective focus.

**Further Reflections on Positionality and Ethics**

This ethnography is, to borrow from Stewart, not a “flat and finished truth but some possibilities (and threats) that have come into view in the effort to become attuned to what a particular scene may offer” (Stewart, 2007, p. 5). Describing what ‘came into [my] view’ depended on grasping for language at some points; not just based on this research being done in a second language for both myself and participants, but also in seeking to articulate what is often at the edges of stories (ibid). Acknowledging this affective focus required me to come to terms with my own “capacity to affect and be affected” (Massumi, 2005, p. 1), not as a hindrance to fieldwork but as a necessary way of understanding the practices within which I was entangled (Barad, 2007). Keeping voice notes as an intermediate tool helped to have a way of capturing the affect of the market. Processing this separately later into written form allowed me to reflect at slightly more of a remove on how interactions, affect and expressions were woven together, and refracted through my own experience. The diaries themselves allowed me to see as I wrote up the work the “flow and arrest” of ordinary affect I was entangled with (Stewart, 2007). In the same ways that I could notice
confusion and intractability through the trailing and disconnection in the threads participants shared, I could see this in my own unedited voice diaries while transcribing and as a later record. Identifying with a feminist approach to ethnography, I was mindful throughout of the power dynamics (those I could see and those I could not) that permeated interactions at the market, knowing also that my own relationship with participants as individuals and in collectives were also imbued with these asymmetries. Theoretically, this resulted in pursuing "feminist objectivity", understanding that knowledge and truth are always “partial, situated, subjective, power-imbued and relational” in ways that shift continuously (Hesse-Biber, 2011, p. 9; cf. Harding, 1993, Haraway, 1998; Bhavnani, 1993). I centred the need to take seriously the responsibility and privilege that comes with the everyday intimacy this form of research affords and requires; both through the need to invest reciprocally in relationships and to choose which parts of lived experience to foreground in “a commitment to engaging in research that is socially and politically relevant to those we study” (Craven and Davis, 2013, p. 9).

Escalating insecurity significantly changed what was relevant to participants over the course of the research and I was prompted to make a renewed reinvestment to this research site, and hence these emergent themes, five months into my fieldwork. After a terrorist attack in Ouagadougou in August 2017, there were discussions between different stakeholders at the university about whether I should move countries to somewhere safer and/or with more links with the UK and the university. Ultimately, I decided to stay in Burkina. Given what was relevant to interlocutors was materially changing, this decision felt like a shift where I was increasingly uncertain of what forms of knowledge could come out of this project and how I could render them impactful relative to the original intentions of the research. Furthermore, I was aware of choosing against both an institutional preference but also similar preferences within those I cared about at home, precluding me from sharing my own experience with them fully and undermining my ability to participate in my own reciprocal investments of care outside of the field. The security situation had shifted my own understanding of the research through what was pertinent to participants, and therefore
relevant for the research, but also my own relationship to the research, to participants as contextualised within my life and personhood more broadly. I think it is important to break the Malinowskian mould and highlight that taking a year out of one’s life to be abroad is a privilege afforded to those of us without significant care duties, and also that it can undermine our own non-validated work outside of professional understandings as a researcher. However, I do not to conflate the work or personal stakes of undertaking research with the actual struggles of research participants, mindful of my own mobility and privileges in co-producing this type of knowledge (Spivak, 2010, p. 29).

In terms of who is included in these representations, the through-line I’ve drawn backwards through this chapter on getting to know people pulls distinct threads out of a noisy set of interactions and non-linear trajectories. This composite of relationships resulted in some voices, and hence concerns, being weighted more than others in the coming ethnography. I wanted to privilege enthusiasm and interest from participants as the baseline of consent and so generally favoured a more participant-led way of building relationships. However, due to my lack of Mooré or other local languages, and how the market was configured, the path-dependent building up of connections favoured males who spoke fluent French and had their own space, or could make a claim to some space, with lines of sight to the road. In response, I reflected on what experiences I wasn’t learning as much about and sought to diversify the composite of perspectives I was able to include and did get to know; for example, more women and older vendors towards the end of the fieldwork. Choosing not to take on a research assistant who could have helped me carry out more research with vendors who did not speak (much) French excluded some of the more marginalised voices from being included in this project. However, I ultimately decided that this was counterbalanced by ways in which the addition of an assistant (either a vendor or student) could feel disciplining in certain ways and ultimately leave me less equipped to be responsive to what unfolded in relationships with participants. There were not many social connections between vendors on the perimeter and the interior. As such, I felt that employing either an external assistant
or a vendor from the perimeter of the market, could have resulted in power dynamics that may have significantly changed the nature of relationships and the broader project, given the visibility of this in a public space.

As detailed throughout this chapter, the need to respond to the everyday reality of the market shaped encounters in the field. It also determined how I documented them, with the impossibility of longer, uninterrupted conversations, while associations of surveillance and danger made note-taking something I scarcely did at the market itself. At times, I felt this compromised somewhat my ability to fulfil my intent to “see together without claiming to be another” (Haraway, 1988, 586). My original preference would have been to have more of the ethnography narrated in longer, uninterrupted sections of participants’ voices and/or the to-and-fro of our conversations. However, without asking for increasing amounts of participants’ very limited time outside of market hours, and recording such conversations, this was not possible. I did have such interactions with a few participants at times when they had pockets of time that they seemed enthusiastic to invest in this way, and this is reflected in a weighting towards their accounts, but I was tentative about requesting any extra work from participants within the minimal time they had with their families, to rest and invest in their non-market relationships.

To borrow maths terminology, I have attempted to ‘show my workings’. I have tried through the ethnography to show how and why I drew inferences between and around accounts based on interrupted threads at the market and how they related to denser narrations that were possible in limited cases.

The practice of writing up is a process of breaking ties to the field, of reconfiguring our connections to the lived everyday reality of participants and reshaping our relationships with them (Mosse, 2015). I went back to the market eight months after I finished fieldwork, talking through what stories and themes were coming through in the thesis with them. This visit served to help
check the validity of some early interpretations and emphases, but also to engage in the reshaping of mutual understandings about what this research is and to show a commitment to stay connected to this group of people beyond what was ‘needed’ to complete the project. With the proliferation of technology, we have more ways to stay connected to the field in the “mutual, open-ended yet limited” engagements that we commence through fieldwork (Maurer, 2005) and this maintains a dynamism to relationships and also changes the relative connections through who has access to smartphones, data etc. This has implications both for the choices of how we represent our participants through our work and what we seek to do with that work, but also in how we maintain or reconstitute the shared understandings and reciprocities that we had in person.

Critics of research focusing on the complicity of academia with global inequality call for research to be centred clearly on what it seeks to do for the people it is about and ostensibly for (Smith, 1999). Originally, I sought to frame the expertise and needs expressed through vendors’ financial management in a way that was legible across disciplines. Following Hart’s call for critical economic anthropology to bring perspectives to “economists on their own ground” (2015, p. 414), I knew that this may be more immediately impactful given the disproportionate emphasis on this form of knowledge in how global flows are shaped. As such, I planned to nest more traditional quantitative methods within this ethnography. However, after spending time at the market, I began to see how this would not just take time and energy away from the ethnography but fundamentally change the nature of the engagement by directing participants away from framings of topics that were more relevant to their experience.

I now see the responsibility of finding ways to make this research as impactful as possible in relation to the urgent needs of those researched (Pailey, 2019) as something that will continue far beyond the PhD, intertwined with evolving understanding of what reciprocity and responsibility mean around this and other projects. Much of the work I did before embarking on this PhD was within organisations aligned with dominant development paradigms that see the financial
behaviour of the poor as rational only if the investments made are tied to known exposures to risk and bounded to an individual or nuclear family. Haraway argues, “struggles over what will count as rational accounts of the world are struggles over how to see” (Haraway, 1991, p. 194), which reflects my shifted orientation to this project in addressing gaps in “what we learn how to see” (ibid., p. 190). I hope that the coming chapters can contribute to this struggle, in ways that valorise the expertise of the poor and illuminate the visceral nature of the work people do to calculate care through uncertainty. The outline of the thesis that completes this chapter traces how I will argue and illustrate this through the thesis.

**Outline of the Thesis**

*Chapter Two: Calculating Care: The Work of Reorienting through Uncertainty*

This chapter is devoted to the literature review, outlining the debates to which the thesis responds and contributes. I begin by drawing on ethnographies of marketplaces, and the critical literature on Sub-Saharan wage-less life in uncertainty, to provide a baseline for existing understandings of the scope and nature of work. I then move on to introduce how exploring calculation in terms of reciprocal investment could provide more precise and generative vocabularies for describing work in the ethnography to come. This section is further developed by considering threads from different literatures on less visible forms of work, particularly those that relate to collaboration and anticipation, helping to build up a broader conceptualisation of (calculative) work to support the empirical chapters.

*Chapter Three: En Grosse Ça Va Mais En Détail Ça Va Pas: Maintaining Integrity Through Discouragement*

The third chapter introduces the historical context of the site and the unfolding macro context within which Marché Collé’s vendors were working, using their narrations of their responses to these changes to show how they worked through uncertainty rather than in uncertainty. This chapter begins to outline how they attuned themselves to the information they needed to sustain and
remake their moral and material worlds, and to maintain a belief in good futures at a level that transcends the market. As the plausibility of ‘previsible’ good futures of conviviality for Burkinabè were undermined through violence – external to these vendors’ everyday but encroaching on it – this chapter traces how vendors drew on and reinvested in entangled cosmological and political beliefs to maintain hope in the presence of everyday contraindications. This chapter leads into the ethnography to follow by finishing with a more ethnographically rich introduction to one trader’s experience of managing his own particular impasse at the market.

Chapter Four: Prevention and Pre-emption: Calibrating Everyday Concern in Uncertainty

The fourth chapter begins to draw out connections between practices of calculation and care, using vendors’ own articulations of calculation as a point of departure and moving through the different practices of care that mutually constitute them. These practices of calculation expressed and mediated care for objects, health, family, social-economic connections and the attendant tenability of plausible futures that were affordable. This chapter examines everyday calculation in uncertainty through the frame of calibration, prevention and pre-emption in order to elucidate the scale and scope of such calculative work. The nature of these practices shifted qualitatively in response to intensifying scarcity and unknowability of both inputs and outputs of calculations, requiring vendors to make more pre-emptive investments in minding themselves and their worlds. This shift requires more deft expertise to reflect increased exposure to loss and uncertainty.

Chapter Five: Exhausting Edges: The Saturation of Calculating Care

The fifth chapter seeks to contour the edges of what calculative work can do and what it costs. This chapter illustrates how the emotional and cognitive work of allocating labour across the household and market responsibilities are integral to how poor households, and women’s bodies in particular, to absorb global shocks. While the preceding chapter describes the expertise and experience of internalising and responding to the shape of possible and probable future losses, this chapter specifically focuses on being at the edge of loss. We see how increasing gendered
exposures to uncertainty reshape women’s lives, and the toll it can take to fit within such new realities. I posit that this work is not fundamentally wearing in and of itself, but is wearing due to the intense mismatch between the resources people have, and what they need to manage the true scale of work they are responsible for.

Chapter Six: Husbands of Hope: Maintaining the Affective Commons of the Market

The final empirical chapter interrogates how vendors cared for one another and for the future of their livelihoods at the market. I examine how these generative practices of care and associated calculations facilitated continuity in the present and the emergent future. Rather than just latent social capital to be deployed, the dense sociality of the market relied on everyday affective and cognitive labour that diverted investments of time, money, energy and attention into collectives of different scales. The care that was invested here through everyday practices built a collective solidarity, facilitating the weathering of tougher moments when the tenability of individuals’ experiences at the market were challenged affectively and materially. Moreover, these investments shaped the precise calculations made to distribute care in a way that became even more salient when resources waned and insecurity intensified.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

The concluding chapter of the thesis summarises the contributions of the preceding chapters, laying out the experiences and expertise of Marché Collé’s vendors in ‘calculating care’. In this final chapter, I arrive at a tentative working definition of this term, and explore its usefulness in responding to the empirical and theoretical gaps articulated in the literature review and policy landscape explicated in the early chapters of the thesis.

Throughout this introductory chapter, I have articulated my own ethical and intellectual imperatives that motivated the project and shaped it as it developed in the field. Chapter Two will
now deepen the contextual base of the thesis by establishing the debates in scholarly work that this research responds and contributes to.
- Chapter Two -

Calculating Care
The Work of Reorienting Through Uncertainty

In the specific time and place of uncertainty covered in this thesis, margins for accumulation for vendors were slim and increasingly unknown, but so were margins for error. Seeking and leveraging the former, while staying within the latter was a constant practice of (re)orientation. Along with the responses they reconfigure, these practices of reorienting constitute a layer of work in and of themselves.

Emotional and cognitive orientations to work are often taken for granted or treated as the context within people work or make decisions on how and why to work. Instead, as I seek to illustrate through this thesis, this is in itself a specific layer of work that is onerous, and the intensity of this labour compounds with uncertainty. Without seeing it we miss crucial elements of the work the poor are forced to do to maintain markets for their own labour. But we also fail to understand the texture of how their lives and livelihoods feel.

I argue that the mutually constitutive practices of care and calculation offer a prism through which to render this work visible. Behavioural economics dominates the evidence base of development policy, framing how the poor make decisions in line with neoclassical economics, with adjustments for their “behavioural biases” (World Bank, 2015). Conversely, critical work on calculation frames calculation as situated value-laden expertise that needs to be contextualised socially and culturally to be understood meaningfully.

Yet, there is a dearth of literature that explicitly interprets calculation as a taxing and affectively intense mode of work, and links this work with experiences of poverty and uncertainty. Feminist literature, however, has long problematised the work of pre-empting and absorbing shocks, of
holding body and soul together through care. Through exploring the potential of employing the concept of care in its broadest sense, I illustrate the calculative work required to sustain and create what is of value can be fruitfully explored as a practice of care.

In this literature review, I firstly outline how working through uncertainty is explored in the literature on informal markets in Africa and on market labour in particular. This situates the ethnographic accounts of work done at Marché Collé market within broader material and political struggles and highlights how insights from this thesis will contribute to wider debates on marginal livelihoods.

The second section of this chapter elaborates on broader critical debates around investment and calculation that explicate the contestations implicit in moral and economic decision-making. Reflecting on investment from a processual perspective maintains our focus on the work of allocating resources and dynamically rebalancing means, needs and aspirations. Such an understanding of investment frames everyday calculation as a nuanced, iterative practice of vigilance and hope, where people deploy situated expertise to enable the best possible future while evading or mitigating evolving threats.

Finally, I set out the rationale for deploying care as a way to understand how calculation constitutes a major component of work for the poor that is both onerous and fundamental. A brief exploration of the feminist literature on care and labour provides fertile analytical and political potential with which to illuminate this work and its costs. This section concludes with an introduction to some terms I have used as a starting point to describe this type of work in the ethnographic chapters.
Informal Labour Markets and Market Labour

Working Through Uncertainty

Given that most of the world's poor make their livelihoods in the informal market or in subsistence agriculture, managing their own exposure to omnipresent uncertainty is fundamental to getting their needs met. However, much scholarly work on precarious livelihoods treats uncertainty as an aberration from an assumed stable baseline, othering experiences in postcolonial geographies where uncertainty and unpredictability have long characterised the available modes of living (Narotzky and Besnier, 2014; Johnson-Hanks 2006, Sassen 2014). Indeed, any conception of the ‘loss’ of stable and secure employment represents “a historically narrow and strikingly Eurocentric perspective” (Bernards, 2018, p. 2). What is novel, however, is how this uncertainty is currently intensifying for many and, of particular concern in this thesis, how this growing uncertainty changes the nature and amount of the calculative work the poor must do to manage their (necessary) exposure to what is increasingly unknown.

Western interest in the informal sector has persisted since the 1970s when seminal studies made it visible as materially as well as socially and culturally important (Hart, Boserup, 1970; I.O, 1972). Indeed, the informal sector is integral to the workings of what has been delineated as the formal sphere of capitalism, and has “subsidised” the latter through the provision of cheap food and as a reserve of surplus labour (Drakakis-Smith, 1990; Meagher, 1995). However, there persists a dearth of work for many, even within this informal labour market, and critics argue the global configurations of capital that have led to this have constituted “the human itself as a waste product at the interface of race and capitalism” (Mbembe, 2011, p. 7).

A recent discursive turn has seen interest in the informal sector shift from a ‘shadow’ or ‘backward’ economy to a space of innovation and promise (Elyachar, 2002, Ferguson, 2013). With this new legitimating narrative, inclusion of informal workers in Africa into the global economy has become
the “bread and butter” of policy makers and development practitioners (De Nunzio, 2017, p. 102). However, critical scholars assert the need for robust and nuanced explorations of the actual terms on which people are included and what they are included into through adverse incorporation that reproduces vulnerability (Karnani, 2016; Hickey and du Toit, 2007; Barrientos, Gereffi and Rossi, 2011). The pattern of linkages between informal workers and the global economy determines what forms of work, and relative levels of freedom, these connections enable and preclude (Cooper 2001, Meagher et al., 2016).

This vast base of critical literature interrogates the forms and consequences of the relationship between excess labour and global distributions of investment, but what I am specifically interested in throughout this thesis is the particular work of orienting oneself to this uncertain and evolving landscape of labour and capital. While new projects (discursive and economic) seek to incorporate African informal workers into the global economy through micro-entrepreneurship and global value chains, these new linkages do not offer “path[s] out of vulnerability” for most people (Meagher at al., 2016). Rather, shifting forms of opportunity and vulnerability require vigilant and responsive (re)orientations to what is unfolding. In order to challenge the forms of “limited entitlement” that marginal inclusion allows (De Nunzio, 2017), we need to understand this layer of labour as integral to the full scope and nature of the work that people are doing.

Critical work on African livelihoods must increasingly account for “crisis as context” due in no small part to sequences of failed development paradigms which have so eroded basic entitlements (Vigh, 2008). Structural violence bears down on people through slow violence and associated crises. However, these macro forces are mediated through the impacts on and responses of individuals at the micro level. People are required to act to remake their moral, material and social worlds in light of unfolding landscapes of threat and opportunity. When facing ever more uncertain economic and physical violence, people actively work through grief and insecurity, “not
simply coping with misfortune but dealing with the normalcy of non-development and everyday disasters in creative and morally-informed ways” (Ibanez-Tirado, 2015, author’s emphasis).

In this way, crisis percolates through individual and collective experiences and actions, as people sort and sift through flows of information, discerning what to internalise and respond to based on its relevance in relation to their own capacities (Serres and Latour, 1995). This process of working through uncertainty is a core component of responsive livelihood strategies, shaping all other work by determining how to organise and deploy labour and resources. Through these everyday calculations, people frame and make the everyday decisions that are required to reorient themselves, reorganising their resources and remaking their moral worlds in response to unfolding insecurity.

For those afforded no opportunities even for adverse incorporation (Phillips, 2011), such structural configurations force them to improvise modes of living, “under conditions of their own superfluity or disposability,” whether unemployed, underemployed or trying to make their own employment in saturated informal markets (Tadiar, 2013, p. 23). “Urban improvisers” - “jobless” but far from idle - represent the central experience in African cities now, adopting complex and highly socialised livelihood strategies, based on claims made across dense networks of responsibility and reciprocity to access resources (Ferguson, 2015).

A great deal of work is done in this distribution of resources across people, making and meeting moral and social claims to sustenance in the absence of social protection. Market labour needs to be situated within this landscape of precarious informal and heavily socialised distributive labour. Market vendors often exist at the edge of saturated labour markets, with distributive claims or criminality the only other option to making ends meet should their enterprise fail (Thieme, 2018). The border of legitimacy is porous and vendors need to actively engage with the uncertainty surrounding them to maintain their livelihoods.
The Work of Maintaining and Making Markets

Physical markets, like the one at the heart of this research, are sites where the economic, moral and social considerations of getting by are particularly visible. These markets, and the livelihoods that mutually constitute them, are made through the leveraging and tolerance of uncertainty. The labour of making and maintaining such markets is laden with the emotional, cognitive and social labour of processing emergent and partial information, as well as what is actually recognised more generally as the work of being a trader. This layer of expertise is not validated through development paradigms. But grounded anthropological work has revealed the responsive cognitive, social and affective investments that go into (re)making markets and market livelihoods to deal with this uncertainty (Stoller, 1996; Clark, 1997, 2004, 2010).

The term ‘market vendor’ encompasses a broad range of livelihoods. It includes those with marginally feasible livelihoods or activities that supplement their household’s income, selling fruit at the edges of the market or walking around it trying to achieve some marginal gain, through to those who are engaged in activities like fabric-selling with relatively high barriers to entry. As cornerstones of city and neighbourhood spaces, markets are anchored through daily, weekly and annual rhythms that stabilise experience for vendors and for clients, despite the heterogeneity and volatility of individual experiences of traders.

Underpinning market livelihoods is traders’ deep understanding of the uncertainty around determinants of both demand and supply, and their own margins for affording losses if estimates are wrong. Vendors are required to invest in the relationships and expertise that generate and stabilise market exchanges over a career. Navigating the “culturally organised information maze” (Appadurai, 1998, p. 43) means discerning among an abundance of information (prices, footfall, international and national news, rumours, affect) of differing qualities and connotations and
deciding how to respond to evolving understandings in making decisions. The expertise required to do this encompasses a deep understanding of the relationship between vendors’ own actions and whatever is unfolding in their local economy and in the structural factors beyond that impact them (Wharton, 1971). As with people living in poverty more broadly, their livelihood strategies require remaining keenly attuned and responsive to the actions of more powerful individuals and collectives they are necessarily exposed to for their survival (Simone, 2016).

A significant example of this in West Africa is the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), which resulted in increased saturation of market labour through public sector cutbacks, and amplified vulnerability to global price fluctuations due to an increased dependence on imports and exports (Berry, 1997; Clark, 2004). Across cities and towns in Africa, economies “have been saturated with simple informal microenterprises for many years” (Bateman & Chang, 2012, p. 14) leading to “hyper-competition”, especially for selling small-ticket items, rendering these livelihoods highly sensitive to changes in demand and (increasing) supply. The corrosive effects of this saturation compound, and are compounded by, the lack of vertical linkages in economies hollowed out by asymmetric exposure to global markets (ibid.).

As noted by Brenda Chalfin in her work on the experiences of Ghanaian market vendors, dealing with the uncertainty of these external structural forces such as policy changes coming from outside of local economies also interacts with other “certainties” of gender, class and other axes of privilege (Chalfin, 2000). Vendors may be required to navigate the tensions between the impacts of these uncertainties and certainties, and their interactions, in times of exceptional constraint. Similarly, Kapchan’s work chronicling women’s entry into historically male market segments in Morocco underscores the affective work and vulnerability inherent in responding to overlays of different structural constraints (Kapchan, 1996).
One way that traders minimise risk is through building up reciprocal relationships with their customers and/or wholesalers. There are more explicit versions of these relationships in the form of formalised “commodity clubs” found across West African countries (see, for example, Lewis’s (1976) work on female traders in the Cote d’Ivoire and Trager (1981) on forms of economic personalism between traders and wholesalers in Nigeria). However, less explicit forms of friend-client relationships abound where both sides place value in a longer-term arrangement. The dual nature of such social-economic relationships may mean forgoing purely economic gains at some moments in order to hold stock for someone, to deliver to someone, to offer credit with the understanding that these relationships stabilise trading over time. As Mintz wrote of the “pratik” relationships he documented between intermediaries and market traders and market traders with consumers in Haiti, the understanding that these relationships fold in small concessions for long-term stability is a stabilising force in the market socially and economically (Mintz, 1961).

Sharing of information between traders is also fundamental to navigate the uncertainty that shapes vendors’ livelihoods. Rather than incidental to their mutual exposure to one another, information-sharing is nurtured to allow traders to build up a rich collective (if incomplete) picture of the evolving limits of their livelihood (Chalfin, 2000). By the same token, informational asymmetries can reinforce and be reinforced by relative social and economic hierarchies, as seen in the case of the need to cede profit to “market queens” in Ghana due to a lack of price transparency (De Lardemelle 1996, cf. Clark 1997). Although accused by some as being “cartels” and often responsibilised for the consequences of state neglect of farmers, critical ethnographers have illustrated how Market Queens bridge gaps in broader market systems eroded by liberalisation and weakened state capacity (Katila, 1997, p. 284, cf. Adimabuno, 2010, Britwum, 2013).

Though these strategies form the economic structure of markets, the social and affective investments made transcend purely economic functions. Personhood is inextricably linked to the sustained production of markets, particularly in contexts without state protection for vendors or
consumers, where building trust, accountability and quality is vital to sustainability. These investments are in many cases enmeshed in friendships, building a rich and dynamic sociality that underpins the market.

The literature on market livelihood strategies and responses opens up several rich seams of analysis on the expertise required to hold markets and market livelihoods together in uncertainty and its embedding within the social and moral worlds of traders. Throughout this thesis, I argue that we must recognise social and affective work in the economic management of holding things together, even when that work overlaps with the work of friendship or love. The following section will briefly introduce how reciprocity and sociality have been considered within anthropological literature, before looking at how practices of calculation mediate moral, social and economic parameters of decision-making and world-building.

**Investing and Calculating as Contested Moral-Economic Processes and Expertise**

**Social, Moral and Affective Investments**

Investments in reciprocity and sociality are moral as well as social, reflecting and affecting how we get our bearings “by having a ‘bearing’ on each other” (Simone and Pieterse, 2018, p. 95). Economic anthropologists and critical geographers have problematised how people invest in sociality and the spaces they inhabit. The economy itself is an “instituted process”, and the individual and collective investments that make it up are processes, rather than static, pre-determined preferences and needs as they are often represented as in economics literature (Polanyi, 1957). Expanding our framing of what constitutes investment more “boldly and broadly” as social and moral processes can facilitate a more grounded perspective on how economic and labour decisions are situated in everyday life (Guyer, 1997, p. 125).
Focusing on the process of how resources are being allocated rather than the actual allocations of resources allows us to foreground the people making these allocations. The dynamic, contingent investments they make are a repertoire of responses, rather than a repertoire of resources they are somehow drawing down or reallocating without effort or contestation. Bourdieuan ideas of social capital have long been deployed (and instrumentalised) in development, viewing social relations as a web of resources to be drawn down and converted into economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Bebbington, 2004, 2007; Elyachar, 2015). The idea of sociality, on the other hand, is “appealingly processual”, anticipatory and imaginative in nature in contrast to static, bounded conceptions of social capital (Long and Moore, 2012, p. 41). Maintaining reciprocal relationships is a dynamic process that must be nurtured, and attended to responsibly, especially in times of rapid change in social, political and economic conditions (Härkönen, 2014).

Similarly, the physical spaces people spend their lives in, such as the market this thesis explores, are invested in through dynamic processes of remaking that in turn shape social connections and self-understandings (Bolt, 2003; Simone, 2008). How vendors invested money, time, energy and attention into improving and adapting the space of this market reflected and reshaped the sociality of the market and their connections to it. Spaces enable certain lives to be lived, but are also recreated by vendors who format space to enable the lives they deem worthwhile (Lefebvre and Nicholson-Smith, 1991) – the configuration of benches and perimeter fences facilitated certain forms of gathering and connection; repairs made for older vendors expressed respect and deference to them.

Attending to the specificity of investments of labour, other resources, and self, which make up the true scope of making a living, shows how poor people express and create lives that are ‘good’ on their own terms. As Millar illustrates in her work with rubbish-collectors in Rio de Janeiro, the ways that people invest their labour, and themselves, is something to be attentive to beyond livelihoods and survival (Millar, 2018). How people make a living is also as “a key site of struggle
in everyday efforts to construct the good - not in the sense of the normative and prescriptive but in the sense of what is valued, desired and aimed for in the living out of life” (ibid., p. 12).

Moreover, people co-create the physical and social spaces they have access to for work, (re)making places and relationships as well as whatever their ‘work’ produces. We invest in the places we inhabit, maintain and create in order to make money, in ways that transcend the economic, social or material through to our self-understandings. This is particularly true when the specific labour market one is part of requires constant, responsive remaking to get by, reshaping livelihoods and lives, along with the physical and social contexts they are supported by.

Such investments of self and resources into (re)building spaces, socialities and identities are inherently value-laden. But often these values remain implicit unless and until significant compromises need to be made. Moral convictions often come most saliently into view when people notice they cannot fulfil what they had taken for granted through some form of rupture (Zigon, 2009). In particular, for anthropologists, this also often prompts more direct articulations at the edges of possibility where obligations become threatened or contested, and where people are forced to “reconfigure values and reshuffle the frameworks of moral obligation” in response to crisis (Narotzy and Besnier, 2014, p. S4).

In practice this means being attentive to the “emotional basis of moral judgement” (Prinz, 2006, p. 29). In the particular case of this thesis, this was often the entry point to a conversation about a specific impasse someone was trying to calculate through – where a frustration or sadness reflected a shift in the morals they could afford to express, or joy and relief when they could fulfil a moral aspiration without a painful compromise. In Diana Ibañez-Tirado’s ethnography on how people deal with everyday disasters in Tajikistan, she deploys Kathleen Stewart’s concepts of arrest and flow to frame the affective rhythm of her interlocutors’ experiences, being faced with and finding patches for crises in their moral economies (Ibañez-Tirado, 2015; Stewart, 2007). Similarly, Li
(2016) calls for us to pay particular attention to these moments in our research when participants say “this shouldn’t be like this” as openings of analytical and political potential, reflecting the Gramscian role of the intellectual as tracing and joining up disconnected articulations of struggle.

Throughout the coming chapters, I seek to understand such moments of rupture and reimagining, the work that went into mediating them, and their consequences. Critical work on calculation provides a frame to explore how people reproduce or challenge interconnected social, moral and economic realities. The next section draws together work that grounds the contingent, contested practices of calculation in everyday expertise, destabilising suppositions around the bounded nature and scope of calculation that are fundamental to dominant development paradigms.

**Calculative Practices**

Neoclassical microeconomics and behavioural economics enjoy narrative authority in policy and mainstream development discourses on the economic behaviour of the poor. Development economics maps out behaviour as choices between competing knowable priorities that can and should be traded off to maximise an individual or nuclear family’s composite level of wellbeing. In this framing, uncertainty is flattened to exposures, with known parameters of severity and probability that can and should be bounded, managed and mitigated.

This manifests as a paradigm framing the need to counter ‘behavioural biases’ that cause the poor to allocate their resources ‘sub-optimally’. These ‘biases’ include ‘present bias’, over-emphasising the importance of the present, and ‘inattention’, where the poor are assumed to be distracted from their real needs and preferences by what displaces their attention (Ashraf, Karlan, & Yin, 2006, 2010; Dupas & Robinson, 2013; Karlan, Ratan, & Zinman, 2014). In short, these biases assume that the poor could manage their poverty better by being more rational welfare-maximising economic actors.
These paradigmatic assumptions are underpinned by, and reinforce, several dominant suppositions. The first is that there are clear, knowable parameters that determine what, when and how the poor should calculate to optimally manage their wellbeing. Secondly, this understanding of calculation assumes people only place value on their individual wellbeing and that of their nuclear family, with no discernible investment in conviviality beyond that, and any contraindicating behaviour is understood as “social constraints” (Karlan et al., 2014) or proxies for insurance through risk-sharing (Mobarak and Rosenzweig, 2013). Finally, there is the overarching assumption that the poor calculate sub-optimally, and that this could be improved through more strategic responses that project further into the future.

These assumptions certainly did not bear true in the empirical findings of this thesis, and scholars have long countered them in critical debates around calculative practices. My observations aligned more closely with these critical conversations, marginal to mainstream development actions, which interrogate the value-laden, responsive and nuanced everyday expertise of calculation. This expertise reflects the uncertainty inherent in these livelihoods, and indeed in living in poverty more generally, taking considerable work to determine what and how to calculate in response to what is known and is unknown, and the potential consequences thereof.

The calculative practices undertaken by the vendors I knew were continuous and manifold as they mediated diverse (and at times unmeetable) demands of different orders: remaking and fixing objects, minding bodies preventatively and in illness, managing social relationships, and at the same time sustaining the moral world within which these exist. These processes of calibration and mediation brought together “the contests, preoccupations, numeric artefacts, and improvisational practices” (Ballestero, 2015, p. 266) required for traders sustained their social, moral and material worlds. Or, often, these calculative practices made apparent what could not be sustained or hoped for, as different registers of value and values were brought into dialogue with one another.
The improvisational acts of vendors making themselves living, both in terms of their livelihood and personhood, were mediated through the micro-decisions of everyday calculations. However, I soon learned that whatever practices were clearly visible as calculation rested atop a dense network of other work that facilitated these calculations – internally and socially mediated work that frames and capitalises on opportunities and recognises and mitigates vulnerabilities.

There is a significant amount of labour underneath and around visible financial decisions, framing and stabilising what exactly is relevant to a calculation. What people need to identify and assemble (and reject) as relevant information in order to facilitate calculation is a type of work that requires a nuanced understanding of the contingent social, moral and economic values that are being reconfigured. Bowker and Star highlight the forms of knowledge and work folded into processes of calculation, asserting that:

“solving a mathematical problem is not a matter of mentally using an algorithm and coming up with the correct answer in a fashion that exists outside of time or culture, rather, it is a process of assembling materials close to hand and using them with others in specific contexts” (Bowker and Star, 2000, p. 288).

Dominant suppositions about calculation, markets and money tend to take for granted (and overlook) the “the messiness of desublimation” needed to make different scales of investments and risks knowable and commensurable (Maurer, 2003, p. 336). Calculations rarely reflect clarity and continuity in the materials to be assembled, or the relationships between them, and this is especially true in contexts of escalating uncertainty with little margins for error. In times of rapid change and insecurity, these vendors needed to orient themselves to slim, ambiguous and evolving
opportunities for sustenance while remaining attuned to an unfolding landscape of new threats to their lives and livelihoods.

Calculation of this nature also prompts the holding open of calculations for longer, without the possibility to see far enough into the future, with enough certainty and safety around the consequences of calculations to fully complete them. Navigating this volatility requires people to hold together interim solutions and foothold potentials that facilitate pivoting, where “things that don’t readily belong are assembled into provisional bundles” (Simone, 2011, p. 111). This requires an iterative everyday reconfiguration of resources, seeking to meet what is needed in the present while chaining together a path into the future through provisional partial fixes.

Vendors sought to nourish and nurture themselves and those they cared about, to meet their material needs, their sense of themselves and their direction in life, balancing the ambiguous opportunity cost and result of potential paths. Similarly, objects, collectives and identities were minded and appreciated to maintain and sustain them through calculations that iteratively reconfigured their resources. In these ways, through everyday calculations, a sense of oneself, or of someone one cares for or about, can be sustained or undermined through calculative action that reflects value-laden means and ends, shaped by “a constantly changing set of cultural orientations” (Appadurai, 2012, p. 7; cf. Lave, 1998).

These perspectives on calculation give a broader view on what calculative practices are, and how people act and think through the moral and social economies they are part of. These practices necessitate a keen attunement to the needs of oneself and others, and to unfolding landscapes of opportunity and threat, especially in uncertainty. However, this body of literature does not treat calculation as work, and so does not put this set of practices in dialogue with other critical
discourses around work and its cost. This is why, in the second half of this chapter, I will argue for the analytical and political potential of treating calculation as a practice of care.

Minding What Matters: Hoping and Coping through Care and Husbandry

Crises of Care: Saturation and Scarcity of Work

I contend that these culturally and socially grounded processes of calculation should be conceptualised as a practice of care. This framing reflects the affective and social dimensions of world-building people do when calculating, but also allows us to draw on genealogies of struggles for recognition – recognition of effort, expertise and vulnerability – inherent in debates around the work of caring.

Feminist theorists across disciplines have long argued for recognition of the value of care work as an economically and politically important form of labour (Tronto, 1998; Ruddick, 1998; England and Folbre, 2003; Abel, Nelson and Nelson, 1990). Moreover, the perspectives of feminists have also countered the dichotomy of love and self-interest as binary motivating forces for care and economics respectively, generating richer understandings of socio-political and economic processes that reflect the expertise and meaning of care (Beneria, 1999; Lawson, 2007; Elson, 2017).

The following section of the literature review builds on the ethical and intellectual foundation of this body of work, but also seeks to expand on this understanding of care. The literature which interrogates the relationship between care and work has predominantly focused on care-for the work of caring for those whose survival depends upon such care. I argue that broadening our deployment of care and labour to transcend caring-for and encompass caring-about can illuminate
decision-making, calculation and work from a more holistic perspective, encompassing what animates and facilitates action.

**Shock Absorption and Care Chains: (Representations of) Women’s Unpaid Labour**

The form of capitalist extraction that connects the world’s poor to global markets leads to a saturation of work for some bodies along with a dearth of decent paid work, while allowing for the compounding concentration of wealth in others. This process, though ‘functioning’ for those with the most capital, also tends to “destabilise the very processes of social reproduction on which it relies” (Fraser, 2017, para. 3). Feminist analysts increasingly refer to the interlocking crises of care, capitalism and environmental degradation, requiring radically holistic approaches to valorise care and husbandry over accumulation in order to create “liveable futures” (Haraway, 2016).

Mainstream discourses of ‘empowerment’ for women in development paradigms reinforce the saturation of work for them, while offering them the opportunity to do more poorly paid work outside the home. Critical feminists have long critiqued this form of liberal feminism that conflates empowering women with allowing markets to access them (Whitehead, 2009; Cornwall, Harrison and Whitehead, 2007). Through naturalising and romanticising maternal altruism, these framings and the policies they inspire veil the feminisation of responsibility that is fundamental to the feminisation of poverty (Chant, 2008). The notion of “Gender Equality as Smart Economics” in practice frames empowerment as engagement with a saturated and extractive market, with negligible opportunities to return more than poverty-pay, either in global value chains or entrepreneurial openings, while also maintaining responsibility for reproductive labour (Chant and Sweetman, 2012).

The female entrepreneur has been the poster-child for the neoliberal interventions of the Washington Consensus on poverty - a deserving self-starter who seeks and leverages the
commercial opportunities that abound in the under-served informal sector (Schwittay, 2013; Dolan, 2011; Moeller, 2014). This archetype of the entrepreneurial woman reflects and reinforces broader problematic imaginaries of women in development, framed as responsible, resourceful and resilient. The continued presence of women as this altruistic problem-solver “prepared to make unlimited personal sacrifices to provide the household with a safety net against the ravages of neoliberal macroeconomic policies” (Cornwall, Gideon and Wilson, 2008, p. 5) assumes an unending supply of unpaid labour (Elson, 1989).

A particularly striking illustration of how this archetype has been deployed was during the peak period of microfinance’s promise. The female entrepreneur, empowered through microcredit to pull herself, her family and country out of poverty, was constituted as the new ‘deserving poor’ and centred in representations of this ‘silver bullet’. As a result, women were disproportionately targeted as “important conduits of microfinance loans with an altruistic propensity to utilise income for social development” (Roy, 2010, p. 3). Such a sustained focus resulted in significant material and discursive consequences. The flow of high-interest loans to women for low-return businesses resulted in a “feminisation of indebtedness” (Wichterich, 2012, p. 407). In other cases, critics traced gendered tensions and forms of exploitation that were exacerbated, through appropriation of loans by male family members and cases where women were forced into prostitution to pay back loans (Karnani, 2011; Guérin, Morvant-Roux, & Villarreal, 2013).

However, as with all development interventions, there were also impacts for those not reached by these interventions, through the reinforcement of both the discursive framing and practical targeting of women as altruistic, resourceful and resilient conduits. Interconnected changes in technology and techniques of representations contributed to the calcification of this archetype in the World Bank’s “gender turn” in the 2000s, as the potential proliferation of images on the internet amplified the importance of legitimating imagery (Schwittay, 2013). However, these representations continue to frame empowerment as women “better fulfilling subservient roles in
the family and its social reproduction”, taking for granted the capacity and altruistic propensity of women to carry out double burdens (Mader, 2015, p. 17).

In these ways, the representations that brought women to centre-stage in mainstream development agendas, also served to depoliticise and instrumentalise gendered responsibilities. This has resulted in the household and women’s bodies acting as “shock absorbers”, the sites of accumulated strain of “adjustment by necessity” in the wake of structural adjustment (Campbell, Stein and Samoff, 2019). As the state retreated from its role in social protection, households (and women’s bodies as the guarantors thereof) were tasked with responding to intensifying and diversifying imperatives in maintaining families and communities.

On the other hand, the archetype of the mother-entrepreneur renders invisible other forms of work and responsibility for social reproduction. First, these investments in women’s capacity and responsibility to manage and mitigate poverty also cast a shadow of poor men in the Global South as “selfish and irresponsible” (Cornwall, Gideon and Wilson, 2008, p. 7). My ethnography challenges this now common-place archetype of the third world man as idle and negligent in mainstream development discourse. At Marché Collé, social reproduction dominated men’s framings of their decisions and preoccupations – from decisions on whether they could afford to marry, or have more children, to facilitating their children’s trajectories through school and into adulthood, to the everyday sustenance of buying rice. Male vendors also continually reinvested in the social, moral and material fabric of the market itself. In reclaiming husbandry on feminist terms, as advocated for by Nelson (2016), we can allow more space for these gendered articulations to be explored holistically, encompassing gendered solidarities as well as tensions through the ways care is calculated.

Maintaining social reproduction usually takes much more female labour than that of the mother alone. The care chain literature interrogates the concentration of care labour in the bodies of
women of colour who migrate to the Global North out of necessity, and the implications of this migration on economies and care in these women’s home countries and families where other women’s labour must in turn compensate (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002; Yeates, 2004). Particularly relevant to this ethnography is this tracing of “where [care] comes from, and where it goes” domestically, when mothers’ labour and responsibility is spread outside the household (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002). The work and investment of multiple wives, teenage sisters, grandparents or poorly-paid live-in staff from poorer families are required to give women the mobility to participate in market labour and also fulfil their responsibilities for social reproduction.

Caring-About as a Frame for Calculation

Vendors calculated through uncertainty, directing their time, attention and money, to reflect direct forms of care work (their own and the managing of outsourced care work), but also what and who they cared about. The literature introduced in the previous section deepens the contextualisation of market labour within the wider work that vendors were doing, and in representations thereof, but the following section seeks to extend this base to counter a stark delineation between direct ‘care work’ and work animated and directed by care.

Who people care for is clearly of vital importance. However, in addition to including this form of care in the analysis for this thesis, I also advocate for expanding this understanding of care to encompass what people care about. Care is not just conceptually useful or important when we think about the one-directional flow of caring for others who legibly need to be cared for for their survival (Tronto, 1998). What people care about is also a rich site of analytical potential that can help illuminate what animates and mediates lines of thought and action in a holistic sense.
Care is frequently framed as a burden in the literature on ethics (Mattingly, 2010), but it is an animating force that orients and compels thought and action. It shapes how we engage with the world and how we experience those engagements, not only in moments of strain but in moments of joy, pride, fear and confusion and all the orientations of attention and intention in-between. In her seminal work foregrounding the political imperative for centring care, Tronto defines care as a “species activity” encompassing all the work we do in “maintain[ing], continu[ing] and repair[ing] our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible” (Tronto, 1993, p. 103).

For Tronto, this “world” extends to “our bodies, ourselves and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life sustaining web” (ibid.). Although the main components of this definition do resonate for the purposes of this thesis, the actual work of the ‘interweaving’ of this web are the core emphasis for me, especially the calculative work of trading off different investments (economic, moral and social) when the environment itself is increasingly insecure. On the other hand, Louw’s work on people at the margins, excluded from their relative expectations of care, illustrates how care’s spectral character may “become more visible on the thresholds which mark human life” (Louw, forthcoming). Although care is abundantly discussed in anthropological literature and is integral to how we understand the world, it remains vague and overused (Mattingly, 2010; Mattingly and Kearney, forthcoming). However, care that is taken for granted and normalised becomes more clearly articulated when its tenability is threatened, or needs to be reconfigured in response to constraint. The care I came to see as orienting and animating calculation resonates most closely with Louw’s definition, transcending the people and things we seek to mind to encompass the ‘world’ those people and things are framed within: “The presencing forth of something or someone; of confirming or creating the presence of something or someone in a ‘world’”. (Louw, forthcoming)

Vendors’ everyday decisions reflected this wider understanding of care, safeguarding and iteratively reimagining an increasingly precarious future. Through their calculations, they sought
to encourage and facilitate in material as well as affective ways, imagining and stabilising possibilities for themselves, their family and friends, but also the broader collectives of market and country. This work takes into account the path-dependence and interdependence of trajectories, both desired and threatening, in calculating what possibilities are being enabled and precluded. They are also necessarily iterative, allowing for the myriad contingencies that come up. The tentative and tenacious ‘presencing forth’ of trajectories for oneself and one’s friends, families and compatriots must be made meaningful and actionable within one’s own conception of a “world” or “life-sustaining web” (Tronto, 1993, p. 103). As covered in the next chapter laying out the context of my research, the period of fieldwork was marked by a gradual degradation of the security and economic context that required husbandry across the individual elements of life – of the body, objects, social relations, business activities. However, as or more important was the maintenance of continuity of the ‘world’ itself, the present and potential future of what being a Burkinabè and making a life in this country was and meant.

**Making the Meantime: Hoping through Active Waiting**

Throughout the thesis, I will explore how these vendors’ practices of calculating care allowed for hoping and coping, manifested through active waiting. They actively invested in waiting at this market, bridging the survival of businesses but also of bodies and objects, of individual and collective identities and imagined futures. A growing body of scholarship around the work of waiting helps to understand these investments.

Guyer’s work on the dichotomous temporalities afforded to those robbed of a middle future by the structural absence of decent employment catalysed a wave of work in a similar vein, framing a dearth of aspiration between survivalism and fantasies of future fortunes (Guyer, 2007; Allison & Piot, 2014; Dolan and Rajak, 2018). However, there is also a rich body of accounts that explore
the creative work of actually making this middle future in the absence of a political economy that facilitates it. Waiting does not just lead to dead time, to an ‘evacuated’ future between a myopic survivalism and a fantasy of a perpetually receding impossible future. Rather, waiting changes the relationship to the middle-future in everyday life where a sense of “prospective momentum” has to be constantly, actively remade (Miyazaki, 2006, p. 8).

An emerging literature on experiences of waiting attends to the experiences of generations of under- and unemployed youth in Sub-Saharan Africa, waiting for opportunities to take on livelihoods and adulthood (Honwana, 2012; Mains, 2007; Masquelier, 2013; Newell, 2019). Without the macro-level stability that would facilitate imagined futures, this literature explores the continual micro-adjustments over multiple temporal horizons people are required to make to reconfigure and reanimate the potentials for their (re)imagined futures (Muehlebach, 2013).

This body of research primarily focuses on young men, in contrast to the predominant focus on mothers in the care debates covered in the previous section, and indeed the majority of the anthropological literature on markets covered in the first half of the literature review. Although undeniably gendered in their distribution and form, the care and husbandry of active waiting permeated the labour undertaken by both men and women at Marché Collé, across different ages. Tropes of women reproducing and men waiting, with nothing produced, are undermined by counternarratives of collaborative and individual efforts to iteratively remake imagined futures.

The degradation of traders’ expectations, though steady in many ways, did not track on a linear path but rather “percolated”, as they integrated what was novel, concrete and actionable in relation to the tenability of their livelihoods (Serres and Latour, 1995). However, there were also everyday moments of joy and connection within this percolation of crisis, of vendors co-creating meaning within the “tissue of shifting relations” (Deleuze 1997, p. 59). Despite, and in response to, stagnation and degradation of the political economy within which they make themselves living,
desirable futures were reimagined, and work was done to tack paths towards them. This work of reproduction reflects another dimension of care that is necessary to keep body and soul together: “without hope there is no life” (Pettit, 2017, p. 1).

This existence doesn’t just pass the time but is actually generative, stemming the tide of encroaching constraint, patching and reformatting solidarities and strengths in reorienting to what is known and what can’t be known. Interwoven with the practical patching of material and social resources, “mundane hope-making” (ibid., p. 52) facilitates path-dependent sustenance of the belief in and orientation to desired futures, and resistances to undesirable present conditions. Vital to holding onto, or recreating hope, is an appreciation of the richness of “having adventures and being in the impasse together, waiting for the other shoe to drop, and also, allowing for some healing and resting, waiting for it not to drop” (Berlant, 2011, p. 266).

Maintaining hope or constantly rebuilding fractured and fragile hope in new forms is not a passive process - hoping “takes place, it is co-constitutive of the transformation of urban life” (Hauer, Østergaard Nielsen and Niewöhner, 2018, p. 59). Viewing active waiting in the frame of husbandry – husbandry of hope and of the material, social, and moral worlds that facilitate it - allows for this work to fall under the more expanded conceptualisation of calculating care put forward in the preceding section. As such, such accounts of how hope is cared for through waiting is a fertile analytical contribution to the underpinnings of this project.

**Tools for Tracing the Work of Calculating Care**

The previous sections have introduced what the work of calculating care does and responds to. However, we also need robust, precise ways of understanding this labour as practiced, allowing us to trace its distribution and cost and workers’ experiences of it.
In order to establish the tools that will help elucidate the performance and cost of this work throughout the empirical chapters, I here draw on analytical frames that illuminate different types of less visible work: ideas around anticipation work help to unpack invisible work that holds collective and individual projects together, while articulation work renders legible the work that people do to fold the future into their present actions and thoughts. Meanwhile, the complementary concepts of mental load and work intensity frame how this work, and its impact on the people required to do it, evolves in relation to shifts in the broader structural problems they manage.

Anticipation work is done to try to claim and stabilise potential “best possible futures”, navigating the “palpable sense that things could be (all) right if we leverage new spaces of opportunity, reconfiguring ‘the possible’” (Adams, Murphy and Clarke, 2009, p. 246). The scope of plausibility of best or good futures determines how risk averse or pre-figurative someone can afford to be in doing this mode of work. This action can work to tack a path into a more aspirational future, or can be anticipatory action that aims to ensure there are no bad surprises that cannot be afforded (Derrida, 2003). Ultimately, the balance of exposure to risk, and the affordability of aspirations, determine how the balance of one’s anticipation work is weighted.

Articulation work, on the other hand, is the real-time, responsive work that “gets things back ‘on track’ in the face of the unexpected, and modifies action to accommodate unanticipated contingencies” (Strauss and Maines, 1981, p. 275). Developed by Star and Strauss, the concept is most commonly used in Science and Technology Studies to make visible the work done to “make cooperative work work” (Schmidt, 2002, p.184). Star and Strauss explicitly politicise this form of work, and the modes of knowledge production and conceptions of work that put it in their blind spot, reminding us that “the important thing about articulation work is that it is invisible to rationalised models of work” (Star, 1991, p. 275, italics in original).
A kind of “supra work”, often gendered in its deployment, articulation work maintains and patches the seams between different roles and responsibilities (ibid). Crucially, this work is most noticeable when it is not done and often barely visible to anyone except those who do it when done successfully. Just as with other practices of care, it doesn’t always ‘work’ in terms of having the desired result. Often the concentration of this labour someone is required to do corresponds to their relative responsibility to absorb shocks and safeguard futures, demanding them to keep iterating through potential responses to ensure that efforts have their intended effects – ‘to make work work’.

Both of these forms of work fold the future into the present but in different ways, depending on the worker’s interconnected capacities to hope and to absorb potential loss. Feminist economist Maria Floro defines “work intensity” as the relationship between the activities required and the capacity someone has to do that work (Floro, 1995). The intensity of both articulation and anticipation work depends on the potential for things to go off track, for the unexpected to happen and for the buffers built for unanticipated losses, delays or other misalignments to be sufficient. This labour is at the core of the work of shock absorption anticipating, mitigating and managing risk and tracing new potentials when expected plans go off-track completely.

Recent debates in feminist literature around the concept of “mental load” problematise the sheer amount of information that people, particularly women in heteronormative, patriarchal society, are required to mediate in order to maintain everyday life while also safeguarding imagined futures for oneself and one’s emotional dependents (spouse, children, extended family and friends). This absorption of less visible work that anticipates and monitors the other work of social reproduction, and its relation to the work outside the household is a significant form of cognitive labour (Buchanan, 2018). This cognitive labour is also necessary to keep communities, businesses and their interdependencies with households going, especially through constraint and uncertainty that heighten the stakes of holding them together.
Combined, these analytical framings can give us some tools to understand the cost of this specific layer of work to people’s lives, in terms of the time, energy, peace and rest it takes from people. The intensity of the work of calculating care through uncertainty dramatically increases as insecurity heightens, and people’s capacity to decision-make is undermined by the lack of knowability of the parameters they should be using to make decisions. Attending to the intensity of articulation and anticipation work being done by the vendors at the centre of this thesis offers a way of understanding their increasing mental load as they do this work, and to get a more complete and accurate idea of the true cost of this work.

Conclusion

In order to understand experiences of everyday decision-making through escalating macro-level crisis, we must attend to the vigilance, the attunement and the responsive processes of decision-making that are required to cope with such insecurity. Vendors’ everyday calculations reflect what aspirations and responsibilities are understood to be affordable, and what losses are understood to be unaffordable, contouring and responding to new understandings of what is possible.

Through the analytical framework of calculating care, we can see a core part of the work the poor necessarily have to do to navigate the uncertainty they are disproportionately exposed to. In doing so, we can more accurately capture the amount and nature of the work done by the poor. Throughout this thesis, I illustrate what this work does, the expertise required to do it, and its cost. Contextualising this work as a practice of care allows us to leverage the analytical and political potential of a rich genealogy of problematising the unpaid work of care. Using this more rigorous and comprehensive frame to explore calculation, foregrounding it as work that has a cost, also builds on the work already done by critical scholars on calculation to render visible the expertise inherent in everyday calculative practices.
In the next chapter, I contextualise and ground the specific ways uncertainty percolated into the everyday lives of Marché Collé’s vendors. Their accounts of their unfolding concerns articulate the scope and parameters of their responsibilities, aspirations and vulnerabilities in relation to escalating insecurity and economic stagnation. An understanding of the specificities of this evolving context over the period of my fieldwork frames the work of calculating care explored in the later empirical chapters.
The ethnography in the chapters to come will focus on the granular everyday calculations through which Marché Collé’s vendors maintained their livelihoods, and kept body and soul together. In order to contextualise these experiences, and the expertise enacted within them, this chapter sets out the history of Burkina Faso’s political economy, walking through the period of flux that shaped these stabilising practices of care.

I begin with a description of the historical context up to the start of the fieldwork (March 2017). I then chronicle the dynamic political and economic context of the fieldwork (March 2017-March 2018, November 2018 follow-up) through the framings of news and rumours offered by participants as it unfolded. These accounts detail the unfolding of historical events. But crucially, they illuminate how vendors traced connections between the macro-level uncertainty and the increasingly unknowable parameters of their own calculations.

My entry point for this is the perspectives and commentary on the current political situation and the related economy of Marché Collé, as articulated by market traders themselves. I frame these connections within the concrete context of the market and its daily rhythms, as vendors related their own experience to the wider macro-political-economic crisis. Throughout the thesis, I will return to these quotidian routines in order to explore the work that maintains them and sustains them in crisis. Here, I lay out the social and temporal norms of the market I observed, and the

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shifting ways they were both impinged upon and supported by evolving understandings of the present and possible future.

Perspectives on what was possible for Burkina and Burkinabè shifted significantly over the period of fieldwork in response to intensifying uncertainty. The latter half of this chapter begins to unpack how this emerged, not linearly but refracted through individuals’ specific repertoires of resources and responsibilities. These repertoires reflect what market vendors have access to materially and socially but are also shaped by the wider frames within which meaning is made - faith in God, faith in compatriots, and the straining solidity of the market’s own patterns. These broader containers of moral worlds, rather than transcending or counterbalancing the calculative practices of vendors, are inextricably enmeshed with calculation and decision-making, instrumental to how people directed and deployed resources for survival and sustenance.

Demanding an Accounting: A Brief History of Burkina Faso

“With this transformation each one of us now feels that wielding power is his business, that the destiny of Burkina Faso is the business not just of certain people but of all Burkinabè. Everyone has something to say. Each one of us demands an accounting from the other. Never again will things be done as before. No longer will the wealth of our country belong to a minority. This wealth belongs to the majority, a majority that speaks its mind”

Thomas Sankara – March 17, 1985 printed in Intercontinental Press April 29, 1985

The coupled ideals of political and economic enfranchisement and mutual accountability outlined by Thomas Sankara here underpin the Sankarist understanding of being Burkinabè. The period of 1983-1987 during which Sankara was in power – commonly referred to as La Revolution – represents a brief interlude of self-determination and hope in the memory of the greater Burkinabé population between two periods of elite capture and impunity. Sankara named the country Burkina Faso - the Land of the Upright (or Honest) Man - in 1984 on the first anniversary
of the revolution that put him in power (Somé, 1990). In a combination of the three most popular languages in the country, the name also encapsulated the respect across ethnicities and religions this ideal of mutual solidarity rests upon.

Sankara’s myriad articulations of what it meant to be Burkinabè continue to shape the day-to-day lives of Ouagadougou’s residents despite his death in 1987 and the subsequent 27-year tenure of his once-friend, then-rival Blaise Compaoré. Burkina’s rich history of protest and dynamic civil society chronicles Burkinabè’s refusals to accept a lack of accountability from the state, defining experiences of citizenship as a struggle against elite capture. However, these form just one end of the spectrum of political articulation. Everyday political articulations shape daily life through discussions of what is and should be that are interwoven, explicitly and implicitly, with the principles that inform personal decision-making.

As Ferguson argues, the popular legitimacy of governments in Africa relies not on "good governments in technical terms" but on governments that are “‘good’ (morally benevolent and protective of its people)” and citizens consistently demand the latter (Ferguson, 2006, p. 85). Compaoré’s regime was one of these “good governments” in technical terms, which orient themselves towards accountability to the IMF rather than to their citizens (ibid.). This required Compaoré to rely on coercive authority, using enforcement to align behaviour with the government’s agendas in the absence of legitimate authority (Harsch, 2017).

Although Sankara and Compaoré planned the 1983 revolution together, Compaoré came to power through the coup that killed Sankara in 1987, after which he sought to ‘rectify’ Sankara's revolution with a suite of neoliberal programming. Sankara had been vehemently opposed to conditional loans from IFIs, rather seeking to format the economy for domestic food security before engaging with external markets. However, once in charge, Compaoré quickly opened up the country to structural adjustment. A structural adjustment program (SAP) was launched in 1991 under the
Enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative, conditional upon Compaoré's promises to transition to multi-party democracy (IMF, 2002).

Scaling-back the public sector included privatising state bodies, while enforcing user fees and cost recovery for state-provided services such as primary healthcare and education (R. Marcus, Wilkinson, & Marshali, 2002). The "Strategie de Croissance Acceleree et de Developpement Durable" (SCADD) was adopted in December 2010 to cover the period 2011-2015 in line with extended funding from the IMF, focusing on more private sector development (Omega, 2016). This shift to foreign investment climate improvement was tethered to measures for increased "scrutiny" of the "implementation process to ensure effectiveness", with greater emphasis on indicators and targets, and ultimately accountability to lenders (World Bank, 2011).

Once Compaoré took power, Burkina was "once again up for sale" (Wilkins, 1989, p. 388). Although its exploitable resources remained low, capital investment (predominantly from Canadian firms) was incentivised through exploratory studies commissioned by the French government and changes to fiscal policy in 2003 (Orezone, 2016). As Ferguson attests, none of the impoverished nations of the world are truly sovereign or independent and to speak of a “national economy” can obfuscate the asymmetric dynamics of the global political economy that structure poorer countries’ extractive entanglements with mobile capital (Ferguson, 2006, p. 65). Burkina’s secure and private-sector-friendly environment was core to the success of drawing international capital to extract natural resources, with the “government’s eagerness to host foreign exploration companies” effectively mitigating investor risk despite an unimpressive rating on risk indices (Luning, 2014, p. 72). This resulted in Burkina Faso becoming the fastest growing gold-producing country in Africa. Under Compaoré, Burkina Faso was also the only country in West Africa to allow Monsanto access to its farmers to implement genetically modified cotton crops. This short-lived new-wave green revolution resulted in decreased quality of yields and was rolled back after his departure. Beyond cotton and gold, other formal commercial activities are largely
underdeveloped, limited to smaller domestic-market production of bottled drinks and minimal food processing.

Through corruption and extraction, systemic economic violence kept the majority of Burkinabès in poverty during Compaoré’s 27-year tenure, and the rights to the wealth syphoned off by Compaoré and his associates were protected by physical violence. Resistance to Compaoré’s regime was understood to be violently policed through his presidential guard, most saliently reflected with the emblematic murder of journalist Nobert Zongo in 1998. The consolidation of power through economic and blood crimes, combined with the foreclosure of opportunities for institution-building and economic development which were not directly dependent on Compaoré and his close allies, succeeded in preventing the emergence of a plausible successor for the majority of his tenure, except his brother François who became as much a figurehead for the regime's failings as Compaoré himself.

Since 2011, protests against Compaoré and his entourage had mounted, resulting in "the authorities' monopoly of violence [being] lost and shared among [Burkina’s] important sectors of society" (Chouli, 2012, p. 46) . This new intensity of protest layered into an already robust history of mobilisation across organised demonstrations, riots and broader civil society struggles, highlighted by an activist’s description of the relationship between citizens and the state: "In Mooré language, we say: The government is like a donkey. If you do not beat it, it does not move forward" (Anonymous activist, quoted in Engels, 2015, p. 100).

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18 Nobert Zongo was a Burkinabère journalist who reported on the crimes of Compaoré’s regime, including the killing of a guard of Compaoré’s brother François in police custody. Zongo was killed by the presidential guard without official consequence from the regime, and remains a symbol of both Compaoré’s impunity and of public resistance.
The 2014 insurrection mounted under imagery and narratives of Sankara was successful in deposing Blaise Compaoré. With the motto “Trop, C'est Trop” [Enough is enough] connecting protestors to decades of demands for accountability, unrest had been fermenting and coalesced around the efforts of Compaoré to change the constitution to allow him to run for another term (Hagberg, 2002, 2015). Young people, led by Balai Citoyen (the Citizen’s Broom), were a particularly visible collective in the fight for political and economic enfranchisement. Balai Citoyen had been established by prominent musicians, radio DJs and producers Smockey and Sams’K le Jah, with Sankara as their ‘patron’, resonating especially with the frustrations of the burgeoning under-employed youth population and reflecting the success of the Y’En Marre movement in Senegal (Wienkoop, 2020). Balai Citoyen set its mission as sweeping away the corruption of the state. Their successful incorporation of the young and under-employed into an already dynamic civil society of student protest and unions culminated in the insurrection successfully ousting Compaoré on 31st October 2014. Although young men were visibly at the forefront of the insurrection, a women’s demonstration on 27th October 2014, the day before the official day of protest called by opposition parties on the 28th October, paved the way for the large-scale insurrection (Ouédraogo and Yabré, 2015). The women demonstrating embodied the courage and exasperation that marked the insurrection that followed (ibid., p. 21-22).

However, the aftermath resulted not just in a vacuum of power but one which had to work around "many pillars of an embedded political structure" that remained in place despite the departure of Compaoré and his "small coterie" (Harsch, 2019, p. 211). In light of Burkina's poor economic status, international positioning was a cornerstone to the longevity of Compaoré's regime. By playing critical roles in (often Western-backed) peace-building missions in neighbouring countries such as Cote d'Ivoire and Niger, and acting as a base for French and American special forces for their anti-terrorism missions in the Sahel, stability in Burkina became a Western priority manifest in the bolstering of Burkina's military and international political rhetoric (Brookings Institute, 2015).
Given the succession of coups from independence through to when Compaoré took power in 1987, his departure marked the first time that Burkina Faso was grappling with a democracy in living memory of most Burkinabè. International observers praised the 2015 election for its transparency and peacefulness, with a 60% turn-out electing the first democratically elected civilian president since the country’s independence in 1960 (Menas Associates, 2015). However, the infrastructure of government had been weakened by decades of extractive leadership, and the types of global connections this facilitated.

Roch Marc Christian Kaboré - former prime minister under Compaoré - became president in January 2016, promising to build a "new Burkina Faso" by "fighting youth unemployment, improving education and modernising the health system" (Kendemeh, 2015). However, his regime has been unable to meet the high expectations of the population for positive change, or even to maintain previous standards of living. Kaboré’s stated aspirations have been constrained by Burkina’s weak economy and the dissolution of an entrenched elite governance structure (Ohayon, 2016), manifested most saliently and urgently in inadequate security services. An unprecedented terrorist attack in Ouagadougou in January 2016 and two more since heightened international concern about stability, while negotiations between the government and self-organised vigilante groups highlighted the impacts of insufficient financial resources for functioning domestic security services (SLM, G. 2016).

As summarised by Augustin Loada of the Centre for Democratic Governance, Compaoré’s regime’s success in holding onto power for nearly three decades was underpinned by the threat of absolute chaos in the case of his departure: "If our system doesn't work, there's nothing" (Augustin Loada, quoted in Nossiter, 2011). One particularly urgent aspect of this related to terrorism. It was widely circulated that Compaoré’s regime used to dependably pay ransoms to jihadi terrorists, in an arrangement that kept disorder limited to the Northern border of the country. While Compaoré
anchored his international relevance as a peace negotiator (Eizenga, 2015), his absence has seen chaos creep across the country and into its capital.

The below representations, based on the French foreign ministry advice regarding travel to Burkina Faso, show the shift in security during the period of fieldwork (roughly the first to second picture). The third map acts as a proxy for the follow-up trip in November 2018, but also the shadow of (unknowable) future degradation that was increasingly folded into the present of everyday market decisions towards the latter end of the fieldwork.

![Security Zones](image)

**Figure 3.1 – Graphics of Burkina Faso zones of relative security alert, based on the French foreign ministry advice at April 10th 2017, March 9th 2018 and February 4th 2019.**

This degradation of the security situation did not happen (nor was it experienced) in any linear or uniform way, as the threat it brought to lives and livelihoods unfolded in unpredictable and varied ways. The next section outlines the unfolding situation in Burkina over the first nine months of fieldwork, as new information continued to trickle into and around the market through news and rumours. In doing so, this section maps out how the parameters of everyday calculations came to be and shifted over time, while also introducing the rhythms and networks of social relations through which they emerged and were (de)stabilised.
“We Manage with What we Have”: Margins of Manoeuvrability in a Cornered Market

On one of my first days at the market, Diane pointed from the backroom of her second-hand clothes stall to an old man passing. He couldn't see or hear us as we were sitting 10 metres away in the shaded store, but we tracked him passing slowly in the bright sun outside. The omnipresent plastic kettles used all over the city (to wash before praying or eating and after the toilet) dangled from his arms and a stack of plastic basins balanced on his head. "The Vieux" there, he should be at home," Diane said, "The market is saturated; he should be at home with his family.

New norms, and the erosion of old ones, marked the degradation around Diane and her market neighbours. Rather than being at home being cared for by his family in his old age, this Vieux was an ambulant seller walking around in 35-degree heat, trying to eke out a margin on an item sold by dozens of other sellers at their stalls in the market's central courtyard around the corner. Expected life trajectories – rhythms of reciprocity and investment over life spans - were being compromised and, with that, the expectations of who Burkinabè were and could be individually and collectively.

Men arrived with these swirled, colourful plastic kettles to Ousmane's forecourt next-door to Diane's two or three times a day. Ousmane held mats in his back room and a large yellow plastic water canister outside his stall for the group of men who would come to pray with him across the road along this stretch of the market's perimeter. Depending on the time of year, sunset prayers could sometimes fall just before or after the gates locked at the edge of the market. However, even when the market was officially closed, several of the men often lingered to pray there rather than in their home neighbourhoods. Before each prayer time, the intergenerational grouping of men

19 A “Vieux” means an old man, often used as a term of respect rather than the name of elder men being known or used.
20 "Le Vieux là, il devrait être à la maison… Le marché est saturé; il devrait être à la maison avec sa famille"
would come together and fill their kettles from the canister to wash the morning away as they joked and asked about each other's days, families, activities: Ahmed, Ousmane's brother who shared the space with him as a base for his moto\textsuperscript{21} transport business; Moussa, Ousmane's ‘Papa’\textsuperscript{22}, a tailor inside the market’s gates; Ismail, a young butcher in his promotional red and yellow Maggi\textsuperscript{23} apron and his friend Madi who struggled to shift his stock of shiny new shoes on the other side of the market; Djibril who sometimes sold at the market and sometimes travelled to other businesses around the country. Similar groupings would cluster together to prepare together along the road before coming together to meet at the handful of prayer sites around the market’s edge.

These men had very different businesses, which formatted divergent experiences of the current state of the market. Moussa, like most tailors, was still relatively busy with repairs and outfits for weddings. However, people were being conservative as they waited to see how the new regime stabilised and so were re-wearing outfits during the annual fêtes, which meant that the peaks of his commercial year had levelled off. The younger men, Madi and Ismail, were more affected by the downturn in the market, with meat and new shoes lying outside the scope of most clients’ current budgets. Ousmane on the other hand sold the omnipresent black plastic bags used for everything from fabric to illicit\textsuperscript{24} roast pork, cloaking the mystery of what had been purchased in a shiny uniform. He also sold pineapples, a relatively luxurious food purchase but one that could also be sold to the teenage girls around the corner who made gingembre (ginger and pineapple juice) once the fruit had begun to turn. This supplementary base of customers mitigated the risk

\textsuperscript{21}Motos are motorized scooters/mopeds, ubiquitous as a mode of transport in Ouagadougou.

\textsuperscript{22}Papa is used to term an elder, while using “mon papa” would name an older male who is particularly close, usually connected to someone one would share with in confidence and seek advice from on bigger concerns. The relationships of this nature I saw at the market were based on friendship rather than family or home-area connections and often transcended religious/ethnic groupings.

\textsuperscript{23}Ubiquitous stock / seasoning company

\textsuperscript{24}“Porc au four” is roasted in large outdoor ovens on corners around the neighbourhood. It was commonly joked that the demand for this far outweighed the Christian population and so the black bags may contain pork for some Muslim families. This contrasts with drinking alcohol, which is not hidden away in covered bars in Burkina as it is in many neighbouring majority Muslim countries.
that Ousmane’s expectations of the market would not match demand on any given week, as he could sell off overripe fruit at a discount.

Diane’s second-hand clothes business was towards the slower end of this spectrum of buoyancy, and she told me it had been this way for a year or so by the time I arrived in Spring 2017. Now, people were coming to take a few items at a time, very infrequently. Sometimes they hesitated and came back to purchase after careful consideration. She was nostalgic for the time when her clients would look forward to her getting new stock, or feel nervous leaving anything they liked behind in case it sold quickly, reflecting her pride at choosing and engaging the right stockists in Dubai and Canada. In contrast to the tarps full of second-hand textiles that sellers without their own stall cut open and sold outside the market’s limits, Diane sourced her items through her husband (who worked and lived most of the year in Canada), and they arrived neatly encased in cardboard boxes.

Like most of the vendors at this market, Diane and Ousmane lived outside the local area and did not go home for lunch. This was the norm for many workers around the city, due to the sprawling nature of Ouagadougou and the relative expense of petrol compared to other living costs. Breakfast, lunch and mid-day sleeps or rests (a necessity with the heat) happened at the market for the most part and were shared with market neighbours, rather than with families at home. Flows of people to and from the tea kiosk 50m away from Diane and Ousmane’s stalls, and the other food stalls that lined the edge of the market, punctuated the day.

Hot drinks and sandwiches were often fetched by younger neighbours for older vendors like Maman, whose stall bordered Ousmane’s on the opposite side to Diane. “You’re invited”, a customary invitation was extended to friends or passing acquaintances before starting to eat or drink. Maman would extend her baguette filled with fish paste or a plastic container of sugary tea

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25 “Tu es invité”
to us in the morning and invite us before she ate her breakfast. The baguettes were always rolled up in old accounting print-outs. Huguette, who ran the kiosk where Maman and others bought their baguettes, had a friend who would give her the old print-outs from his office for free so she could wrap her customers’ food without eating away at the 25F (£0.04) margin she made for each baguette she sold.

These circulations of food, of goodwill, of people, of the stories brought into and around the market, and the contingent methods of holding things together, animated the market. Exposure to these everyday rhythms both discouraged and encouraged vendors, depending on the activities and experiences of one another. The mutual attunement of vendors to one another's experiences through different circulations of stories and bodies signified and mediated expectations of further degradation, as well as manifestations of buoyancy and continuity. The vendors at this market continually lamented the lack of circulation of money and clients, both of which had gradually diminished, reflecting declining expectations and resources under the current government, but the vendors themselves still circulated. They came to the market every day and moved through it to socialise, to make change26, to get food, to bring older neighbours tea, to pray.

These vendors made themselves living at the market as well as (or sometimes instead of) making a living there by the sheer momentum of continuity. This momentum was not just based on inertia, but was constantly remade through daily rhythms, and through fixing the material and social fabric of the market whenever its tenability was particularly compromised. However, moments of joy and resonance continued to push back against the tide of crisis. The rhythms of prayer, of eating and checking in on one another formed a dense, responsive network of everyday practices of care that patch moral worlds back up when they need repair. This "quiet encroachment" (Bayat, 2013,

26 “Problème de monnaie” - a lack of small change - meant that extra trips would often have to be done throughout the day. Larger bills would be broken with bookies or other businesses around the market’s edge with access to banking and then this would have to be mediated through other sellers to filter through the market.
p. 46) of everyday resolve, persisting through tenacity and humour, through paying attention to one another, pushed back against signs of stagnation and saturation that reverberated around the country, and tended to hopes for a return to normalcy.

A variety of common phrases expressed this continuity and a spectrum of affective attachments to the market. Articulations of “we’re here”, “we’re stuck”, “we’re cornered” reflected the stagnation and immobility experienced at particularly bad moments. These emotional and material impasses were usually diluted or diffused, by oneself or others, with counters “God will give/provide”, “It will go/be/work”, or the most common of affirmations “We’ll manage or get by with what we have”. These common phrasings that drew the future into the present were echoed in the specific content of conversations. As well as attending to the present state of the market, vendors’ success required “the constant folding of futures into the here and now” of the market and their specific project there (Anderson, 2010, p. 793). Discussing the news and making sense of rumours stabilised an ambiguous present and uncertain future enough to make decisions. Vendors’ perceptions of what potential clients knew or believed about what was unfolding, and the government’s capacity to attend to it, informed decisions about how these stories might manifest in the market.

“He’s sorting out the security situation, then he’ll sort out the economic situation. Little bit by little, the situation’s improving” Ousmane said of Roch Kaboré, the country’s then-new president during the first few months of my fieldwork. Just a year into his term, Roch still enjoyed the general benefit of the doubt then, with an understanding that the legacy problems he had inherited were being sorted out, if slowly. This period was marked by tentative hope and a waiting

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27 “On est là”, “On est collé”, “On est coincé”
28 “Dieu va donner”
29 “Ça va aller”
30 “On se débrouille avec ce qu’on a”
31 “Il est en train de régler la situation de sécurité, puis il va régler la situation économique. Bil-bilfou (little by little in Mooré), la situation s’améliore”
for the current stagnation to pick up, for the clients who were still being conservative to start recirculating.

Across the road from Huguette’s tea kiosk, Jacques and his friends and clients discussed politics throughout the day at his stall. Jacques explained the slowness of Roch’s progress in addressing the security and economy concerns using the tools of his own work as a cobbler. Holding up a darning needle and an off-cut of thread he was using for a small job, he pushed the thread through the eye of the needle: “It goes through. Simple. But if you have three? It doesn’t pass”. He held the thread across his palm and unfolded his fingers to count out three on his hand for Roch, the President, but also the Prime Minister and the head of the National Assembly. Without the consolidation of power Blaise had amassed over his 27 years in power, and reflecting a new expectation of accountability from the country post-insurrection, the country’s theoretical forms of governance were now being meaningfully strived for. This was the first time in decades (and in living memory of most Burkinabès) that anything more than superficial democracy was being negotiated. Blaise had “sucked virtually all meaning from the procedural architecture of Burkinabè democracy” (Reza, 2016) and this needed to be rebuilt through slow and deliberate practice.

Vendors broadly problematised the threat of terror in Ouagadougou during this time as coming down to a past event that should not have happened right here in the capital. By the time I arrived, the attack was already over a year before and the threat was more saliently connected to a creeping threat that was making the North of the country unliveable. At the time, attacks in the North had not yet escalated to the level of 2018-2020, but were strategically targeting teachers. Killing teachers, and hence preventing other teachers being willing to work in these regions, was

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33 Blaise Compaoré was commonly called by his first name, a continuation of when he had been broadly referred to “Beau Blaise” [beautiful Blaise] during his time in power. Roch Kaboré, his replacement, was also most often referred to by his first name. Conversely, Thomas Sankara was never referred to by his first name.
galvanising the cession of these territories to jihadism. Within the city, people at the market often warned me not to go to Avenue Kwame Nkrumah, the street full of Western-oriented restaurants where a terrorist attack had taken place over a year before. But otherwise, this first attack in Ouagadougou was broadly considered to be a problem of under-policing and under-resourcing. People attributed it to traces of Compaoré’s network of power seeking to undermine the new regime, and expressed hope that the new government could get the security situation under control in the absence of evidence to the contrary.

Another manifestation of the under-resourcing of the security forces, more rooted in the city’s everyday rhythm, was the Koglweogo. A self-defence force that was emerging across the country, Koglweogo groups were stepping into the void where the state could not and was not policing communities. These groups, made up of volunteer men from local communities, had allowed for some normalcy to resume in areas plagued by theft in particular, but their methods of public violence and humiliation were often problematised as overly violent and arbitrary in public debate. They also served as a salient manifestation of the lack of resources of the current government now that Blaise had left, taking his money and connections with him.

In August of 2017, five months into my fieldwork, a second Ouagadougou attack took place on the same road as the first one. Again, the day-to-day perspectives of vendors and their friends and families did not reflect an assumed immediate threat of violence to them, given that this attack had again targeted areas frequented by Westerners and elite Burkinabè. However, it was a blow to the assumption that Roch had the security situation under control, especially in light of the closeness of this attack to the previous one which had taken place only 19 months before. The fact that even this stretch of road, which should have been protected as a known target, was not secured pulled the benefit of the doubt from him for many.
Salif Diallo, the head of the National Assembly, also died the same month as this attack happened. Diallo had been a king-maker and breaker, his alignment with and later defection from Compaoré seen as a core dimension of his rise and fall (Bensinom, C. And Le Cam, M., 2017). With Diallo’s death, the most established of the three threads Jacques used to represent the different strands of Burkinabè’s nascent democracy was now gone. Some rumours circulated connecting Salif’s death and the attack, with implications that rather than the official story of illness and death, his death had actually been connected to the attack in some way. Sankara’s body had been exhumed the year before in the wake of the insurrection and accompanying calls for transparency around the previous regime’s blood crimes; the feeling that official stories about political events would diverge significantly from the truth had survived Blaise’s departure.

Stickier rumours circulated about the leaders of the Balai Citoyen, as salient public stewards of Sankara’s legacy. Their public identities had centred around their honesty, which linked them back to Sankara - "They/he speaks the truth" was often the stock phrase about them when they came up in conversation. However, their reluctance to present parliamentary candidates to build on their momentum was increasingly resented by some over time, especially as Roch’s lack of capacity to manage the country’s crisis became clearer. Swirling narratives also connected a new 4x4 that Sams’K le Jah had apparently been seen driving around the city in to an Amnesty International prize they had received during the transition - Christian, Huguette’s 20-year old son who often sat with Jacques in the afternoons and on weekends complained: “They have the money from the NGO. How do we trust them when we find out after there is money and they haven’t told the truth about that money during the transition?”

As Smockey’s mother is French and he spent ten years of his life in France, faith in his motives had been more tentative, so an erosion of faith in Sams’K undermined their joint role.

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34 “Ils ont l’argent que l’ONG leur a donné. Comment on peut leur faire confiance lorsqu’on découvre après qu’il y a de l’argent et qu’ils ont pas dit la vérité pendant la transition?”
The “Ambassadors of Conscience” prize that the Balai Citoyen were recognised for, along with other African youth movements, does not have a cash prize but these connections were still often speculated (and there were possibly other ways that this may have channelled support to the organisation). This disappointment in rumoured compromises made by Sankarist leaders reflected the unforgiving standards that Sankara’s shadow left for potential leadership. As organic intellectuals at the forefront of the insurrection, Sams’K le Jah and Smockey role in stewarding the hope of that moment forward was central to how it was made meaningful, especially in Ouagadougou where they were based. Sankara’s leadership had been potent with symbolism - living at home with his mother and cycling around the city during his time as president, replacing the government’s expensive cars with Citroens. A 4x4 was a very salient break with the hope that Sams’K le Jah or Smockey could carry Sankara’s vision into the present.

The death of Salif Diallo and erosion of confidence in Sams’le Jah and Smockey reflected a general paradox in the presence and absence of Sankara who was “everywhere, yet nowhere” (Ra-Sablga Seydou Ouédraogo, quoted in Harsch, 2017). His image was on t-shirts and posters, graffitied all over walls on underpasses and reverberating around conversations as a proxy for morality and justice, but policies and projects that carried his project forward tangibly were nowhere to be seen within the new political regime. The parties that aligned with him remained weak after the 2015 elections despite the broad resonance of Sankarist ideas, staying in the minority, which many people connected to the amount of power that remained concentrated with Blaise’s allies in the country. Sankara’s call to “dare to invent the future” jarred with the economic reality that people were trying to survive. As the imagined futures that had inspired the insurrection waned, collective and individual processes bargained with the past of Blaise and his potential return.
Although the broad understanding of Burkinabè people as fundamentally good or "upstanding," (as in the name Sankara had given the country) persisted, criminality was felt to be increasing dramatically during this period. This was coupled with a creeping pragmatism and an atrophying of the belief in the primary importance of the connection between intention and consequence in political life (Dakuyo, 2019). Outside of the small number of pro-Blaise vendors I knew at the market, who had maintained their affection for him throughout, the disdain for Blaise and his regime among vendors more broadly thawed over time, replaced with pragmatism and a sense of what the recent context had illuminated about the impossibility of peace without him.

Jacques, for example, had complained frequently, as many did, about the immoral and negligent government of Blaise's time in power. However, by December 2017, I saw that he was reading a biography of Blaise. Jacques got his books for free from a local friend who sold books and gave Jacques damaged copies, often without the first and last few chapters. He usually read critical books about colonial legacies, or football or geography books, so I was surprised to see him reading this book. When I asked him about it he said: "Blaise, he is OK, it was better with him. Roch, he doesn't have the means for everything he promised…. [touching his chest] Sankara, I like/love Sankara too much. But Blaise, it's different."  

Jacques and many others had often argued that Roch not having the means to fulfil his promises to Burkinabés was due to Blaise "leaving with the money," but new, more pragmatic perspectives and preferences were emerging. Although the lack of capacity of the current government was often attributed to Blaise's corruption and extraction, his disregard for the population and its implications were gradually uncoupled from the stability he had brought, and potentially could bring again if let back into the country. A nostalgia and desire for this stability was eclipsing more comprehensive political aspirations that linked intent and consequence. The trade-off between

35 “Blaise, ça va, c'était mieux avec lui. Roch, il n’a pas les moyens pour tout qu’il a promis…Sankara, j’aime Sankara trop. Mais Blaise, c’est différent.”
“justice for the martyrs” and “vengeance” came up increasingly frequently towards the end of the year in recalibrating expectations around the clean sweep of corruption envisaged under the insurrection, in light of the difficulty of bringing the most powerful men in the country to justice. The term “vengeance” circulated increasingly in reference to increasing efforts to get Blaise and his brother François Compaoré back into the country, from their exiles in Cote d'Ivoire and France respectively, to be held accountable for their part in the murders of Thomas Sankara and Nobert Zongo, but also in reference to two other key figures in Compaoré’s regime. Djibril Bassolé and Gilbert Diendere were about to be tried for leading a counter-coup in late 2015 that sought to undermine the election that brought Roch to power. Their being held to account had been consistently connected to the two attacks on Avenue Kwame Nkrumah in public conversation.

President Macron made a stop in Ouagadougou en route to Cote d'Ivoire, France's most important economic interest in the region, in November 2017. The Cote d'Ivoire had granted Blaise citizenship after he had been reportedly airlifted from Burkina by French helicopters, precluding his extradition on new charges related to Sankara's murder, and so some of the dynamics between the three countries had been rendered particularly salient. Macron used his visit to tell the Burkinabè people that he would agree to the opening of the French intelligence file on Sankara's death, which had been sealed for 30 years (RFI, 2017). In the tradition of his predecessors, Macron framed his visit around a break with Francafrique - the paternalistic and extractive relationship entrenched between France and its former colonies in Africa. “I am of a generation that doesn’t tell Africans what to do” he stated, limiting France's desired engagement with Africa to that of mutual economic interest (Reuters, 2017).

36 The martyrs referred to those killed by state violence during the 2014 insurrection, but also to Thomas Sankara, Robert Zongo and anyone killed for challenging the impunity of the former regime.

38 Macron’s stated stance on “resetting” France-Afrique was undermined saliently in February 2019, when the French military intervened through airstrikes in Chad.
“Our head of state is arriving today!” Ousmane laughed the day that Macron arrived in Ouagadougou. He contradicted the French president’s claims of distance by elaborating that “if something serious happens in Burkina, it’s him that will decide what must be done”. The French were known to have supported Blaise from the moment he took power when Sankara was killed until the final moments their military airlifted him out to safety in the Cote d’Ivoire during the insurrection. Their shaping of Burkina’s political economy continued through their entanglements with the gold industry and the Sahel G5 counter-terrorism force which was based in Burkina Faso. Christian, the student who often spent time at Jacques’s stall, echoed Ousmane’s acceptance of this neo-colonial relationship, but with a more optimistic potential: “At least he knows that we’re here. Maybe it means they can hear us.”

Jacques expressed conflicting but pragmatic feelings about Burkina’s continued entanglement with France and the tone of the speech Macron made at the city’s public university: “He lacked respect, but we remain in the hand of France. We can’t go back. We need the investment of Blaise’s friends and they are afraid [due to the security situation]. Jacques’s comment encapsulated the collapse of any meaningful distinction between France and Compaoré in understanding his tenure as a manifestation of Francafrique, while Macron’s speech at the university reflected a distinct lack of acknowledgement of the legacies, and current manifestations, of Franceafrique. Macron had bristled at an audience question about the lack of electricity at the public university, denouncing any accountability the French head of state should take for the current state of Burkina Faso’s public resources.

39 “Notre chef d’État arrive aujourd’hui!”
40 “Si quelque chose de sérieux arrive, c’est lui qui va décider ce qu’il faut faire”
41 “Au moins, il sait qu’on est là. Peut-être ça faut qu’ils puissent nous entendre”
42 “Il a manqué le respect, mais on reste dans la main de la France. On peut pas aller en arrière. On a besoin de l’investissement des amis de Blaise, et ils ont peur”
The experience of Nina, a student at Ouagadougou university who came to get her shoes fixed at the market, reflected the lack of resources and accountability that those relying on state services faced every day. Her studies had been stalled as the academic year's start date kept getting deferred, and she told me so many classes had been cancelled the previous year that it hadn't counted as a full academic year for her and her classmates. The university was often referred to as Guantanamo by students, given that nobody knew when they would leave. She articulated the frustration of having her trajectory blocked by the lack of resources in a phrasing that echoed throughout my fieldwork: "They must facilitate our passage."

Nina’s demands for having her passage facilitated raises the questions of who should facilitate what for whom, and could they be expected to do so? In the absence of desired frames of accountability, what did that mean for people's own landscapes of responsibility and aspiration? During the final months of fieldwork, these questions continued to reverberate as insecurity and stagnation further intensified.

“Overall [it's/everything’s] ok, but in the details, [it's/everything’s] not OK”

As much of the analysis of the thesis engages with the later months of fieldwork (December 2017 -March 2018), the remainder of this chapter introduces how that period was characterised by a shift to a new texture of uncertainty. Using a short ethnographic framing of two vendors’ experience of an attack which took place in Ouagadougou on 2nd March 2018, this section foregrounds the complexity of dealing with this intensifying crisis. By illustrating the personal and interpersonal prisms through which François and Traoré sought to assimilate new knowledge into their individual and collective frames of meaning, I move to problematise what can be delimited to context when the context makes everyday life increasingly at odds with sustaining beliefs.

43 “Ils doivent faciliter notre passage”
44 “En grosse ça va mais en détail, ça va pas”
This section is concerned with the implications of this specific attack for vendors. The first daytime terrorist attack in Ouagadougou targeted both the French embassy and national army headquarters on the same week as the trial of Blaise Compaoré’s allies for a failed coup. The convergence of these events crystallised the coupling of the security situation with the legacy of the former regime, stabilising the loss of potentials and precluding previously plausible futures. In talking about the connection between the start date of the trial against Djibril Bassolé and Gilbert Diendere and this most recent and boldest attack on Ouagadougou, Huguette summarised emerging explanations and their implications: "After the first attack, we thought it could be; after the second attack, then we suspected; and now, now we know they are connected….Burkinabès, we’re scared. We’ve never had similar attacks”45

These suspected connections were widely accepted and circulated, and understood to have been exacerbated by the Sahel G5’s escalating counter-terrorism programme which was based in Burkina Faso. The G5 had been receiving increasingly heavier financial and political investment, which many had predicted would provoke an escalation that had now come to pass: “reality is really real when it is provoked, and hence realised” (Muniesa, 2014, p. 17). Down the street at her second-hand clothes stall, Diane echoed Huguette's articulation of the certain incompatibility of peace with the two most powerful men in the country being in prison. She spoke of all the things Diendéré and Bassolé would know; of all the people who would be accountable to them because of their knowledge and embedded power.

Even before this attack, for the few months since Christmas 2017, François had had a new response to my greetings: “Overall, OK, but in the details, not OK”46. He would emphasise the

45 “Après la première attentat, on a pensé que c'était possible; Après le deuxième, on a soupconné; et a l'heure là, on sait qu'ils sont connectés…..Les Burkinabès, on a peur. On a jamais eu les aggressions pareils”
46 “En grosse, ça va mais, en détail, ça vas pas”
second part by raising his eyebrows towards his hairline emphatically, nodding his head or slowly wagging his finger side to side – "en détail, ça va pas". However, the terrorist attack the previous week had marked the threat of terror coming much closer to the lives of the city’s residents, and the emotional register of this statement had since seemed much heavier. Before, the discouraging details he referred to had generally related to his trade as a fishmonger; now, each day he would speak of what he knew about the eight security forces who had been killed in the attack.

On this particular day in March 2018, some of the men were being buried. Most conversations swirling around the market focussed on how low the official death-count from the attack was. By contrast, the common belief among vendors was that the government was inaccurately reporting the figure to limit public concern and international withdrawal of investment. However, François maintained his focus on the specific men known to have been killed and sat apart from the wider conversation - not speculating about what may be lost but focusing on the compatriots he knew to have been violently killed. He told me his brother was being buried that day, echoing the Pan-African citizenship that runs through Sankarist thought (Murrey, A., 2018). “If he has black skin, he is my brother”47; he continued, tracing the finger-nail of his right forearm along his left forearm.

François’s business had been struggling more than some of his neighbours. He shared a forecourt and backroom with Jacques, whose cobbler business was maintaining a slow but relatively dependable rhythm, patching the shoes and footballs that continued to wear out and needed to be remade. In contrast, fish were a relative luxury and his deep-freeze full of frozen fish in the backroom of the stall did not have much of a turnover. The forecourt was – however formally or not – entirely claimed by Jacques, with François choosing public seating options nearby according to the time of day, who was where and how the shadows were falling. His sign was tacked to the

47 “Si il a le peau noir, il est mon frère”
side of the forecourt - a small wooden plank with his name and number written on it, signalling his connection to the plastic-covered table, aged blue scales and small machete lined up on top.

The frozen nature of his produce meant François did not have the same daily anxieties as butchers or fruit-sellers. He did not have to concern himself too much with calibrating stock levels to avoid loss, arranging collection or delivery, discarding of stock, or setting up / closing down his business each day. His business could remain suspended with less salient daily markers of the shift of pace than other types of vendors. All he had to do to bookend his work-day was to lift out his table, scales and blade from the back room in the morning, and return them in the evening, cleaning off the plastic cloth top if he had sold any fish that day. The lack of sales activity made his days long and uneventful and sometimes he would drift from the market’s edge mid-afternoon to the space that sold dolo, a strong locally brewed beer, a few streets away before coming back to close out the day.

Figure 3.2 – View of François’s table with his scales, sponge and knife on top, and water kettle below for cleaning (Taken by Jacques, cropped by me)
The daily details of bad news that were pouring in that month were reflected in the daily tally of François’ poor, or non-existent sales. Like many of his clients and neighbours at the market, he had not been able to celebrate Christmas with his family in the same way as usual. The acute crisis of security and economic stagnation had become chronic. Compounding the effects of lower everyday levels of trade, the expected annual peaks of consumption for festivals levelled off. This stagnation precluded vendors themselves from investing in these annual festivals, or being able to afford the ‘lumpy’ costs on time, particularly school fees. After Christmas, François lamented how he and his family had not been able to uphold the social and material norms of the season but expressed gratitude for the health of his family as primary: “But there is health, the essential48”. Health and being together to pray and rest were not taken for granted, but the festive food and drinks, the outfits and also the scope for hosting (or expecting to be hosted by) friends and family over the holiday was still missed.

Moreover, the same concerns that precluded an upturn in pre-holiday sales from his potential clients now compounded the same concerns for him. He still had a freezer full of fish and overdue school fees. Since then, he had used this same phrase each time I saw him - "En grosse, ça va, mais en détail, ça va pas”. After the March 2018 attack, all of the vendors at the market were affected. The attack marked a salient degradation in the felt security of the city, and in expectations for the future. However, François remained more legibly upset to me than others. He sat apart from others often in the weeks after the attack, disrupting the social and spatial rhythm through which he had usually traced shade and company throughout the day. He resisted the audible presence of conversations about politics and lies, maintaining his focus on the violent reality of the loss of life, itself remarkable with or without the other potential connections.

48 “Mais il y a la santé, l'essentiel”
Although death due to economic violence and its myriad ramifications were not new to Burkina Faso, physical violence of this form and scale - especially violence in the name of religious intolerance - reflected an intolerable loss of life and of collective identity. In Burkina, faith in God, faith in the general goodness of most people, and in respect across ethnicities and races is fundamental not just to harmony but also to day-to-day functioning of society in the absence of a resourced police force and other public services. The shift in emphasis in François’s phrasing - itself expressing the duality of his current experience - landed as a strain in how life ‘en grosse’ could be experienced as OK when the details of everyday were not. François’s mantra and his re-weighted emphasis encapsulated this tension between faith and the salience of the insecurity, the lack of sales, the lack of money. It was not easy for the vendors at this market to see foreseeable ways in which the current situation could be worked through either at the level of their everyday lived experience or the country-level crisis. However, the ‘details’ of everyday life vary by person according to their respective repertoire of resources and responsibilities that shaped how affordable different moral worlds were in a moment and over time.

François and Traoré’s market stalls were just ten metres apart but their experiences illustrate different margins of manoeuvrability based on their differential economic, social and spatial resources at the market and outside it. Traoré had more tangible resources requiring and affording reciprocal investment. As well as his stall at Marché Collé selling cuts of cotton and jersey knits to the market’s tailors, he also had a fabric shop outside the market’s walls on the edge of a main road that his son ran for him. This wider base of investment helped ease the friction of this market, but also required him to manage more exposure as the profitability of both ventures edged closer to its limits.

One Sunday at Jacques’s forecourt, Traoré expressed his frustration through a monologue, which was remarkable as he was usually sparse and deliberate in how he gave his opinion to his entourage.
Afterwards he summarised, "Burkinabès, they don't have patience". He explained that he was angry that some of his neighbours at the market were losing hope when every country that’s had a successful revolution has had to wait years for things to improve. This regime, he said, could not be expected to provide real change fast, but it would come if everyone would wait like in other successful revolutions. Traoré’s perception of the discouragement of others was a threat to the sense of conviviality and solidarity around him, but also to what may be possible for him and his family within the worsening economic and security crisis, when his resources may no longer be enough to buffer them against intolerable loss.

Traoré’s frustration with the other vendors’ demoralisation prompted me to think about what resources were required to afford waiting, individually and collectively. I couldn't read whether Traoré's frustration was an expression of an erosion of belief, a genuine rejection of doubt or an expression of the tension between the two. On other days, Traoré himself would be clearly worn down by his own venture's stagnation and the state of the country. Just a few days before he expressed his frustration with others’ discouragement, he had cast his hand around languidly at the stagnant market around him as he lay down on the fabric piled up outside his stall - "It doesn’t function, do you see?". When I asked what he meant, he replied "everything - the country, the market". In elaborating, he wove his way between the levels of market and country with no contextualisation in either direction, a pattern that was common, connecting individual impasses at the micro level with the unfolding macro-level political economic that they refracted, without the need to explicate the linkages.

Witnessing others’ descent into suffering and doubt was demoralising to vendors even at moments when they themselves were able to maintain the level of financial and affective buoyancy needed

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49 "Les Burkinabès, ils ont pas le patience"
50 "ça fonctionne pas - tu vois?"
51 "tout, le pays, le marché"
to weather their current set of circumstances. Traoré was trying to make decisions into an individual and collective future - for his business and his family - and his frustration illustrated the intense effort of staying attuned to the people he cared about at the market while “also fear[ing] the disappointment of one's lack of imagination and trust in the patience and inventiveness of others” (Berlant and Edelman, 2014, p. 110). Affect moves through people and spaces, refracting based on the mutual implication of different people, their investments and their “angle of participation” in the processes that are larger than themselves (Massumi, 2015, p. 6). These repertoires of thoughts and feelings available to an individual in a collective reflect common investments and structural exposures as well as individual resources and responsibilities.

That Sunday, on Jacques’ forecourt, was one of many Sunday mornings we spent chatting at an increasingly empty market. Although Monday to Saturday remained animated by the dependable rhythm of a critical mass of vendors, Sunday mornings became increasingly quiet over the year of fieldwork, showing erosion at the edge of the structural integrity of this container of livelihoods and lives. Christian vendors had for the most-part not come on Sundays, but the rest of the vendors also gradually ebbed away as the market’s vendors responded to new realities. Around the corner, the tailor-supplies store owner, Sor Adama, used to bring in at least three members of staff on Sundays but had reduced this down to one, or sometimes wouldn’t open at all, as not enough tailors came to the market to support a full opening anymore. However, Traoré still came in to open his fabric stall every Sunday morning: “It’s better to come and try to earn to eat than to stay at home and eat the money from yesterday.”

Traoré’s vacillation between frustration and ease reflected how his specific set of resources could be drawn upon and reconfigured to match the needs of the present and future, but also his interdependency with those around him. He had some margins of manoeuvrability that exceeded

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52 “C’est mieux de venir essayer de gagner a manger que de rester à la maison et manger l'argent d’hier”
those of vendors around him, but his repertoire of resources still showed strain at the edges, especially when understood in reference to imagined collective futures. For François, this moment after the March attack was experienced as a grave loss of life, but also as a moment when the frame within which he could hold his world ‘en grosse’ required more challenging and nuanced labour of reorientation and recalibration to entrust his livelihood and life to God in light of increasingly unaffordable losses.

Figure 3.3 – A run of closed stalls on the interior of the market on a Sunday morning

Although these two vendors had different capacities to weather the current crisis, which in turn shaped their experience of it, the fates of all of the traders at Marché Collé were intertwined through their mutual investment in the market. Their relationships to collectives and ideals, as
friends, colleagues, parents, as men of faith, as Burkinabè and Pan-Africanists, formatted their experience of market life but also transcended it. Moreover, in the period of increasing provisionality that marked the end of the fieldwork of this project, Traoré’s frustrations reflected how the existence of vendors in one another’s “background” came to have more explicitly pertinent implications for the worlds they were trying to individually and collectively stabilise and (re)create (Simone, 2019).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have introduced the context of flux that the vendors at the heart of this thesis were working through. The degrading security and economic situation marked continuity with a persistent sense of state impunity throughout Burkina’s recent history, whereby figures in power would not or could not take accountability, thus saturating responsibility in market vendors for maintaining and remaking the market and themselves. As an acute crisis became chronic for traders like François and Traoré, what facilitated the continuity of the belief that “en grosse ça va” when the evidentiary details of life were not OK, and what were the limits of that belief and its sustenance? Their experiences of and responses to a daytime attack in the city, and the wider context of their livelihoods within which it had to be made meaningful, reflect the rich practices of world-building that calculating through uncertainty entails. The tension between loss and the creative and vigilant tenacity that remakes in the face of economic violence illuminates what is cared about, and what the work of calculating such care requires of people.

Maintaining moral coherence of the world ‘en grosse’ shapes the world that people want to act into but also the resources they need to lean on when the ‘details’ of everyday life betray fraying possibilities. Maintaining and recreating one’s moral world, within which their lives are lived, requires attending to the intertwined divine and political investments that frame and make meaning of all other forms of investment. These responses reorganise and deploy resources in new ways, but also reformat investment into resources, most importantly instituting new “worlds of truth”
that can hold material, social and physical resources in wider frames of meaning (Mbembe and Roitman, 1995, p. 323).

This affective framing of everyday uncertainty is necessary for a holistic understanding of the entangled practices of care and calculation, as a point of departure for the rest of the thesis. The next chapter will move to build on these understandings of attunement to explore the entangled practices of care and calculation deployed by these vendors, shifting emphasis to how they experienced and leveraged increasingly unknowable, slim and heterogeneous margins of manoeuvrability across multiple scales. We have seen here the emotional and cognitive complexity of attuning to what is unfolding in relation to the tenability of the market, and now we will see how vendors respond to these attunements through qualitative shifts in their calculative practices.
“There isn’t the money to throw it away,” Emmanuel responded to a disgruntled Jacques. Jacques was complaining about the state of one of the footballs Emmanuel had brought in to get fixed for his youth association. Among hundreds of seemingly irredeemable items I’d seen brought to Jacques over the preceding ten months, this was the first claim that something was beyond fixing. His stance softened when he heard Emmanuel’s clear and simple statement of the limit - there wasn’t the money for Emmanuel or his association to throw the ball away. The impossibility of disposing of an object that could not feasibly be replaced seemed to resonate, thawing Jacques’ resistance, and he went into the back room to find a dusty honeycomb of leather hexagons peeled from another football whose condemnation had been more successful. He uncloaked a shiny razor blade from its paper coat and set to work, releasing well-worn patches to replace the most fatigued segments.

Jacques’ trade as a cobbler involved constantly pushing out the boundary at which shoes and footballs were deemed obsolete, his stitches and glue pulling these objects back together and keeping them working until their next renewal. Among his customers and neighbouring traders (the two often overlapping), the conscious intention to keep things in good condition and to maintain wellbeing was omnipresent in a way that transcended taking care. Such efforts often reflected an explicit understanding of the boundaries of one’s own agency and resources - expecting that deterioration of health and objects beyond a certain point was not reversible as the costs of healing one’s body or replacing objects was not within the scale of surmountable costs.

Il y a pas d’argent pour le jeter”
What was and was not understood as a surmountable cost in the present and imagined future was changing rapidly and becoming less ‘previsible’ for Marché Collé’s vendors. Due to the coupled problems of degrading security and decreasing confidence in the state’s capacity, these traders were required to recognise and respond to unfolding landscapes of constraints and opportunities, recalibrating the scope and temporality of responsibility and aspirations that they deemed plausible in their emergent reality. As we have seen through the preceding chapter, the stagnation of the market, where participants continually referred to themselves as stuck and cornered, reverberated country-wide uncertainty and lacking confidence in the potential of the future. Constant waves of “everyday disasters”, particularly surrounding the inter-related problems of holding the former regime to account and degrading security, eroded the credibility of what could stabilise the country (Ibañez-Tirado, 2015).

In this chapter, I will examine how vendors responded to such a context, focusing on the work of understanding and internalising rapidly-changing constraints and opportunities through their practices of care and calculation. As the landscape of decision-making for the vendors at this Ouagadougou market became more uncertain, what they could afford to care about and not afford to neglect was constantly shifting. Determining what information to use to calibrate the edges of their agency, and resultantly where to place their attention and other resources, became an increasingly complex challenge. People “aren’t necessarily….orienting themselves to a known world, so that they can know what their interests are and go about fulfilling them or meeting them” and this lack of a ‘known world’ is heightened with exposure to uncertainty (Maurer and Tooker, 2014, p. 2). As what can be known or depended on erodes, calculations must rely on more complex inputs and map to more complex aims. Moreover, evolving perspectives and realities are mediated through the very practices of everyday calculation, as contingent processes that reflect and affect emergent subjectivities and affective states.
As discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2, dominant development epistemology does not recognize the expertise poor people in poor countries need to calculate through uncertainty, and this lack of recognition perpetuates the “loss of a vast set of social and economic knowledges” in academia (Carrara, 2018 p. ix). Neoclassical microeconomics and behavioural economics enjoy narrative authority in policy and mainstream development discourses on financial inclusion, and the financial behaviour of the poor more generally. Development economics maps out behaviour as choices between competing knowable priorities that can and should be traded off to maximise an individual or nuclear family’s composite level of wellbeing. In this framing, uncertainty is at risk of being flattened to exposures, with known parameters of severity and probability that can and should be bounded, managed and mitigated. On the topic of tackling the ‘sub-optimal’ savings practices of the poor, this manifests as a discourse framing the need to counter ‘behavioural biases’ such as ‘present bias’ (over-emphasising the importance of the present) and ‘inattention’ where attention is diverted away from intentions of saving by competing claims (Ashraf, Karlan, & Yin, 2006, 2010; Dupas & Robinson, 2013; Karlan, Ratan, & Zinman, 2014). In illuminating the complexity of calculative practices, this chapter seeks to place interlocutors’ experiences in direct relation to the terms used for the behavioural biases of ‘the unbanked’ in economic literature, aiming to foreground their expertise through their practices of calculation.

This chapter looks at the negative space of financial inclusion - the felt experience of everyday calculations for Jacques and his neighbouring stallholders, framed within mainstream discourses as ‘unbanked’. In doing so, it offers grounded counter-narratives about lives without formal financial services in poor countries, which mainstream financial inclusion discourse directly interprets as people whom access to formal finance will help (Schwittay, 2011). These counter-narratives shed light on the nuanced everyday labour of calibrating resources in response to an inundation of ambiguous information, preventing and pre-empting unaffordable harm while also (re)calibrating responsibilities and aspirations across different temporal scales.
I will begin by exploring how calculation was presented by participants, mapping out the underneath and edges of what constitutes this practice in their lives. Through this, I aim to trace processes of meaning-making across related and underpinning lines of thought and action to render visible some moments that exemplify the scope of this calculation. By exploring how vendors calibrated their shifting scope of agency in conditions of increasing precariousness, we see how their financial decision-making moves from more preventative to more pre-emptive in nature. This focus on margins of manoeuvrability, and what shapes them, illuminates the everyday efforts people are required to make to remake their worlds and selves through the pressures of an unfolding macro crisis.

This chapter is split into three sections. The first introduces the practice of calculation as a process of calibrating investments in safeguarding and creating what is of value. These investments express and mediate care for objects, health, social-economic connections and the attendant shape of affordable worlds. Using vendors’ descriptions of calculations they are required to make to maintain and remake their livelihoods and selves, I trace what these complex decision-making processes might tell us about the relationship between calculation, care and work. The next section focuses on prevention as mediated through these (re)calibrations, shedding light on how preventative investments reflect nuanced understandings of the edges of one’s agency and resources. Using the concept of anticipation work, I seek to elucidate how much labour this creates for people in calibrating and then avoiding unaffordable losses related to the absence of state provision of care. Finally, I will interrogate what escalating uncertainty means for the expertise and experience of this anticipation work, shifting its weighting from preventative to pre-emptive in light of increased unknowability and its everyday implications.
Ahmed often referred to specific times in his day he would carve out to ‘calculer’. His work as a moto transporter did not warrant a separate physical space so he would sit back in the office chair in his brother's stall's back room with his feet up on the wooden counter for this activity. A calculator resting on his lap would remain untouched for the most part, as he kept his eyes closed with his palm resting on his cheek. He splayed his fingers out across his face, blocking himself off from the conversations unfolding on the forecourt of the stall a metre away.

Ahmed didn’t refer to figures on paper or write down the results, opening his eyes only sporadically to punch out some calculations as he thought through all the open loops. This mathematical aspect formed a necessary part of his process of calculation, but was embedded within a more complex tangle of trade-offs that he worked his way through in his head. He explained how these calculations had become more and more complicated as liquidity dried up. Now it was becoming even more common to have to offer credit for transport, and often clients wouldn’t have the money for him when he went back to collect it later. This meant it took multiple trips using expensive fuel and multiples of his original time investment to get the same return, or to write off the loss, at least for the time-being.

Difficult as mediating the scales of space, time and money may have been, they didn’t seem to be the most complex parameters of these calculations. All of the efforts of his calculations were contingent on the success of the social mediation: ‘Right now, it’s hard, it takes time…. I must think, if I said something or made a joke and [the client] didn’t seem happy with me…. I must manage that the next day. I have to be sure that there aren’t problems between me and others”54

54 “À l’heure là, c’est dur, cela prends du temps…. Il faut penser, si j’ai dis quelque chose ou fait une blague et il a l’air qu’il est pas content avec moi…. Il faut le gérer le lendemain, il faut être sur qu’il y a pas des problèmes entre moi et les autres”
“Because the social and work are connected?” I asked. “Voila” he replied before making an example: “For example, if someone today made a remark about your skin [touching my arm], the next day, it must be sorted to be sure we can continue.”

This all took place in an increasingly saturated transport market, requiring more delicacy in his relations with clients and friends to avoid layering more financial stress onto them or offending them, rendering the social-economic relationships that sustain his business vulnerable. Ahmed’s calculative work drew together information and judgements about prices, petrol costs, potential write-offs and driving routes around the city. However, he also had to consider the amount of times he had been to try to collect the same money, his past, existing and potential future relationship with each client and the fragility or resilience that could be inferred from the social and emotional texture of their recent interactions. Keeping track of all the credits, times and locations of when his clients needed items to be collected and delivered were the cornerstones of his work. But he also had to stay attuned to, remember, and respond to any possible social strains they faced.

Ahmed had to match up the livelihood and life he wanted to create or stabilise with the resources he needed to leverage into economic and social outcomes. As well as managing and deploying resources, these precise calculative practices also require time, energy and mental bandwidth. Although Ahmed’s margins of manoeuvrability were socially and emotionally contingent, he often reflected on them alone in silence, to translate these less visible, legible or certain parts of experience into actionable information - to understand what work could and should be done in and on these relationships. Multiple scales of value are mutually constitutive, not parallel, and, rather than “constitute[ing] a cognitive map” actually represent a “repertoire, the elements pegged to each other in performance” (Guyer, 2004, p. 60). Individuals must draw on this repertoire but also attend to it, cultivate it, and adapt it in response to what unfolds around them, holding on to

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55 Me: “Car le social et le travail, ils sont connectés?”
Ahmed: “Voila. Par exemple, si aujourd’hui quelqu’un fait une remarque sur la couleur de ta peau, le lendemain, il faut le régler pour être sûr qu’on peut continuer.”
the truth that the effectiveness of any part of this repertoire is dependent on the unfolding context it is deployed into. A limited framing of the economic as wage labour and capital accumulation misses the mass of everyday economic activity that is underneath and interwoven with these more recognisable economics manifestations – what lies under the waterline of the economic iceberg (Gibson-Graham, Cameron, & Healy, 2013). Vendors made themselves living, both in terms of their livelihood and personhood, through the micro-decisions of everyday calculations. As we see here with Ahmed, they perform what may be clearly visible as calculation atop a dense network of other work that facilitates these calculations – internally and socially mediated labour that frames and capitalises on opportunities and recognises and mitigates vulnerabilities.

Moreover, the networks in which the financial transactions that constituted this market were embedded were social links that these vendors need to live within for most of their waking hours. Most vendors stayed at their stall from 8.30 until 6 or later Monday to Saturday and from 8.30 until 12 on Sundays. These sites needed to function socially as spaces to be, to pray, to eat, to nap, to connect with others, as collaborative spaces that facilitate individual life projects. Keeping clients was inextricably linked with keeping friends and respectful relations, and intentions to nurture both social and commercial connections were often mutually beneficial. But, in some cases, trade-offs were articulated.

Jacques refused to fix bags anymore as he found it brought too much potential conflict in pricing. Some clients were resistant to pay the price of the labour he wanted as it took multiples the time of shoe repairs. Even though many people were still willing to pay him the correct price, he said he didn’t want the complication. He had made a decision for himself years ago to forgo the earning potential to keep his space peaceful, sending clients on to other cobblers around the market to prevent anything “complicated” from coming up. He told me of interactions he had where

56 “compliqué”
people would accuse him of being dishonest for how he priced his work on bags. Even though he said they had happened infrequently, having the potential for these contestations was not worth the potential extra income for him.

When complicated things came up for Jacques, he often consulted Traoré, the older trader who owned several fabric stalls around the corner and parked his car across from Jacques’s stall, who we were introduced to in Chapter Three. Although Jacques had other close friends and a wide network of acquaintances at the market, Traoré was one of two ‘Papas’ he would defer to for more important advice. To live “straight ahead /right on” Traoré said, with his hand facing straight out from his chest and travelling out into the space in front of him, is to support your family, check on your neighbours and “try to earn [enough] to eat.”

Traoré expressed certainty on the ultimate importance of having children, and we had the conversation many times based on my own lack of children: “Children are what we bring to the world. Without children, what do we bring?” On deciding how many children to have though, he stated simply: “One cannot calculate, it’s a benediction… God will tell you if you are to have a child, to search for another wife, these are not decisions for me. It’s God who will decide. … But it’s not good to have children you don’t have the means for, that end up as children in the street. That, that is not interesting/good.”

Jacques often reflected on this mediation between the interconnected pulls and pushes of enacting God’s will, expectations of one’s capacity to care well for children over their lifetime, and one’s

57 “tout droite”
58 “chercher à gagner à manger”
59 “Les enfants sont ce qu’on amène à la monde. Sans les enfants, qu’est ce que nous amenons”
60 “On peut pas calculer, c’est une bénédiction… Dieu va te dire quand c’est le moment pour avoir un enfant, pour chercher une autre femme. Ce sont pas les décisions pour moi. C’est Dieu qui va décider…. Mais c’est pas bon d’avoir les enfants si on n’a pas les moyens, qui deviens les enfants dans le rue. Ça, c’est pas interessant.”
responsibility to bring children into the world. Jacques loves children, his stall often being the spot where the younger ones came to linger out of the sun for a while when their brothers and sisters were at school. He was always up to date on the studies and aspirations of the secondary school students Aida and Christian who stop by on their way home from school and showed him exercise books and projects. Christian often kept him company on Sunday afternoons when the market was closed, and traders would empty out at noon, but Jacques would stay on. Jacques lived with his mother, brother and his brother's wife and children but he preferred to stay here, catching up slowly on his work, napping or chatting with the children who lived in the courtyards nearby and wandered around the quiet market, avoiding the Sunday afternoon family activity of visiting other families or hosting visits.

“You can see, I like/love kids and kids, they like/love me too…..We are at ease together”61 he said one day after mediating gently in a small argument between the four- and five-year old siblings who lived in the courtyard two doors down from his stall. He also highlighted the practical need for a family and the lack of certain commensurable scales for calculations of care: “This coin here,” tapping a 50F coin on the bench between us “this coin can’t go to the market for you. A child can do that. What are you going to do if you’re old and too weak to buy food? A coin can’t prepare [food] for you, clean your house.”62

Jacques saw having a family as a practical necessity, as well as something he desired. However, even with his stall and his skill, and working 7 days a week, he had not been able to make enough for ‘grandieuse’ plans, like making significant progress on his house and getting to the stage of moving out to start a life with children. The income level Jacques had become accustomed to over the last

61 “Tu vois, j'aime les enfants, et les enfants m'aiment aussi… On est à l'aise ensemble.”
62 “Cette pièce là, cette pièce peut pas aller au marché pour toi. Un enfant peut faire ça. Qu’est-ce que tu va faire quand tu es trop vieux et trop faible pour aller chercher le nourriture? Une pièce peut pas préparer pour toi, faire le ménage.”
15 years at this market was enough to eat, to contribute to his family for school-fees and towards food. However, it was not sufficient for bigger ambitions like building his own house, which would facilitate him moving out of his family’s compound and getting married. He had owned the parcel of land for several years, and has started some of the building work, but he rarely got to the stage of accumulating enough money to progress because there was always someone and something he needed to support - someone in his extended family was sick, the fees were due for the cousin he pays for to go to school, he hurt his finger, his stall’s roof needed to be repaired.

Jacques was now in his late thirties, more than a decade older than most of the other unmarried men who work around him. However, he had not yet been able to afford to get married and have children. Nonetheless, he was calm in proclaiming his faith that God would make this so for him, despite the lack of evidence that the income from his activities or the outgo to his network of responsibility would shift favourably in the foreseeable future: “God will decide when it’s the moment for me to have children. It’s God who has given me [what I need to] do what I can do. If not, I would be in the city-centre [holding hands out] begging. God is cool.”

As Daniel Mains (2011) foregrounds in his engagement with the impossibility and deferral of social reproduction among young men in Ethiopia, the emotional experience of this depends on the success of “discursive sustainability”, the “possibility of constructing narratives” that maintain the plausibility of this dream through different resources. The faith and hope that Jacques’s dream of fatherhood would unfold with God’s timing allowed him to attend to the everyday costs to keep his business working, his body healthy, his objects dependable and to maintain his responsibilities. He did not calculate for these more ‘grandieuse’ things which ultimately lay outside his frame of

63 Jacques used the term “little brother” to speak of his cousin, which generally denoted a younger male relative or younger male in one’s network of close friends / connections for which one looked out and/or was responsible for in some way.

64 “C’est Dieu qui va dire quand c’est le moment pour moi d’avoir des enfants. C’est Dieu qui m’a donné a faire ce que je peut faire. Sinon, je serais au centreville en train de demander. Dieu est cool.”
actionable agency in the present but could speak about ways these plans have not yet been possible with calm and apparent certainty in the unpredictable future. Conversely, the everyday moments where the responsibilities he was accustomed to meeting slipped out of his grasp seemed much more painful and salient.

On the first day of the school year, Jacques seemed proud to pull the 60,000F (£82) out of his pocket, ready to bring to his cousin’s school later that day. He had dressed up in a matching outfit of orange and navy wax print for the occasion in contrast to the work clothes of sportswear he would usually wear to the market. However, he was upset the following week when a niece, who had been visiting Ouagadougou from his village, returned home before he had the liquidity to give her a gift towards her school supplies like he usually did. He appeared solemn and agitated the day before she left to return to the village, as the shoes stacked high on the table at the front of the stall, fixed and waiting for their owners to come and pay for and collect them. It was an expensive time of year for everyone, and especially strained this year, and so non-essential outlays were deferred. Others deferred the fees themselves, with schools allowing some parents / fee-payers to push out payments a few months to wait for the usual surge in business they would expect in December for the ‘fêtes’. When this surge did not happen, this complexity was compounded and knocked forward into the unfolding future.

A few days after Jacques had been unable to give his niece her annual back-to-school gift, he told me the story of what had happened and explained what had made him feel dejected, but also the labour he had to do to manage such disappointments. When talking about the poverty that made such trade-offs and misalignments happen, he explained it in relation to how he managed his interior experience of these painful calculations: “You have to manage poverty, and what is in your heart. Even if I am annoyed, or the sadness comes, that will only pass. Keep faith in God.”

65 “Il faut gérer le pauvreté, et ce qui est dans ton coeur. Même si je suis énervé, ou si le tristesse vient, ça passe seulement. Garder l’espoir avec Dieu.”
In this way, coming to terms with the edges of what was affordable in the current moment needed to be dealt with through both labour and faith to maintain his self, as he remade what his ‘world’ could hold.

Conversely, moments of joy showed what was sustaining in the meantime, and left traces of what may have made it so. The most joyful I ever saw Jacques was a moment that illustrated his scope of care, transcending what people are deemed to care about in bounded conceptions of both care work or financial management. Two students from his neighbourhood came by on a moto to tell him they had passed their bac. He gleefully pulled out 500F for each of them (£0.70, which would take repairing around five to ten pairs of shoes to make) and told them to go and get a Fanta - considered a luxury good for elites at many times the 25F-100F cost of locally made ginger or hibiscus drinks. Jacques was so happy to give the young men this gift that it stuck in my mind as a key moment for understanding how he invested himself, and his resources as part of that, in intergenerational relationships outside of those he more formally supported. Another moment
that showed this investment beyond the wider network he supported was when he accepted a suggestion to borrow my camera for a while and tell me more about his life outside the market through showing me photos he took. He gave warm descriptions of the picture of his mother reading the bible, of his football team, of his friends and the children at the market. However, the photo that elicited the most animated and reflective response was of a stranger he photographed when he was charging his phone at a neighbourhood charging station and a man stopped to dance to the music playing there: “He just stopped, and his bicycle dropped, and he danced. And I could see, he was happy in his heart. When I watched him, I could see. He was happy in his heart, and I was happy too. I don’t know him, but it was joy, the true joy. After the end of the song, he picked up his bike and he left.”

Figure 4.2: Man dancing by charging station (taken by Jacques)

66 “Il s’est arrêté, et son velo est tombé, et il dansait. Et j’ai pu voir, il était contente dans son coeur. Quand je l’ai regardé, je pouvais voir. Il était contente dans son cœur et j’étais contente aussi. Je le connais pas, mais c’était la joie, la vrai joie. Après la fin de la chanson, il a repris son velo et il est parti.”
This photo, of the top of a stranger’s head and his arms in the air, illustrated the investment that Jacques made in his broader world. Making a life worth living through day-to-day investments of money, but also of energy and attention, into what is resonant and nourishing, works to “confirm and create” the moral worlds that co-constitute personhood (Louw, forthcoming). These affective resonances underpin the seemingly minor or “petty reciprocations” that are inextricably linked with making a livelihood and keeping body and soul together through scarcity and uncertainty (du Toit and Neves, 2009, quoted in Ferguson and Li, 2018, p. 12). These traces of what Jacques cared about illuminate what constitutes a “life sustaining web” for him, the “tiny solidarities that prevent the individual from being ground down” (Lévi-Strauss 1985, p. 287).

To an extent, Jacques’ faith did allow him to “place [his] agency in abeyance” in terms of his long-term goals, but he also had to invest his effort in managing his feelings and thoughts in relation to the short- and long-term disappointment, and invest in maintaining his moral world and self in line with this (Miyazaki, 2006, p. 106). The calibration of resources reflects one’s (affective) investment into what makes a good life and how that can be safeguarded and created (Narozzky and Besnier, 2014). This requires people “to continuously gather up the tools and possibilities to endure in volatile urban conditions”, including affective resources which can be nourished through small investments of money, time and attention in order to participate in the “mundane hopemaking” of everyday solidarity (Simone, 2016, p. 6; Pettit, 2017, p. 52).

Jacques’ ways of engaging with the world and keeping body and soul together show the complex ways in which “care for a world” and care for oneself are interwoven (Louw, forthcoming). Guyer reminds us to be broad and bold in terms of how we conceive of investment, especially when people live in poverty and there is often a clear opportunity cost to every choice on the investment of resources. While “fantasies of intimacy” are often confined to normative familial formations and romantic relationships, intimacy is also expressed through the attachments we form in being together in our in-betweens, beyond the structures within which care is more broadly validated
In particularly stark absences of state provision of basic services, networks of who people care for (in financial, social and physical ways) are required to be wider than a bounded nuclear family, or the limits of a polygamous household. Going beyond even this broader remit of who people care for, we can see what and who we care about also shapes our investments, of resources and self.

Nuanced calibration work was done by Jacques, Ahmed and their neighbours every day in responding to their evolving understandings of the edges of their agency. Ahmed's present experience required delicate calculations and social skills to try to eke out the edge of possible liquidity as it dried up in the market. An increasingly narrow set of potentials of how to be intensified the complexities of these daily recalibrations, representing his exposure to so many open loops of the pending calculations of others that he was dependent on to meet his most basic of responsibilities. The same constraints to liquidity (and solvency) led Jacques to be unable to fulfil his expected responsibilities within his extended family - to contribute to his niece's school year - when other school-fee-burdened clients deferred their payments for his work.

Deferral of school-fee instalments to later in the year meant that liquidity for the whole market as a system didn't materialise when expected in December. These series of knock-on vulnerabilities reverberated around this market, and the country. They are a condensed version of the rhythm of illnesses and moments of rupture within Jacques's network of responsibility that have brought him to this point without yet fulfilling his “grandieuse” plans to move into an independent space and start his own family.

But not everything is a calculation. Faith in the ordering of one's lifeworld maintains a sense of expectation that the future will bring something new and that one's aspirations and this grander scale will come with God's own timing. Meanwhile, the ways Jacques responded to the people he is linked to beyond those he is responsible for illustrate ways of investing his self and his resources...
that upheld a life with joy and meaning in the meantime while he could wait. By investing in this dense world of meaning, Jacques managed his poverty and what was in his heart.

Calculations and the parameters used within them reflect and mediate complexity, internalising perceived limits and/or denoting shifts between different registers of value. The value-laden expertise Jacques, Ahmed and their neighbouring vendors exercised in their everyday allow us to see how this “cognitive activity is value-laden and integrally related with the (value-laden) settings in which it takes place” (Lave, 1984, p. 110). Contextualising calculation within everyday lives foregrounds the expertise that is required to bring together and mediate entangled forms of holding and conceptualising value. If we focus on financial decisions without exploring the work underneath and around them, we are not attentive to what exactly is relevant to a calculation another is performing – what they need to identify and assemble or reject as relevant information in order to facilitate this process, and the effort that this sifting and sorting entails.

The processes of calibration undertaken by these market vendors across different scales, temporalities and registers of value illuminate what they care about in what they are investing themselves in, and what work they have to do to align their resources to what this sustenance and world-building requires. People invest their resources in their worlds in ways that are inextricably embedded within their wider life experience, in a ‘combinatorial juggling of multiple independent scales – for things and people, in quantities and qualities’ (Guyer, 2004, p. 131). This labour of calibrating entails collecting, holding and mediating between different emotionally and socially contingent threads of uncertain information in thought and action in order to keep body and soul together.

Decreasing revenue and increasing uncertainty called for nuanced responses in seeking out footholds in what was unfolding, reconfiguring what is and what could be while maintaining everyday life. The tenability of responsibilities and aspirations depended on what came to be
understood as possible, plausible and probable through what was and what was not circulating at the market. This affective state of felt (im)potentiality framed individual’s “margin of manoeuvrability” - “where [they] might be able to go and what [they] might be able to do in every present situation” (Massumi, 2002, p. 212).

**Prevention: Responding to Unaffordable Threat through Preventative Investments**

The anticipation work done through calibration mediates the complexity and activity of waiting. Anticipation work involves the cognitive, emotional and social labour of calculating *how to wait* and the expertise this demands. This required vendors to situate themselves in a “moral economy in which the future sets conditions of possibility for action in the present, in which the future is inhabited in the present” (Adams, Murphy, & Clarke, 2009, p. 249). The following section will explore how value is recognised and stored through evolving understandings of these constellations of the possible, which results in an oscillation between different orders of calculation. What is a reasonable frame within which one can expect to have agency, and how does one exercise that agency on a day-to-day basis?

The preventative spending of time, energy and attention on staying healthy and keeping objects in working order was a constant thread at the market, in sharp contrast to the narratives around present-bias in behavioural economics referenced in the introduction to this chapter. Preventing complications that can be anticipated is more complex than behavioural economics would have us believe, as multi-faceted constellations of investment of one’s self and one’s resources must prevent the loss of what is valued and can’t afford to be lost.

Huguette had run the tea kiosk across from Jacques’ stall for 15 years. Huguette and her children lived in the rooms off the courtyard behind her stall. Her husband, a veterinarian, lived away from
the city for work during the week and came back to spend the weekends with Huguette and their five children. Huguette articulated calculating care in how she prepared food for her family and made choices around ingredients, mediating different temporalities of calculation and various facets of this investment. Some cheaper ingredients like lower-quality oil poison the body, she told me, resulting in spending 10,000F, 15,000F, 20,000F, to get treatment, money that would have to be sourced by borrowing. She didn’t buy meat unless she could afford quality meat which she would tighten her belt to buy, closing her eyes to hand over the money. She mimed the actions squeezing her eyes shut and then pulling an imaginary belt out from her waist and straightening her back in response.

Huguette expressed a certainty of the deferred cost implicit in saving money by buying cheap, poor quality ingredients: “you have money, which is not money\(^{67}\). In this way, deteriorating health becomes a financial liability that manifests later “and then, in that moment, you suffer\(^{68}\). “I don’t complicate eating\(^{69}\)” she introduced an example of when she could have been tempted to complicate her life by preparing food her family would want, but downgrading the quality of the ingredients. She reminded me of a simple green sauce she had dropped on my wrist to taste the week before. She hadn’t had money for fresh ingredients so she bought dried fish and leaves and made the sauce with “l’eau simple” (plain water) instead of buying cheap oil for 25F or 50F. With this, and every similar decision, she was proud that she hasn’t introduced the undue complexity of potential unnecessary illness into her and her family’s life: “I haven’t complicated my life. And my children, they are not complicated\(^{70}\)”

\(^{67}\)“tu as l’argent, qui n’est pas l’argent”

\(^{68}\)“et puis, à ce moment, tu souffres”

\(^{69}\)“Je complique pas manger…”

\(^{70}\)“Je n’ai pas compliqué ma vie. Et mes enfants, ils sont pas compliqués”.
Jacques was also very careful about where he ate - he would not accept prepared food from outside a small number of trusted vendors, and on days where he could not access that, he would often skip meals. One day he came to the market annoyed that his nephews had eaten all the food left for him before he got back from football the previous evening. He said he couldn’t just go out in the quartier to get something to eat as the affordable things that were available then were not “propre” and so he wouldn’t eat until he could get a proper meal from someone he knows to be good at lunchtime. “Nonnnnn”, he drew out the word while shaking his head “I don’t eat if I’m not sure, sure, sure that it’s clean/proper. It’s better to be hungry than to be sick?”

, framing his decision not based on the immediate financial-calorie trade-off, but between being sick or hungry.

Playing football on Sundays was something Jacques enjoyed and was proud of his talent for, but most of all he framed his commitment to do this every week as keeping himself well. This was not something compartmentalised from his economic life, but rather keeping himself living and healthy represented most of the money and attention he spent on himself, with the rest going to his responsibilities in his network. He didn’t regularly go to maquis bars and, beyond a few religious pilgrimages and cinema trips a year, this was how he invested in both leisure and health. He was often injured in ways that would impact his day-to-day life negatively for a few days, weeks or even months but he was steadfast in his conviction that playing football was important for preventing any grave illness or breakdown of his health: “It gives health if I stay fit”.

During the year of my fieldwork, he hurt his knees and shins several times, was head-butted giving him a several-day headache and broke or dislocated his finger. When he first injured his finger, we spoke a lot about how he could get it seen to, what help he may need. He explained that it would be hundreds of thousands of CFA (hundreds of pounds) to even start getting full treatment if

71 “Je mange pas si je suis pas sûr, sûr, sur que c’est propre. C’est mieux d’avoir faim que d’être malade.”
72 Maquis are bars, often open to the street outside.
73 “ça donne la santé si je reste en forme”
there was anything wrong with it that couldn't easily be fixed through accessible means. He tried the drop-in clinics, diverted 2,000F (£3.) to a healer in his neighbourhood, but bringing his injury to the hospital nearby seemed completely out of the frame of possibility rather than a potential escalation of action. He gradually began rolling out a response of “propre” when asked how it was, but I still wondered if the pain lingered as he sometimes held the finger differently. When I came back eight months after the end of my fieldwork, and over a year after the injury, he told me “It’s there but it’s OK”.

Disease is not just physical ill-being and unwelcome financial outgo. At a certain level of access to resources, this can also be something that cannot be afforded - an irreversible step-wise downward shift in your wellbeing that may even end in your death. For Jacques, it was worth opening himself up to injury which had affordable, if incomplete, options of treatment, on the understanding that it would prevent serious illnesses that could not be afforded. When talking about sexual relationships, Jacques was emphatic about always protecting himself from disease, noting succinctly “We don’t have the means for a big illness”. He explained how sometimes people would sleep with anyone and they should know that they’re exposing themselves to illnesses that they could die or continue to suffer greatly from without being able to get expensive hospital treatment.

Just as Jacques invested in his health through spending time, money and attention to prevent unaffordable injury or illness, his care of physical objects also reflected the edges of affordable inattention. He would scold me for the cracked screen on my phone, evidence of having let it fall on the ground, or for putting it in my pocket and leaving it vulnerable to falling again. He showed me how he places his phone carefully on the bench beside his enamel bowl of tools, letting one end of it touch the wood before lowering the other end. He told me how he leaves it there all the

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74 “C’est là, mais ça va”

75 “On n’a pas les moyens pour une grande maladie”
time unless he needs to use it. He wagged his finger back and forth with one hand and then went on to mime all the ways he wouldn’t treat his phone and their consequences. “I don’t put it in my pocket or move it all around” he said, mirroring his descriptions with the imaginary phone in his hand, before stretching out his fingers to drop the imaginary phone from a height, looking down to where it would fall - “It will fall, it will break”.

Even though I knew the limits of our “grasping for language” in French, preventing the frequent use of conditional tenses most of the time, Jacques often used caveated language or the verb pouvoir - can - for potentials. He was usually precise and direct, so it struck me how he expressed this. Rather than opening oneself up to risk or uncertainty by being less careful - peut tomber, peut caisser – not paying close attention to one’s phone opened oneself up to a certainty of an eventual loss through carelessness. It will fall, it will break. The certainty of not being able to afford a loss, or survive a degradation in condition (of objects, of one’s own body, of the country) past a certain degree cast the parameters around everyday decisions and where it was worth placing attention, time, and money in order to make informed decisions across whatever temporality and scale was affordable.

Clearly, there is no novelty in wanting to avoid serious illness or the degradation of health and belongings, but these potential degradations were often articulated as financially unaffordable consequences of a lack of investment of attention, energy, and money. Jacques could forego the cost of going to football, the expected costs of soothing minor ailments and repairing his boots. However, he also understood and internalised the limits of agency were he to not care for his body through exercise, a different scale and temporality of exposure to risk without means of mitigation should it manifest. He could also mend bags to make extra money, but he turned away paying clients even when his stall was not busy so as to prevent the ‘previsible’ tensions that could

76 “Je le mets pas dans ma poche ou se déplacer tout autour”

77 “Ça va tomber, ça va caisser”
introduce into the social relations his livelihood is entangled with. His own expertise took into account a more nuanced, grounded understanding of his own agency and limits thereof, allowing him to prevent reaching these limits through his choices on how to spend his time, attention and money.

The idea that people could shift themselves into a new state where they had no plausible or palatable options to avoid perpetual discomfort or even death articulated boundaries on possible trajectories. These edges shaped decisions of how to spend their attention and money in ways that reflected stakes infinitely heightening beyond a certain point of conceivable control or influence. Actions that could prevent approaching these limits of life were folded into everyday practices and decision-making. Moreover, the interdependence of emotional, social and material parameters of their margins required vendors to have nuanced understandings of how different forms of losses and enrichments may interact with one another to keep their lives and livelihoods together.

This process of internalising and responding to the evolving limits of calculations mapped out the edges of what was possible, plausible and probable in terms of the aspirations and responsibilities that calculations represent. At Marché Collé, this resulted in preventative investments of time, energy and attention across different planes of potential impact to stay healthy and keep objects working in ways that reflected vendors’ assumed limits of agency. Through understandings of their own access to public services and private and socially mediated resources, traders made decisions to tack a path through an uncertain present. Their precise investments demonstrated and transcended their economic expertise. holding and cultivating value in their objects, health and relationships.

This expertise in attuning to and responding to what ‘previsible’ complications may arise and cannot be afforded underlies a precisely calibrated set of practices to prevent the loss of what is valued and what one can’t afford to lose or weather. As the vendors at this market experienced
increasing uncertainty, Maurer’s reflection lands with heavier resonance: “people aren’t necessarily… orienting themselves to a known world” (Maurer and Tooker, 2014, p. 2). The knowability of the market and country around them was changing, the path-dependent matrices of factors in and onto which they make decisions had blurred, with new contingencies to grapple with. Dealing with these different degrees of knowability prompted a different orientation to knowledge and action, invoking pre-emption in contrast to prevention, as acting and deciding “precisely on the basis of an absence or an unknown, on the basis of that which can never be captured” (Amoore & de Goede, 2008, p. 179).

**Pre-emption: Calculating with the Unknowable**

Vendors’ work in managing the intensifying macro insecurity they were exposed to required a qualitative change in the nature of their everyday decisions. The increased complexity of balancing care and resources shifted their labour to a pre-emptive orientation towards the decisions they made to distribute their resources. Beyond just their trade at the market, their calculations facilitated the “speculative transactions [that]…enable[d] the momentary stabilisation of any situation as it negotiate[d] a particular positioning or niche within the swirling intersections of urban life” (Simone, 2019, p. 1002).

Huguette’s specific set of choices at that moment reflected a complexity in the world she was trying to stabilise for herself and her family. As well as her tea kiosk and her husband’s salary as a veterinarian, her family also owned some of the neighbouring stalls. Even though a few of these are usually idle, some additional rental income supplemented the kiosk’s takings, buffering her downturn in earnings. Her husband paid for the core outgoings of rice, house maintenance, school fees etc. while Huguette sought to meet the volatile outgo of the household with an increasingly less dependable income from the kiosk.
She now framed her reduced income as enough to keep her children in school, to satisfy them and encourage them to concentrate on finishing their studies. But often “si je dors, je dors pas bien” [when I sleep, I don’t sleep well] as she would be concerned about not having enough money to repurchase the tea-bags or the Nescafe granules for the kiosk and also give the children what they need. If their bike was broken and they need 100F-200F for the mechanic or she wanted to give them 100F to get lunch or a soft drink at school as a treat to motivate and encourage them, rather than giving them food from the kiosk, this could often conflict with the necessary purchases to keep the kiosk going. These decisions would keep her awake, she told me, holding her forearms up to her chest and turning her torso side to side with her eyes closed, “tourner, tourner, tourner” [turning, turning, turning].

In her seminal study on gendered claims on household resources in Ghana and the UK, Whitehead references the household accounting practices that go beyond the allocation of resources and processes of needs articulation and prioritisation to “the conceptual and material distinctions between the collectivity and individual” with the ultimate responsibility imbued in “maternal altruism” leading to women backstopping household budgets: “mothers will not let [their families] starve” (Whitehead, 1984, p. 100, 107, 101). The preoccupations that resulted in sleepless nights for Huguette, trying to calculate the interconnected threats of letting her business or children be in danger of neglect or discouragement, did not relate to her children physically starving. Rather, she sought to maintain a state she was proud of cultivating for them, to keep them remaining ‘uncomplicated’ so they could maintain a survival of the aspirations they had, and that she has for them, in the face of a constriction of their resources.

“Ça se degrade”, Huguette described her experience of security after the third terrorist attack in Ouagadougou’s city centre in March 2017. As introduced in Chapter Three, the most ambitious attack to date took place on the same week as the trial of two of the most senior men in Blaise Compaoré’s former regime began. Targeting two of the most secure buildings in the city by
successfully setting off a car bomb within the army headquarters during a G5 Sahel meeting and gaining peripheral access to the French embassy, the attack was seen as a bold escalation that edged threat closer to non-elite Ouagalaise people. The increasingly salient implications of the security situation prompted more uncertainty around the likelihood of the stagnant market picking up in the near future, or of the social and economic fabric of the country degrading further.

“Ça décourage le population”, Huguette continued, remarking on the security situation and the current regime’s apparent lack of capacity to deal with it. Days after the third attack, she told me of how she took her courage from God in order to make herself go to church. She asked: “if they did that, why will they not come to a Christian church and kill all of us there?”

Beyond the usual calculations of whether she could afford the fuel, and ‘intra-household-bargaining’ for access to the moto she shared with the rest of the family, Huguette now needed to steel her own courage or that calculation was rendered irrelevant. Along with the time, petrol and access to a vehicle, she framed courage as a prerequisite that she needed to get her back to church after the attack. However, she was also investing in courage through this journey, and the calculation that facilitated it: she explained how she asked God for courage to allow her to leave her house and get to the church and now she knows she can still go to worship, she can take her courage from God. In short, she had to actively invest in her courage and her faith to push back against her own discouragement and fear.

Through this crisis, vendors consistently linked together the degradation of their own progress, and the decline in opportunities and living conditions of others, with the capacity of the state to manage the economic and security situation. Huguette placed the fingers of her right hand flat, perpendicular to her body in front of her and dipped it slowly down, miming a hand coming from

78 “Si ils ont fait ça, pourquoi ils vont pas venir dans les églises Chrétienes et tuer nous tous là?”
above calmly and deliberately, telling me of the need for the "main divine" [divine hand] to intervene in that moment of heightened uncertainty or else she could not see a way that the government would keep paying state salaries, which would filter through to a complete stall of the economy. “If not, it’s [the moment the state stops paying public servants is] coming”, she said, “I believe that.”

Values and belief systems that transcend the material and social interact with financial decision-making, especially in managing uncertainty, through practices such as sacrificial offerings, prayer, thanks for blessing (Shipton, 2014), but also conceptually through the framing of the future and our part in shaping it. Huguette invests her time, courage and money into going to pray, knowing this will encourage her, it will give her the courage that she needs to bolster herself and her family’s faith in their future. Faith and hope are not a pre-existing resource or characteristic - hope “takes place” (Hauer, Østergaard Nielsen, & Niewöhner, 2018, p. 1). Looking at the co-construction of hope gives shape to the frame within which decisions are understood and made: “its generative dimension does not only point to possibilities, but literally brings potential futures into being and stabilises pathways for transformation” (ibid., p. 2). In this way, "affect also allows us to expand our sense of agency – where change can include feeling something (different)" and such feelings can in turn have material and social ramifications (Meer, 2019, 202).

Others had also become fearful of attackers opening fire in traffic in the city, now that the pattern of attacks on international and elite hotels and restaurants had been broken and broadened to targets that were more ambitious and more likely to harm Burkinabé people beyond the elite. Huguette reflected the crystallising fears of those around her, often synthesising and responding to what she had gleaned from the conversations at the bar of her tea stall that morning - “these boys are not Tuaregs, they are Mossis and they look like our sons,” she said, referring to photos

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79 “Sinon, ça viens. Je crois ça.”
80 “ces garçons sont pas des Touaregs, ils sont des Mossis et ils ressemblent à nos fils”
circulating on smartphones allegedly showing the dead attackers in checked shirts and jeans covered in blood with their guns and “Lafi” bottles beside them. “They aren’t just in the North anymore, they are amongst us in our neighbourhoods and our neighbours must be supporting them.”

Huguette mediated between potential income and stability in her business and other investments with very different shapes of certainty and temporality through her everyday calculations. She risked losing sales and potential future custom if she didn’t have tea or coffee replenished for her customers, but she sought to stave off more nebulous potential losses through small investments in her children. She framed such micro-expenses for her children – 100F for lunch at school instead of giving them a packed sandwich from the kiosk, 50F for soft drinks or letting the older children borrow the moto and use petrol - as ways to “encourage” them to stay motivated and focused on their studies despite the increasing threats around them. She cupped her hands around the side of her eyes and ran them forwards and backwards when describing these costs, mimicking a tunnel that blinkered them from looking around at what was happening and getting drawn into it. In this way, small treats safeguarded the future they had imagined, a “performative conversion, a devotion of present income to the hope of future gains” (Guyer, 2004, p. 99).

Sugary drinks are often framed as an example of a ‘temptation good’ in behavioural economics literature and development policy literature, one of the ways in which money that could be saved is frittered away on daily non-essential expenditures, a symptom of the ‘behavioural biases’ that are often used to explain suboptimal financial allocations. Looking at ‘inattention’, a lack of focus on or adherence to a specific financial management plan identified as one of these core ‘behavioural biases’, it is hard to see how Huguette could navigate this set of vulnerabilities and

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81 Lafi is the a popular water brand in Burkina. The plastic bottles are expensive but they are omnipresent in their recirculations as containers for cheap juices, for fuel etc.

82 “Ils sont plus seulement dans le Nord, ils sont parmi nous, dans nos quartiers. C’est clair que nos voisins leur donnent un soutien”
opportunities without the agility to stay attuned and respond to what emerges. Being exposed to uncertainty requires these vendors to be vigilant in drawing on their social, emotional and cognitive resources to remain attuned and responsive to the evolving world around them. Another core behavioural bias, ‘present bias’, assumes the present is overvalued compared to the past, but Huguette’s framing of treats as pre-emptive investments here illustrate a keen awareness, and responsibilisation for, the future potentials of her family.

Huguette framed her decisions in the context of rising “immorality” around her and her children, by drugs and prostitution that was increasing as the market stagnated and young people saw few options for their future, and of course the increasingly salient fear of radicalisation. When contextualising her own relative privilege in having several forms of income, she also told me of the “mamas” with babies strapped to their back who “push, push, push” - mimicking the pedalling of an old bike with her hands - who now get up at three instead of four in the morning to go and get the best of the cheap produce to lay out on their pagnes83 and sell at the edges of the markets that are becoming more saturated. As we saw with Traoré in Chapter Three, vendors sensed what shifts were unfolding through witnessing one another’s experiences, and affective responses, and these attunements refracted through their own calculations of care by reshaping what was felt to be possible, individually and collectively. These senses of what sustains, what challenges, and what is changing are made explicit in certain moments but also lie latent and evolving in the “structures of feeling… beneath the surface of explicit life that is collective, saturating atmospheres of held but inexplicit knowledge” (Berlant, 2015, p. 194.; cf. Williams, 1997)

These new constraints and unpredictability saturated market experience during those final months of my fieldwork, shaping decisions based on an inherent lack of knowledge about where the market, and individual lives and livelihoods there, would go. Writing of the experience of

83 Pagnes are measures of fabric worn as skirts and used to sit on or carry items in.
speculative traders in Juba, Newhouse considered the practices of calculation that a context of omnipresent uncertainty engendered, exploring the labour that underpins hedging as a “calculative practice that is produced through the tension between the desire to discern and the impossibility of actually doing so” (2017, p. 506). Within a market, in its own specific way, the future is folded into the present even more intensely and explicitly than some other places, layering new forms of speculation and saturation into an already strained market-place.

Around the corner from Huguette and Jacques’s stalls, Traoré was sitting on a stack of dusty fabric outside one of his handful of fabric stalls, all filled with piles and rolls of surplus stock from Europe. He was contemplating what he should do, if he had any alternative to waiting and seeing - maybe he would open a supply stall in one of the units to sell materials for shoe repair as that is one trade that people still are paying for. He was also trying to figure out a role he could give his son who is finishing school that year, without prospects for employment. Further along the row, Safitou was considering whether to sell off the wigs she had in stock for a loss. They were worth 11,000F but selling them for 6,000F would give her at least some money, and she said she was obliged to take the money when “il y a que 6,000F” [there is only 6,000F].

At the market, “you depend on others”, Safitou said, contrasting her experience against those of “big/important people” who were educated and connected, and could become state employees. “Even if there is no market, they earn/attain”, Safitou says, using the verb to touch or to attain to describe the unconditional salary that state employees could rely on. She was eating rice brought from home from a metal saucepan and invited me to share with her - she now woke up at three in the morning to cook this food before coming to the market. Not knowing when she would next make a reliable income from her hairdressing services and supply sales, Safitou wouldn’t spend money on food there anymore if she could help it. Even though the petrol for the journey to the

84 “tu dépends aux autres”
85 “grandes personnes”
market often rendered a day as overall loss-making, coming the market at least still maintained some potential for making money. As Traoré said of his continued decision to come on Sunday mornings despite fewer vendors opening their stalls, it is better to come and “try to earn [enough] to eat” than to stay at home eating the money from yesterday.

Efforts to minimise loss and vulnerability, while optimising future possibility often don’t manifest as a decision to shift direction or change pace, but rather to defer change and maintain as much of the everyday as can be managed. The process of deferral, which is how most vendors I knew were trying to weather the current uncertainty, involves micro decisions being made and re-made constantly: “Deferral also relates to preparedness as the putting forward of action and prolonging of anticipation, not as procrastination but again as abduction, of telescoping the future into the present” (Adams et al., 2009, p. 258).

Madi was young and could not stop moving, which made the waiting he saw as his only option seem even more uncomfortable. His shoe stall had been hit hard, with new shoes a luxury far outside the calculative frame for most, and hence effectively illiquid. He wandered around the market for conversations with his friends and fellow traders increasingly over the months to pass the time away. He was lingering after prayer-time one evening holding the hand of Ismael, the young butcher, who was still wearing his Maggi apron covered with the day’s residue, swinging their clasped hands rhythmically as he talked. As the dusk got darker, he described the tension between feeling a pressure to get home and his difficulty with reconciling his current reality with his family. Madi said he had to go home but was also not in a rush because his family didn’t understand that he cannot make money at the market. He was frustrated at the tension this introduced into his relationships with his parents and the rest of his family, and their perceptions of him, as well as his own relationship to his frustrated aspirations: “You are at the market all day

86 “chercher à gagner à manger”
and you haven’t earned [anything]. How do you explain that? They don’t believe that you haven’t been to the maquis [bar]. But I’m a good Muslim, I don’t want to drink, I want to be engaged [to be married]”

His family’s perceptions, that he must be going to a bar to spend his money on beer, brochettes or girls rather than waiting at the market until it closes and prayers finish, diverged from the reality those around him on Ousmane’s forecourt understood - there was no market for the shoes he sold to pay for such adventures. There was currently no way for him to earn enough to materialise the plans he and his parents had for how and when he would transition into his own life outside of his parent’s home. This brought his market relationships into heightened focus, providing a space that was more comfortable than his home in ways, where the parameters of his day-to-day calculations, but also his long-term affective investments in being married over drinking, could be recognised.

“There is not [enough money/market] to eat” was a common response to salutations at this time. As Madi lingered after saying he had to leave, he twitched the fingers of the hand that wasn’t holding his friend’s hand, saying there was not even enough to smoke, which is what allowed him to think. He had too much to think about and no cigarettes to think with. He had been trying to decide whether to marry a villageoise girl, which was never what he imagined he would do, or to wait and see if his business picks up. “The girls in Ouaga, they like money”. Based on the differences in social status, marrying a villageoise girl would have marked an acceptance of a new type of future for him and his family, diverging from the aspirations they collectively had held for him.

87 “Tu es au marché toute la journée et tu n’a pas gagné. Comment expliquer? Ils peuvent pas croire que tu n’étais pas au maquis. Mais je suis un bon Musluman, je veux pas boire, je veux être fiancé”
88 “Il y a pas à manger”
89 “Les filles à Ouaga, elles aiment l’argent”
New subjectivities can be shaped and expressed precisely through the actual moments where the constituent elements of calculative processes are assembled, and explicitly held in frame in relation to one another. These moments enforce a recalibration of the constellation of aspirations and responsibilities that are deemed realistic. Step-wise shifts in these expectations of the future are staved off, surrendered to, or engagement with them is paused if possible. A decision to wait to decide is often part of the calculation, leaving myriad open loops, with interconnected dependencies. Sometimes agency is exercised through deciding to wait for a clearer view that may take years to come.

Madi’s efforts to maintain the legitimacy and plausibility of his past aspirations in the face of countervailing current experience suspended him mid-decision in how he could map out his life going forward, echoing the day-to-day rhythm of getting by. “God will provide, we must wait”90, Daouda - an older tailor who Madi prayed with every day - responded to him a few days later when Madi visited his stall while circulating the market and said “There isn’t [enough money] to eat”91. Madi challenged the divine timing: “We will die before that happens. What should we eat while we wait?”92. Just as Huguette strained to encourage her children through complex calculative trade-offs, this inter-generational encouragement and hope aimed to over-ride the despair and confusion of the present moment and ‘previsible’ future. Daouda as an established vendor and ‘Papa’ took the strain of practicing hope and courage in supporting Madi in this moment.

For Ousmane, the current constraint becoming chronic also shaped his decisions on social reproduction. Ousmane and his first wife Tenin had both wanted Ousmane to marry a second wife soon, but the plan was now on hold. A year earlier, Ousmane had expressed his wish for a second wife as more of his own aim rather than as a joint decision with his wife. He had expressed

90 “Dieu va donner, il faut attendre”
91 “Il y a pas à manger.”
92 “On va décéder avant que ça arrive. Qu’est-ce qu’on mange en attendant?”
this as God’s wish for him, coupled with his understanding of the societal expectation on someone with current and expected future means to support a larger household. However, Tenin had warmed to the idea over the months, and especially around the end of her pregnancy with their fourth child. Ousmane spoke of her becoming impatient for another adult to spend her days with at home, to share her work and her life with while he was at the market.

However, the time horizon for this had now been pushed into the frame of years rather than months as Ousmane’s expectation of being able to support a larger family frayed. Ousmane joked about how his wife would be able to understand more easily him leaving the country to work for long periods of time abroad, than she could understand how he consistently spent his time and attention at the market without earning a real profit. She felt isolated at home and Ousmane’s coming to-and-fro without producing enough for the family to maintain their expectations. This tension required emotional work from both Tenin and Ousmane in developing new shared understandings about what the market was to him and to them as a family. They both had to negotiate the implications of intensified financial strain at both the market and within the household, but also navigate an additional layer of collaborative renegotiations of time, energy, attention and intention towards the collective overlap of household-market projects.

Moreover, like Madi and his family, the dissonance between Ousmane’s wife’s perception of the market based on what he returned with, and his own experience of its everyday rhythms also intensified the importance of his social world at the market. Sharing that specific form of tension with others facing similar experiences held the space for this dissonance to be joked and vented about with those who viscerally understood the limits of the market and witnessed their work there every day. While those at home struggled with the fact that vendors could not bring home the money they needed to maintain and build the lives they had expected, social relationships at the market were often deepened through these solidarities. In various ways, these shifts galvanised the investment vendors had in the market socially and affectively, despite its waning capacity to
support them financially. These reconfigurations reflect how “disaster so folds its way through the ordinary that it is impossible to distinguish the reproduction of life from the ways it wears out people and worlds” (Berlant, 2012, p. 85). The moments where expectations fall away can also be moments where footholds (or even toeholds) are forged, such as between vendors in leaning into the liveable community they had created for themselves at the market.

The state of flux and deteriorating security vendors were dealing with required a new weighting towards pre-emptive rather than preventative orientations, and the associated work inherent in deferral and waiting. An increasing need to “hedge” within decision-making foregrounded a “fraught interdependence between a lack of reliable knowledge and calculative practices” (Newhouse, 2017, p. 503). As such, vendors often expressed their agency through the choices to embody courage and to encourage others, particularly inter-generationally, investing in hope for oneself and others rather than having any margins within one’s business to exercise. When structural violence bears down on people, we have seen how this can “walk a line, between inciting adaption, and thus new capacities, or a wearing away of desire and ability” (Simone and Pieterse, 2018, p. 96). Often, while waiting for clarity, vendors’ margins of manoeuvrability were leveraged through investing in the faith, courage and tenacity to buoy the imaginary of a future for oneself and younger generations that was not currently ‘previsible’.

Holding hope for a turn in fortunes for the market and country - and the people making themselves living in them - was inextricably tied to practices of calibration that held open cognitive, social and affective loops of inter-dependency. An imperative to shift from the preventative towards the pre-emptive reshaped skills and work, but also selves and worlds. By reshaping their practices of calculating care, vendors’ reoriented their expertise and their social and moral worlds, reflecting immanent subjectivities. Remaining attuned to unfolding situations and acting into an uncertain future requires a sensitivity to what is important, maintaining both the margin of liquidity
needed to continue and the hope and courage to “presence forth” (Louw, forthcoming) a future without this scarcity.

Through difficult moments where different registers of value need to be brought into the same plane of attention in order for decisions to be made, vendors’ reflections and actions around relative conceptions of value(s) offer rich counter-narratives for perceptions of behavioural biases. While the behavioural biases of ‘inattention’ and ‘present bias’ are considered to undermine efficient savings behaviour in the economics literature, we have seen how paying attention to what cannot be lost in the future prompts precise investments in the present. Being careful with one’s health, objects and relationships requires vigilant attention to avoid unaffordable loss or degradation. Moreover, holding and conceptualising value in individual and collective hope and tenacity frame investments of time, energy, money and attention that are no less generative or more contingent than investments of cash in business expenses or savings accounts.

**Conclusion**

In response to intensifying scarcity, and unknowability of both inputs and outputs of calculations, deft expertise is required to mediate increased exposure to loss and uncertainty. The financial management practices of traders at Marché Collé illuminate the responsive and value-laden practices needed to calculate through uncertainty. Calibrating the edges of one’s own agency, and of those whose wellbeing one is actively invested in, determines life paths and decisions from the most granular to the most consequential levels. Huguette’s decision between buying tea bags for her stall or encouraging her children through treats that keep their focus on their schooling during rapid shifts in the landscape of their potential future is loaded with the complexity of the path-dependence of her constrained decisions.
These counternarratives interrupt understandings that constitute poverty and precariousness as a problem of the behavioural biases that may be barriers to the poor’s demand for financial services. In the frame of behavioural economics, spending money that could go into essential business expendables on pocket money for sugary drinks and other treats of encouragement could be seen as an over-emphasis on the present, on “temptation goods”, resulting in sub-optimal savings or business investment rather than an investment in the tenacity and aspirations of a child in a moment of uncertainty. Although more evidently impactful, Jacques’ decision(s) of whether and when to have children reflects a knowing about the tenability of this aspiration in the short term that is normalised through his deep faith that God will provide the means for this plan when it is time. His faith that God will ensure potentiality of this in the future allows him peace about the lack of plausibility of this in the present or foreseeable future. When confronted with impotentiality, courage is central to hope at the edges of that practice. Calculations that allow for and are framed by a drive to invest in the courage of themselves and others when the situation “décourage le population” hold life in place.

Foregrounding the less visible labour and affective dimension of calculation enable us to look at decision-making in a more holistic frame that centres the expertise of the individuals engaged in these practices, and the vulnerabilities they are exposed to. Configuring resources to move forward towards aspirations and maintain responsibilities, while avoiding complications, transcends economic parametrisation - with calculation, “there is always a moral remainder” (Maurer, 2003, p. 329). (Re)calibrating the complexity of one’s life requires (re)assembling myriad strands of information about the past, present and expected future, in order to evaluate what are affordable responsibilities and aspirations to hold. People must reshape, or hold in waiting, what they can afford to care about, while also keeping body and soul together in the ever-extending interim. Understanding how everyday calculation in uncertainty ushers in a greater weighting towards pre-emption in building and safeguarding the future illuminates how this changes the intensity of such work, and the ways in which it reshapes social and moral worlds.
These processes of mediating different sets of needs and temporalities are underpinned by courage and tenacity, and the reinvestment in faith that facilitates these characteristics. Calculating care is entangled with social and cosmological connections, not as resources but as investments of oneself and one’s resources in belief: belief in those around oneself, in Burkinabè people as predominantly honest and respectful of one another with the patience or resources to maintain this baseline. We cannot extract calculations from the social, cultural and material frames that they are undertaken in and on.

Calculation and valuation are entangled practices that permeate the lines between consumption, saving and insurance to constitute an investment of resources in a future with different degrees of predictability. The way these vendors prevent and pre-empt the possible exposures to them and their networks, while maintaining an affective investment in their individual and collective aspirations, is the work of calculating through heightened exposures to uncertainty. The following chapter explores how this labour is distributed, and the implications of such distributions. Focusing on how female vendors reconfigure their resources and responsibilities in response to unfolding changes, we will see how efforts of calculating care are concentrated for those most densely responsibilised for being resourceful, without the resources to meet such expectations.
Huguette was wrapped in a faded blue pattern punctuated with silhouettes of mother and child and “8 Mars 2017” - last year’s women’s day pagne. Her hair was plaited for the first time in months and she proudly asked if I’d noticed she’d put on weight, circling her fingers around the top of her arm. Then, with her fists towards her chest, she raised her elbows and pushes her hands out in the gesture that usually accompanies the Mooré phrase of “Ya Shoma” - feeling strong or well. Huguette had a new “fille 93” - a teenage villageoise girl who had moved into the family home behind her tea kiosk to help with household labour a few weeks earlier, and she was already feeling the difference. With support from Sadia, Huguette now had access to both her own and another woman’s labour to manage the work of her business and her household.

At this specific moment, Huguette appeared the perfect poster-woman for the “smart economics” of gender empowerment (Chant and Sweetman, 2012). Illustrating her resilience, resourcefulness and altruistic propensity to channel any market opportunity she had into her family, she was planning to enlarge her activities in order to improve her children’s opportunities. A mother with access to the opportunities to expand the money she could make, she pre-spent her new margin of available energy on plans for new ventures and reinvesting this back into her family: “I am looking to expand, to have the money to be able to help my children, to encourage them 94”

Huguette’s efforts to align her hopes of expanding her enterprise with her maternal responsibilities represent the double burden ascribed to women in this paradigm. The contingent and precarious

93 A “fille” is a teenage girl or young woman who lives in with another family to help with childcare and housework.
94 “Je cherche vraiment à aggrandir, pour avoir l’argent, pour pouvoir aider mes enfants, pour leur encourager.”
nature of this alignment in Huguette’s case provides a helpful entry point into an exploration of
the intensity of the gendered articulation work being done more broadly, in mediating between
market and household responsibilities. In the previous chapter, we explored the practices through
which vendors calibrate what they can afford to care about and how to cultivate and deploy their
resources to perform this care. We have seen how reproductive labour permeates the market and
vendors’ experiences of managing their livelihoods. I now move focus to explicitly incorporate the
work of maintaining their homes, of caring for their families and selves at home, within the scope
of labour that upholds the market and the people there. This illuminates the articulation work that
mediates between market and household labour, with gendered realities shaping and shaped by
different permutations of how the composite of this labour gets done.

This chapter brings to the fore the gendered work of overlapping responsibilities within and
outside the home to trace a fuller appreciation of the labour done by women and the intensity
thereof. Specifically, it focuses on gendered distributions of the intensity and toll of calculating
care. In cases where they have margin[s] of manoeuvrability, women draw on a complex repertoire
of interdependent and dynamic resources, to meet an unfolding, and often relatively unknowable
set of needs. This process of ascertaining and responding to the limits of affordable aspirations
and unaffordable losses is fraught with uncertainty. On the other hand, many women don’t have
a sufficient or well-positioned constellation of resources in order to meet the needs of the moment.
Still, their overarching responsibility for the articulation work that gets things back on track
prompts the constant, exhausting effort of trying to find and implement solutions.

By attending to this less visible “shadow work” of reproductive labour – a prerequisite to
maintaining the market - I seek here to illustrate how the toll of calculating care is distributed
across people according to the relative responsibilities and resources afforded to them (Starr and
Strauss, 1999). Critical feminists have long critiqued the form of liberal feminism that conflates
empowering women with allowing them to access markets (and markets to access them) (see
Cornwall, Harrison and Whitehead, 2007, for an overview of such myths). As explored in the literature review, the confluence of factors that brought women to centre stage in mainstream development agendas has depoliticised and instrumentalised gendered burdens, framing the household and women’s bodies as “shock absorbers” (Campbell, Stein and Samoff, 2019). The discursive framing and practical targeting of women by development agendas as altruistic, resourceful and resilient conduits entrenches the holistic responsibility women bear for their family (Roy, 2010). The notion of “Gender Equality as Smart Economics” in practice frames empowerment as engagement with a saturated and extractive market with negligible opportunities to return more than poverty-pay, either in global value chains or entrepreneurial openings, while also being responsible for the reproductive labour (Chant and Sweetman, 2012). Such framings of women assume an unending supply of unpaid labour (Elson, 1989). The focus on strength leaves no space for (particularly black) women’s humanity, “acknowledg[ing] them primarily when they tolerate the intolerable” (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005, p. 106).

While Chapter Four examined the embodied nature of the inputs and outputs of the work of calculating care to keep body and soul together, this chapter shifts focus towards the embodied cost of this labour and its saturations in specific bodies. Being the resourced and resilient woman archetype central to “smart economics”, microfinance and tropes about the empowerment of the flexible informal market, involves dense everyday efforts to allocate and manage one’s own labour and the labour of other women (if available) across business and household. The work of understanding and meeting complex interdependent claims on one’s finite resources and capacity to labour has an embodied cost, and women can be exhausted by it. Moreover, it is most heavily shouldered by the people whose labour is least valued in the global configuration of capital and labour. The contradictions between capitalism and care require these saturations, and so mandate the exhaustion they cause (Fraser, 2017). This “paradox of work”, of endless work in the absence of jobs, expands the pressure of the terrain of labour (of the reproduction of life) (Berlant, 2012, p. 85).
The first section of the chapter focuses on Huguette and her experience of having incorporated a new “fille” in the weeks preceding a major terrorist attack and shift of confidence in state capacity. Drawing on her own labour, and Sadia’s, Huguette considered plans that allow her to leverage the alignment of access to additional labour and an emerging market for cheap takeaway food she was now well-resourced to meet. However, through tracing the new potentials that have opened up to her, Huguette also articulates their edges, and the landscape of evolving needs and risks she is planning to meet through newly possible projects. Reflecting on her previous experience of burn-out, Huguette’s calibration of her aspirations and threshold for risk reflected the complexity of her responsibilities and her nuanced understanding of how resourced she was. These reflections illustrate the expertise-laden, high-stakes and potentially exhausting labour of constantly seeking solutions, attuned to both margins for accumulation and unaffordable margins of error.

Figuring out “comment faire” - how to proceed - is work, whether or not there are possible solutions. The second section of this chapter introduces Diane, a second-hand clothes vendor who is attempting to navigate the changing relationship between her business and family life, and manage her care of both. Her efforts in trying to exhaust potential solutions without finding one resulted in her own exhaustion, reflecting the embodied challenge of bearing the ultimate responsibility for caring for both her family and business without the necessary support. The intensity of Diane’s depletion was not proportional to the results produced by her labour but related rather to the mismatch between her resources and responsibilities undertaking this less visible articulation work.

The final section of this chapter returns to Huguette and specifically her experience and framing of narratives around women’s day, which express and remake boundaries around women’s potential for celebration and mobility. As the robust dictatorial management of the day has
dissolved since Blaise and his wife’s departure, a newly informalised market segment had opened up for the celebratory pagne. Everyday stories about the implications of women ceding their responsibilities at home for one day and night were contextualised and given weight by a starker salutary story about the consequences of not being able to accurately anticipate the unknown future in calculating responses to emergent opportunities and threats.

Matching Emerging Margins

Huguette and I sat on the steps inside her family courtyard a few days after Women’s Day. Sadia stood over by the taps, within the boundary of the short square wall that demarcated the space for washing and filling buckets and pots. It was one of the first times I had sat down inside the courtyard beyond short visits to say hello and Huguette told me how she was glad to have more time to “coser” properly now that she had Sadia. I spent time with Huguette at her tea stall through the year, but the week before she had asked if it would help my research to spend some time together to talk about her life away from her kiosk, now that she had some more time. She could take an hour away in the afternoons because of Sadia, which enabled my research along with other new investments Huguette was now freer to make.

Sadia lit the fire for dinner, filled buckets of water and began cleaning the vegetables. Huguette signalled over at her with the back of her hand when talking about her, or raised her voice to direct her when she saw errors in her labour or needed to remind her of something, but otherwise there was no interaction between her and us. Sadia’s presence allowed me to be there, and for Huguette to be sitting with me in what would have been a busy period before dinner but, for most of our conversation, she receded to the background of the courtyard.

However, Sadia’s arrival marked a significant shift for Huguette after months of searching for a live-in domestic worker through her network of family and friends. As introduced in Chapter Four,
Huguette’s calculations had recently been recalibrating to an increasingly unknown frame of decision-making for her children. The agency she had to make such decisions was limited, as she attempted to mediate uncertainty by trading off between replacing expendables needed for her business (tea bags, coffee grounds and so on), against satisfying the day-to-day needs of her household. These trade-offs made her “turn, turn, turn” when trying to sleep as she tried to figure out how to absorb the macro-level economic and social shocks her family were impacted by. With little liquidity of time, energy or money, she had felt she had little margin to respond, but now another margin had opened up with Sadia’s arrival. The emerging mandates of the moment had a potential match.

The embodied manifestation of this for Huguette - gaining weight and feeling strong - was mirrored with a more certain flow between scales of problems and potential solutions when she spoke. Even when she spoke of the intractability of the country’s issues at that current moment, she moved without hesitation between these concerns and this new space of potential that had opened up for her personally in managing her and her family’s everyday lives. Having access to someone else’s labour backfilled the well of physical, cognitive and emotional capacity required to maintain a household and her business simultaneously, allowing her to think about ways to increase her income.

Even before Sadia’s arrival, Huguette could bi-locate between household and entrepreneurial labour more easily than most women at the market due to her kiosk being attached to both her home and to where she purchased food. She could come back from the tea-stand at a quiet moment to light the fire for cooking, or get one of her teenage children to do their homework behind the wooden bar for fifteen minutes while she went to do the shopping in the main market in the afternoon. However, she had found the rhythm of her life and this limited and contingent mobility wearing before Sadia came. Her husband worked away from home as a veterinarian in
another town during the week, and between care for her children and her business, she had enjoyed little choice in where and how to spend her time and energy throughout her days.

Physically and emotionally buoyed, Huguette was excited about the possibilities of leveraging this newly released time and energy into new ventures. With her increase in labour capacity, she planned options to grow her business’s output and ultimately encourage her children with their studies and transitions through the uncertain time by increasing her income. The extra labour and energy absorbed from Sadia was ear-marked in advance to expand Huguette stall’s activities: pre-committed potential unleashed, oriented and reinvested. Although the market was generally stagnant and saturated, the uncertain reality of the country had created one new margin for gain for those well placed to seize it. As touched on in Chapter Four, cheap take-away food was relatively in-demand as fewer people had the cashflow to light a fire at home, and discretion over food quality got more difficult to uphold for many.

In her immediate surroundings, Huguette had seen salient examples of this potential opportunity and threat during the preceding year, but she had not yet scaled up her activities herself. Nine months beforehand, a group of young women and schoolgirls had started a buzzing food stall two doors down which had reanimated, or masked the lack of animation in, neighbouring stalls. Each week, a new offering was layered in: a large plastic box of degue (sweetened yoghurt and grains) being scooped into bags was joined by a second box filled with charred disks of fried plantains, bringing a new massive pot of frying oil and a gas fire to the stall. Next, coils of savoury pastries were prepared to be fried in the same oil; then salads being chopped and washed in the backroom. The group kept adding new offerings, equipment and friends to expand the enterprise.

After a few weeks, they had split the enterprise across two stalls, setting up an additional table beside the parking space across the road. This expansion gave them more space for the increasing range of finished foods, ingredients and the people making one into the other: shaping dough,
chopping vegetables, mixing pots of degue or dropping pastries in simmering oil. However, when the school term restarted, the enterprise scaled back down abruptly into a degue stall with just one seller, Assana, remaining – the joking and dynamism evaporated to leave her alone and mostly on her phone while she waited for customers. The project had absorbed their extra labour while the girls were on school holidays and the plan to reanimate the thriving stall the next summer lingered as a buoying possibility. It seemed the project could work for pocket money but not enough to warrant an ongoing business. Their customers had mostly been traders along the road, who now had to travel a bit further to find their sweet yoghurt breakfasts and fried vegetable snacks.

Makeshift temporary stalls were also opening outside the high metal gates of some of the wealthier households around the edge of the market, with small professional-looking cellophane bags of homemade cakes set out on wooden tables. The names and phone-numbers of those who made them were printed on white paper rectangles stapled to the front of the bags, announcing new entrepreneurs. These cakes were relatively expensive and so didn’t sell as well as cheaper everyday items. However, their existence in the sphere around Huguette’s home and business represented another market that could be emerging if she had the capacity to orient herself to it. Fewer people had (potential) access to an oven and so this type of venture was less vulnerable to a race-to-the-bottom on prices. The higher cost associated with needing access to an oven made this segment of the market slower to saturate for those who could afford the space and money for an oven upfront.

Huguette was now exploring both of these types of ventures. The previous week she had shown me a cool room off the back of her courtyard - dark and nearly empty, the perfect spot for her oven to make cakes. An idea she was more immediately animated about was to start selling liver and sausages - things that would move more bread. Huguette anticipated little to no mark up on the meats themselves but expected to be able to instrumentalise them to multiply the amount of commission she could make from the bakery by increasing the volume of bread sold. While we
spoke sitting on her concrete steps, Huguette got up to get a pale pink booklet from the back
room, unfolding it and pointing to the table that marked the amount of baguettes sold each month
with calculations for commission. She speculated how she could get more multiples of the 25CFA
(£0.03) she earned per baguette by layering in new options alongside the eggs and fish sandwiches
she already sold. As Huguette already was committed to her tea stall, she was excited by the
prospect of the potential extra marginal gains from these activities that she imagined herself and
Sadia could manage.

However, Huguette was still conscious of calibrating her new level of activity prudently. She had
expanded her stall before, when she had last had a fille five or six years previously. She proudly
told me how she had run a really busy trade selling riz-sauce [rice and sauce] for lunch from the
kiosk, explaining how customers would ring all morning to have food put aside in the fear she
would run out before they could arrive. This expanded version of the business had been
Huguette’s most lucrative to date, making 2,000F a day (approx. £2.70) at its best. She expressed
pride that she was able to make as much as a state employee, but also that so many people had
wanted the food she made. But this amount did not include the cost of her site, or any accounting
for her or her fille’s labour.

Moreover, the pace of the business that enabled that amount of money exhausted her physically,
mentally and emotionally – a depreciation excluded from mainstream development framings of
the bottomless capacity of women to harness aspirations and risks for their families (Elson, 1989,
2017). Even with her fille’s help, the pace of the dual responsibility for the business and her family
(who at that point were younger and required more direct care) was too much. Everything had
been a balance of the household and market, operating from the same space and ultimately for
the same ultimate aim of supporting her family but needing different repertoires to be deployed.
Huguette illustrated the complexity of managing that expanded business alongside her household, offering an example of the different types of rice she and her fille had to keep separate in the same space through their fast-paced days. She said she found it tiring to keep the cheaper rice that she had for customers separate from the higher quality rice that her husband bought for the family. She had often had to remind her former fille, who hadn’t assimilated the importance of this separation, or negotiate the conflict with her husband when mistakes were made. She became exhausted and knew her body would not support her continuing, expressing this in the present tense when recounting while touching her chest: “I feel that I’m risking burning myself out.”

Having the help of a fille supported her business’s previous expansion but a certain level of responsibility could not be ceded in terms of keeping track of the synergies and tensions between market and home life. This oversight required complex articulation work that “manag[es] the consequences of the distributed nature of the [co-operative] work” (Star and Strauss, 1999, p. 352). Both Sadia and her previous fille lived at Huguette’s home when working for her and engaged with her business activities as well as her household labour. However, it ultimately fell to Huguette to manage the overarching responsibility for balancing the rice for the house and the rice for the business. The responsibility for which resources needed to be deployed to make the business and household work in their connected and separate ways, was a different layer of efforts to the actual visible labour of the double-burden.

Huguette was required to understand and mediate the relationships between a complex set of parameters in order to successfully calibrate her own and Sadia’s investments of time and energy, alongside her family and business’s other resources. Previously, the combination of this articulation work, along with the physical and mental efforts of both burdens of household and market labour, had eroded her physical and emotional wellbeing. As explored in Chapter Four, understanding the

95 “Je me sens que je risque de m’esquinter”
(un)affordable parameters concerning one’s own body is foundational in the expertise of calibrating one’s (financial) life. Huguette’s expression of feeling physically strong and well after Sadia’s arrival underpinned her potential to expand her activities and increase the resources she could deploy to encourage her children. Meanwhile, her reflection of the last time she had expanded her business projected an embodied limit on the potential that had emerged.

Huguette’s understanding of her own embodied limits contoured the margin that had opened to her, but shifting parameters of health more broadly were also reshaping the emerging mandate for her as a mother. Her aims to enlarge her business were animated by her wish to help her children, to encourage them. What that encouragement looked like practically depended not only on the resources she could invest in them but also in the evolving (and increasingly unknowable) path-dependent potentials that were relevant to her children. As discussed in Chapter Four, the same growth in the market for cheap food that she was planning to leverage was also something she understood as representing a dangerous degradation in the food that was affordable for many and potentially for her own family. This degradation was prompted by structural constriction that was reshaping what people ate, and what they had to do to earn enough to eat.

Even with help from Sadia, Huguette was ultimately responsible for deploying her resources in response to the growing structural pressures her family was facing. The double-edge of this evolving situation in relation to food illustrates the nuanced work that she had to navigate to make sense of her inter-related market-household responsibilities, responding to both margins for accumulation and the exposure to risks for her and her family. As a mother with the responsibility to leverage margins in the market, she understood this as the only sub-section of the market that “donner un peu” [gave a little] at the time. However, as a mother responsible for choosing and preparing the food her family ate, she saw this enlarging marker as representing deferred potential health complications and related financial risks for families. She also lamented the social degradation that accompanied the gradual shift to families increasingly giving children 25F or 50F
to eat dinner outside the home on days when lighting the fire for a meal felt too expensive. She argued this exposed people to more risk of health issues but also moved families away from eating “en famille” [as a family].

As introduced in Chapter Four, these social shifts were part of a broader degradation of conditions that Huguette was witnessing. As legal options for ‘earning to eat’ became more limited due to economic constriction, criminality - petty theft, prostitution, drug use and dealing - were increasingly the only option for many poorer families in the city. Her own holistic responsibility to encourage her children through their education and into the futures they had imagined as a family had to be calibrated against these evolving parameters of their and her decisions – the shape of emerging practical and ideological threats. An additional layer to these threats was the calcifying feeling for Huguette and others that the jihadi terrorists who had been mounting terrorist attacks must have accomplices in Ouagadougou’s own neighbourhoods. Based on the photos circulating, they apparently dressed like young men in the city, not in the traditional garments associated with Tuaregs who had previously been responsibilised for attacks.

Huguette’s eldest son Christian was re-sitting his bac that year, to get his grades up to the level to apply for medicine. However, he would have to wait another year after completing his exams before going to university, until his sister Julie had finished her course at culinary school, due to the prohibitive cost of sending both at the same time. It had been decided that it should be Julie who would skip the order and go first, as she had found school more difficult and a gap in education was potentially more problematic for her. In the absence of expected employment, this plan depended on the family trusting that Christian would be OK to spend the upcoming academic year in the “quartier” waiting.

Parents at the market often expressed concern about their young adult children staying in the (home) quartier, waiting for scarce employment opportunities or for the public university to start
the often perpetually deferred term. The lack of activity and opportunity was increasingly associated with risks for criminality. As introduced in the literature review in Chapter Two, there is a broad literature on the complexity of investment young people need to make to maintain and recreate hope for a liveable future through early adulthood when their labour is deemed as excess. Many vendors were concerned about how resourced their children were to maintain such hope in an atmosphere of encroaching discouragement. Huguette and her family were in a slightly different position to other vendors at the market with children of this age as the “quartier” was also where she was all day running her business. Moreover, the livelier “quartier mixte” – both residential and commercial – lacked the threatening passivity of the residential quartiers.

Nevertheless, it was still a core priority for Huguette to invest in her children’s hopes and distract them from social degradation that may lead them into discouragement or illegal activity. She remained vigilant to keeping her children encouraged. As we saw in Chapter Four, when she spoke about the necessity of having money to get Christian’s bike fixed immediately if it broke, or of giving her children money for snacks or soft drinks at school on days when they were discouraged, she framed this in relation to the potential for them to engage in criminality intensifying around them. Huguette’s practices of encouragement reflected her responsibility for pre-empting their involvement in these increasingly salient opportunities that diverged from the future she wished to safeguard for them.

Huguette’s efforts in calibrating her investments to her family’s evolving needs drew on a base of resources and expertise. In response to decreased income from her kiosk and the handful of stalls she owned, Huguette had chosen to adapt how she cooked for her family – to use simpler methods and ingredients like water instead of oil, dried leaves and dried fish in place of fresh vegetables and meat. When she did use higher cost ingredients like oil and meat, she would do so sparingly, using them less frequently and in smaller quantities. Making different meals for less money, drew on her budgeting and cooking skills, but also required her to build new understandings with her
children. Huguette told me how this required her to resist her family’s pressure to maintain their usual recipes which she would have had to degrade the quality of ingredients to cook as often as before. She said she had explained to her children plainly that a “tightening of their belts” was temporary, and would allow continuity of their schooling into university. This process of managing shifting norms within her family drew on her skills to communicate well with her children within their shared imaginaries for her children’s futures, as well as the resources that facilitated that stability despite present constriction.

In short, her micro-level management of macro-level insecurity within her family built on previous skills and trust she had built up within her family, prompting her to reinvest in their physical health and altered aspirations. In the introduction to this chapter, Huguette contextualised the arc of dependency that animated and shaped her decisions on how to leverage Sadia’s labour alongside her own. Their combined efforts had to respond to the emerging margins and mandates she was responding to, pointing to the intensity of the labour which she is responsible for: “I really want to scale up, to have the money, to be able to help my children, to encourage them”

Through this chain of dependency, the new affordance of time and energy that Huguette was excited to leverage was already pre-spent, not just on an activity, (enlarging her enterprise) or on the intended outcome of that activity (encouraging her children). What possible ways she could scale up her enterprise and how she could meaningfully encourage her children in spite of what was happening around them required a nuanced understanding of what could keep body and soul together despite discouragement. Supporting her children went beyond their schooling or individual transitions, to encourage an ontological security of their intended life paths and resist the potentials for chaos that were encroaching in their unfolding life worlds.

96 “Je cherche vraiment a aggrandir, pour avoir l’argent, pour pouvoir aider mes enfants, pour leur encourager.”
Huguette’s opening to engage in activities at that specific moment was dependent on the alignment of her access to Sadia’s labour but also to a constellation of other factors including her children’s ages (all teenagers needing a lighter level of care) and the suitability of her existing business to an emerging opportunity in the market. The temporary buzz of Aida and her friends’ stall had similarly emerged from the alignment of an excess of under-valued and well-oriented labour with the demand for cheap take-away food over their school-holiday time. These openings into the market are important framings and exercising of potentials; however, they are also both underpinned by labour that is not valued in the market and that has a real embodied cost.

Huguette’s ability to meet this mandate, to access a new (albeit small) potential market segment that now opened up, allowed her to feel a reasonable expectation to enlarge her business offerings and hence income, and to ultimately encourage her children through this moment. However, this opening rested on an overlapping set of relative privileges that set her apart from those around her and were also not representative of her own experience over time. Myriad forms of resources needed to be in place for her to enact ‘resourcefulness’: some rental income, a husband with a stable salary, a live-in worker to help with both household and business. Still, we can see how challenging it was for Huguette to balance her range of resources and responsibilities. Seeing the resources Huguette needed to capitalise on a margin in the emerging landscape of opportunity, that also responds to the shifting margins for error in her and her family’s life, illustrates the contingent nature of being resourced enough to be resourceful.

The complexity of Huguette’s frame of decision-making illuminates the immense responsibility, and the nuanced and exhausting labour of calculating care that this management of resources (present and future) requires, even when women do have access to an emerging margin. Care “build[s] and embod[ies] forms of responsibility and commitment that helps work get done, including in relation to emergent obstacles” (Jack and Jackson, 2006, p. 2211). Huguette was responsible for encouraging her children through a period when the landscape of opportunity and
threat they were exposed to was radically changing. She was able to do this emotional, cognitive and physical labour because she had relatively more access to resources, as well as the expertise to reshape investments in the food her family ate and their shared aspirations.

However, Huguette and Sadia’s experience highlights another blind spot in the archetype of the mother-entrepreneur - other women’s labour. In tracing chains of care, we need to attend to where care comes from, and where it goes (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002). In Huguette’s case, this extra labour came from Sadia, a young migrant worker who was able to access a better school by staying in Ouagadougou but had very little other recourse for compensation or mobility. This labour came to and through one woman, Huguette, but from another woman, Sadia. The arrangement Sadia now found herself in illustrated the level of female embodied investment and immobility needed for one women to be seemingly able to make a living, manage a household and have any free time.

**Intensity and Articulation: When Work Doesn’t Work**

In order to maintain an “uncomplicated” life, Huguette had to undertake the complex work of calculating care, reshaping her and her children’s practices for eating, and remaking mutual understandings of their situation to prevent them from being discouraged. When explicating her own margins for choice, and the responsibilities and aspirations she was trying to manage within them, Huguette framed her own position in reference to mothers around her. Such a lack of ‘complication’ was not affordable to many other mothers in the city as options for “earning to eat” became more limited, with criminality (petty theft, prostitution, drug use and dealing) increasingly prevalent for poorer families.

Huguette expressed a tension in how she felt about mothers increasingly taking drugs and engaging in prostitution, which I have included the full text for below in French as well as English in order
to highlight her specific repeated phrasing of “comment faire”, which takes on opposing meanings that reflect the internal conflict she expressed:

If you are a mother and you are ethical(aware), you’re not crazy…. How can you do that? But, it’s the poverty. Often, they don’t want to do it, but what can they do? What can they do? You don’t have the solutions….. That’s the problem. Right now, it’s hard (t)here, it’s like that. Right now, there are families that don’t have 500F in the family. One has to eat. What are you going to do? If you see the parents in the city centre…. (with hands out simulating begging for money as is more often done in the centre of town) It’s the suffering, it’s the suffering, it’s the suffering.

Si tu es mama et si tu es consciente, tu n’es pas fou… Comment faire?
Mais c’est la pauvreté. Souvent, ils veulent pas le faire, mais comment faire? Comment faire? Tu n’as pas des solutions… C’est ça le problème. A l’heure là, c’est dur là, c’est comme ça. A l’heure là, il y a des familles où ils ont pas 500F dans la famille. Il faut manger. Tu vas faire comment? Si tu vois les parents dans le centre-ville……. C’est le souffrance, C’est le souffrance, C’est la souffrance.

Huguette considered this thread of what to do - comment faire – of how to proceed in these two different frames one after another, articulating the contours of responsibility and agency that shaped emergent actions. In the first instance, morally or logically (in contrast to being aware, sensible, not crazy) she asked how mothers could take drugs or engage in prostitution unless they were crazy, if they were ethical and aware. However, immediately she countered her own seeming inability to comprehend these moral aberrations by reframing the problem as structural. What to
do when you don’t have solutions - what is someone going to do when they don’t have money or solutions in their family? What other choice do they have over what they can do without edging into illegality or what she deemed immoral?

One vendor who was grappling with the fact that there was no solution to her impasse was Diane, who sold second-hand clothes just down the road from Huguette’s kiosk in a stall beside Ousmane’s pineapple stand. Financially, Diane had the resources to be more patient than many other vendors. However, she had found it very difficult to secure any childcare to enable her to be at the market consistently. Moreover, her business was squarely oriented towards the saturated, illiquid end of the spectrum of market trades. People were not buying things that weren’t essential and higher-end second hand clothes definitely fell outside of the essentials. The everyday reality of her lack of capacity to perform the work required to maintain her livelihood, coupled with her lack of clients, was demoralising.

In Huguette’s case, the intensity of her household work, her market work and her efforts to mediate between the two were more immediately evident to me because of the close physical proximity of each. In general, the vendors along this stretch of the market do not live in the immediate area but within five to ten minutes by moto. During my time at the market, I met a handful of people with connections to one another outside of the market but most of the market relationships remained relatively compartmentalised from relationships at home or in their respective quartiers. For Diane, the differentiation between home and market had recently become even more stark, and this divergence rendered visible the complexity of aligning resources to responsibilities. A few months earlier, on his annual Christmas visit back from Canada, Diane’s husband had prompted a move for the family to a new area 12km away from the market. This longer distance between home/school and market exacerbated the challenges Diane faced in justifying her identity as an entrepreneur through the crisis.
Diane always had to balance her presence at the stall with caring for her two children. She had sometimes brought them along to the market before, but they were now getting too big and she was nervous they would run into the road. She had found it very difficult to find a replacement for her ‘fille’ - rumours of girls available would buoy her enthusiasm, one or two of these had materialised into trials at the house but nothing had stuck. She had the funds to pay a villageoise girl but, coming from another country and with her Ouagalaise husband working abroad, Diane lamented the lack of connections she had to find someone to help after more than six months of searching.

Co-ordinating the search for and trials of domestic staff took up a layer of Diane’s threadbare resources. This project, combined with managing her own constantly shifting expectations around the possibility of help and its interactions with all of the other constant drip of decisions she had to make in managing her livelihood and life was exhausting. Although sometimes she would drop the search for a week or two at a time after a disappointing dead-end, she would then restart, spurred on by the hope of potential relief in the long term if she found a girl who would stay and who got on well with her children and her.

Even though her husband wasn’t there most of the time, the general cultural expectation of male-headed Ouagadougou households shaped the availability of this type of household labour for Diane. Ouagalaise men, predominantly Mossi, apparently had a mixed reputation for how filles were incorporated into the household compared to other ethnicities, in a way that impacted sending decisions for village families. Ousmane told me how he could see how wearing the search had been for Diane. He connected her lack of success in finding household help to the combination of tiring workloads and less familial relations within Mossi host families that made Ouagadougou a less appealing destination for young women to come for work compared to Burkina’s second city of Bobo, unless there were close family connections. Diane was responsible for finding a resource made less available by the broader reputation of male behaviour within
Ouagadougou homes that shaped decisions even if, as in this case, her husband was not there most of the time.

The lack of access to someone else’s labour aligned with a particular season in Diane’s household and life. Alongside the move that changed her commute and the time it took to arrange school drop-offs and pick-ups, her two daughters were now a little bit older and would run out in the road when she brought them to the market, so she felt it was getting too unsafe to bring them along after school. She was pregnant and exhausted and getting intense headaches, the medication for which made her even more tired. Her warmth and wit were worn, and she spoke haltingly.

Diane’s childcare commitments and lack of support left less and less time and energy to be at the market. It wasn’t clear to me if her lack of engagement with her stall was actually making a difference to the low levels of trade, but the lack of trade was definitely making engagement with it less appealing or even possible. The stall may have been just as quiet if she was able to devote more of herself to it at that moment. Although she had lots of ideas of what she could do, from new storage or displays to using Facebook marketing to try to draw wealthier clients to the market, knowing that they could potentially make no difference left her demotivated to commit her energy and other resources to any plans.

There was no single solution for the challenges facing Diane at that moment. However, there was one potential way in which she could have access to resources that would bring her closer to being able to meet her responsibilities at home and the market simultaneously – a fille. When one is ultimately responsible, not having found a solution means continuing to look for one. For Diane, the problem-solving required in the project of looking for a fille was exhausting work even (and especially) when that search did not produce a fille. Star and Strauss describe articulation work as the contingent, real-time responses “that gets things back ‘on track’” in collective work, but what happens when getting things “back on track” is simply not possible and is depleting beyond the
constellation of social, emotional and material resources someone has access to (Star and Strauss, 1999, p. 10)? Even though Diane was far from the material poverty that many others at the market faced, she found herself surrounded with a web of interconnected problems without any clear solutions. At the heart of these challenges was her lack of access to the labour support (here, other women and girl’s labour) that underpins sustainable engagement with work outside the home.

When Diane spoke of the cluster of overlapping concerns, she trailed off as she connected the threads of difficulty or “structures of constraints” (Folbre, 1994) she faced in her individual impasse and the current deteriorating security situation. This echoing of the personal and political was common, with conversation weaving the scales of government decisions with everyday personal concerns without transitions or explicated connections between one and the other. However, this struck me especially at moments where individual and collective concerns reflected one another particularly saliently and where an impasse at the political level was concretely blocking a personal decision from seeming possible or consequential. Here, with Diane, it felt both very close and very far from Huguette’s experience at that moment. Both women expressed deep-seated fear over the intractability of the national security and economic situation, and connected the degradation in expectations to the responses of themselves and the people around them. However, for Huguette, there were plans she could make and think through and spend time on that seemed reasonable and choiceful and for Diane there were not. The difference in their felt (lack of) potential was echoed in their physical manifestations, in the ways in which they spoke and moved.

The relationship between the tangle of interrelated problems Diane faced, and the absence of potential solutions available to her, amalgamated to a lack of agency at a meaningful scale. She did not have the resources to meet her responsibility to ‘trouble-shoot’ her and her family’s problems. Even though she spent time at the market, it was less than before and her capacity to engage was different; in many ways, her business was effectively on hold as the dust settled, or continued to
layer on, cloaking her illiquid stock. In a context of escalating uncertainty at multiple scales and registers, this work is exhausting even (and especially) when it does not get things back on track, when new lines of possibility need to be envisioned and built.

Diane’s emotional exhaustion came from the fundamental mismatch between the scale of the challenges she was trying to orient herself towards and the capacity she had to meet them. Floro’s framing of the intensity of work in feminist economics seeks to foreground not just the amount of labour someone has to do but also the relation between tasks and the capacities and resources needed to do them (Floro, 1995). The intensity of Diane’s articulation work in trying to get her situation back into some sort of working rhythm illustrates the mismatch between resources and responsibilities for this less visible labour. Care and responsibility orient people to do the best they can to find solutions. Meanwhile, articulation work as the “‘make cooperative work work’” (Schmidt, 2002, p.184), but also the efforts that get things back ‘on track’ in the face of the unexpected” (Star, 1991, p. 84), performs this care. However, care, and the articulation work through which it is performed, is not guaranteed to sustain and rebuild the worlds we value: “care does not automatically make work successful (just as articulation work does not always make work succeed)” (Jack and Jackson, 2016, p. 2211).

Diane’s experience of calculating care here illustrates what happens when a solution cannot be found, and exasperation comes to the surface. Such an impasse emerged after Diane had invested a huge amount of effort to calculate care effectively over the preceding year: months of looking for and trying affordable solutions and investing in patches of solutions to keep her family and business afloat in the meantime. Discourses about resilience and resourcefulness and strength do not leave space for vigilance and persistence to not have the intended impact. Conversely, the sustained vigilance of people responsibilised through these terms usually means there is every possibility of responses not ‘working’ to sustain and rebuild what is valued, given what resources
are available and what problems need to be solved. The unaffordability of maintaining what is valued should that happen intensifies this work, even and especially when it is not ‘working’.

Problem solving is work with or without a solution. The struggle of trying to exhaust potential solutions without becoming exhausted oneself is the embodied challenge borne by whomever ultimately has the responsibility for finding a solution. The intensity of Diane’s emotional depletion here was not proportional to the results produced by her market or home labour or even by the intensity of the visible work she did in each of these roles, but more so to the negative spaces of an insolvable web of interrelated challenges. The absence of workable solutions prompted a constant requirement to calculate care, seeking and trialling workable ways through. Attending to the intensity of this type of labour at its frayed edges tells us about the responsibilities that orient people’s lives, and about how new gendered solidarities and tensions arise. By turning our attention to the work that can’t be done - and the toll of dealing with that incapacity – we see the strain that goes beyond what is produced and reproduced, to what is cared about and the intensity of carrying that care specifically at moments where this can’t translate into meaningful changes.

The labour Diane and Huguette both refer to here is specifically feminised, and undertaken in relation to spouses absent for most of the time (Diane’s husband by the year; Huguette’s husband by the week). However, responsibility is not zero-sum, and to render the articulation work done by women does not negate the specific gendered responsibilities men also mediate in getting market and household labour to work together. On the contrary, exploring the articulation work being done by men can open up space for the dynamism and responsiveness of these gendered relations of care and control, and the relative intensities of the labour constantly done to mediate them. As we saw in Chapter Four, men’s work in calculating care was also imbued with concerns about social reproduction, but ultimately the responsibility for the day-to-day efforts of maintaining home life lay with women and so saturated this care more generally with them.
“She Completely Lost”

To return to Women’s Day and the depressed celebration of 2018 with which Huguette opened this chapter, this global holiday had been a mainstay of the Burkinabè cultural calendar since Sankara’s time. It would not be celebrated in 2018 because of the attack that had taken place only six days beforehand. Huguette, in her early 40’s, said she could not remember a year where she had not celebrated, and spoke of its place in her life fondly: “It was great. We would celebrate in the neighbourhoods, we would follow on the TV. Women were really honoured. It was interesting/good. But now, voila”98 The “now” she referred to was not just the cancelled celebrations. The minister had called off the celebrations due to the attack, but preparations would have usually stretched back through February, picking up the market after the post-Christmas lull. As introduced in Chapter Three, the unfolding crisis was felt in the market through both the presence of stories and concerns, but also the absence of normal annual rhythms of festival consumption and there had been no big surge in custom in advance of women’s day.

On women’s day, men were expected to do the household labour that usually fell to women for the day - going to the market for groceries, caring for children, cooking and cleaning. Men’s physical presence as buyers of vegetables and condiments was an embodied manifestation of the occasion at the market on the day itself. There had also traditionally been a buzz in the market leading up to the day, as with other annual festivals. From early in February, a selection of women’s day pagnes would be sold – in a similar style to the Christian fabrics, they were brightly coloured cloths with repeat illustrations showing a women, often with a child, or a dove. Many of the patterns also included the date (8 Mars) and the year. This pagne would be purchased a few weeks before. Then the tailors would be commissioned to make outfits from it and the waves would ripple out – tailors

97 “Elle a totalement perdu.”
would buy thread from the supply shop, and bring outfits in for their edges to be finished to prevent fraying by the overlocker machine.

However, due to a confluence of economic and social pressure, Huguette was now suggesting that the day should not continue, divesting from a festival she had so valued because of its unaffordable costs. The anticipatory practices in preparation of 2018’s festival had been slow – very few customers had come through the market or the city to purchase the new pagnes or commissioning outfits. Some of this was undoubtedly due to national mourning after the attack the previous week but - even before this rupture - tailors, fabric sellers, the young men at the haberdashery had been lamenting a lack of any discernible bump in trade from customers preparing outfits for this year’s celebration. As with the subdued festivals in December, another season in the annual ebbs that formerly boosted the market was missing that year. The government had called for the day to be spent with family at home - not with the usual round of national televised events and evenings out or off duty for women – as it fell within a week of a terrorist attack on Ouagadougou’s city centre.

After the quiet of religious festivals and new year before it, another muted annual festival signaled a cleaving away from normalcy and the expectation of continuity at the market. In the run up to women’s day in 2018, stories also circulated about the recent downward trajectory of the festival, exemplifying the encroaching parameters around women’s mobility and agency outside the home and market spaces. Huguette wove together a host of problematic narratives to explain why, even before the 2018 cancellation, she couldn’t see women’s day continuing for more than the next few years.

Huguette said she thought that a permanent cession of women’s day may be for the best; it causes too many problems now, in contrast to when Blaise was in power. The lack of control over the pagne was an entry-point for Huguette to problematise the broader problems of the day:
Since Blaise has left, the 8th of March is not interesting/good anymore. His wife was (t)here, Chantelle was (t)here and she had the money so she organised it well ...her merchant had the monopoly. So, the president managed it well. So, because it was the government, no-one else could make the pagne elsewhere. Since Blaise has left, everyone can make the pagne..... You'll see..... ten types up to fifteen types for the 8th March. It's not good anymore. Everyone who has the money can go and make the pagne, bring it to the market and sell it. It's not interesting/good anymore. When Blaise was here, because it was the president's wife, if you made it, you were afraid.99

Blaise’s wife Chantelle had sufficient means to make sure the day was “bien fait”, and the authority to decree monopoly power to her associate for the right to make the women’s day pagne, the core money-maker of the festival. The monopoly on the pagne was understood to be tightly enforced, and the fear of retribution amongst vendors maintained a concentration of the financial benefit of the festival for this monopoly-holder. Protected by the violent limits of the former regime’s corruption, the silo-ing of this profitable segment of the festival placed an upper limit on how much of the economic boost of women’s day moved outside Blaise and Chantelle’s close associates.

However, there had still been a predictable increase in income for a chain of vendors who offered related services and products in the market: commission for the fabric vendors who sold it at the markets, the tailors who made it into outfits, the haberdasheries who sold the thread, trimmings and zips that held the outfits together. The pagne and accompanying expectations about a day of celebration had circulated at Marché Collé and other markets in the weeks running up to Women’s Day, and generated a small margin for many others beyond the monopoly-holder. Huguette

99 “Depuis que Blaise est parti, le 8 Mars n’est plus intéressant. Sa femme était là, elle était là et elle l’a organisé bien. Elle a l’argent, elle a organisé bien… son commerçant avait la monopole. Donc, le président a bien géré ça. Donc comme c’était le gouvernement, personne ne peut confectionner le pagne d’ailleurs. Depuis que Blaise est parti, tout le monde peut confectionner le pagne. Tu va voir…. dix modèles, jusqu’a quinze modèles pour le 8 Mars. C’est plus intéressant. Tout la monde peut aller confectionner le pagne, venir au marché et le vendre. C’est plus intéressant.”
foregrounded the new saturation of pagne at the market, which had started with Blaise’s departure, but the risk of which was now laid bare by a slow year. This time, she didn’t know if it could continue because so many vendors had invested in this newly opened market segment, and the demand was not there:

Each [trader] makes his small business with that but, this year, I’m not sure if the 8th March can continue. This year, it wasn’t good, it wasn’t interesting. There were some who did not celebrate, there are others who will not buy the pagnes as made. How does one/ do we continue? There is a risk of not continuing the 8th March.100

In the last few years, the new regime was seen to have invested less and organised fewer televised and well-publicised charitable and advocacy events for the day. The legitimation of women’s day was faltering in the vacuum. Huguette told me how, when women go out to the maquis without their husbands, people would chat about them using the opportunity to cheat on their husbands, followed by war at home. These rumours of cheating on 8 Mars and subsequent fights and even divorce articulated an edge to women’s mobility:

There have been many men who have rejected their wives because of the 8th March. There are women who dress up to go out, go into the bars with other men, go dancing until two or three in the morning. In Burkina, the men don’t like that.. There are women who go out and, after, it’s war, it’s war. Lots of women leave and then it’s war. You go out, you come back. You go out, you leave the family. You go out, you go dancing. You go out, and maybe you take the opportunity to cheat.101

100 “Chacun a son petit commerce avec ça, Mais cette année, je suis pas sûr que le 8 Mars peut continuer. Cette année, ça n’a pas été. C’était pas intéressant. Il y en a qui n’a pas été, il y a les autres qui veulent pas acheter le pagne comme fait. Comment on va continuer? Il y a un risque de pas continuer le 8 Mars.”

101 “Chaque année, il y a beaucoup d’hommes que a répudié sa femme à cause de 8 Mars. Il y a des femmes qui s’habiller pour sortir. Aller dans les bars, sortir avec des autres hommes, aller danser jusqu’à 2h, 3h du matin Au Burkina les hommes n’aime pas ça. Il y a des femmes qui sont sorti et, après, c’est le guerre, c’est le guerre. Beaucoup des femmes partent et, après c’est la guerre. Tu sors, tu reviens, Tu sors, tu laisse la famille. Tu sors, tu allait danser. Tu sors, c’est pour profiter tromper.”
Huguette shifted her focus from describing men’s reaction to women’s behaviour, to problematising women’s own desire to spend time out at maquis late at night in the first place, and ultimately advocating for the removal of the opportunity to do so:

Like that, it’s not seriously done. If you are aware/ethical, you know, you have a family. If, for example, you go out until the early morning. You are a ‘responsible’. If you go out early, and you stay out until eight in the evening and come back, or if you go on until early morning? What would you do outside? And you know that you are a ‘responsible’. When you do that, you lead another live elsewhere. There have been divorces because of that. It’s for that that it’s better to stop the 8th March. 102

Here, Huguette used the noun “une responsable” [a person responsible or held accountable], asking rhetorically if these women would want to take part in this element of women’s day celebrations if they embodied the responsibility of motherhood. Conversely, when I asked about this in reference to men, for whom it was relatively normalised to go to maquis and cheat on their wives with mistresses and prostitutes, Huguette framed their behaviour as problematic, but at a level that exists within marriages rather than at the edge of their tenability:

It’s true, there are those who have not found Jesus 103 - they’re not ethical/aware. There are men like that, who lead their life like that. There are men who are not strong. There are men who bring to their wives enough to eat and who lead their lives elsewhere. 104

102 “Comme ça, c’est pas sérieusement fait. Si tu es consciente. Tu sais, tu as une famille. Si, par example, tu sors jusqu’à petit matin. Tu es une responsable. Si tu sors à l’heure là, si tu a duré jusqu’à 20h, où suite tu aller jusqu’au petit matin? Tu faisait quoi dehors? Et tu sait que tu es une responsable. Quand tu fait ça, tu mèns une autre vie d’ailleurs. Il y a des divorces à cause de ça. C’est pour ça, c’est mieux d’arrêter le 8 Mars.”

103 Comments that connected behaviour to specific religions were often used to allude to someone of faith being the same as someone who has a moral conscience (rather than necessarily meaning here that Huguette could only see Christian men acting morally).

104 “C’est vrai, il y a eux qui n’ont pas trouvé Jesu – ils sont pas conscients. Il y a les hommes comme ça, qui mènent sa vie comme ça. Il y a les hommes qui sont pas forts. Il y a les hommes qui amenent a la maison à manger mais qui mènent leur vie ailleurs.”
The contrast between Huguette’s descriptions of women going out for this annual festival and some men’s general separation of their household, with ‘lives led elsewhere’, underscored a difference between gendered mobilities and potentials. It was considered irresponsible for women to (want to) be away from their children and home in spaces where cheating on their husbands was possible - a reason for divorce. They could be seen to put their life elsewhere through this one annual night. For men, leading their life elsewhere was a normalised option, a sign of weakness and lack of faith, but not something that could threaten marriages or norms.

Huguette further supported the argument that Women’s Day celebrations should not continue with a story that articulated a more extreme perimeter around what seemed to be possible for women: a vendor who had died when her attempts to leverage the emerging frontier of the day failed. According to the story, right after the departure of Blaise, a local vendor had mortgaged her home to make a version of the women’s day pagne, taking advantage of the newly open market now that Chantelle’s associate’s monopoly was over: “There was a woman, three years ago. 8th March came, and she went and manufactured a lot of pagnes. The pagnes arrived, she took a lot of pagnes.105”

“[She] filled, filled up the whole house,” Huguette continued, stacking the sides of her hands over one another in the air continuously until they were over her head, before detailing how this woman had mortgaged that very house to buy the fabric. “She went to the bank. She brought the papers for the land of their house, her husband’s papers. She took the guarantee to make the pagnes. What she sold - because she took two bales [of fabric] - she didn’t sell much. She completely lost.106”

105 “Il y avait une femme, il ya trois ans. 8 Mars est arrivé, et elle est allée confectioner beaucoup des pagnes. Les pagnes sont arrivés, elle a pris beaucoup de pagnes”
106 “Rempli, rempli toute la maison… Elle est allée à la banque. Elle a pris les papiers pour le parcel de la maison, les papiers de son mari. Elle a pris la garantie pour confectioner les pagnes. Qu’est-ce qu’elle a vendu – car elle a pris deux balles – elle a pas vendu beaucoup. Elle a totalement perdu.”
Huguette swiped her palms against one another firmly like she was ridding them of flour as she recounted what this women had lost. She reoriented my attention then, punctuating her story between what happened with the pagnes and the ramifications in this woman’s life: “Look at what this women, what she did. Because she had lost, she had nothing. She took products to die by suicide. She died. Is that interesting/good?"

When Blaise and Chantelle were ousted and the pagne monopoly opened up, a proliferation of women’s day pagnes entered the market. 2015, the year the woman in the story had mortgaged her family’s land to take advantage of this freshly informalised market segment, was the first women’s day since Blaise and Chantelle left - she had identified and was capitalising on a calculated risk in this newly open frontier of accumulation. She had filled her home with pagne. and hardly sold any due to the immediately saturated market. Many others had also made the pagne, and potentially they had more liquidity than her.

Her risk turned into a complete loss for which she had to absorb the full responsibility: “She completely lost”. She had identified a potential margin but was exposed to the huge risk that the saturation of this market segment would come so immediately. This story encapsulates the edge of the exposure that female vendors embody: themselves saturated with responsibility and seeking exhaustible opportunities for accumulation in the saturated market. As a warning parable, it demonstrates the internalised external limits of women’s opportunities to capture capital under and after Blaise at their extremes - the fear of violence had one threatened the monopoly under Blaise and his wife Chantelle, or death by saturated market in the disorder after their departure.

107 Regarde cette femme, qu’est-ce qu’elle a fait. Car elle a perdu, elle a rien. Elle a pris des produits pour se tuer. Elle est deecedé. Est-ce que c’est intéressant?
Just as with stories that circulated about the availability of and limits to villageoise fille labour, narratives about limits of women’s affordable entrepreneurial identities and experiences both expressed and reshaped evolving limits on female vendors’ agency. These (im)mobilising narratives “[did] not merely reflect prior subjectivities but instead showed themselves to be partially constitutive of them” (Prentice, 2015, p. 59). As discussed in Chapter 1, I did not understand rumours that circulated in the market to be necessarily objective or stable accounts, but rather saw the different stories that gained traction in different spaces and with different people as part of the meaning-making that shaped decisions. Such traction was particularly pertinent in cases where they were directly connected to frames of possibility and action currently being considered within livelihood strategies. Even when we can’t trace or validate a rumour or story, the presence of such knowledges tell us just as much about the multiple incentives, ideas and values that shape experience and the uncertain reality in which they are produced as they do about their content (Perera, 2017). This story with its sobering ending also gives weight and legitimacy to more nebulous resistances to the celebration and mobility of women and the possibility of exchanging household responsibility for men’s evening freedoms for one day a year. The combination of these threats in the shadows of what was possible was squeezing the feasibility of the future of women’s day, a “structure of feeling” that “[does] not have to await definition, classification, or rationalisation before [exerting] palpable pressures and set[ting] effective limits on experience and action” (Williams, 1997, p. 132).

This striking example shows us what such narratives motivate, enable or preclude. The threat of divorce and death combined with the visible saturation of pagnes at the market were reasons to shut down the day for Huguette, who advocated for stopping a celebration she had so enjoyed for decades, a day when she and other women had been ‘really honoured’. The market is a site where gendered norms were (de)stabilised through everyday entanglements, but also through the stories that refracted manifested exposures to risk into the lives of women not directly implicated in those experiences, making their own exposures to risk more salient. Gendered dynamics are not static
as they are often represented in development discourses (Onnrod, 1994). Women’s day, when women’s work had historically been celebrated, offers a prism that refracts immanent gendered subjectivities. This day brought to the fore dramatic shifts that appeared to be eroding, or rather tipping the weighting of tensions over solidarities within some gendered relationships, refracting the pressures of state incapacity and a saturated market. Huguette’s narration of this specifically shows how the (fatal) edges of what is possible shaped what societally was aspired towards, and the affordability of individual and collective experience of a celebration of women’s labour.

Tropes of resourceful, responsible women confer a “role of strength [that] does not necessarily fit or supplant one’s reality that contains uncertainty, vulnerability and fear” (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005, p. 110). As we have seen from the stories Huguette told, stories of broken marriages, businesses and ultimately bodies marked the tideline of eroding possibilities for her, reconfiguring what she deemed as affordable opportunities for recognition and joy in her and other Burkinabè women’s lives. Huguette was reorienting herself to this new reality and what it meant for her; how it would shape what she could afford to care about and what collectively Burkinabès could afford to sustain.

The cautionary tale of a women who took her own life – whose exhaustion was complete, leaving her family with a house now owned by the bank, full of instantly value-less pagnes - contoured the margins that could and should be leveraged by women according to how they have been responsibilised in development paradigms. As we saw in Chapter Four, calibrating the dynamic edges of what was possible was fundamental to vendors’ efforts in building and safeguarding their worlds in the presence of “precursory signs of what threatens to happen” (Derrida, 2003, p. 96). As the ultimate “responsible”, women’s everyday experience had to adapt to new landscapes of opportunity and threat, requiring them to vigilantly reorient themselves and how they organise and deploy their resources in light of what was emerging.
Conclusion

Whether one has a margin or not, the edge of exhaustion is always close when one is ultimately responsible for safeguarding one's family's wellbeing and aspirations, and the macro-level support for liveable futures is degrading. The potential and drive to illustrate entrepreneurial foresight and financial savvy - to see and capture emerging market segments - is limited by the amount and nature of resources available to women, and the evolving sets of needs and risks they are responsible for. In saturated markets with sparse resources (money, time, social connections and energy), the small marginal advantage needed to capture limited opportunities before they are saturated is seldom sufficient and aligned to the margin of resources needed to absorb a loss if the saturation comes more quickly than expected.

The experiences explored in this chapter show how much (hidden) work it takes to mediate between the market and the household and the necessity of incorporating understandings of embodied depletion and other women's (often unpaid) labour in how we explore the true cost and value of work. Huguette's alignment of margin and mandate represent an overlapping set of relative privileges while still showing the intensity of her efforts in trying to leverage some extra time and energy into a sense of safety and promise for her children in response to increasing insecurity.

For Diane and many others, the lack of a sufficient and aligned margin of manoeuvrability in navigating her double burden saturated her body with stress. The risks and responsibilities inherent in this labour have embodied effects. Being attentive to the intensity of less visible articulation work can give us a language to explore the work that does not succeed, and the burdens and vulnerabilities these traces illustrate. The next chapter explores the collaborative efforts that hold the market, and vendors, together when such structural pressures are brought to bear on them, examining the generative and fragile sociality that binds their livelihoods and life projects together.
In the streets that encircled the sturdy market walls, narrow plumes of black smoke wafted up from burning piles of rubbish every morning. Sometimes white butterflies danced through them; sometimes they were just burning remnants, lacking the contrast and life that made them felt like something more. Aggregation of debris began again as soon as more people arrived to the market, with the rainbow of discards mixed in thrown into sharp relief against the omnipresent black plastic bags that were dropped once their contents are used. Yellow soap sachets for washing hands and feet, blue water sachets for keeping thirst at bay, mango stones with threads of orange tracing teeth marks along their edges, twirls of yellow-brown pineapple skins and the green sprays of their spiked leaves. As new layers of the day’s life were dropped, they were gradually mashed into a sepia colour-scape of brown and beige by the movement of people and motos, ready to be scooped up by the evening cleaners and dragged away by their donkey-led karts. The dregs that remained got corralled into little pyres for burning the next morning and it all cycled through again.

“Les gens circulent pas, l’argent circule pas” - people are not circulating, money is not circulating - was the chorus of the inhabitants of this market, and it is true that increasingly fewer clients come to visit them, to spend money. But these market vendors themselves are people, and they circulated around the market spending their money there on a narrow range of necessities. This was the circulation that kept this market as a market. The patterns of this circulation, and what it
produced were shifting but life continued to unfold there, its sediments rhythmically dealt with each evening for the market to be re-made in the morning.

This chapter explores how the market was re-made through practices of hope, not as an abstract affective state, but as collective practices of care, humour and respect that enabled tenacity. Centring on three neighbouring stallholders and the space their stalls held for wider social entanglements, it unpicks the density of social relationships needed to consistently recommit to this market through a period of crisis. Nuanced practices of individual and collective care regenerated and held these relationships through impasses where constraint wore down emotional resources. This social and affective labour was vital to maintaining the limited but critical mass of movement that signalled the continuity of the market. This effort and energy generated a “social surplus” of trust and connection that transcended even the moments where the social fabric of the market was frayed and the tenability of its future compromised (De Martino, 2003, p. 8).

This “affective commons” enabled the imagined continuity of the market, and the day-to-day continuity that bridged to it (Berlant, 2012, p. 77). At a moment when economic responses were more difficult to invoke, the work of investing in the sociality and related maintenance of potentiality of the market comes into further prominence. Understanding and using one’s margin of manoeuvrability reflects a nuanced appreciation of individual and collective agency and one’s capacity to be affected and to affect (Massumi, 2002, p. 212). This determines the ways in which people can and do invest in hoping through their social, financial, material and cognitive strategies and actualisations.

“We only speak108 was often a response to greetings at the market - a denunciation of the scope of activity possible for vendors. This chapter aims to unpack what this talking did. If this market

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108 “On discute seulement”
had become a place predominantly for talking, how did this talking – the ways of being with one another in the impasse - maintain the market? The fragility and dynamism of relations constantly remade and adapted through the market’s daily social practices facilitate and reinforce the daily rhythms of comings and goings, eating and praying. These social practices did more than bring people together, the congregations they created both in and beyond the market itself facilitated a collective future.

As discussed in the introduction, social capital is often instrumentalised practically and discursively to motivate and legitimate action and inaction in different contexts. A narrative about the informal market as a frontier where savvy entrepreneurs can draw down a livelihood from their mutable stock of social capital without depleting it persists in mainstream development discourse. Such framings, which mobilise and legitimate development agendas, represent vendors as actors who can and should figure out how to meet their needs based on leveraging their mutual fund of goodwill.

However, I will argue that nourishing the social and emotional resources that underpin the daily life of this market was a rich and complex map of connections and rhythms, responding to the capacities and needs of those who served and were served by it. This sociality mutually constituted the market as a zone in space and time where/when the expectation of continuity was performed and enabled through vendors’ actions. Such dense social fabric was not an innate resource and it did not come without work - it was practiced, dynamic and embodied. The walls and buildings of this market created a robust physical frame imbued with the expectation of continuity and structure; this backdrop of metal, concrete and burnt red dust was enlivened by the coloured sediments of dynamic sociality that unfolded there every day: the water sachets and mango pits, the soap sachets and pineapple tops.
This sociality, as much as the walls and buildings, formed a structural scaffold within which the continuity of the market was made plausible, despite the failure of the market to produce surplus financial value for most of its vendors. This exploration aims to shed light on other ways in which value was created and maintained in the present and into an imagined future through the “expectation of sheer continuity” that the continued presence and practice of these vendors facilitated (Langer, 1953, p. 129). This continuity transcended the material and discursive - it was the "co-presence of potentials" that held together the affective reality of the market (Massumi, 2005, p. 5). The maintenance of this latent potentiality, of the felt sense of having or being the potential for a future market underpinned the business of maintaining the market.

These vendors met challenges to their businesses and their self-understandings as entrepreneurs that transcended the material and the social, recreating the market by upholding their individual-collective daily rhythms when the economic reasons for them ebbed away. Securing continuity for themselves, practically and conceptually, required traders to undertake the abductive work of “tacking back and forth between futures, pasts and presents, framing templates for producing the future” (Adams 2009, p. 246, emphasis in original). The interdependencies of the market also required them to respond to their “implication in the existence of others” (Gibson Graham, 2006, p. 88). Such efforts to enable a collective future together mutually reconstituted the social and material space, facilitating the continuity of the precarious market through the maintenance of its potential.

This collective and individual labour was performed in response to people’s relative densities and distributions of resources and responsibilities, both within and outside the market. This heterogeneous constellation of capacity is entangled but relatively self-contained core groupings of stall-holders who held space for one another and the collective beyond, through daily practices of care, humour and tenacity. This chapter explores a group of vendors whose experiences of
moments of impasse show the diversity of how this market is currently enacted and experienced, and the ways in which these divergent experiences frame and respond to one another.

We will first revisit Diane who we met in the previous chapter at a moment when her identity as a market vendor was being undermined by both a lack of childcare and salient markers of her stall’s stagnation. Diane's experience of Marché Collé sheds light on the vitality and fragility of the social life of the market as she grappled with the edge of the tenability of her business and her resultantly precarious place in the present and future of the market. This potential rupture played out through emotional and social strain at moments, but was mitigated through the expectation of continuity facilitated by the community she has co-created around her within the market.

Secondly, I will move next door to her neighbours Ousmane and Maman and their very different experience of the market and the manifestations of its current (im)potentiality. Although Maman, Ousmane and Diane shared a forecourt and much of their time when at the market together, the differences in the ways the current situation confronted them reflects their divergent resources and vulnerabilities and the dense, dynamic sociality that they had created and continued to recreate together. As vendors were confronted with shifts in the felt tenability of their livelihoods, emotional resources were tested. However, moments where the (im)potentiality of this period felt particularly salient illustrated how the collective continuity managed to buoy and smooth potential ruptures in public feeling and rhythms. Highlighting how Ousmane in particular was tethered to the market through his own impasse foregrounds the tenacity required to maintain this tether in daily practice, but especially through potential rupture.

The third part of this chapter considers how the close relationship between Diane, Ousmane and Maman connects to broader collective rhythms and how they animate, reconfigure and respond to the material space of the market. Ousmane in particular, bolstered through his wife’s labour and his market friendships with Diane and Maman, maintained a node of stability for himself and those
around him, representing others who performed similar functions in different “families” of vendors across the market. While the market did not function financially for many, continuing to come together and to perform the daily rhythms of the market nourished and reconstituted an affective commons, a collective practicing of the plausibility of continuity in the face of crisis. This final section will finish by exploring how new spatial configurations recalibrate the potential sociality going forward, reflecting wider emergent tensions between trust and sociality.

**Individual-Collective Impasse-Continuity: Diane**

Diane sold premium second-hand items sourced with the help of her husband’s networks. Originally from the Cote d’Ivoire, and with her Burkinabè husband working in Canada, Diane’s life and livelihood at the market existed in a different frame than many of those around her - financially it was less material in that her family’s financial survival was not dependent on it, but in terms of her sense of connection to others and her own identity, her stall and the people she connected to there were very important. Diane had co-created a meaningful family for herself around this physical space and this imbued her stall and her experience of the rhythms of the market with a life that significantly transcended the livelihood it represented. However, as her business became less plausible and her care responsibilities coalesced with health concerns, she navigated new tensions between her life and livelihood at the market.

When I first arrived at Diane’s stall in March 2017, the rhythm that marked the start and end of the days was relatively clear and streamlined. Mornings felt rhythmic enough for time to pass quickly. Diane would open up the padlock on the back-room and the wooden table of glassware and crockery would be moved out to the forecourt, along with a smaller version piled with belts, jewellery, baby shoes - whatever was catching her clients’ eyes at the moment. The placard would go out onto the edge of the street and then the hanging would start, perching colourful items of
clothes from Canada and Dubai around the wood and metal structure of the forecourt by any available nook a hanger could find a home in for the day. Then a tea, and some breakfast, and clients would start coming by, their stays interspersed with conversations with her neighbours - Ousmane, Ahmed, Maman - and passers-by. It was very rare for more than two minutes to go by without something happening – someone arriving or leaving, a client, a sale - jokes and movement were constant, and small jobs like dusting made sense in relation to the passing of visitors and potential sales.

Diane, Ousmane and Maman had stalls next to each other with Ousmane in the middle. Nothing higher than a knee-height wooden bench lay between their forecourts, maintaining lines of sight and open space for conversation. The space could be sectioned off for private conversations by how people sat together on benches or the languages they spoke, but it defaulted to an open space. To the east side of Diane’s stall, a full-height wooden trellised border separated her from the tailors beside her, and to the west side, a high pile of rice sacks and wooden shelves stacked with tins had already marked the boundary between Diane and the neighbouring grocery trader Sorgho. The vendors didn’t know one another before they were placed side-by-side by random allocation. Ousmane and Maman had been moved to this neighbourhood market 15 years before, following a fire at the city’s central market, and Diane joined them after moving from Cote d’Ivoire several years later.

Diane’s warmth and humour anchored her business and her life here. She was the first person who welcomed me at the market and I saw the same responsive practices of care tether her friends and clients to her. The nature of Maman and Ousmane’s businesses as smaller-ticket items (condiments for Maman, plastic bags and pineapples for Ousmane) was tied to a quicker rhythm of clients than higher-value second hand clothes, but generally Diane spent the day out on the benches and interacted with them and their clients when she wasn’t busy.
Maman was from Bobo, Burkina’s second city and so she and Diane both spoke Dioula as their first language and as Maman didn’t speak much French or Mooré and Ousmane only had a few sparse threads of Dioula, Diane was the main mediator of language across the three forecourts. Diane took up organisational activities of care - she had a water cooler stocked with just enough sachets of cold water for the few stalls closest to her, which were often bought with accruing tabs or exchange. At Ramadan, she arranged a collection between the Christians at the stalls closest by to buy sugar cubes and dates for the Muslim vendors who worked and prayed near them every day.

The market as any social space was not without its tensions - early in the year, Diane was very upset by rumours a vendor down the road had reportedly been spreading about her, feeling judged and excluded. During that week, she repeatedly expressed how meaningful the support of Maman, Ousmane and Ahmed was and how moments of difficulty always make that clear. She said she didn’t know what she would do without them always being there for her and how, given her lack of family in Ouaga, they were her family there: “If there is love, there is family”.

Many of Diane’s clients were vendors at the market who would admire a dress or top they had seen while passing, or came in to rifle through new boxes of stock while chatting to Diane, and would then return to buy after another visit. The rest of Diane’s client base had mostly been repeat clients from the local area, many of whom would buy stacks of children’s clothes in shopping trips where they came to the market specifically to see Diane’s stock. They would sit with her for an hour, piling up multiples of tiny garments, catching up with her and joking before lightly negotiating prices. All her clients knew that her prices were significantly higher than many of the

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109 Dioula is a (family of) language(s) spoken across Burkina Faso, Mali and Ivory Coast. It is a minority language in Ouagadougou but the primary language in Bobo, Burkina Faso’s second city.

110 “Si il y a [de] l’amour, il y a [de] la famille”
other second-hand stalls, as she bought premium batches that came in sorted boxes from specifically curated suppliers, not the bundled tarps that were cut open at the edge of the market.

![Clothes hanging on Diane's forecourt](image)

**Figure 6.1:** Clothes hanging on Diane's forecourt, and a water-cooler in the bottom left corner for neighbouring vendors. By the end of my fieldwork, the trellis behind her had been replaced by a metal wall enclosing the neighbouring forecourt.

However, by January of 2018, Diane noted after a client left that she was selling things for cheap. She said she knew that the limited amount her clients offered her was all they could afford, but she realised after that specific client left that there was nothing left over for her. “There is but/only” was commonly used by clients at that time for their offers. This phrase was echoed by sellers in their rationalisations of selling at low prices that had begun to break the threshold of profit and loss; the limit of the public’s capacity for expenditure understood and internalised within

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111 “Il y a que”
the market. That January, Diane was often only breaking even on transactions and two months later, even these break-even transactions had dried up.

By March of 2018, it was coming to the end of Harmattan, when winds full of red sand and dust blow in from the Sahel between November to March. The dust had just kept coming for months, the opaque residue of time passing, and Diane had become too exhausted to continually keep up with it. It had only been a few days since she wiped the last layer of dust off the glassware lined up on one of her wooden tables but new brown dots of sediment from far and near had blown in and cloaked her merchandise. The tables needed to be moved in and out of the back room every day, slowly edged out onto the forecourt by Diane and whoever else was there to help, bringing the dust with it.

With the absence of sales and the wear of day-to-day life, the rhythm of Diane’s days was changing. It was one of the hottest months of the year and she was exhausted. Diane had been having continuous headaches through Harmattan and was two months pregnant with her third daughter. Now, not much beyond what facilitated living in the market space - eating, sleeping, and being with her neighbours - was done in terms of opening and closing the stall. Her stall was not completely set up – few things were hung out on her forecourt and she hadn’t got new stock for a while, so the idea of rotating things potential clients hadn’t seen to draw them in wasn’t relevant. The tables were still moved outside - they needed to be in order to make space to sit in the backroom.

Diane was sitting on a plastic chair when I arrived one morning after I hadn’t seen her at the market for a few days. She prompted me to lie on the mat rolled out on the floor rather than sit between the cardboard boxes on either side of the wooden bench - she said she could see that I was tired, that my energy dropped after the first three or four weeks whenever I had come back from Europe. She mirrored back concern I had for her, warning me I would get ill if I didn’t get
rest. She offered to put on the fan tied to the ceiling above her but said she had turned it off because it was just blowing hot air and dust around.

“Burkina’s not easy”, Diane said with her head tilted towards her left shoulder. Originally from the cooler coast of the Cote d’Ivoire, she found the climate particularly difficult to tolerate, exacerbated by the lengthening and intensifying of the hot and dry seasons this year. She was shelling peanuts onto her lap, not to eat but to keep awake as it was hot and her new headache medication was making her drowsy. As she sat shelling rhythmically, her attention darted between the stacked-up stock surrounding her and other related concerns. She talked about whether she should sell stock that she was sick of looking at for a loss, whether to figure out new storage options so that everything stopped getting so dusty and future clients may have been happier, how to arrange her childcare to look after her two girls without any help. All these decisions were considered against the backdrop that she had no clients, was exhausted and couldn’t see either of these conglomerations of constraints changing any time soon.

While Diane sat shelling peanuts, Nina came by on her way back from the interior courtyard of the market. Nina sold stationary a few doors down and she often passed her time at Diane and Ousmane’s stalls - she would make jokes about Ahmed being an old man when he’d ask about her being his next wife and helped herself to plastic bags in Ousmane’s back room when he was out, slipping coins under the plastic mat on his counter. She came across the forecourt and leant against the door frame, tentatively touching the edge of a dress she had planned to buy. She smiled awkwardly - she’d changed her mind because she didn’t have the money to buy the dress anymore.

Diane was polite but did not hide her disappointment and Nina left without a joke or a smile. It felt strained, and is one of only a handful of conversations I can remember witnessing or

112 “Burkina n’est pas facile”
participating in at the market that was abandoned where I felt such tension remaining. The affective labour that goes into keeping relations smooth and buoyant felt out of grasp at that moment. A sale lost usually would have prompted a joke, an offer to keep something aside for a while, any warm closing to the conversation, but the unsold dress stayed suspended from the doorway and Nina moved away with an awkward smile after the conversation abruptly halted.

“It’s not easy”\textsuperscript{113}, Diane said softly after Nina left, followed by a pause that left the impasse in the air. She went on to remind me of a client who came by the other day whom she felt cornered into selling to at a loss. Looking back, I don’t know if this cornering felt social or financial or both but she seemed uncomfortable as she retold the story. Apart from Nina, no one came by the whole hour or so that we sat in the back room. It was difficult to know if the lack of trade was compounded by the fact we were out of sight and the stall was increasingly sparsely marketed outside. We heard passers-by being greeted by Maman and Ousmane but this room is so much darker than the sun-saturated road that no-one could see in without deliberately coming closer to find Diane. She had been telling me the different ideas she had for how to store and present her stock, but each potential plan tapered off. The shop felt hollow right now but, if nobody had the money, would continuing to present the stock in the best way make a difference?

Diane had a full box of shoes in the corner behind me, with a calculation marked out in thick black marker on the outside of the box: the cost price of the box divided by the number of pairs gives the cost price per pair. The shoes had cost Diane 800 CFA (\$1.00) a pair and she didn’t think she could sell them for that – she flicked her hand slowly and dismissively away from her body in front of her as she looks over at them: “I don’t want to see them anymore. I’ll sell them to the girl inside

\textsuperscript{113} “C’est pas facile”
the market [the main courtyard] – even if I lose some money on them, they’ll be gone and maybe she can sell them – one, one [piecemeal].

Presumably both she and the girl she would sell the box to would have to believe they could be sold individually for more than the price Diane was willing to sell them to her for, or Diane wouldn’t have thought the sale feasible. There was an apparent relative margin or mitigated loss that Diane could herself materialise by selling for these cheaper prices individually. However, the material reminder of stagnation with their cost price written in indelible marker on the outside of

Figure 6.2: Dusty glasses on a table and bright scarves hanging on Diane's forecourt

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114 “Je ne veut pas les voir. Je vais les vendre à la fille à l'intérieur du marché- même si je perds de l'argent sur eux, ils seront partis et peut-être qu'elle pourra les vendre un-un”
the box seemed too salient right now. Her own more pertinent margin of manoeuvrability was to clear space, to cut down the emotional burden of this stall.

As we saw in Chapter Five, keeping her and her children’s home-life functioning without a fille or ‘villageoise’ at home had eroded Diane’s capacity to come to the market and partake in the rhythm of her days as she once did. She hadn’t been able to find a fille during months of searching - the connections made through her network hadn’t returned someone she felt would work well within her family and she lamented her lack of denser social connections within the country. As an Ivorian, she did not have a close family network in Ouagadougou. Meanwhile, her Burkinabè husband spent most of the year in Canada which meant her connections with his family were less of a part of her everyday life than they would have been had he lived in the country full-time. As also touched on in Chapter Five, Diane’s husband returned to visit her and their two children once a year at Christmas and during his visit that year, they had moved neighbourhoods and she now had to travel 12km to get to the market from the other side of the city.

At a moment where the viability of Diane’s stall was already questionable, the additional time, energy and fuel money of this commute prompted further fatigue and underscored the lack of profitability of her business. She had started to go home to eat breakfast at her new house far away after bringing the kids to school rather than having it at the market, so she often came to the market a few hours later than before, and left to bring the girls home from school a few hours after that, to prepare food and look after them. Sometimes she left the stall open and came back to close it up later, sometimes not. Often, she didn’t open up at all. Diane’s old rhythm hadn’t been replaced with something stable. Everyday decisions of how to distribute energy, time and attention made painfully salient the overarching challenges she has in not being sufficiently resourced. The cluster of issues Diane was facing challenged her capacity to partake in the daily practices of being a vendor, undermining her identity as an entrepreneur and eroding her capacity
to maintain hope and to participate in the sociality of the market in the same rhythm she had been used to.

This strain played out in the connections around Diane, pulling her back from the daily rhythms and showing frays in her capacity to maintain hope and the social practices of attunement and mediation that embody it. Diane’s specific impasse at the market reflected her own constellation of vulnerabilities and resources. Her gendered work, and the overarching social and affective vulnerability of always being away from her husband and broader family imbued her experience with a different emotional texture than her next-door neighbours and closest connections at the market, Ousmane, Ahmed and Maman. However, years of spending her days with those around her at the market had co-created a base with her friends and neighbours that she could come and be part of, even if it was at a slight distance - a greater rhythm that held a space for her to return to, and drew her back on days that she wanted to be here even if there was not much expectation of a sale.

This social space was there for Diane if and when her business became workable again and the maintained rhythm of the market allowed her to wait, at least for the time being. Sociality is processual and anticipatory, “always yet to be completed, always inclusive of conjunctions” (Simone, 2016, p. 225): the sociality of the market allowed for plurality of experience, for divergences to be held within it. Exhausted as she may be, she continued to invest her energy in making it to the market and partaking in the co-creation of this space from whatever capacity she currently had, balancing current exhaustion with the placeholder for a future possibility of a sustainable livelihood and lifeworld that stays here. Emotions “do things, and work to align individuals with collectives – or bodily space with social space – through the very intensity of their attachments” (Ahmed 2004, p. 26). As Diane said, “where there is love, there is family”. The attachment between her and her market neighbours kept her tethered to the sociality of the market, and to the expectation of continuity into a collective future that its rhythms signal.
Tethering Tenacity: Ousmane

Next door, Diane’s neighbours Maman and Ousmane maintained their daily rhythm at the market throughout the waning time. Because of their roles in their family system (Maman based predominantly on her age and being a grandmother, Ousmane based on his gender), neither Ousmane nor Maman were expected to contribute to the labour that upheld their family’s household in a similar degree to Diane. As many others who maintained a robust rhythm throughout this year of constriction, they both continued to nourish and draw from the richness of the market’s sociality in a dependable way. This mutual tethering maintained flexibility and potentiality for others, knowing there was a market to return to at any moment. However, the trust and warmth that buoyed this stability were not untested. These vendors’ commitment to re-enact the stability of the market in the face of everyday threats to the sustainability of their livelihoods showed both the depth and the edges of their social and affective strength.

Maman sold herbs, spices and dried leaves from sacks, and stacks of tamarind, hibiscus, salt and pepper were laid out across her forecourt and a low table that lay against the wall into her back room. The room was the same size as Diane and Ousmane’s but it was full with layers of sacks to the extent that there was only a quarter-circle of space to open the door. She would squeeze around the edge of it to close it from the inside to change her clothes in the morning when she arrived, and in the evening before she left. Otherwise she lived her life at the market on her forecourt. She ate her meals out there, and often in the middle of the day she would lie down on a mat on the ground beside the bench and sleep.

Setting up and closing down her stall at the end of the day took longer for Maman than those around her. The sheer quantity of items that she had to be unpack and pack up at the start and end of each day required longer rituals for bookending her daily engagement with the market.
When Maman got new stock, she would shake the dust from them, tumbling them out of their stacks into big baskets and flicking them high in the air with a flick of her wrist to dislodge the sediment before placing them in enamel bowls to show her clients. Her clients were mostly friends who would come and sit with her for quite a long time.

Maman and Ousmane’s warm and peaceful dynamic with one another allowed for both of them to know that they would have company through the day, even at the quietest moments. Maman’s stable rhythm allowed Ousmane to run to-and-fro helping people, and arranging things knowing that someone was looking after his stall, while Ousmane helped Maman out with physical tasks like collecting stock, or bringing her home when she didn’t have transport with her family. Ousmane sold pineapples from a wooden cart on his forecourt, and plastic bags from his back room. Although pineapple sales were down, the ubiquitous black plastic bags were still needed by everyone and so Ousmane’s decline in sales was slower than many others. “Sachets” were also needed for takeaway food which was doing better than pretty much everything else, 115 so his livelihood generally covered at least his operating costs.

Moreover, Ousmane was so integral to his network at the market that to miss even a day would have been keenly felt around him. He kept the prayer mats in his back room for the men who prayed with him across the road throughout the day, and filled tall yellow plastic water canisters for them to wash with beforehand at the edge of his concrete forecourt. He had once talked about what it would be like to move markets, to a market closer to his home or along the edge of a road, but said he couldn’t move because he had built up his clients here and it would be too hard to start from the beginning again. He had invested a lot of himself at this market.

115 As introduced in Chapter 4, due to the cost of starting a fire to cook and the constrained economy hampering liquidity and prompting people to be out and about trying to “gagner” more, the market for the cheapest of take-away food was actually doing better than before.
Ousmane’s commitment to the daily rhythm at and around his stall was a very visible type of place attachment. Yet a responsive mobility also underpinned his relationship to the market. His stall was a central space and he nurtured his relationship with Maman and Diane at this base, but he also nourished that centrality through his availability to others and the articulation work that kept the collective life of the market “back on track” (Star and Strauss, 1999, p. 10). He was always running to help a little brother\textsuperscript{116} with the parking if someone was late or hadn’t come, giving someone a lift to or from the market when they didn’t have transport, helping with fixing or updating stalls. His availability to others also manifested at his own stall - especially as trade dwindled, the men who prayed with him lingered longer on his benches before and after praying. Ousmane seemed like a node that both discursively and materially afforded stability to those in the collective beyond his close friends.

\textsuperscript{116} a younger male relative or younger male in one’s network of close friends / connections for which one looks out and/or is responsible for in some way
Of course, his level of presence reflected a very specific composite of resources and dynamics specific to his gender, relative wealth and other aspects of his experience, as well as his personality. Ousmane’s wife undertook the labour of looking after their four children and managing their household, and in fact he often framed his relationship with his family and their understanding of his livelihood as a reason to keep the very fixed rhythm of his day - his family could understand his efforts to try to maintain his operation more if he did not break the container of his work-home divide in space and time. As one of 30 children from a four-wife household, Ousmane was confident that his migration to the city was final and returning back to the village to care for his parents would not be part of his life. He was a net contributor within his network, with many little brothers relying on periodic financial help from him in addition to his nuclear family, but he could call on his older brothers if he needed to; as neither the wealthiest nor the eldest in his family and close friends, he was not the last line of defense in his financial network.

When I arrived to Ousmane’s one morning, he was squatting on his forecourt with all of his pineapples on the bare concrete in front of him, his elbows resting on his knees with his hands blinkering his eyes. Everyone else there was standing and Ahmed explained that the wooden cart his pineapples were usually lined up on had been stolen from where he stored it across the road. He had known that there was a period of time every morning when the courtyard across the road was unlocked with the cart there - the students who stayed there left at 5.30 and Ousmane arrived at around 7.30. His cart would cost 25,000F or 30,000F (£ 30- £ 40) to replace - the equivalent of over a month’s profit from pineapples - throwing the sustainability of this part of his business into sharp relief. He had kept his cart there overnight, stacked with pineapples, for five years and nothing had ever happened. Now, it was missing and his reaction underscored the deeper
ramifications of the theft: "It must have been someone who passes to know it was there. I greet everyone who passes"\textsuperscript{117}.

The violence of someone he knew - someone he acknowledged - taking the cart seemed to prompt a particular shock, given how Ousmane had cultivated such an embeddedness in the social rhythms of the market. This social injury was coupled with the reality that this would tip the pineapple portion of his business into being unprofitable over this period - his margin for accumulation on pineapples was much less than the margin he had lost by trusting his cart in a semi-public spot. On a logistical level, he now had to find a new cart and deal with finding another storage solution for it. Everything remained sombre at the collective space across Ousmane, Diane and Maman’s stalls that day, with friends coming to sit but very little spoken.

The options for justice were very limited. Nobody seemed to have seen anything and the police weren’t expected to do anything with their threadbare resources. The Koglweogo\textsuperscript{118} were a contentious option who were often more successful at dealing with theft than the police, but by using extreme measures. The danger of engaging the Koglweogo at the market was especially salient that week. The day after his cart was taken, a row between the Koglweogo and a butcher in another residential market in the Tanghin zone in the north of the city had escalated to the point where a member of the Koglweogo allegedly killed the butcher and was then himself beaten to death by the surrounding vendors. News rolled into the market through papers and radio and conversations the following day of the shockingly violent scene at an everyday market in broad daylight. “Killed for nothing”\textsuperscript{119}, another vendor said on learning of it, lamenting how theft was never something someone should die for. However, he and other vendors also acknowledged that

\textsuperscript{117} “Ce doit etre quelqu’un qui passe pour savoir qu’il était là. Je salue tout le monde qui passe”

\textsuperscript{118} As introduced in Chapter Three, the Koglweogo are community-organised / vigilante armed security groups whose legitimacy was contested but had (and has since) been increasingly sanctioned by the government on the pragmatic grounds that formal police services are heavily under-resourced.

\textsuperscript{119} “Tué pour rien”
the police didn’t function so theft was rarely followed up through this official channel of
accountability.

In a city and time when there was no apparent path for recourse for such a loss, Ousmane had to
find a way, along with his neighbours, of dealing with the different levels of this transgression. The
next day, the crisis softened as he joked about it sitting on the forecourt with Ahmed and two of
their friends: "$They're painting it now so I can go and buy it from them once I have the money -
it will have a nice new colour." I had often noticed how Ousmane would make an effort to joke,
to go beyond a superficial interaction with those he engaged with around the market, even when
he would later say or imply he didn’t know them. He impressed upon me months before how
important laughter was when things were hard at the market. “You can’t be like this” he said,
folding his arms and frowning exaggeratedly. “What does that do?”

While the market’s vendors often lamented that they were only talking, or only waiting at the
market, there is a qualitative difference in what different ways of talking and waiting can produce
or mediate. As well as these moments of personal confrontation, news of change flowed into the
market with increasing frequency and severity and was absorbed and refracted with similar
repertoires of social and emotional resources. So many hours of life unfolded in the market that
the time spent there necessarily had to make space for life to happen and be processed, both in
relation to their livelihoods and their broader moral worlds. The everyday disasters that edge
understandings of what is normal away from the known limits of these vendors’ experiences were
somehow mediated through the relational practices that were performed here.

120 “Ils sont en train de le peindre maintenant pour que je puisse aller l’acheter dès que j’aurai l’argent. Il
aura une belle nouvelle couleur.”
121 “On discute seulement”, “On attend seulement”
What does joking do compared to crossing one’s arms and frowning, as Ousmane had mimed as a non-option? Membre and Roitman’s article on “the spirit (esprit), visibility and profanity of this immediate present” and the cluster of social upheavals faced by African societies opens with the quote from a Senegalese participant: “Me, when something happens to me, I just laugh.” (Mbembe and Roitman, 1995, p. 323). Although written in 1995, Mbembe and Roitman’s study of unfolding everyday crisis and the repertoires for their partial and contingent mediation, including humour, maintains resonance.

Here the event that Ousmane had to mediate was manifold. He had no cart, but even if he were to get a new cart, he would have to find a new rhythm for storing it. Both of these problems were surmountable if inconvenient, and were solved within a week. Friends helped him to pay for a new cart and he rearranged the locking of the gate so that it wasn’t open in the mornings between the students’ leaving and his arrival. In terms of these two layers of the event, Ousmane’s joking through the moment allowed him to signal to those around him that they could move on from the immediate crisis. In this way humour allowed him and his neighbours to “sustain the morale and cohesion of [their] groups” (Fine, 1984) through reframing the problem and minimising it, signalling that it was something that could be moved on from.

Two other problems of a different scale and emotionality remained - the amount of loss, even if it was surmountable, brought the sustainability of his pineapple business into focus by showing how a loss that he was vulnerable to would undercut many weeks of profitability. The direct margin of his business was positive over a weekly rhythm - he still sold pineapples for more than he bought them and spent on petrol to get them, even if it was with lower margin and volume than before - but the tenability of Ousmane’s business was precarious enough for a loss of this size to throw it into question.

122 “Moi, quand quelque chose me dépasse, je ris seulement.”
On a more existential level, this event impacted Ousmane’s sense of trust. On this one particular road along the perimeter of the market, Ousmane was the person who was always visibly reinvesting in the social fabric of the market. The symptomatic problems of the actual material loss and organisational problem could be closed within a relatively short amount of time, but the underlying causes of this everyday crisis could not. Public trust was decreasing and criminality was rising. The theft illustrated and compounded an expectation of general degradation that threatened the sociality of the market as well as its economic viability. Humour can “[make] life easier to bear, at least briefly” (Berger, 1997, p. 205), but this is just one of the social and affective practices of mediation that are needed to move through an impasse.

The way Ousmane shifted to joking about the theft, and the thieves, reminded me of a time when he split up an argument tipping into a physical fight across the road the year before. I had noticed his eyes flickering from mine over my shoulder as we talked before he got up and walked briskly across the road just as one party reached their leg out to kick the other. I hadn’t seen it start and didn’t feel like I should be there so I left but could see peripherally as I left that Ousmane had deescalated the situation as the men sat back down. The next day, he told me - “the most important [thing] to helping, it’s to never ask why, to try to know who is right or what happened. The most important [thing] is it’s finished”123.” Being pragmatic in holding space for others to deescalate their conflict was a practice that now seemed to echo his own relationship with the unknown thief and the market collective both were part of.

Dealing with transgressions of trust between himself and others and the confrontation of the vulnerability and thinness of the profitability of his business simultaneously threw two different but connected challenges into sharp relief around the future of this market and Ousmane’s place

123 “Le plus important pour aider, c’est jamais demander pourquoi, d’essayer savoir qui a raison oui qu’est-ce qu’est passé. Le plus important est que c’est fini”
here. Ousmane invested in the affective commons daily through the way he performed and facilitated the rhythms that made up the days of the market around him but his commitment to the market was tested at this specific impasse, showing both the depth of the mutual tethering between him and his place at the market and the vulnerability thereof. Drawing on the care and humour of the dense sociality he had built up with those around him, he could be tenacious in recommitting to and maintaining his rhythms, and doing the work needed to facilitate this even when the path to the future of this market became less visible.

(Un)making the Social Surplus: Diane-Ousmane-Maman and the Collective

The sense of community and warmth cultivated between Diane, Ousmane and Maman’s stalls was salient - an intimate self-contained unit who bore responsibility for each other but were still outward-facing and warm to the larger community. Although financial transactions were dwindling for many vendors, the interaction between such close social networks and the support of wider social entanglements sustained and recreated the market. The embodied practice of continuing to be there and nourish closer relationships created a social surplus “that [could] be used to replenish and expand the commons” (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. 95).

The sociality of Diane-Ousmane-Maman’s space and its rhythms overflowed beyond them. Djibril sold solar panels across the road but shared his stall with an older tailor and spent most of his time over with Ousmane, Maman and Diane when he was at the market. He had a line of sight from there to his stall so could run over if he saw someone coming to look for him. He also has a business venture in Bagré, which he describes as an “economic area” surrounding the dam of the same name near the border with Ghana, and he spent an increasing amount of his time there. Djibril’s stall was not a necessity for him here anymore as most of his clients would call to arrange visiting, and he was in Ouaga increasingly rarely.
However, through the maintenance of the communal social entanglement with his neighbours, he had a place to come back to that is meaningful. Djibril's footprint at the market was small – some panels in the backroom of a tailor's stall, but it struck me how the market he kept coming back to held space for him - each time he came back, he was so quickly enveloped back into the daily rhythms that it felt like he had never been gone. He told me how he often spent his evenings with a friend who was a tailor whenever he was in Ouaga, chatting to him until it was time to go to bed as he didn't have a wife and family yet and wanted to be with a friend. The city's market spaces at Marché Collé and his friend's tailoring business formed his home when he spent time in Ouaga. What they produced was not just value in economic terms (or a dearth of this when ‘failing’) but a set of zones in time and space where he could be, which in turn maintained a container within which he and others could wait for fortunes to turn without deciding to close their stalls.

Figure 6.4: View from Diane's forecourt across Ousmane's through to Maman's. Taken on a Sunday morning when Maman's wooden table is empty and no one has their benches out. The forecourt on the far side of Maman’s is partially blocked by small shelves and a short pile of bags of rice; it was fully enclosed by a metal grid by the end of fieldwork.
Djibril often told me that the market had no economic activity for me to observe – “There is nothing to see”. Little money or custom was circulating compared to places like Bagré or Togo. However, the work that facilitates collective work - articulation work - undertaken by those like Maman and Ousmane who maintained their everyday rhythms at the market, and Diane who invested in the sociality of this home within the market whenever she could, underpinned Djibril’s continued engagement with this market, and the skeletal continuity that enabled the possibility of a more legibly economic future. This articulation work is not legible to rationalised models of work but facilitates the visible work of maintaining the market (Star, 1991). His own investment of time and energy also nourished the affective commons, as did the other people who dipped in and out of this base every day.

This sociality also went beyond Diane, Ousmane, Maman and their close friends like Djibril. The effectively combined forecourt in front of their stalls was a node of social life along this road. Just a few doorways away from one of the main gates into the market courtyard, many people had to pass by to get to their stall from one of the parking sites while Ousmane’s plastic bags were also needed by many vendors. Ousmane’s storing of prayer mats for all the men who prayed across the road throughout the day and yellow plastic water canisters for washing beforehand reflected and deepened the social texture of this forecourt with a regular rhythm of congregation and dispersing throughout the day. These forms of rhythms facilitated a connectedness where most of the market’s vendors would move to one another regularly, at this or other nodes, nourishing and drawing from the collective. These rhythmic entanglements did not stop and start at prayer, or getting tea for elder vendors, or congregating to eat - the scaffolds of the need to eat, pray and drink were wrapped in curiosity and connection that mediated current concerns and imbued the space and sub-spaces within it with meaning during the time that the market was open.

124 “Il y a rien a voir.”
One evening, Djibril and Ousmane stayed after the market closed to help Sorgho create a metal enclosure around his stall and forecourt. Sorgho’s forecourt bordered onto Maman’s. His rice sacks and wooden shelves stacked with tins had already marked the boundary between him and Maman/Ousmane/Diane but now this upgraded barrier went the whole way around his stall, and didn’t need to be brought down and re-enacted every day. The next morning, the only sign anyone passing would have that this sturdy metal box hadn’t been there for years was the excess wet cement that pooled on the ground in front of Ousmane’s pineapples.

Figure 6.5: Jacques at his stall before a new forecourt structure was erected next-door

Figure 6.6: Contrasting picture Jacques took of a client in the same spot a few months later, in the shade cast by the new green stall next door. Lines of sight to the perimeter road to the left were cut off by the structure
These enclosures were increasingly popping up around the market. This particular new box cut off the line of sight to and from the gate to the market, and the other half of the road beyond it, creating new shadows and parameters of privacy and sociality for Maman, Ousmane and Diane. A little while later, a pastel pink version went up overnight on the other side of Diane's stall. There had already been a lattice of wooden slats creating a semi-visible block between Diane-Maman-Ousmane and their neighbours, but the combination of these two metal walls, gave the infrastructure of their social world at the market a more permanent feeling. The new enclosures created a collective space for the three stalls that at once felt more intentionally connected as a unit in resisting any barriers internally, and unintentionally less connected to the outside market.

Extra fittings on the front of forecourts were not new, but this new generation were more solid, mirroring a set of enclosures being built across the city to galvanise the boundaries of private spaces. As introduced in Chapter Three, the increasing salience of security threats reshaped how Ouagadougou’s residents engaged with the city’s markets, and this also held for its other business and public spaces. In the last few months of 2017 in particular, following the second attack on a restaurant on Avenue Kwameh Nkrumah in August of that year, vestibules and security porches were built or augmented on restaurants and other businesses aimed at elites and foreigners all around Ouagadougou, foreclosing lines of sight and discouraging social connection. Cities’ residents’ identities and (im)potentialities are remade in the ways they reconstruct and adapt the space they live their lives within: “As we collectively produce our cities, so we collectively produce ourselves” (Harvey, 2000, p. 159).

Within the market, lines of sight set the boundaries around the daily rhythms of salutations. As the market’s economic activities scaled down to have more to do with the rhythms that facilitated vendors being there than with serving external clients, it also felt like more opportunities were being foreclosed socially through the erection of dividers. Anybody seen was greeted, and darker back rooms or enclosures offered limited engagement with the everyday incidental sociability of
The configuration of inter-related public and private spaces at Marché Collé continually shifted over the year I spent there. The way Maman, Ousmane and Diane’s stalls related to one another, and to those of neighbouring vendors reflected their resistance to any formal divisions between their units. Even when Diane or Ahmed elected to sit in their back rooms, they could step onto their effectively communal forecourt, and know that with Regularity they would find a rhythm to be part of, and those who come to pray, shop, eat and talk here still can. Even if scaled down to core small groups, the existing social configurations and the rhythms that reflected and maintained them remained relatively intact, while shifting orientations to privacy reflected in the social-physical structure of the broader space reflected the “simultaneous undoing and remaking of life” (Simone, 2016, p. 6). In line with the general focus of the market during that specific period, vendors’ focus in maintaining their social space was less on trying to gain and more on maintaining and remaking what they could not afford to lose.

**Conclusion**

Maintaining a skeletal rhythm of the market animated the social, embodied and material dynamics of its existence within the physical space each day. The certainty of daily rhythms - whether one had capacity to currently partake in them or not - tackled a path of continuity through the uncertainty inherent in this set of interdependent livelihoods across a more nebulous temporal frame, stretching into the unknowable future. The work that went into hoping for oneself and for a collective was a heterogeneous set of practices, drawing on individual’s own relative resources and acting into a collective future as it unfolded.
Vendor’s nuanced, responsive work held together the social fabric of the market. From exceptionally engaged vendors who acted as anchors, and the dense networks that engaged in reciprocal rhythms of care and attention with them, social ties afforded stability to the market through the sheer continuity they enacted and facilitated. These social, embodied and material rhythms facilitated and nourished by this affective commons, though pared down and skeletal, were necessary and sufficient conditions to hold space for a future “economic activity” that Djibril lamented as missing in the present. This scaffold supported the ontological security of the market’s continuity, even through a period when many vendors attested they spent more on petrol and food than the average they were earning from their stall.

Continuity is not a smooth and effortless path. Moments of rupture and reconnection illuminated the vitality and fragility of the relations that co-constituted the market at both the individual and collective level, showing both their depth and their possibilities for exhaustion, and the work that went into recommitting to them. Being with one another through the impasse by attending to the social fabric was how people made themselves living through the everyday disasters that came at them, both from outside and within the market.

Investing in the affective commons happens through dealing with transgressions of trust, and moments where the untenability of future continuity feels more certain. Vital, embodied and fragile sociality enables and maintains the market. This sociality is not a static resource to be drawn upon. It is a complex and dynamic path-dependent qualitative vector of potential that needs to be continually cared for. Even though their own respective moments of impasse drew into question their specific identities as members of this community and project, Diane, Ousmane and Maman continued to nourish and be nourished by the rhythms of the market, both as the daily practices themselves and the expectation of continuity they facilitate.
Throughout the year I spent at Marché Collé, vendors and clients often questioned what I could learn from them about the economic reality of a market, when they continually said “there is no market”. Economic matters were not functioning in everyday life for them anymore, with this sort of buoyancy limited to “economic zones”, at sites like dams or gold mines where resources were concentrated and extracted at scale. However, what I became most interested in was the work that was done to maintain this neighbourhood market, designed to facilitate the local circulation of goods and money, when a national degradation of macro-level economic and security conditions eroded these circuits. Through their shifting practices of calculating care, vendors were not just reorienting to the economy, but they were reconfiguring it. This happened through changes to their everyday practices and was mediated by the labour they were required to do to respond to structural changes, in order to continue making themselves living.

Tropes of the poor's resilience and resourcefulness (and particularly that of poor women) obfuscate the depth and range of capacities needed to work through simultaneous depletions of resources and certainties. Through this research, I set out to understand the calculative labour of managing unmanageable exposures to uncertainty, what it requires to be successful and what the stakes are for loss at moments when it is impossible to align resources to what is needed. In tracing this labour, I became convinced that scholarly understandings of labour, and specifically the work of living in poverty, are missing a crucial element. The practices I came to see as vital to the struggle of managing this continual reorientation is what I have described throughout as ‘calculating care’.

Vendors’ complex calculative work facilitated the myriad ways care was exercised, and was also animated by care; it articulated what people could afford to care about and what they couldn't afford to neglect. Without taking into account the cognitive and emotional labour of calculating
care, we miss the complex work individuals and collectives do every day to reorient themselves to shifting resources and imperatives, especially when there is little room for error. Through this thesis, I have arrived at a tentative description of calculating care which I hope can offer a way of seeing and describing this work going forward:

Calculating care is the set of cognitive, affective and embodied practices through which resources are minded, reconfigured and invested to maintain and rebuild moral, social and material worlds. They reflect the scope and shape of agency and constraint experienced by a person or collective, and their expertise in working through these emergent parameters to meet individual and collective needs, and to enable best possible futures. Calculating care is a form of work whose embodied cost is exponentially increased with one’s exposure to structural violence through poverty and other socially constructed inequalities which saturate responsibility and exposure to uncertainty in specific bodies and geographies.

The context of intensifying scarcity of resources and increasing unknowability of consequences, rendered the work of calculating care more onerous and heightened its stakes, making it more visible. Many of the vendors at the heart of this ethnography had been at this market since its first or second year, fifteen years before my fieldwork took place. The period of fieldwork spanned a gradual but stark degradation of security and an associated faltering of economic conditions in the wake of Burkina’s 2014 insurrection and the vacuum left by its former Strong Man regime under Blaise Compaoré. We saw throughout how vendors’ intricate work of calculating care maintained and rebuilt the moral, social and material world of the market and their lives beyond its gates during this period of dramatically shifting expectations around whether one’s business or way of life could continue. These practices spanned from the most granular decisions to the most consequential. Crucially, paying attention to how these calculative practices were animated by what this group of vendors cared about maintaining and creating threaded these scales of calculation together.
This conceptual framing illuminates the visceral nature of financial management and contextualises it within the maintenance and (re)creation of moral worlds. It also allows us to see the potential limits of what can be managed, where too much work is required or where someone is not adequately resourced to keep body and soul together. In this concluding chapter I begin by outlining the key findings of the four substantive chapters at the core of the thesis, articulating how each chapter contributes to the overarching argument of this research, and how the ethnography illustrates the calculative work of sustaining and remaking the market. I will then lay out how this research furthers specific academic conceptualisations of calculation, care and work. Finally, I discuss the implications of calculating care as an analytical tool in a time when, I argue, this labour has become both more vital than ever for populations historically more insulated from vulnerability, and even more onerous for those already on the edge.

In Chapter Three, I introduced the specific ethnographic moment of this project and how vendors were working through rather than in uncertainty at Marché Collé, drawing on their narrations of the unfolding macro-level crisis and what it meant for them. This focus foregrounded the sense of intensified flux that was central to vendors’ experience during the period of fieldwork, as well as their efforts to reorient to what this meant for them as individuals, as a market and as a country. Vendors were working to maintain the sense that things were OK “en grosse” [overall] when challenged by consistent contra-indications in the details of their everyday lives. We saw how investments in God and in the moral fabric of their identities as neighbours and compatriots pushed against the degradation reflected in challenging “everyday disasters” (Ibañez-Tirado, 2015).

From the outset, the ethnography underscored how the moral, affective and social were not just contextual to vendors’ efforts to manage the economic ramifications of the crisis, nor a set of latent resources to be drawn down. Vendors actively invested in their faith and relationships as part of the world(s) they maintained and rebuilt, especially through moments of doubt and
challenge. Their investments articulated a keen awareness of how unfolding macro factors were shaping their government’s actions, or inaction, and their own scope of possibilities. As insecurity escalated, the emergent context, and resultantantly the consequences, of their decisions became increasingly unknowable and the work of understanding their margin of manoeuvrability became more challenging cognitively and emotionally. In managing these slim margins, vendors were required to be attuned and responsive to the everyday reality of the market, but also to make sense of what was unfolding in relation to God, to others and to themselves.

The labour vendors were required to do in reorienting through unknowability was explored in more depth in Chapter Four. In this chapter, traders’ framings of their calculative practices illuminated the scope and nature of this labour in their lives. We saw how their precise and responsive practices of allocating labour, attention, money and other resources required constant recalibrations to meet immediate needs and invest in possible futures, expressing and mediating shifts in resources and responsibilities, and emergent understandings of the relationships between them. Everything that needed to be nourished, patched and remade to maintain the market and the individual life projects that converged there, was directed through calculating care: keeping together shoes and footballs, bikes and buildings, bodies and relationships simultaneously required constant multi-scalar processes of attunement and response. This work “works” when “we get by with what we have”\(^\text{125}\) - when there is a critical mass of resources, and practices to nourish and deploy them, that meet immediate needs and maintain the integrity of moral worlds. Whether changing what they ate and fed their family - seeking to balance reducing costs while also pre-empting unaffordable illnesses - or paying increased attention to the emotional texture of their relationships with clients and friends, vendors undertook increasingly complex calculations to mitigate the degradation of material, social, moral and embodied resources beyond what was an affordable loss. The work of maintaining and creating one’s world will always incorporate some

\(^{125}\) “On se débrouille avec ce qu’on a.”
patching and pivoting. However, as resources and expectations erode, we have seen how this element of fixing - of reorienting to what needs to be fixed and what ways are (un)available to do said fixing - can become more complicated, onerous and wearing.

I demonstrated how calibrating the edges of one’s agency is a fundamental part of the practice of calculating through uncertainty, mediating the “ordinary affect” of the market - the bodies and stories that circulated in the market, the structural violence they refract and the emergent potentials they represent. As macro-level strain percolated into everyday life at the market, I posited that intensifying scarcity and unknowability tipped the balance of vendors’ calculative work to be increasingly pre-emptive rather than preventative in nature. More than just changing the parameters of decisions, intensifying uncertainty about what was even possible made the labour of understanding and responding to distributions of resources and possible outcomes more speculative. Vendors’ practices of calculating through the everyday and towards their imagined futures had to qualitatively change, requiring them to take on more risk and responsibility, and to hold more loops of waiting open, tacking paths into the future through temporary footholds rather than durable solutions. Vendors continually reconfigured their investments of resources to meet needs and build worlds, articulating what they valued and what they were vulnerable to. Vendors’ calculative “tactics”, responding to the macro structural shifts they are exposed to through nuanced investments, also represent a deeply contextualised form of everyday expertise (De Certeau, 1984).

In Chapter Five, I moved beyond the focus on the market itself to trace the labour that supported it to encompass reproductive labour, and, in particular, the calculative work that manages labour distribution between households and market activities. Taking as a point of departure the experience of Huguette, a woman who had recently found a teenage ‘villageoise’ girl to help with her housework, this chapter examines the true amount of labour needed to uphold the archetype
of the singular resourceful resilient female market vendor and mother. My aim was to elucidate the amount/degree of invisible work women must do to balance household responsibilities while simultaneously remaining poised (and flexible) to spot and capture narrow market segments as or when they emerge. Exploring what a new helper meant to Huguette foregrounded the amount of work needed by additional family members and low- or un-paid labour from other women or girls to underpin the illusion of infinite resourcefulness. I argue that the role of this resourceful archetype may be more accurately understood as those who are responsible for sharing and distributing the visible labour of minding businesses and families, rather than performing all of it. This opens up their scope of work to also include the additional toll of calculating the parameters of collaborative efforts or managing someone else’s efforts alongside one’s own, whether other family members, friends, or live-in staff. As we saw through Huguette’s experience, even when someone does have help, this overarching responsibility requires vigilant and responsive investments of attention, and can be exhausting.

Conversely, we saw how the sleeplessness of vigilance can tip into exhaustion, of solutions and of people, when the work of trying to allocate resources doesn’t ‘work’. Focusing on an impasse Diane faced in finding someone to help with her household labour, we see how a lack of the specific connections that would help her secure appropriate help for her household converge with the lack of economic viability of her stall. This bottleneck left her to cycle through an exhausting set of potential solutions before finally reconsidering the plausibility of performing both motherhood and market labour simultaneously. Diane’s experience illustrated how, no matter how much effort and energy goes into redistributing labour and other resources, this work doesn’t work if the constellation of resources simply cannot be configured to meet the mandate of the moment.

The work Diane, Huguette and their fellow vendors do in calculating care articulates the responsibility and agency concentrated into different bodies, and hence it has embodied effects. Without the possibility of finding new ways of solving an issue or a path of footholds and
“provisional bundles” of resources that can tack a path into the future, traders were required to keep iterating, exhausting solutions, and in turn risked becoming exhausted themselves as the people rendered responsible for finding a solution (Simone, 2011, p. 111). Throughout the chapter, we see how the work of calculating care costs vendors time, rest, comfort and sleep when calculations involve costly high-stakes trade-offs, and through the uncertain mean-times while people waited to see if the wear to social, physical or affective resources could be patched. The effort this requires increases manifold when people cannot afford for these foothold solutions not to hold or enable better options, for the waiting not to have been worth it, leaving them holding the ultimate responsibility to keep working on finding a way through. We saw the edges of this exhaustion through an account of new experiences of women’s day and shifting societal norms around it that concluded this chapter, reflected in warning narratives that circulated about the possibility of broken marriages, businesses and ultimately bodies. These parables reflected intensifying risk for women in embodying the dichotomous tropes of responsibility and entrepreneurial savvy that female vendors have come to represent in the development imaginary.

In Chapter Six, I moved to focus more explicitly on the collective social and affective resources of the market that shaped, and were shaped by, calculative practices. Consistent maintenance of everyday rhythms and proactively caring about one another nourished the dense sociality of this place - the solidity and agility of kinship in micro-spaces of close relationships and the wider affective commons of the market. This vital and fragile sociality that enabled and maintained the market was invested in at different levels by vendors according to the constellations of resources available to them at different moments. Rather than seeing this as a space full of social capital that vendors have access to through their friendships and can thus draw down to enable resilience, I explored the relationship between the “affective commons” of the market and the investments that held and reshaped individual micro-spaces of intimate friendship and kinship networks (Berlant, 2012: 77). Vendors’ practices of care maintained and recreated the social life of the market at different scales, from close friendships to the broader networks of acquaintances across the
market, as well as the spaces that they all used together. These different scales of reciprocal investment allowed vendors to deal with periodic transgressions of trust and losses of faith, without the fundamental social structure of the market being wholly compromised.

Investing in the affective commons, and in the closer micro-spaces within it, was especially visible at moments when market livelihoods felt more threatened. These moments did not occur all at once, but came to pass when individual vendors’ constellations of resources could not meet the mandate of the moment, due to a sudden shock like the theft of Ousmane’s cart, or the wear of trying to maintain an imaginary of a functioning market as dust built up on Diane’s stock. While weathering these affective and material losses in the moment, vendors also had to reconcile (and reconstruct) their imagined futures in relation to/in light of these setbacks. This was complex collective work, based on a dense sociality built up over years both as support and as markers of the sustainability of the market. By examining the individual impasses vendors face, we saw how they worked through transgressions of trust and confidence through humour, tenacity and the sheer continuity of care expressed by others for them and the market. Although these challenges often lay outside the scope of vendors’ agency, the solidity and responsiveness of the social container they built together buffered the negative momentum from coalescing into a collective loss of faith prompting divestment from the market altogether.

Moments of rupture that threw the tenability of market livelihoods into question, or shifted these marginal livelihoods past their tipping point of economic, practical or affective viability, laid bare how the social reality of the market actually shaped decisions rather than just contextualising them. Collective and individual investments tempered discouragement when businesses were loss-making. The “stickiness” of affect, the “accumulation of affective value” there, kept people and places together, tethering vendors to the market for reasons that transcended making a living (Ahmed, 2014, p.92). Vendors’ affective solidarity was expressed in individual relationships but also transcended the personal to the affinities and attunements that created and maintained
solidarity, through and beyond personal relationships. Their reciprocal investments were also manifest materially in maintaining and adapting the physical space through patching and reshaping their stalls. In reshaping the market’s internal boundaries, traders reinforced or shifted lines of sight and enclosure and responded to emergent preferences for privacy and relative levels of intimacy and trust at the market, illustrating how the social and spatial mutually remake one another (Bolt, 2013; Lefebvre and Nicholson-Smith, 1991, Harvey, 2000).

Through the empirical specificity of the labour Marché Collé’s vendors were doing, this thesis shows how the everyday disasters of structural violence are managed through calculating care. Although I argue that the work of calculating care occurs everywhere all the time, its texture is materially changed when “solutions” to calculative problems are more sparse, precarious or involve more difficult trade-offs. Moreover, the affective intensity of this labour is qualitatively different when people are dealing with unaffordable exposures. Through accounts of how vendors’ investments sustained and were sustained by the collective project of the market through crisis, the chapters have shown how a tide of tenacious efforts pushed back against encroaching structural violence through a spectrum of everyday activities. From the solidity of prayer rhythms and the sociality around them through to the tenacity and humour through which people navigated existential impasse, we saw the work of maintaining the market, and the possibility for options and people to become exhausted as resources are progressively eroded.

The overarching aim of this thesis is to argue for the analytical and political value of applying this new concept of ‘calculating care’ more broadly. To that end, the following section will analyse the thematic contributions that underpin this concept, grounded in its enactment at Marché Collé as synthesised above, before articulating how it responds to an urgent need for new tools to understand the labour of managing poverty and world-building. I begin by linking the findings of the thesis back to broader academic debates about practices of calculation and care, before articulating the unique potentials opened up by understanding these as mutually constitutive
practices as illustrated throughout this thesis. I then return to the analytical tools of articulation work, anticipation work, mental load and work intensity as introduced in the literature review and woven through the empirical chapters to render the work of calculating care visible. I will detail how deploying these tools has helped to build a more rigorous understanding of calculating care, both conceptually and practically, but also how academic conceptions of each of these tools may be furthered through the accounts of Marché Collé’s vendors’ labour. Finally, I underscore the analytical potential that the framing of calculating care could offer to broader debates around personhood and productivity outside of the expectation of wage labour.

The Work of Calculating Care

As we have seen throughout this thesis, calculation is embodied and embedded, morally, socially, and materially within the worlds that people are remaking. What people care about animates and shapes these practices of calculation. This resonates with the arguments of critical scholars on calculative practices who highlight how calculation is imbued with the contestation of value(s), and requires deft expertise (Bowker and Star, 2000; Appadurai, 2012; Lave, 1988; Ballestero, 2015). However, building on this appreciation of the complexity and contention of calculation, I have sought to render visible that these practices also represent arduous work.

Despite substantial bodies of research on both calculation and the work of care, there is a dearth of literature focused on either the work of calculating or how what we care about, rather than whom we care for, animates and shapes work. This thesis explores the possibilities generated by seeing both calculating and caring-about as forms of labour, and argues that understanding their mutually constitutive nature allows us to see the value and cost of this work more holistically.
We have seen how reconfiguring investments of resources to meet needs and build worlds relies on a complex awareness of how one’s resources and imperatives are distributed and could be reconfigured. Being attuned and responsive to persistent unpredictability increasingly calls for people to orient themselves with vigilance and develop the associated competences (Vigh, 2011) which allow urban improvisors and those who make their livelihoods outside of (relatively) dependable structures to calculate their way into the future. Vendors’ increasingly pragmatic articulations of national and international parameters for accountability reflected their scope of agency: “the possibilities of mutual response, which is not to deny, but to attend to power imbalances” (Barad, in interview with Dolphijn & Tuin, 2012: 53). People seek to understand the parameters of the decisions they need to make - the inputs and outputs of their calculations and the relationships between them - and how they understand their own individual and collective margins of manoeuvrability in order to effectively manage their resources.

This is complex work and it is costly. It takes intense investments of time, energy and attention, that increase exponentially when resources and imperatives become more difficult to align. As introduced in Chapter Two, the rich canon of critical literature on calculation interrogates its processual nature and problematises the value-laden expertise it requires and reflects, but does not go as far as to call it work. Without these linkages being made, there is a dearth of literature that leverages these generative conceptions of calculative practice and what it requires of people in relation to other ideological and material struggles around what constitutes labour and how it should be valued. Relatedly, little attention has been given to the everyday calculation of those living in poverty and uncertainty where these struggles are intensified.

Meanwhile, by advocating for the work of caring-about, I seek to leverage the dense genealogy of scholarly work and activism that has highlighted the labour of care, the politics of knowledge production that veil its value and the material and embodied implications thereof (Tronto, 1998; Beneria, 1999; Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002). There is much analytical and political potential
that can be leveraged by understanding calculative work as a practice of care, because so much feminist thought and practice has been devoted to rendering the work of caring visible. Critical feminist scholars have also underscored how the intensity of effort care requires is qualitatively different according to one’s levels of access to resources, and the related lack of recognition of the work of caring, which is certainly reflected in the work of calculating care I describe through this thesis (Floro, 1995). However, as introduced in Chapter Two, the majority of academic work on the relationship between care and work deals with the work of caring for, the work of social reproduction and the work of caring for the more vulnerable people in our societies.

I do not want to dilute this focus or the struggles that brought the work of caring-for to the fore in these debates, but to extend it to encompass the broader work animated and directed by what people care about. Doing this enlarges and diversifies the compilation of people we would understand to be doing work related to care, but without seeking to undermine the problematic way in which the responsibility of caring is shared, or the invisible nature of social reproduction. Rather, I suggest that this is part of a broader species of work of caring that is also invisible, and it is precisely the distribution of (the intensity of) this labour across bodies, and in many cases the saturation of this labour in certain bodies, that this conceptualisation could help us see and understand more clearly. Calculating care is, of course, gendered and shaped by other axes of privilege, and it is for this reason that the chapter of this thesis that specifically foregrounds the exhausting nature of calculating care focused on a female perspective (Chapter Five).

However, I found that male vendors’ labours in calculating care were also saturated with social reproduction - of ideas of how they could and should be in a household, community, country - and how this connected to their relationship with the divine and associated moral imperatives. Focusing on caring-about allows for the work of calculating care to encompass husbandry and world-building beyond the work of caring-for. Indeed, it allows us to appreciate all of the labour that maintains, replenishes, patches and reimagines material, social and moral worlds. An expanded
view of caring-about in how we conceive of calculating care builds on critical feminist and anthropological literature that trouble narrow understandings of care and its labour; more holistic remits of care encompass the maintenance and creation of whole moral worlds, beyond the work of caring for people or objects within those worlds (Tronto, 1998; Louw, forthcoming).

If we can see both caring-about and calculating as work, the concept of calculating care shows how the work of each is mutually constitutive of the other. It is important to choose our words carefully in the pursuit of accuracy and accountability in International Development; combining two words can dramatically shift the possibilities they hold for description and action (Alfini and Chambers, 2007). Using the coupling of ‘calculating care’, I have sought to counter the false compartmentalisation of calculation and care from one another, offering counternarratives that demonstrate how this binary can result in conceptions of calculation and work that are not just incomplete but inaccurate. What we see in calculating care is that affective and numeric modes of knowing are not antithetical or parallel, but are densely interconnected ways in which the relationship between internal worlds and external worlds are worked through.

Enriching Tools for Seeing the Work of Managing Resources and Worldbuilding through Vulnerability

In order to build towards fuller understandings of what the work of calculating care encompassed, I deployed several analytical tools from Science and Technology Studies and feminist conceptions of work throughout the thesis. To my knowledge, these tools have not been broadly deployed within International Development or studies of global inequality, or to understand processes of world-building or financial management previously. I nevertheless found them incredibly resonant in understanding the labour I had witnessed and wanted to build a conceptual framing for. Articulation work and anticipation work offer scaffolds to render visible the creative, imaginary and often less visible work required to maintain and reshape individual and collective projects,
while work intensity and mental load offer ways of thinking through the concentration of work in different bodies. I outline here how these helped me to construct a robust but agile frame of what calculating care could look and feel like, while also noting ways this overarching framing could further debates around the use of these tools going forward.

Throughout this thesis, I have used the concept of articulation work to examine the less visible work of managing collective projects of different scales and orders, including the market and vendors’ households, but also the different nested and overlaying collectives that interact with them. Articulation work is the work to “make cooperative work work” that is not visible to rationalised modes of labour (Schmidt, 2002: 184; Star, 1991). It has traditionally been deployed to understand the (often gendered) labour that keeps projects on track, and reconfigures a new path when rupture occurs, but has been mostly used to understand this within the confines of wage labour in the Global North.

We have seen through this research how this concept can render visible what collectives are trying to maintain and create, and what individual efforts are needed to do this. Through and in addition to their individual trades, vendors’ contributions (re)made the collectives of different scales that constituted the market, safeguarding and reimagining the market’s tenability. Articulation work was also necessary at the household level to manage the collective project of social reproduction, getting everyone fed and educated, but also rebuilding shared imaginaries as the landscape of opportunity and threat shifted around them through both responsive and pre-emptive investments in one another. These efforts also transcended the market and household, and the relationship between them, to the broader moral world that each person was trying to maintain or create, and the collective projects that shape it, at the most granular level of business and social relationships to the broader collective of what life in society should be and mean.
Articulation work by definition is not visible to rationalised theories of work. Indeed, even when paying attention, the work of holding these roles and contributions together is often not as clear until it becomes strained; when people are under-resourced to maintain the collective norms they have come to expect. In response to losses and erosions of resources and clarity, we have seen how vendors had to exercise increasingly deft expertise to allocate labour and other resources. Fixing and reimagining what made the market work, while also pre-emptively investing efforts in anticipation of potential loss or derailment to their intertwined individual and collective projects, demanded keen attunement and nuanced responses. The articulation work of financial management and world-building also encompasses the work of vigilanty nourishing resources to ensure things are less likely to break down, from tools and stalls to shoes and bodies. This included maintaining, to the best of their ability given their constraints, the required depth of affective, social and cosmological resources needed to make decisions and understand what is being decided through the complexity, but also to make sense of decisions for oneself, and for and with others.

The articulation work of managing collective projects interacts with “anticipation work”, through which people bring the future into the present in order to manage and mitigate possible threats and enable best possible futures (Adams et al., 2009; Anderson, 2010). Anticipation work allowed us to look more specifically at how vendors reconfigured their resources, responsibilities, aspirations and exposures to threat and opportunity across multiple timescales and registers of value. Rather than using the same practices with a different set of inputs and outputs, vendors’ efforts articulated an evolving relationship to the future which changed the nature of the anticipation work they were required to do. Following Newhouse’s concept of anticipation work to examine street traders’ increasing requirement to “hedge”, orienting to increasingly unknowable global flows in capital and goods (Newhouse, 2017), I examined how the texture of everyday transactions changed, reflecting shifting understandings of agency and constraint. The process of calibration within calculative practices changed qualitatively from preventative to pre-emptive in texture, and this shift dramatically altered the expertise and experience of that labour.
The processes through which people hope and cope are affective as well as cognitive, shaped by fear, and aspiration. They transcend the financial and material, often relating just as speculatively to the texture of social relations and public (and private) confidence as much as global and local flows of money. Calculating care requires a deep understanding of one’s resources, not as a stock of capital to be drawn down but as a world to be cared for, that may be reconstituted and reshaped in light of changes to possibilities, to emergent aspirations or threats. Vendors responded to the impossibility of knowing which aspirations were affordable and what emergent threats may lead to unaffordable losses by reshaping their calculative practices. The increasingly unknowable nature of the landscape of threat and opportunity they were acting into reconfigured the nature of the work they had to do, the expertise that it required and the toll it took on them.

As we saw with Marché Collé’s vendors, even when footholds were available, their pre-emptive work became increasingly iterative, holding loops open for emergent information. This meant the labour had to be done more frequently and responsively, as and when clarity emerged or a point came where a decision needed to be made anyway. There were also moments where satisfactory paths did not seem plausible, and we have seen how this can require even more effort in trying to work out a way forward. This “mental load”, or embodied and affective impact of onerous and intensive cognitive activity, increases across different planes of responsibility and their intersections (Buchanan, 2018). I found “work intensity” useful to describe this accumulation within experience - a concept introduced by Maria Floro (1995) as a way to understand not just the amount of time poor women were working but how the relationship between the resources someone has to do a task and the requirements of the task impacts the embodied experience of doing such work. We have seen how this concept can be useful in terms of deciding how to allocate labour as well as actual visible tasks. Examining the work intensity of calculating care has helped to articulate throughout how the entangled tasks of financial management and worldbuilding
become exponentially more taxing the greater the divergence between what is hoped for or needed and what someone is resourced for.

*Working and Remaking: Personhood and Productivity through the Prism of Calculating Care*

This thesis responds to (and addresses) the need for new tools to understand work - and relatedly, embodiment, strength and exhaustion - through uncertainty, particularly but not exclusively focusing on Sub-Saharan African informal labour markets (Ferguson and Li, 2018). This work encompasses distributive labour, where people make and meet moral and social claims on resources, as well as reproductive and productive labour. As development paradigms increasingly adapt to the expectation of long-term experience outside of wage labour, conceptions of financial inclusion do not reflect the improvisational nature of this experience or the forms of expertise required to manage finances within it. This thesis offers a way to see the labour needed to manage and allocate resources as part of the relentless efforts that many poor people in Sub-Saharan Africa make to stabilise and remake their worlds and selves through uncertainty (Mbembe and Nuttall, 2004). Such efforts demand a level of attentiveness - social, cognitive and affective - to those who exert influence over their lives, and so encompass the work that is required to maintain such attentiveness.

We have seen how fine-grained everyday decisions mediate the relationships between the value of objects, money, bodies, souls, identities, collectives across temporal scales, reorienting the economy of Marché Collé. This centring on how this economy was being patched and remade from the ground up is not to undermine claims for better states and international configurations of investment that would facilitate better economic conditions. Rather, it aligns with ethnographies that have shown how economies are built up through the webs of relations between everyday material, embodied, social and moral imperatives, even and especially when structural forces bear
down on them, as these two forms of structure from “above” and “below” interact (Millar, 2018). This thesis similarly seeks to shed light on how micro-level responses to macro-level economic and political deterioration actively push back against degradation. Seeing the efforts that continually remade the “individual, infrastructural and collective bodies” that constituted the market in resistance to eroding resources and security as work allowed us to consider more broadly and accurately the burden and agency of these traders (Simone, 2016: 12).

As need and norms become difficult to meet and maintain, the remaking of worlds though uncertainty requires more active anticipation, more tenacity at the granular level of finding novel solutions. This safeguarding and rebuilding of moral worlds through profound loss and disorientation requires creativity and courage. The calculative work that mediates these efforts is hence affectively as well as cognitively loaded. Many have already countered the idea of a ‘culture of poverty’, showing that rather than morality eroding, it tends to get more densely problematised when there is a struggle to meet basic needs (Valentine, 1986; Gorski, 2008; Zigon, 2009; Lewis. 1996). I seek to further these conceptions by describing the affective and cognitive investments the poor are required to make to maintain what cannot be lost, while reconfiguring their resources in light of emergent potentials (threats and opportunities).

The aim of this thesis is to illuminate the efforts of calculating care, illustrating its centrality within marginal and improvisational livelihoods despite its invisibility to rationalised modes of work. The efforts of Marché Collé’s vendors have illustrated how concentrations of vital labour without sufficient recognition or structural support saturate such efforts in certain bodies, requiring deft expertise, and all the while taking their toll. Tracing the determinants and consequences of vendors’ work in calculating care, we have seen how this labour is inextricably linked to personhood, minding and recreating selves through and alongside the ‘world’ people care about.
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