Between world history and state formation: new perspectives on Africa's cities

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BETWEEN WORLD HISTORY AND
STATE FORMATION: NEW PERSPECTIVES
ON AFRICA'S CITIES*

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ABSTRACT: The dramatic urban change taking place on the African continent
has led to a renewed and controversial interest in Africa's cities within several
academic and expert circles. Attempts to align a growing but fragmented body of
research on Africa's urban past with more general trends in urban studies have
been few but have nevertheless opened up new analytical possibilities. This article
argues that to move beyond the traps of localism and unhelpful categorizations
that have dominated aspects of urban history and the urban studies literature of the
continent, historians should explore African urban dynamics in relation to world
history and the history of the state in order to contribute to larger debates between
social scientists and urban theorists. By considering how global socio-historical
processes articulate with the everyday lives of urban dwellers and how city-state
relationships are structured by ambivalence, this article will illustrate how histor-
ians can participate in those debates in ways that demonstrate that history matters,
but not in a linear way. These illustrations will also suggest why it is necessary
for historians to contest interpretations of Africa's cities that construe them as
ontologically different from other cities of the world.

KEY WORDS: Apartheid, civil society, colonial, crime, culture/cultural, economic,
postcolonial, power, precolonial, state, urban.

IN 1910, around four million Africans lived in cities. By 2007 there were
373 million, and demographic projections suggest that there will be around
770 million in 2030, more than the total number of city dwellers in the entire
western hemisphere today.[1] Even if these estimated numbers of urban
dwellers are far from accurate, they reveal the amplitude of the recent
urbanization process in Africa which is said to be unique in world history
and, according to the Executive Director of UN Habitat, the second biggest

[1] UN Habitat, *The State of African Cities, 2008, A Framework for Addressing Urban
Challenges in Africa* (Nairobi, 2008), 4.

challenge facing Africa after HIV.[2] This recent urban trend has been analyzed in some cases as ontologically distinct from other urbanization processes in the world. Since the early 1990s, the World Bank has recognized that the urban-based economy in the South has significantly contributed to Gross Domestic Product though recent reports have described the continent's urban growth as 'pathological' or 'dysfunctional', suggesting that, unlike the rest of the world, urbanization in Africa has not been accompanied by sustained economic growth or reduced poverty.[3] Global city research theorists suggest that the world has been witnessing an epochal transformation in the spatial organization of capitalism since the 1970s which has enabled cities to regain their primacy as the geo-economic engines of the world system.[4] They also contend that there is no global city in Africa, with Johannesburg arguably the only exception. More recently, a group of Western scholars and experts have popularized the idea that Africa's cities are either dominated by a series of self-regulatory systems working outside state regulations, or are quasi-slum cities in which three-quarters of the population are slum dwellers.[5] These expert analyses, although very different in their foci, all share a 'failed state' developmentalist perspective, an increasingly common stance in some circles of political science that views African states and cities as ungovernable, in crisis, and incapable of implementing public policies.[6]

However, a less normative vision has recently suggested that cities should not be seen only in terms of what they lack but rather on the basis of what they are and how they arrived at their contemporary configurations. Analyzing Africa's cities within the larger framework of the global South serves the dual purpose of avoiding their construction as exceptional and reinserting them in broader academic debates that are not confined to the continent's history.[7] According to this argument, it is imperative to include

[2] Executive Director of UN-HABITAT, 'Rapid urbanization a major challenge for Africa', 16 February 2010, Wilton Park, Sussex, accessible at: http://www.unhabitat.org.

[3] Christine Kessides, *The Urban Transition in Sub-Saharan Africa: Implications for Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction* (Washington, 2006); UN Habitat, *State of the World's Cities, 2010–2011, Bridging the Urban Divide* (London, 2008), 50.

[4] Neil Brenner, 'Global cities, local states: global city formation and state territorial restructuring in contemporary Europe', *Review of International Political Economy*, 5:1 (Spring 1998), 5.

[5] Rem Koolhaas *et al.*, 'Lagos, Harvard Project on the city', in *Arc en Rêve centre d'architecture* (ed.), *Mutations, événement culturel sur la ville contemporaine* (Bordeaux, 2000); Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (London, 2006); UN Habitat, *The Challenge of Slums, Global Report on Human Settlements* (London, 2004).

[6] See recently Robert Bates, 'State failure', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 11 (2008), 1–12; Jeffrey Herbst, 'Responding to state failure in Africa', *International Security*, 21:3 (1997), 120–44. For an urban dimension of this analysis see 'Cities in fragile states', London School of Economics and Political Sciences, and Crisis States Research Center at: http://www.crisisstates.com/download/publicity/CitiesBrochure.pdf.

[7] Dominique Malaquais, 'Cosmopolis: de la ville, de l'Afrique et du monde', *Politique africaine*, 100 (Décembre 2005-Janvier 2006); Jennifer Robinson, *Ordinary Cities. Between Modernity and Development* (London, 2006). AbdouMaliq Simone, *For the City Yet to Come. Changing African Life in Four Cities* (Durham and London, 2004); Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe (eds.), *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis* (Johannesburg, Durham, 2008).

Africa's cities in a larger context in order to look at them comparatively and move beyond a perception of urban Africa as being essentially different from the rest of the world. In this renewed and contentious academic interest in the continent's cities, what is the place, and role, of history and historians?

The production of knowledge on Africa's urban past is far from being the monopoly of a set of scholars who would label themselves urban historians. In dealing with Africa's urban past, scholars are instead confronted by at least three distinct bodies of knowledge. First, there are an impressive number of monographs and edited collections which constitute an increasingly important field in quantitative terms but which have not yet led to the sustained development of synthetic overviews.[8] This is overwhelmingly the work of urban historians who may be distinguished from those who might be considered as only 'passing through their territory' (that is, the city).[9] African urban history is a specific subfield of research that first developed in the USA and Europe in the late 1960s and then in Africa from the late 1970s onwards. This history examined the ways in which Africans shaped the patterns of urbanization and how urbanization influenced African social practices. Secondly, there are scholars who do not claim to be urban historians nor make the town their territory but whose interests in related topics constitute a central, and sometimes more valuable, body of research on cities than urban history itself. Finally, there is the production of other social scientists that includes an historical perspective within the framework of a more general interrogation of cities in Africa and the world. Considered in this broader perspective, the historiography of cities in Africa is considerably richer than the limited subfield of urban history.

For understandable reasons, attempts to merge the body of knowledge produced on Africa's urban past with the more general trend of urban studies have been very few but have nevertheless opened up cross-fertilizing fields between history and the social sciences.[10] Understanding Africa's urban past and presenting this in a comprehensive analytical manner is actually faced with two major – and probably not so new – challenges. The first is to critically analyze the categories which are commonly used by scholars and policymakers and which are supposedly characteristic of the cities of the continent. In the past, cities were seen as Islamic or colonial; today they may be analyzed as postcolonial, cosmopolitan, informal, or yet to be globalized. A second challenge is to move beyond one of the major biases of urban history and urban studies that often remains trapped in a localism that considers

[8] See, however, Bill Freund, *The African City: a History* (Cambridge, 2007); Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, *History of African Cities South of the Sahara, From the Origins to Colonization* (Princeton, 2005); Renata Holod, Attilio Petruccioli and André Raymond, *The City in the Islamic World* (Leiden, 2008); Andrew Burton (ed.), *The Urban Experience in Eastern Africa*, c. 1750–2000 (Nairobi, 2002).

[9] H. J. Dyos, 'Urbanity and suburbanity', quoted in David Anderson and Richard Rathbone (eds.), *Africa's Urban Past* (Oxford, 2000), 9.

[10] See for instance, Simone, *For the City*; Carole Rakodi (ed.), *The Urban Challenge in Africa: Growth and Management of its Large Cities* (Tokyo, 1997); James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley, 1999).

local strategies, regulations, and actors in isolation.[11] This article seeks to
avoid the traps of localism and the temptation of categorization in an attempt
to understand Africa's historical urban dynamics. I suggest that research on
Africa's urban past may benefit significantly from a more thorough engage-
ment with African history, urban studies, and social sciences in general.
Historians may also contribute to this debate in ways that demonstrate that
history matters but not in a teleological and linear way.

Analyses of urban Africa in relation to world history and the history of the
state are suggested as two analytically productive ways for exploring the
dynamics of Africa's urban past while contributing to ongoing debates in
urban theory, state-formation analysis, and world history. Unlike current
studies of globalization, which do not tell us much about the historical depth
of interconnections between Africa and the rest of the world,[12] world history
tries to understand the processes involved in the exchange of commodities
and social and cultural practices between continents. Such an approach does
not need to include the West nor, therefore, to involve a study of Western
capitalism in order to pay increasing attention to the social, cultural, and
environmental effects of the globalization process.[13] To insert the continent's
cities in world history provides a method of analysis that does not depend
upon the lens of European history nor does it oblige consideration of Africa's
cities as necessarily African cities. The major metropolises of the continent
are actually not only African cities. Cairo belongs to the Middle East, the
Mediterranean Sea, and the African continent; the port cities of the Indian
Ocean may be referred to as 'Afrasiatic' from the early modern period;
while Johannesburg can be said to be an elusive metropolis because of the
multiplicity of registers in which it is either African, European, or even
American.[14] It is suggested here that the notion of African cities is in-
appropriate – albeit largely used in the academic literature – as it implies
a common history among cities of the continent while underestimating
the heterogeneous global influences that have shaped them. Privileging
a broader reading of the continent's cities is also a necessary academic chal-
lenge in a context in which Africa has been excluded from research on and
theorizations of the global city.

However, this world perspective is not to be looked at in isolation from
other scales of analysis. Charles Tilly once admonished urban historians to
stop oscillating between 'the time-space particularism of local history and

[11] Patrick Le Gales, *European Cities: Social Conflicts and Governance* (Oxford, 2002),
27. For overview papers criticizing this bias in African urban history, see Catherine
Coquery-Vidrovitch, 'The process of urbanization in Africa from the origins to inde-
pendence: an overview paper', *African Studies Review*, 33:4 (1991), 1–99; Laurent
Fourchard, 'L'histoire urbaine en Afrique: une perspective ouest africaine', *Histoire
Urbaine*, 9 (2004), 129; Christopher Saunders, *Writing History: South Africa's Urban
Past and Other Essays* (Pretoria, 1992), 12, 22.
[12] According to Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question, Theory, Knowledge, History*
(Berkeley, 2005), 91.
[13] Georg Iggers and Edwar Wang, *A Global History of Modern Historiography* (Harlow,
2008), 391.
[14] Michael N. Pearson, *Port Cities and Intruders: The Swahili Coast, India, and
Portugal in the Early Modern Era* (Baltimore, 1998); Nuttall and Mbembe,
Johannesburg, 25.

grand timeless, spaceless processes, causes and effects'. Tilly's cure for this disease was to exhort urban historians to admit that their turf was quintessential social history, and to turn back to interpreting 'the ways that global social process articulate with small–scale social life'.[15] To follow up Tilly's suggestion is one possible way of inserting Africa's cities into world history and taking social history into consideration which, since the 1980s, has been one of the most innovative fields in the historiography of cities in Africa.[16]

It is also important to consider the role towns and cities have played in the history of state-formation and explore the effects and limits of state action on the making and shaping of the continent's cities. The point is not to return to a nationalist reading of urbanization process or to write the history of Africa's cities caught within the teleological framework of the rise of the nation-state.[17] It is instead to participate in an important current debate on state formation in Africa and to understand how local, national, and transnational actors have forged and remade the state, an interpretation that challenges 'failed state' analyses which 'tend to reify African states as ahistorical "things"'.[18] Analyzing the multiple, ambivalent, and non-linear city/state relationships on the continent is a way of moving beyond this normative vision of the state while facilitating the interrogation of this relatively unexplored issue in the analysis of state formation in Africa. Such a perspective also opens up novel analytical approaches for understanding the urbanization of the continent. African states and cities have a long history but this current analysis limits its scope by drawing upon examples predominantly from the last two centuries.[19]

AFRICA'S CITIES IN WORLD HISTORY

Various labels have marked the last thirty years of urban studies and the literature on urban history in Africa. From the criticized Islamic and colonial city paradigms to more recent global city theory, Africa is alternatively perceived at the core or at the periphery of a process of academic categorization that concerns most of the cities of the south. In a way, these approaches have been developed to either include the continent's cities in, or exclude them from, a world history perspective, though neither has been entirely able to

[15] Quoted in Pierre Yves Saunier, 'Global city, Take 2: a view from urban history', in Pierre-Yves Saunier and Shane Ewen (eds.), *Another Global City. Historical Explorations into the Transnational Municipal Moment, 1850–2000* (New York, 2008), 20.

[16] See the pioneer works of Charles Van Onselen, *New Babylon New Nineveh: Everyday Life on the Witwatersrand, 1886–1914* (Johannesburg, 1982); Frederick Cooper (ed.), *Struggle for the City: Migrant Labor, Capital and the State in Urban Africa* (Beverly Hills, 1983).

[17] For a critique of this particular reading of the apartheid city see Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe, 'A blasé attitude: a response to Michael Watts', *Public Culture*, 17 (2005), 198.

[18] Didier Péclard and Thobias Hagmann, 'Negotiating statehood: dynamics of power and domination in Africa', *Development and Change*, 41:4 (2010), 541.

[19] Despite an increasing (but very uneven) integration of the continent's economy into the world economy, the 19th century does not necessarily represent a radical change in Africa's urban past. To integrate the development of ancient and early modern cities remains beyond the scope of my current pursuit.

escape an oversimplifying vision of Africa's urban change. Concentration on large-scale, anonymous structures and processes has neglected the life experiences of ordinary residents that are at the core of social history. After reviewing the different forms in which Africa's cities have been categorized, I will look at ways of thinking about them both locally and globally, and will use the history of urban labour and the process of historicizing world imaginaries in Africa as two examples that illustrate the potential articulation of world history and social history.

FROM ISLAMIC CITY PARADIGM TO THE GLOBAL CITY THEORY

From the 1930s to the 1990s, the Islamic city paradigm enjoyed considerable popularity especially in North Africa. The Islamic city (that is, a set of political, economic, social, and cultural characteristics supposedly shared by towns and cities of the successive Arab and Ottoman Empires between the seventh and nineteenth centuries), was mainly defined negatively on the basis of a number of elements it lacked according to Max Weber's prototypical city: the regularity and institutions of the Classical city; the political autonomy of the medieval town; urban planning; links with the countryside. The Weberian idea of the medieval town as a parasitic body, a foreign entity encrusted on the land, a 'consumer city' rather than a producing city, was refurbished by Hellenist Moses Finley and successive Orientalist scholars.[20] In the last thirty years, several researchers have denounced the absurdity of using Islam as a conceptual framework to account for the urban phenomena of countries with such varied historical traditions.[21] In sub-Saharan Africa, indigenous forms of urbanism predated Islamic expansion and had no links with Arab trade networks (Aksum, Zimbabwe, Benin City, Old Oyo, Ile Ife, Jenne Jeno).[22] On the East African coast, Swahili towns were polyglot, multiethnic frontiers, and composed of various population groups (Arabic, Indian, African) while (Sahelian) cities ruled by Islamic elites (Timbuktu, Djenné, Gao, Katsina, Kano) were equally places of mutual influence between Northern and Western African societies.[23] Despite these factors, the Islamic city paradigm only underwent a gradual demise and is still sometimes considered central in the historiography of cities of the Arab and African world.[24] Resorting to the consumer and the

[20] Richard Alston, *The City in Roman and Byzantine Egypt* (New York and London, 2002), 366–7.

[21] Janet Abu-Lughod, 'The Islamic City: historical myth, Islamic essence and contemporary relevance, *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 19 (1987), 155–76. André Raymond, 'Islamic City, Arab City: Orientalist Myths and recent view', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 21 (1994), 4.

[22] David Philipson, *Archaeology of Aksum 1993–1997* (Nairobi and Addis Ababa, 2000); Roderick J. McIntosh, *Ancient Middle Niger: Urbanism and the Self-Organising Landscape* (Cambridge, 2005).

[23] Jean-Louis Triaud, 'L'islam en Afrique de l'Ouest. Une histoire urbaine dans la longue durée', in Adriana Piga (ed.), *Islam et villes en Afrique au sud du Sahara. Entre soufisme et fondamentalisme* (Paris 2003), 129.

[24] This paradigm is still at the core of recent productions such as Michael R. T. Dumper and Bruce E. Stanley (ed.), *Cities of The Middle East and North Africa: a Historical Encyclopaedia* (Santa Barbara, 2007), xix–xx; Susan Slyomovics (ed.), *The Walled Arab City in Literature, Architecture and History* (London, 2001).

parasitic city models to explain ancient towns in sub-Saharan Africa simi-larly remains in common use.[25]

The 'colonial city' is another widespread label used both within and beyond the African continent to refer to the city under colonial – and by extension – apartheid rule. It may refer to a particular moment during which colonialism was portrayed as a power demarcating, racialising, and order-ing urban space.[26] The overemphasis on colonial control, segregation schemes, and the 'sanitation syndrome' has indisputably played a role in the development of the colonial city paradigm. A large body of literature has helped to shape the understanding that all European powers used (hygiene/ sanitation) policies to enforce a clearer division between Europeans and Africans. However, this was also a late nineteenth century world phenomenon related to heightened European racial consciousness and therefore more than just a strictly colonial practice.[27] The debate on segre-gation and the control of space has been most vivid in South Africa where cities have often been seen by historians as the origin and centrepiece of apartheid legislation as well as a privileged site of anti-apartheid activism.[28] This overemphasis on the perspective of the colonizers rather than the colonized has led to inconclusive typologies common to many syntheses of Africa's urban past which 'tend to divide between the essentially African and the essentially colonial city'.[29] In some cases, analyses reduce the African practices of the city to a colonial perception of disorder while the reader is left to infer what Africans thought about these developments and the extent to which the laws were obeyed.[30] To view colonial cities as 'dual cities' is misleading since colonial societies cannot be understood merely in terms of a 'European versus Indigenous' dichotomy.[31] It omits the agency of African societies, their capacity to overcome such divisions, to ignore them or even to imagine them differently. The colonial ordering of urban space was incomplete as the colonial powers lacked the resources to enforce segregation ordinances while many Africans circumvented colonial regulations even in the stricter eastern and southern African colonial

[25] Freund, *The African City*, 45, 62; Coquery-Vidrovitch, *Histoire des villes*, 36–7.

[26] For the different urban colonial projects see Robert Home, *Of Planting and Planning: The Making of British Colonial Cities* (London, 1997); Mia Muller, *Moderns Abroad: Architecture, Cities and Italian imperialism* (London and New York, 2007); Hélène Vacher, *Villes coloniales aux 19ème et 20ème siècles. D'un sujet d'action à un objet d'histoire (Algérie, Maroc, Libye et Iran), Essais et guide bibliographique* (Paris, 2005).

[27] For a world analysis see Christopher A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914* (Oxford, 2004), 188–91.

[28] See the special edition of the *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 21:1 (1995) co-edited by Hilary Sapire and Jo Beall; Patrick Harries, 'Histoire urbaine de l'Afrique du Sud: nouveaux axes de réflexion', *Le Mouvement Social*, 204 (2003), 17–33.

[29] John Parker, *Making the Town: Ga State and Society in Early Colonial Accra* (Oxford, 2000), xix.

[30] Garth Andrew Myers, *Verandas of Power. Colonialism and Space in Urban Africa* (Syracuse, 2003); Zeynep Celik, *Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontations: Algiers under French Rule* (Berkeley, 1997).

[31] Frederick Cooper, 'Conflict and connection: rethinking colonial African history', *American Historical Review*, 99 (1994), 1516–45; Andreas Eckert, 'Urbanisation in col-onial and postcolonial West Africa', in Emmanuel Kwaku Akyeampong (ed.), *Themes in West Africa's History* (Oxford and Ohio, 2006), 213.

regimes.[32] In South Africa, this academic – and understandably poli-
tical – obsession with the segregated nature of the city has, more than in any
other part of the continent, been radically criticized since the end of apart-
heid for viewing state and urban control in teleological, monolithic, func-
tionalist terms. Furthermore, this perspective consistently underestimates
the world influence of modern architectural and planning movements in the
country while forgetting to trace the relationships between the local and the
national state, and does not pay enough attention to township dwellers'
practices and imaginations of cityness.[33] This latter criticism highlights the
necessity of giving up a dual city analysis though it arguably remains
necessary for the continued exploration of the extent and limits of discrimi-
nation policies imposed upon African urban dwellers during colonial and
apartheid times.[34]

   A similar ambiguity revolves around the postcolonial city label, commonly
used to qualify cities which have been developing since the end of the col-
onial period. This approach implies the comprehension of an enduring
common colonial legacy that unites Africa's cities and other cities of the
South in a postcolonial framework.[35] In certain instances, this notion, still
poorly discussed in academic arenas, nevertheless articulates something
more essential than a particular historical moment, a condition either radi-
cally different from the colonial city or, conversely, one which cannot rid
itself of this legacy – both readings that impoverish our understanding of the
colonial and postcolonial urban past. The colonial situation, instead of being
analysed as a total social project, as suggested by Georges Balandier,[36] is
limited to urban planning, technologies of control, and the civilizing mission.
Sources of conflicts are said to emanate mainly from the spatial separation
between colonizers and the colonized, while the contemporary city is per-
ceived as a fluid and more variegated space shaped by conflicts of a more
complicated nature (rich against poor, long-standing residents versus new-
comers, youth against elders, citizens versus immigrants …).[37] This latter

[32] John Lonsdale, 'Town life in colonial Kenya', in Burton, *The Urban Experience*,
221; Susan Parnell, 'Race, power and urban control: Johannesburg's inner city slum-
yards, 1910–1923', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 29 (2003), 615–37; Tsuneo
Yoshikuni, *African Urban Experiences in Colonial Zimbabwe: A Social History of Harare
before 1925* (Harare, 2007), 2.
[33] Maylam, 'Explaining the apartheid city', 34; Suzann Parnell and Alan Mabin,
'Rethinking Urban South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 21:1 (1995), 61;
Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall, 'Writing the world from an African metropolis',
Public Culture, 16 (2004), 347–72; Mbembe and Nuttall, 'A blasé attitude', 198.
[34] As mentioned by Vivian Bickford-Smith, 'Urban history in the new South Africa:
continuity and innovation since the end of apartheid', *Urban History*, 35 (2008), 288–315.
[35] Jennifer Robinson, 'Cities in a world of cities: the comparative gesture',
International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 35:1 (2011), 1–23; AbdouMaliq
Simone, *City Life from Jakarta to Dakar: Movements at Crossroads* (New York and
London, 2010).
[36] Georges Balandier, *Sociologie des Brazzavilles noires* (Paris, 1955).
[37] Okwui Enwezor *et al*. (eds.), *Under Siege: Four African Cities. Freetown,
Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos* (Ostfildern-Ruit, 2002); Fasil Demissie (ed.), *Postcolonial
African Cities. Imperial Legacies and Postcolonial Predicaments* (London and New York,
2007); Garth A. Myers and Martin J. Murray, 'Introduction: situating contemporary
cities in Africa', in Myers and Murray (eds.), *Cities*, 8.

approach does not always avoid the trap of introducing forms of binary discourse that surprisingly tend to classify colonial and postcolonial cities into ontologically distinct categories. In this process the concatenation of historical periods and the various influences that have shaped African city life are forgotten. Moreover, seeing Africa's cities only in terms of their colonial and postcolonial relationships may preclude a fuller understanding of the multifaceted ways in which they have engaged with the larger world.[38]

While the various attempts to integrate Africa in large historical frames have sometimes led to an essentialist vision of its cities, one of the more recent and innovative urban theories has left the African continent aside. Global city research looks at the changing forms of capitalism and its effects on urbanization at the world level including the concentration of capital, transnational corporations, and financial services industry in some specific metropolises. On the one hand, it entails an explicit critique of mainstream conceptions of globalization which presume that territoriality, borders, and places are becoming irrelevant.[39] On the other hand, it challenges state-centric approaches in the Western world by stressing the role major cities have played in reshaping the geography of capitalism and the rescaling of statehood.[40] Inevitably perhaps, critics of global city research have emerged especially from within Africa as it presents Western cities as the paradigmatic 'model' in terms of which all other cities are to be interpreted, regardless of their particular locations or histories.[41] Within such a framework, cities located 'off the map', in the South and especially in Africa, are almost invariably said to be lacking the characteristics that would qualify them as genuinely 'global' cities.

Given the shortcomings of the approach mentioned above, alternative notions of the global city have thus been developing more recently. However, using the notion of world city instead of global city to qualify metropolises outside the core of the capitalist system is probably of little help as this, again, has led to some doubtful classifications.[42] The globalizing city notion might be more useful as it construes globalization as a process, not a state that reifies and classifies cities of the world.[43] Looking from within the globalizing city of Accra, Richard Grant considered that there is a widening, deepening intensification and growing impact of global connections on the local economy and on local engagements with the world beyond.[44] The adoption of globalizing strategies is not exclusive to socially mobile transnationals in building gated communities or new foreign companies investing significantly

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[38] Abdoumaliq Simone, 'On the worlding of African cities', *African Studies Review*, 44:2 (Sept. 2001), 19.

[39] Neil Brenner and Roger Keil (eds.), *The Global Cities Reader* (London, 2000), 10.

[40] Neil Brenner, *New State Spaces: Urban Governance and the Rescaling of Statehood* (Oxford, 2004).

[41] Jennifer Robinson, 'Global and world cities: a view from off the map', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 26:3 (2002), 531–54.

[42] Josef Gugler (ed.), *World Cities Beyond the West: Globalization, Development and Inequality* (Cambridge, 2004).

[43] Peter Marcuse and Ronald van Kempen (eds.), *Globalizing cities. A New Spatial Order?* (Oxford, 2000).

[44] Richard Grant, *Globalizing City: The Urban and Economic Transformation of Accra, Ghana* (Syracuse, 2009), 7.

in Accra, but also concerns a process from below including returned migrants, evangelical movements, international NGOs, and slum dwellers looking for transnational alliances. The fact that Accra is more connected today to the world economy, to transnational NGOs and migrant networks is an important point that invalidates part of global city research which, *de facto*, excludes the continent from the global city map.

However, many scholars agree that Africa constitutes a site of extremely uneven globalizing processes. Such unevenness stems from the movement of capital across national borders, in the process linking particular and dispersed sites of global relevance thereby leaving huge regions simply by-passed.[45] Furthermore, post-1970s contemporary urban dynamics need to be read simultaneously as disconnected from – or poorly connected to – the world economy. James Ferguson has dismantled the idea of any linear trend towards more permanent urbanization and greater connection of a city's residents to the world, thereby questioning the meta-narrative of modernization that has frequently been associated with twentieth century urbanization in Africa.[46] Such trajectories of disconnection may be more common than we think as processes of counter-urbanization have developed in several regions of the continent.[47] There are also many small and middle-sized towns (with less than 500,000 inhabitants) where future urban growth will be (proportionately) larger than in the metropolises:[48] the marginal nature of international flows of people and goods in such locations suggests that those flows will not provide an effective measure for analyzing the particular social, political, and economic dynamics characteristic of these burgeoning towns.[49] The notion of a globalizing city might be useful to define post-1980s Accra, but the self-prophetic dimension of this construct is of little help in understanding the social and economic heterogeneity of the continent. In all likelihood, all these labels will be unable to fully reintegrate Africa's cities into world trends without oversimplifying and homogenizing their multiple histories. One single notion does not appear to be sufficient for grasping the uneven integration of Africa's cities into world history. In the next section, the urban labour market in Africa is used as an illustration for understanding the relations between this heterogeneity and larger economic trends.

WORLD HISTORY AND THE MAKING OF AN URBAN LABOUR MARKET

From the gradual abolition of the transatlantic slave trade in the 19th century to late colonial stabilization policies and post-1970s structural adjustment

[45] James Ferguson, *Global Shadows Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham and London, 2006), 37–8.   [46] Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity*.

[47] Deborah Potts, 'The slowing of sub-Saharan Africa's urbanization: evidence and implications for urban livelihoods', *Environment and Urbanization*, 21:1 (2009), 253–9; C. Beauchemin and Philippe Bocquier, 'Migration and urbanization in francophone West Africa: a review of the recent empirical evidence', *Urban Studies*, 41:11 (2004), 2245–72.

[48] UN Habitat, *The State of African Cities*, 3.

[49] See for instance, Yves A. Faure and Pascal Labazzée (eds.), *Socio-économie des villes africaines: Bobo et Korhogo dans les défis de la décentralisation* (Paris, 2002); Matthieu Hilgers, *Une ethnographie à l'échelle de la ville. Urbanité, histoire et reconnaissance à Koudougou (Burkina Faso)* (Paris, 2009); Eric Denis, *Villes et urbanisation des provinces égyptiennes, vers l'oeucuménopolis* (Paris 2006).

policies (SAPs), the urban labour market in Africa seems to have been shaped by world economic trends and by decisions taken in international arenas in which African actors have apparently minimal bargaining power. A focus on historical changes does not, however, illustrate the resilience of African societies to these policies and the manner in which these policies were reshaped in tandem with both national and local circumstances. Recent research in social history and anthropology facilitates a reconsideration of the extremely uneven consequences of world economic history in Africa.

The link between the decline of the international slave trade and the subsequent increase in domestic slavery in the nineteenth century urban economy remained obscure twenty years ago.[50] This is probably due to the fact that for a long time 'many studies dealt with the general history of the states or communities in which ports were situated, rather than with the specific history of port towns themselves'.[51] We now know from several monographs that, locally-speaking, the transition from exporting slaves to 'legitimate commerce' created an acute demand for new labour, increased domestic slavery in and around coastal towns, while the population of slave ports (for example, Accra, Ouidah, Lagos, Luanda, Cape Town, Zanzibar) increased dramatically in a few decades, and sometimes even within a few years.[52] In the history of the continent this change should not be seen as exceptional, as the integration of slaves into major towns and their surrounding hinterlands was central in the making of major hinterland cities especially in West and Central Africa.[53] It remains to be explored how the abolition of slavery in coastal societies transformed emerging urban labour relationships and how the repercussions of widespread slavery affected social relations in various regions of the continent throughout the colonial period and beyond.[54] In nineteenth century Lagos, wage labour held little appeal as local slave owners struggled to slow the decline of slavery and hold on to their bondswomen and men by using marriage, overlordship, patronage, and polygyny, and sought dependents not only for their work but also for the political support and social prestige they embodied.[55] Former slaves in Zanzibar adopted new cultural urban forms and leisure (for example, dialogic poetry exchange, dance performance, competitive songs and football) to escape their servile

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[50] Only a minority of ex-slaves found wage labour in towns but statistical collection during the early colonial period was haphazard according to Suzanne Miers and Richard Roberts (eds.), *The End of Slavery in Africa* (Madison, 1988), 33–7.

[51] Robin Law, *Ouidah: the Social History of a West African Slaving Port, 1727–1892* (Athens and Oxford, 2004), 5; Kristin Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City, Lagos, 1760–1900* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2007), 7–8.

[52] *Ibid.* 193–7; Law, *Ouidah*, 184, 201, 223; Lovejoy, *Transformation in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge, 1983, 1995), 222–5; Raymond R. Gervais and José C. Curto, 'The population history of Luanda during the late Atlantic slave trade, 1781–1844', *African Economic History*, 29 (2001), 46; Jose C. Curto, 'The anatomy of a demographic explosion: Luanda, 1844–1850', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 32, (1999), 401; Vivian Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town* (Cambridge, 1995), 44.

[53] Paul Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery* (Cambridge, 2000).

[54] As in the case of Mali and the town of Man, see Gregory Mann, *Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century* (Durhan and London, 2006).

[55] Mann, *Slavery*, 8–14.

conditions.[56] In French West Africa, many veterans, most of whom were slaves or ex-slaves, had no desire to return to villages where they would be subordinate to elders or former masters.[57] Their integration into different urban environments remains to be understood but reveals in some cases an early process of individualization and social distinction (for instance, through the acquisition of land, bars, and new forms of attire).[58]

While the transformation of slavery into new labour relationships remains to be fully explored at the town level, we know that late colonial stabilization policies were obsessed with urban workers. The main aims of these policies were to cut off the solidarities that had developed in the urban riots of the 1930s and 1940s between the 'floating population' and the more permanent urban workers, and to transform a potentially 'anarchic' floating population into a veritable working class which, it was hoped, would become increasingly differentiated in terms of salaries, promotions, and qualifications.[59] Practically, however, the policies had differentiated and unwanted localized effects. In Tanganyika, maintaining the political legitimacy of chiefs and headmen proved more important to local administrators than did the implementation of a stabilization policy and raising the social welfare of working class urban Africans to international standards.[60] In Nigeria, railway workers were able to use the perks of their jobs – salaries, housing, medical and other benefits – to support large households and become important patrons, rather than form the ideal small, nuclear families advocated by official policy.[61] In several French and British colonies, instead of disciplining urban workers, stabilization policies generally led this section of the population to actively claim more social and political rights for their particular groups or categories.[62]

To a certain extent, the post-1970s SAP sought to reverse the effects of these late colonial stabilization policies. It had the effect of shrinking the number of public servants and formal employment in many cities of the continent and reducing what International Monetary Fund (IMF) economists denounced as the urban bias of African governments (taxing heavily rural products and giving high wages to urban dwellers who were also the first to benefit from public investments in education, health, and infrastructure).

[56] Laura Fair, *Pastimes and Politics: Culture, Community and Identity in Post-Abolition Urban Zanzibar, 1890–1945* (Oxford, 2001).   [57] Mann, *Native Sons*, 15, 79.

[58] *Ibid.* Brigitte Reinwald, 'Citadins au future? L'insertion dans anciens combattants dans l'espace urbain de Bobo–Dioulasso', in Jean-Luc Vellut, *Villes d'Afrique. Explorations en histoire urbaine* (Paris, 2007), 179–200.

[59] Frederick Cooper, *Decolonisation and African Society, the Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge, 1996).

[60] Andreas Eckert, 'Regulating the social: social security, social welfare and the state in late colonial Tanzania', *Journal of African History*, 45:3 (2004), 489.

[61] Lisa A. Lindsay, *Working with Gender: Wage Labor and Social Change in South-western Nigeria* (Portsmouth, 2003).

[62] Carolyn Brown, *We Were All Slaves, African Miners, Culture and Resistance at the Enugu Government Colliery* (London, 2003); Ahmad Alawad Sikainga, *City of Steel and Fire: a Social History of Atbara, Sudan's Railway Town, 1906–1984* (Portsmouth, Oxford, 2002); Severine Awenengo, Hélène Charton, Odile Goerg, Steven Robins, 'Urban planning, housing, and the making of "responsible citizens" (Dakar, Nairobi, Conakry, Cape Town)', in Simon Bekker and Laurent Fourchard (eds.), *Governing Africa's Cities in Africa* (Pretoria, forthcoming).

The popularization of a new notion of the informal sector by the International Labour Organization and several generations of academics, policymakers, and bankers to describe all activities that escape taxation or state registration suggests that the cities of Africa and the global South have entered a 'new era' marked by a general 'informalization' of the urban economy.[63]

This change was not as dramatic in all African countries and the division between the pre-1970s and post-1970s periods sometimes seems too clear-cut while case studies show more complicated situations as well as unexpected elements of continuity and change. Firstly, if we define informal activities as activities not registered, taxed, or regulated by the state, then they must be considered as a continuation of colonial history rather than a novel feature of the post-1970s era. There may also be a historical and gender bias in the informal sector scholarship. The idea that colonial cities were exclusively male preserves while women stayed in the country where they reproduced peasant livelihoods has been challenged successfully by recent research on women's urban experiences that has helped to remap our understanding of the urban colonial landscape.[64] Women involved in trading, dyeing, brewing, or prostitution were part of colonial and postcolonial informal urban economies and were probably more prone to join the non-regulated economy because of their loose connection to administration, their will to escape taxation, and fundamental commitment to following their own agendas.[65] Moreover, once in town, their strategies differed widely from one place to another according to different possibilities of access to land, housing, and work, and according to local and national regulations that were, in many cases, more determinative than the 1980s SAP rupture.[66]

Secondly, instead of viewing the implementation of SAPs as responsible for a general informalization of the urban economy, several studies have

[63] K. Hansen and M. Vaa (eds.), *Reconsidering Informality: Perspectives from Urban Africa* (Upsala, 2004); Paul Zeleza, 'The spatial economy of structural adjustment in African cities', in P. Zeleza and E. Kalipeni (eds.), *Sacred Spaces and Public Quarrels: African Cultural and Economic Landscapes* (Trenton, 1999). For a global southern perspective, see Nezzar AlSayyad and Ananya Roy, *Urban Informality: Transnational Perspectives from the Middle East, Latin America and South Asia* (Lanham, 2004).

[64] Jean Allman, Susan Geiger and Nakanyike Musisi, 'Introduction', in Jean Marie Allman, Susan Geiger and Nakanyike Musisi (eds.), *Women in African Colonial Histories* (Bloomington, 2002) 3.

[65] Teresa Barnes, *We Women Worked so Hard: Gender, Urbanisation and Social Reproduction in Colonial Harare, Zimbabwe, 1930–1956* (Oxford, 1999); Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago, 1990); Judith A. Byfield, *The Bluest Hands: A Social and Economic History of Women Dyers in Abeokuta (Nigeria), 1890–1940* (Oxford, 2002); Claire Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way: Women, Men and Trade in the Nairobi Area, 1890–1990* (Bloomington and Indianapolis 1997). On the involvement of women in illegal liquor trade see Justin Willis, *Potent Brews: A Social History of Alcohol in East Africa, 1850–1999* (Oxford, 2002); Emmanuel Akyeampong, *Drink, Power and Cultural Change: A Social History of Alcohol in Ghana, c. 1800 to Recent Times* (Portsmouth and Oxford, 1996).

[66] For two different examples see Barbara Cooper, *Marriage in Maradi: Gender and Culture in a Hausa Society in Niger, 1900–1989* (Portsmouth, 1997); Rebekah Lee, *African Women and Apartheid: Migration and Settlement in Urban South Africa* (London, 2009).

indicated that large metropolises such as Nairobi, Johannesburg, Cape Town, Abidjan, Lagos, Maputo, and Dar es Salaam have started, in the last decade and sometimes earlier, to regulate their trade, reconquer their centres, and reassess their prerogatives in terms of spatial planning and taxes.[67] These regeneration projects are also aimed at implementing a World Class City agenda, representative of an increasing concern among city managers and politicians to attract investments, raise land values, and clean up the streets from traders. These policies indicate the difficulty of dissociating informal from formal forms of labour in Africa's cities as well as in the more general economy of the continent.[68] They also invalidate the idea, suggested by Rem Koolhaas and his colleagues, that regulated colonial cities have gradually transformed into paradigmatic informal African equivalents.[69] The exploration of social history and world economic trends remain imperative to avoid homogenizing African urban worlds.

HISTORICIZING WORLD IMAGINARIES

To move beyond the excessively narrow economic approach of globalization, more innovative research has looked at the everyday social practices of inhabitants shaped by 'globalised imaginaries' to highlight the worldliness of contemporary African life forms.[70] As mentioned by AbdouMaliq Simone, African urban residents have developed a 'worlding' from below as they are able to operate at larger scales in a broader world through the mobilization of religious practices, modes of dress, food, and musical taste.[71] These perspectives share a vision of Africa's cities in which world cultural repertoires are both locally produced and imagined, and propose a comprehensive reading of the city which avoids both localism and the global city paradigm. The risk, however, inherent in globalization studies is to omit mention of the historical dimension of these processes as well as the limits of world connections.[72] An additional risk is to read the city as a unified actor – considering a metropolis as cosmopolitan, for instance – assuming that its residents univocally share a (singular) world repertoire.

Historicizing various competing world imaginaries among city dwellers elucidates the messy process by which people get connected to worldwide

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[67] Sophie Didier, Mariane Morange, Margot Rubin, Jean-Fabien Steck, 'Informality, public space and urban governance. Evidence from Abidjan, Cape Town, Johannesburg, Lomé and Nairobi', in Bekker and Fourchard, *Governing*; Ilda Lindell, 'The multiple sites of urban governance: insights from an African city', *Urban Studies* 45 (2008), 1879–901.

[68] Alice Sindzingre, 'The relevance of the concepts of formality and informality: a theoretical appraisal', in B. Guha-Khasnobis, R. Kanbur, and E. Ostrom (eds.), *Linking the Formal and Informal Economy: Concepts and Policies* (2006, Oxford).

[69] Laurent Fourchard, 'Lagos, Koolhaas and partisan politics in Nigeria', *International Journal of Urban and International Research*, 35:1 (2011), 40–56.

[70] Edgar Pieterse, 'Exploratory notes on African urbanism', African Centre for Cities, University of Cape Town, June 2009. Dominique Malaquais, 'Villes flux: imaginaires de l'urbain en Afrique aujourd'hui', *Politique africaine*, 100 (2006), 17–37; Nuttall and Mbembe, *Johannesburg*, 10–15; Simone, *For the City*.

[71] Simone, 'On the worlding', 28

[72] As mentioned by Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, 91.

influences and helps to identify groups (who might be defined along social, gendered, or generational lines) who claim to share a form of cosmopolitan life. More importantly for our purposes, it also sheds light on the very processes by which becoming cosmopolitan was equivalent with becoming urban: both marked a distinction from the countryside. Heterogeneity and historical contingency shaped how each group or individual, in each town or city, came to imagine themselves as belonging to several worlds at the same time. For instance, at the core of the social history of Bulawayo (Zimbabwe) in the 1930s and early 1940s, stands a figure named Sipambaniso. He was alternately a police officer, welfare officer, railway adviser, union leader, executive of the Bantu National Congress, and was involved in modern music, dance, football, and boxing. He was considered to perfectly represent the interests of the long-term residents of the Bulawayo at the time.[73] His capacity to embody these diverse cultural and political repertoires aptly captures what it meant to be urban in mid-20th century Rhodesia. In other urban locales, other world repertoires were appropriated and merged with local idioms. In Kinshasa and Brazzaville, appropriation entailed the swift adoption by young Congolese migrants of sports, movies, and new musical genres at the crossroads of American, African, and European influences.[74] Gangsters known as *tsotsis* in Johannesburg participated in the emergence of a 'youth subculture' made up of a mix of American and local influences dominated by specific language, dress code, violent practices, and exacerbated masculinities.[75] They claimed a strictly urban origin, and looked down upon and confronted other groups considered as backward such as the Marashea gangs whose activities were organized between Sotho rural settlements, gold mining areas, and urban enclaves.[76]

Becoming cosmopolitan and becoming urban were thus contested historical processes everywhere, though especially in regions with longer established urban traditions (for example, the Swahili coast, hinterland West Africa, North Africa). In these places, Islam played a central role in the process of dissociating oneself from a rural, 'backward' environment and being associated with real or imaginary prestigious external links. It is significant that Swahili and Hausa city-state elites and those in northern Sudanese cities, especially after the fifteenth century, claimed Arab or Persian origins.[77] Timbuktu and Walata between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries were multiethnic centres of commerce but as time passed, fewer

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[73] Terence Ranger, *Bulawayo Burning. The Social History of a Southern African City, 1893–1960* (Oxford, Rochester, Harare, 2010), 131–66.

[74] Charles-Didier Gondola, *Villes miroirs. Migrations et identités urbaines à Kinshasa et Brazzaville, 1930–1970* (Paris, 1996), 137–270. For following periods, see Janet Mac-Gaffey and Rémy Bazenguissa-Ganga, *Congo Paris: Transnational Traders on the Margins of the Law* (Oxford, 2000); Bob White, *Rumba Rules: The Politics of Dance Music in Mobutu Zaïre* (Durham, 2008).

[75] Clive Glaser, *Bo-Tsotsi: The Youth Gangs of Soweto, 1935–1976* (Oxford, 2000).

[76] Gary Kynoch, *We are Fighting the World: A History of the Marashea Gangs in South Africa, 1947–1999* (Athens, Pietermaritzburg, 2005).

[77] David Robinson, *Muslim Societies in African History* (Cambridge, 2004), 139; Randall L. Pouwels, *Horn and Crescent: Cultural Change and Traditional Islam on the East African Coast, 800–1900* (Cambridge, 1987), 63–74; Triaud, 'L'islam', 136–40.

and fewer scholarly families claimed a West African ethnic identity and 'by 1800 there were almost no scholarly families left in Walata and Timbuktu that claimed anything other than a Arab identity'.[78] Similarly on the Swahili coast from the sixteenth century onwards, to be civilized, one had to be a coastal townsperson: the term *mwungwana* signalled urban culture and the elite's sense of belonging was demonstrated by social markers such as stone houses, prestigious external origins, Islamic practices, and specific modes of public behaviour.[79] This status of urban belonging became increasingly attractive in the late nineteenth century. Participating in cosmopolitan town life, public rituals, and dance societies was a source of prestige and became central to being recognized as a member of the urban coastal society. Nevertheless, demands for inclusion by people from the interior were highly contested by urban patricians who sought to heighten their exclusiveness by identifying themselves with overseas regions associated with Middle-Eastern ancestry, Islamic authority, and international commerce.[80] The word *wanyamwezi* was used by urban coastal people as a derogatory term connoting 'uncivilized' or 'rural', though the boundaries separating Swahili townspeople from the supposed barbarians of the hinterland were shifting, permeable, and extremely ambiguous.[81] These examples illustrate what it has meant to be urban and to be cosmopolitan in Africa at different moments in history. They also suggest how these strategies, when pursued by elites, could be intimately tied to processes of state building.

RECASTING CITY/STATE RELATIONSHIPS

Exploring the co-constitution of cities and states in the continent's history is a less than straightforward exercise. The long tradition of research in history, geography, and historical sociology has focused on the central albeit ambivalent role played by towns and cities in building and rescaling the state in Western Europe.[82] This is not the case in Africa where the history of city/state relationships in a *longue durée* analysis is often either ignored or more recently dealt with through a normative framework of analysis. Thirty years ago, John Peel recommended that 'a satisfactory African urban history must

[78] Timothy Cleaveland, 'Timbuktu and Walata: lineages and higher education', in Samil Jeppie and Soulemane Bachir Diagne (eds.), *The Meaning of Timbuktu* (Cape Town, Dakar, 2008), 79.

[79] Mark Horton and John Middleton, *The Swahili: the Social Landscape of a Mercantile Society* (Oxford, 2000), 18–20, 182–3; Thomas Vernet, 'Les Cités Etats swahili de l'archipel de Lamu, 1585–1810, Dynamiques endogènes, dynamiques exogènes', PhD, University of Paris 1 (2005), 385–7.

[80] Jonathon Glassman, *Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856–1888* (London, Nairobi, 1995), 4.

[81] *Ibid.* 62, 76; Jean Georg Deutsch, *Emancipation without Abolition in German East Africa, c. 1884–1914* (Oxford, 2006), 18.

[82] See the classical works by Max Weber, *Die Stadt* (Tubingen, 1947); Charles Tilly and Wim P. Blockmans (eds.), *Cities and the Rise of States in Europe AD. 1000 to 1800* (Boulder, 1994); and more recently, Patrick Legales, *European Cities*; Brenner, *New State Spaces*; Bernard Lepetit, 'La ville moderne en France: Essai d'histoire immédiate', in J. L. Biget and J. C. Hervé (eds.), *Panoramas Urbains. Situation de l'histoire des villes* (Fontenay, 1995), 173–207.

be about politics … which directs attention to the larger unit of the state in which West African urban analysis must be set'.[83] These recommendations have not always been followed by historians and political scientists. From the perspective of economic history, trans-Saharan and transatlantic trade and Western capitalism are effectively seen as the determining forces of the urbanization process. Such a perspective tends to downplay the role of political leaders at the local, national, or regional levels in shaping multiple urban forms on the continent.[84] From the perspective of political science, the town-state nexus from the precolonial period to the present sometimes appears but has yet to be fully explored. In general, towns and cities have not been highlighted as significant factors in the history of the state in Africa. They are at best briefly mentioned in, and sometimes totally excluded from, the most influential books on the historical formation of states in sub-Saharan Africa.[85] The central argument of Jeffrey Herbst's analysis appears to be an exception but does not totally escape a normative approach to the state in Africa. He suggests that the state in Africa does not extend beyond a core area, defined as either the capital or the critical urban areas and those rural areas with important economic assets.[86] The geographically limited authority of such states reveals their fundamental and historical weaknesses. Herbst uses the same ideal type definition of the state (a monopoly on legitimate violence, an autonomous bureaucratic apparatus, the embodiment of popular sovereignty, a spatially and territoriality coherent entity) that scholars have used to interpret state politics around the world.[87] Measured by this ideal type definition, 'African states are often identified as failed not by what they are, but by what they are not, namely, successful in comparison to Western states'.[88] This analytical framework is thus at the core of the 'failed state' perspective frequently criticized by anthropologists and political scientists but which is nevertheless influential in the ways cities in Africa are often understood.[89] In other words, a long historical urban past in Africa might be seen as either marginal to state-building processes or as the manifestation of the inherent weaknesses of the African state in general.

[83] John D. Y. Peel, 'Urbanization and urban history in West Africa', *Journal of African History*, 21 (1980), 273.

[84] Anthony King, 'Colonialism, urbanism and the capitalist world economy', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 13 (1989), 1–18; James D. Tarver, *Urbanisation in Africa: A Handbook* (London, 1994); Coquery-Vidrovitch, *Histoire des villes*, 219–24; Freund, *The African City*, 62, 65.

[85] Jean-François Bayart, *The State in Africa. The Politics of Belly* (London, 1993); Achille Mbembe, *De la Postcolonie. Essai sur l'imagination politique dans l'Afrique contemporaine* (Paris, 2000) Jean-François Médard (ed.), *Etats d'Afrique noire. Formations, mécanismes et crise* (Paris, 1991); Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective* (Yale, 1994).

[86] Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa. Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control* (Princeton, New Jersey, 2000).

[87] Péclard and Hagmann, *Negotiating statehood*, 541.   [88] *Ibid*.

[89] See 'Cities in fragile states' analysis produced by the London School of Economics; Mariano Aguirre, 'Crisis of the state, violence in the city' and Jo Beall, 'Urban governance and the paradox of conflict', both in Kees Koonings and Dirk Kruijt (eds.), *Megacities: The Politics of Urban Exclusion and Violence in the Global South* (London, New York, 2009), 107–20 and 141–52.

Some authors have suggested less essentialist ways of exploring state-building in Africa. The historicity of the state, the embeddedness of its bureaucratic organizations in society, the interactions between state officials and non state actors, the material dimension of statehood, and the importance of accumulating basic legitimacies are all key dimensions that apply to African states as well as to many states in the world.[90] Scaling down the focus of analysis from the level of the territorial state to local arenas or to socio-economic areas (such as mining or border areas) has been suggested as another possible way of evaluating the manner in which the state is built from the margins or from local situations.[91] Two other analytical possibilities are advanced here. First, understandings of the 'state' and the 'town' have, for too long, engaged with these as separate political entities even though several historical studies have recently emphasized the necessity of analyzing them within a common analytical framework. Second, cities have been privileged places in which multiple authorities compete over state functions and, as such, should contribute more to our understanding of the history of the state in Africa than is the case at present.

MAKING THE TOWN, MAKING THE STATE

There is a clear correlation between state formation and processes of urbanization in various regions of the world and Africa is no exception. This is in spite of the examples of stateless though urbanized societies, for instance Jenne-Jeno, and states without towns but with mobile court capitals, such as Burundi, Rwanda, and Buganda until the nineteenth century.[92] As in Europe, most African states needed the revenues generated by trade activities concentrated in towns and ports in order to strengthen their power over a territory and to finance war. This was the case for the long, urbanized past of both North Africa and areas of sub-Saharan Africa, where governments were even more dependent on taxing trade given the low population densities dispersed across vast hinterlands. In several parts of the continent, town and state formation were simultaneous and cumulative processes. Control or protection of long distance trade, warfare, and a slave-based economy were central elements for town prosperity that, in turn, reinforced state power. The nineteenth century Sokoto Caliphate provides a significant example. The long history of Hausa city-states, the capture of slaves by the cavalry

[90] Péclard and Hagmann, *Negotiating statehood*, 542–3.
[91] Christian Lund, 'Twilight institutions: public authority and local politics in Africa', *Development and Change*, 37:4 (2006), 673–84; Jana Honke, 'New political topographies. Mining companies and indirect discharge in Southern Katanga (DRC)', *Politique africaine*, 120 (2010), 105–29; Giorgio Biundo, 'Dealing with the local state, the informal privatization of the street-level bureaucracies in Senegal', *Development and Change*, 37:4 (2006), 799–819.
[92] Mogens H. Hansen, 'The concepts of city state and city state culture', in Mogens Herman Hansen, *A Comparative Study of Thirty City-State Cultures* (Copenhagen, 2000), 14; Jean-Pierre Chrétien, 'Les capitales royales de l'Afrique des Grands Lacs peuvent-elles être considérées comme des villes?', *Journal des Africanistes*, 74 (2004), 282–91; Richard Reid and Henri Médard, 'Merchants, missions and the remaking of the urban environment in Buganda', in Anderson and Rathbone, *Africa's Urban Past*, 98–108.

destined for work in the textile industry or for settlement in colonizing villages around various towns, the expansion of Hausa merchants throughout West Africa and their connection to regional and international trade networks, all contributed to the economic, demographic, and urban expansion of the Caliphate.[93] The most powerful and populous state in sub-Saharan Africa at the time was also the most urbanized.

Warfare was an integral part of state formation and was a crucial stimulus not just for social and political change but also town growth. There are many examples of towns and states formed by displaced groups or developed by the arrival of 'refugees'. For instance, the collapse of the Songhay 'Empire' in the late sixteenth century led to the re-emergence of Walata (in the western Sahara) as a notable centre of Islamic literary production thanks to the migration of cleric lineages from Timbuktu.[94] The arrival of warriors and merchants from the inland Niger Valley led to the creation of the town and state of Kong (in today's Ivory Coast). The migration of merchants and religious lineages from Gao and Timbuktu to Katsina and Kano contributed much to the rising importance of Hausa city-states after the seventeenth century.[95] In many parts of the continent, warfare led to the multiplication of city walls which, in turn, led to a greater concentration of people seeking protection. This emergent settlement pattern allied to the practice of warfare also facilitated taxation and the control of trade while at the same time imparting prestige to rulers. Significantly, in the 19th century, the two most urbanized regions in Africa south of the Sahara, Hausaland and Yorubaland, were also the densest groupings of African walled cities.[96] Despite the evident significance of the role played by warfare in the development of urban centres, a systematic, continent-wide analysis of this dynamic has not been undertaken.

Nineteenth century warfare was also decisive in shaping town institutions, integrating 'strangers' into local societies and making the state. In Accra, military organization and warfare determined the form of Ga institutions and the dynamics of political competition.[97] In nineteenth century Kumase, warfare and military organizations such as *asafo* became a force to be reckoned with and contributed much to emerging distinctions between the 'urban' and the 'rural'.[98] In the town of Ibadan, founded in the late 1820s, chieftaincy titles were allocated according to practical criteria of military merit and maintenance of a following by warrior-founders of compounds (*ile*).[99] The city did not emerge out of a coordinated project managed by an overarching authority as had been portrayed in earlier academic research. Instead, the conflicting oral histories collected by Ruth Watson clearly demonstrate that the 'residential group was constantly changing as new refugees arrived, built up their military retinues, and then departed to set up their own *ile*, taking their own group of followers and their families with them'.[100] Ibadan is

[93] Paul Lovejoy, *Slavery, Commerce and Production in the Sokoto Caliphate of West Africa* (Trenton, 2005), 152–206; Robert Griffeth, 'The Hausa city states from 1450 to 1804', in Hansen, *A Comparative Study*, 488.

[94] Cleaveland, 'Timbuktu'.   [95] Griffeth, 'The Hausa city'.

[96] Graham Connah, 'African city walls: a neglected source?', in Anderson and Rathbone (eds.), *Africa's Urban Past*, 36–51.

[97] Parker, *Making the Town*, 46–7.   [98] Akyeampong, *Drink*, 23, 52.

[99] Ruth Watson, *Civil Disorder is the Disease of Ibadan: Chieftaincy and Civic Culture in a Yoruba City* (Athens, Oxford, Ibadan, 2001), 16–28.   [100] *Ibid*. 28.

symptomatic of both the affirmation of the nineteenth century military state and indigenous forms of African urbanism: in less than half a century, it became simultaneously the most powerful state in the region and one of the largest cities on the continent.

As state formation and town growth are aspects of the same historical process, it is near impossible to disentangle the terms for 'state' and 'town' in several African languages. The foundational concept of Yoruba political sociology is the term *ilu*, commonly translated as 'town' or community.[101] An *ilu* is both a town and a polity and Yoruba people do not make a conceptual distinction between the two.[102] In Dahomey, urbanity was not only defined by size and the concentration of people, but by political autonomy and the role of the town as an administrative seat: *to* referred to a town or settlement of any size while *togan* (the chief of the *to*) was a provincial governor within the kingdom.[103] In the Ga language (southern Ghana), the term *man* most commonly denotes 'town' and has wider social and political connotations such as people, nation, or state. There are also a large number of names that distinguish townspeople enjoying full civic rights (*mambii*) from people of the bush.[104] 'The very things that made Accra a state – organized political, military, legal and religious institutions –are also the things that made Accra distinctively ''urban''.'[105] These examples suggest that networks of towns directly shaped precolonial states and militate against the idea that the latter developed independent of the former.[106]

In several parts of Africa, a wide range of negotiations, compromises, and conflicts came to define complex relationships between European officials and local elites. Precolonial urban-based institutions were often important in making the early colonial state as many colonial territories came into existence through them. The old and new networks of towns became the architecture of emerging bureaucratic colonial states (with expanded though limited administration and public services). As in rural areas, colonial administration was unable to afford the cost of services for the urban population and was forced to tolerate institutions that were beyond its control and could be used to subvert or evade its dominance. This was the case in cities created by the colonial powers – for instance, the *chefs de quartier* in FWA or *autorités coutumières* in Congo, as well as old settlements like the Kasbah of Algiers, the walled city of Tripoli, the Senegalese Four Communes, the townships of Accra, Ibadan, and Kano, the 'old town' of Zanzibar and Mombasa, and the royal neighbourhoods of Ouagadougou and Kampala.[107] In the latter cases, the influence of chiefs and townsmen of precolonial origin

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[101] John D. Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington, 2000), 30.   [102] *Ibid*. 31.

[103] Law, *Ouidah*, 81.   [104] Parker, *Making the Town*, 6.

[105] *Ibid*. 238.   [106] As suggested by Herbst, *States and Power*, 15.

[107] Parker, *Making the Town*; Diouf, *The French colonial policy*; Watson, *Civil Disorder*; Mia Fuller, 'Preservation and self-absorption: Italian colonization and the walled city of Tripoli, Libya', *Journal of North African Studies*, 5 (2000), 121–54. Zenep Celik, Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Terpak (eds.), *Walls of Algiers. Narratives of the City through Text and Image* (Berkeley, 2009); Justin Willis, *Mombasa, the Swahili and the Making of the Mijikanda* (Oxford, 1993), 3; Olufunke Adeboye, 'The changing conception of elderood in Ibadan, 1830–2001', *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 16:2 (2007), 261–78.

continued long into the twentieth century.[108] In a context characterized by the quick turnover of colonial staff, policy changes, and slow and uneven bureaucratization processes, many of these authorities dating from pre-colonial times maintained or acquired significant authority (see below).

Urban questions, especially those concerning labour, planning, poverty, and delinquency, became important issues within official circles both in Europe and Africa during and after the Second World War. These concerns favoured the creation of new departments in the late colonial bureaucracy.[109] The early colonial experience in towns might also have been decisive in setting up embryonic services and regulations though this has been less systematically explored. It seems from existing case studies that piecemeal responses to moral panics (over disease, unemployed youth, 'unattached women' or prostitutes) were subsequently transformed into public policies at the territorial level.[110] It is also possible – though this remains to be confirmed – that embryonic town services (municipal police, town planning, hygiene and welfare services) shaped the emerging central services of the colonies. This might represent a similar experience to that of Europe, where the emergence of the welfare state was often extrapolated from municipal experiments and the personnel involved in their operation.[111]

While *ad hoc* town initiatives might have shaped the central bureaucratic state, it is also clear that colonial officials, like African political leaders, dramatically transformed urban networks. In the long term, public investments gave rise to different patterns of networks. In former French Western and Central African countries, the concentration of public investments in capital cities after the Second World War favoured 'primacy' that involved 30 per cent or more of a country's urban population living in its largest city. This arrangement meant that labour markets and infrastructure were concentrated in capitals which were then surrounded by networks of towns with relatively poor urban services, a model popularized by a famous formula, 'the state stops at PK 12', that is, 12 kilometers from the capital.[112] In most African countries, postcolonial leaders continued to invest disproportionally in capital cities neglecting both secondary towns and rural areas.[113] 'Primacy' as a

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[108] Lonsdale, *Town life*; P. Mutibwa, *The Buganda Factor in Uganda Politics* (Kampala, 2008).

[109] J. Iliffe, *The African Poor: A History* (Cambridge, 1987), 202–7; J. Lewis, *Empire State-Building. War and Welfare in Kenya, 1925–1952* (Oxford, Nairobi, Athens, 2000), 21.

[110] Myron Echenberg, *Black Death, White Medicine: Bubonic Plague and the Politics of Public Health in Colonial Senegal, 1914–1945* (Portsmouth, Oxford, Cape Town, 2002); Christelle Taraud, *La Prostitution coloniale, Algérie, Tunisie, Maroc (1830–1962)* (Paris, 2003); Andrew Burton, *African Underclass: Urbanisation, Crime and Colonial Order in Dar es Salaam, 1919–1961* (Oxford, Dar es Salaam, Athens, 2005); Laurent Fourchard, 'Lagos and the invention of juvenile delinquency in Nigeria, 1920–1960', *Journal of African History*, 47 (2006), 115–37. For a similar issue in Europe, see Peter Baldwin, *Contagion and the State, 1830–1930* (Cambridge, 1999).

[111] Pierre Yves Saunier, 'Global city', 21.

[112] Thomas Bierschenk and Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, 'Local powers and a distant state in rural central African Republic', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 35:3 (1997), 441–68.

[113] Simon Bekker and Goran Therbon (eds.), *Capital Cities of Africa* (Dakar, Pretoria, 2011).

colonial heritage of centralization still dominates Africa more than any other continent but has begun to decline over the last three decades.[114]

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CONTESTING THE STATE AND COMPETING AUTHORITIES
OVER STATE FUNCTIONS

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Post-1970s structural adjustment policies (SAPs) together with the reduction of state services and decentralization of government administration have facilitated the return of local power centres, increased the number of non-state actors involved in delivering services, and multiplied the patron-client ties and personal networks upon which people must rely to survive.[115] In itself, this process does not necessarily imply the weakening or privatization of the state.[116] Scaling down the focus of analysis to local arenas has recently helped to renew our understanding of the state in Africa. As argued by Christian Lund, the multiplication of parallel structures and alternative sites of authority (for instance, chiefs, political factions, hometown associations, neighbourhood groups, and vigilante organizations) has managed to 'bring the state back' into local arenas.[117] A growing though still limited literature on 'cities at war', in post-conflict situations, or towns beyond the control of government bureaucracies helps elucidate how the state can be built from the margins through unofficial agents imposing taxes on populations, building embryonic administrations, capturing the resources of humanitarian aid (for example, Goma, Lumumbashi, Juba),[118] or developing financial centres for money laundering, receiving migrant remittances, and recycling the goods of the regional economy (for example, Nador [Morocco], Benguerdane [Tunisia], Touba/Mbacké [Senegal]).[119]

An historical approach that examines the contingent relationships constituted through conflicts and negotiations between state officials and multiple competing authorities in local and urban areas reveals processes of state construction and deconstruction in Africa. To oppose the rural and the urban here is probably of little help. Juxtaposing urban Africa as a privileged site of emergent civil society and of challenges to colonial and authoritarian regimes with tribal and despotic power in rural areas[120] overstates the role

[114] Bryan R. Roberts, 'Comparative urban systems: an overview', in Tienda, Marta, Findley Sally, Tollman Stephen, Presthon-Whyte Eleanor (eds.), *African Migration and Urbanization in Comparative Perspective* (Johannesburg, 2006), 71–114.

[115] Péclard and Hagmann, 'Negotiating Statehood', 542; Frederick Cooper, *Africa Since 1940. The Past of the Present* (Cambridge, 2002), 182–3.

[116] Béatrice Hibou, *Privatising the State* (London, 2004).

[117] Lund, 'Twilight Institutions', 688.

[118] Karen Vlassenroot and Koen Büscher, 'Humanitarian presence and urban development: new opportunities and contrasts in Goma, DRC', *Disasters*, 34:2 (2010), 256–73; Theodore Treffon, *Parcours administratifs dans un Etat en faillite: récits de Lubumbashi (RDC)* (Tervuren, Paris, 2007); Nasseem Badiey, 'The local dynamics of statebuilding in Juba, Southern Sudan (2005–2008)', *Politique africaine*, 122 (forthcoming in 2011).

[119] Cheikh Gueye, *Touba, la capitale des mourides* (Paris, Dakar, 2002); Jean Schmitz 'Le souffle de la parenté. Mariage et transmission de la baraka chez les clercs musulmans de la vallée du Sénégal', *L'Homme*, 154 (2000), 241–78.

[120] As suggested by Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, 1996), 289–93.

of urban political forms and undervalues the strategic place of rural con-
stituencies and the importance of urban-rural links in the making of African
politics. Political struggles during the colonial period have more often than
not bridged the gap between the rural and the urban,[121] though this may be
changing.[122] Nevertheless, urban areas should remain a significant focus for
exploring day-to-day interactions between state and non-state actors.

Of radical importance are the effects of urban unrest and large-scale mo-
bilization on the shape of the state. Heightened political tensions in cities
have led to public actions and reinforced the role of bureaucracy as a means
of reasserting the authority of the state over turbulent populations. Examples
of such actions include the establishment of the late colonial state in British
and French Africa after the urban riots of the 1930s and early 1940s, the
creation of security services in Togo alter the revolt of Lomé in 1933, the
notable reinforcement of the South African repressive apparatus after
the 1960 Sharpeville massacre and the mid-1980s township revolt, and the
recentralization of the Federal state stimulated by the 1966 anti-Igbo riots in
northern and middle belt Nigerian cities that precipitated the civil war.[123]
Moreover, 'urban bias' seems to coming back as a key concern for some
African leaders after the so-called 2008 food riots.[124]

These large scale mobilizations are probably not the dominant form of
political and social confrontation in most of Africa's cities. Less visible,
though no less important, are a set of fragmented confrontations and nego-
tiations between the urban poor and the state. In a number of Middle
Eastern and North African cities, mass protests, labour unionism and social
movements failed – at least until late 2010 – to improve the living conditions
of any significant number of people. Instead, poor people fostered what
Asef Bayat calls quiet encroachment, characterized by largely atomized and
prolonged mobilization with episodic actions by individuals and families to
acquire the basic necessities of their lives, and to get access to collective
resources (land, shelter, piped water, electricity) and to public space (street
pavements, intersections, street parking places).[125] The contemporary urban
landscape of the poor in several large metropolises seems dominated, on the
one hand, by the apparent lack of public policies and, on the other, by the
everyday bargaining of citizens with state officials and local political leaders.

[121] Lonsdale, 'Town life', 214; Akyeampong, *Drink, Power*, 95–116; Jeremy Rich, *A
Workman is Worthy of his Meat. Food and Colonialism in the Gabon Estuary* (Lincoln and
London, 2007); Benjamin N. Lawrence, *Locality, Mobility and 'Nation': Periurban
Colonialism in Togo's Eweland* (Rochester, 2007).
[122] The question is to establish whether political and social contestations will be in-
creasingly urban-based in the near future as it was already the case in 1980s South Africa.
See Jeremy Seekings, *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South-
Africa, 1983–1991* (Cape Town, Oxford, Athens, 2000).
[123] Philip H. Frankel, *An Ordinary Atrocity: Sharpeville and its Massacre*
(Johannesburg, 2001); Anthony A. Douglas, *Poison and Medicine: Ethnicity, Power and
Violence in a Nigerian City, 1966–1986* (Portsmouth, Oxford, Cape Town, 2002), 86–118;
Joël Glassman, 'Les corps habillés. Genèse des méties de police au Togo (1885–1963)',
Phd., University of Paris 7, 2011.
[124] Pierre Janin, 'Faim et politique: mobilisations et instrumentations', *Politique
africaine*, 119 (2010), 20.
[125] Asef Bayat, 'From ''dangerous classes'' to ''quiet rebels''. Politics of the urban
subaltern in the global South', *International Sociology*, 15:3 (2000), 533–57.

In Lagos, Nairobi, Casablanca and Cairo, the poorest neighbourhoods are, however, not necessarily abandoned by the central or the local state, as the 'failed state' literature contends, but instead remain strongly tied to it through networks of intermediaries, caïds, and political or union leaders, relationships that result in multiple forms of political belongings.[126] Such a situation might not look unfamiliar to historians of Africa, as large areas of cities under colonial rule were also poorly serviced and often dominated by forms of patronage and corruption, and under the nitpicking control of the state officials.[127] A comprehensive and continental assessment of what has fundamentally changed in urban based patronage and in the poor's access to services, land, and housing from the late nineteenth century to the present is not to be found in the existing literature.

Ultimately, the government's inability to ensure security for its citizens is usually considered the most important indicator of contemporary state failure in Africa.[128] Historically, however, coercive practices including collecting taxes, recruiting labour, implementing sanitary regulations, and policing towns and cities have often been delegated to 'Native authorities', foreign companies and local communities.[129] The colonial establishment of trained and professional police forces was slow and uneven, and never met the needs of the population. Local leaders and elders frequently demanded the provision of security by indigenous authorities, self-defence groups, and vigilante and community organizations in areas perceived as threatened by youth gangs (in some Nigerian and South African townships this has been the case since at least the 1930s). Such provisioning became a cheap way for the state to unload the expense of policing onto local communities.[130] Nevertheless, the results of this delegation – or in certain cases, this capture – of security functions were unpredictable. In the mid-1980s, no one would have guessed that street committees, neighbourhood watches or

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[126] Isaac Olabwale Albert, 'NURTW and the politics of motor parks in Lagos and Ibadan', in Laurent Fourchard (ed.), *Gouverner les villes d'Afrique. Etat, gouvernement local et acteurs privés* (Paris, 2007), 125–38; Patrick Haenni, *L'Ordre des caïds. Conjurer la dissidence urbaine au Caire* (Paris, Le Caire, 2005); Johan De Smedt, '''No Raila, no peace!'' Big man politics and election violence at the Kibera grassroots', *African Affairs*, 108:433 (2009), 581–98 Lamia Zaki, 'L'électrification temporaire des bidonvilles casablancais. Aspects et limites d'une transformation ''par le bas'' de l'action publique. Le cas des Carrières centrales', *Politique africaine*, 120 (2010), 45–66.

[127] David Anderson, 'Corruption at City Hall: African housing and urban development in colonial Nairobi', in Burton, *The Urban Experience*, 138–54; Momar Cumba Diop and Mamadou Diouf, 'Pouvoir central et pouvoir local. La crise de l'institution municipale au Sénégal', in Sylvy Jaglin and Alain Dubresson (eds.), *Pouvoirs et cités d'Afrique noire. Décentralisations en question* (Paris, 1993), 101–26; Sandra Barnes, *Patrons and Power: Creating a Political Community in Metropolitan Lagos* (London, 1986).   [128] Péclard and Hagmann, 'Negotiating statehood', 552.

[129] D. Anderson and D Killingray, *Policing the Empire. Government, Authority and Control, 1830–1940* (Manchester and New York, 1991).

[130] Jeremy Seekings, 'Social ordering and control in the African townships of South Africa: an historical overview of extra-state initiatives from the 1940s to the 1990s', in W. Scharf and D. Nina (eds.), *The other law: non-state ordering in South Africa* (Cape Town 2000); Gary Kynoch, 'Friend or Foe? A world view of community-police relations in Gauteng townships, 1947–1977', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 37:2/3, (2003), 298–327; David Pratten, 'The politics of protection: perspectives on vigilantism in Nigeria', *Africa*, 78:1 (2008), 1–15.

vigilante organizations would, twenty years later, become part of the South African police service through community police schemes and reserve police forces.[131] It was also far from obvious that former night guards in southern Nigerian cities, denounced as vigilante groups by the federal state in the mid-1980s, would become officially recognized and paid agents of states in the early 2000s.[132]

To cast the multiplication of actors performing or subverting state functions as the 'privatization of the state' or as 'the end of the postcolonial state'[133] is to analyze such practices in terms of a one-way affair and ignore the capacity of local authorities to operate in the twilight between state and society, public and private.[134] Looking at sites of authority that are linked to state officials and perform state functions might allow us to see new forms of authority being generated in apparently failing states.[135] Achille Mbembe suggests that private actors who perform functions such as imposing taxes and create moral or political order through violence and other constraints should also be understood as doing so for their own personal material gain.[136] Both arguments are probably valid, depending on circumstances. By placing actors who claim state authority in a larger historical frame, we might move beyond this dilemma and grasp how African public authorities 'wax' and wane' as state institutions are never definitively formed.[137]

CONCLUSION

Considering Africa's cities as dysfunctional, chaotic, failed, informal, or not globalized works to retain the Western city as the paradigmatic model against which all others are to be assessed. Attempts to categorize Africa's cities as Islamic, colonial, postcolonial, and cosmopolitan similarly shed little light on the urban change that has taken place on the continent. These categories tend to underestimate, or leave unattended, more localized and regional historical contexts, and ignore the fact that urbanization in Africa has been, as elsewhere, a layered economic, social, and political process. The heterogeneity of urban situations and the extremely uneven influence of other continents in Africa ultimately suggest that it is more appropriate to speak about 'cities of Africa' rather than 'African cities'. Simultaneously, social history examinations have revealed how the specificities of localized situations have greatly shaped the everyday practices of ordinary residents. Given the sheer diversity of these situations, a comprehensive portrait of urban Africa thus remains a difficult challenge to achieve.

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[131] See for a general overview of this recent phenomenon, Claire Bénit-Gbaffou, Seyi Fabiyi and Elizabeth Peyroux (eds.), *Sécurisation des quartiers et gouvernance locale* (Paris 2010).

[132] Laurent Fourchard, 'A new name for an old practice: vigilante in South Western Nigeria', *Africa*, 78:1 (2008), 6–40; Kate Meagher, 'Hijacking civil society: the inside story of the Bakassi Boys vigilante group of South-Eastern Nigeria', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 45:1 (2007), 89–115.

[133] Crawford Young, 'The end of the post-colonial state in Africa? Reflections on changing African political dynamics', *African Affairs*, 103:410 (2004), 23–49.

[134] Lund, 'Twilight institutions'.   [135] *Ibid*. 701.

[136] What is referred to as 'Le gouvernement privé indirect' by Achille Mbembe, *De la postcolonie*, 95–138.   [137] Lund, 'Twilight institutions', 697.

In this article, exploration of cities as places situated within country, state, and world networks has been suggested as a way to move beyond localism and unhelpful categorization, and to avoid fetishizing scales of analysis. Linking world economic trends more carefully to urban labour history may enable reconsideration of post-war modernization policies as well as the domination of the informal sector paradigm since the 1970s. Labour history has always been an important subfield within African urban history and new topics of analysis such as land, leisure, visual, literary and the performing arts and public policies relating to education, health, housing, water, security remain to be explored. Much recent historical and social scientific scholarship has also insisted on the necessity of thinking about the city and the state, and the city and the world, simultaneously. Being urban, modern, civilized, or cosmopolitan appear, in a number of cases, to be overlapping processes. Making towns and making states were also simultaneous historical processes in many African societies prior to colonial rule, while negotiations and contestations between a range of local and imperial actors shaped the early colonial state in the 19th century. Reasserting the importance of cities in history will likely help us to understand better processes of state formation in Africa today. Exploring, in more empirical detail, the making of the city and the state and their uneven connections to the wider world will make the banality of Africa's urban past part of the history of the urban world.

Today, scholarship on Africa's urban past shares with its European counterpart some common handicaps: a dearth of studies of small and medium size towns, which renders difficult a clear understanding of urban networks and their connections to the world economy; the decline of economic studies focusing especially on cities; and more generally, often absent connections between stories of individual cities and broader trends.[138] Not surprisingly, these gaps and omissions have proven a significant obstacle to the few attempts to write a comprehensive and comparative history of urban Africa. Our analyses of Africa's urban past must move beyond the narrow subfield of urban history, which remains ill-defined, too narrowly empirical, and disconnected from larger debates. Instead, we should return to one of the subfield's initial motivations: the desire to forge interdisciplinary connections between history and the social sciences.[139]

[138] Peter Clark, Jean-Luc Pinol, Lees Lynn Hollen, 'Generalization and synthesis in European urban history', 9th International Conference of Urban History, Comparative History of European Cities, University of Lyon, 28 Aug. 2008.

[139] Well epitomized by the collective book edited by Stephan Thernstrom and Richard Sennett (eds.), *Nineteenth-Century Cities: Essays in the New Urban History* (New Haven, 1969).