African Cities as critical sites of violent conflict and post-conflict reconstruction

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Main Argument

♦ Starting point: Complex relationship between dynamics of urbanisation and dynamics of violent conflict

♦ Need for a better urban understanding of current African conflict dynamics

♦ Cities are critical sites of violent conflict and spatial, political and economic transformations and productions.
Urbanisation & Violent Conflict

2 extremely visible and relevant dynamics in contemporary SS Africa

!! Yet, no interest in the link between the two

This link may be an original angle to study African Urbanity

**Reasons for this gap**

- Urban studies: urbanisation as a non-political process
- Conflict studies: dominant rural perspective
Cities in Violent Conflict

Complex relationship (see Rodgers, Beall & Goodhand 2011)

♦ City as Strategic Target
  symbols of power and control

♦ City as Site of Insurgency
  sites of mobilisation

♦ City as Site of Protection
  safe havens

♦ City as Site of Production
  war as a ‘productive moment’

♦ City as Site Violent Contest
  war reinforcing conflictual urbanisation
Case: Goma in Eastern DR Congo

**Context:** 20 years of violent conflict and state decline

Profound impact of protracted violent conflict analysed by Academics
Donors/humanitarian sector

Both: Rural focus

Yet: Cities are crucial sites: mobilization of rebel groups, issues of land access, war economies, and security or political governance.
Case: Goma in Eastern DR Congo

Urbanisation: major outcome of civil war

High urbanisation rate in Eastern Provinces

Conflict induced Urbanisation:

- Transformation of existing cities
- Emergence of new boomtowns

Through 20 years of war, Eastern DRC society has increasingly become urban
Case: Goma in Eastern DRCongo

Increasing regional political importance
Increasing regional economic position
Site of refuge and protection
The city as a zone of protection: A safe-haven for whom?

IDP’s, demographic pressure, unplanned urbanisation

Yet also save haven for rebel-leaders

Indirect presence and influence in the city

Crucial Location of violent conflict because playground of multiple actors involved in war and peace
Future Peacebuilding: Taking the debate to the city

Both Local politics, international interventions, donor programmes, peace-building, all look at the RURAL

!! CRUCIAL to address link between conflict and urbanisation in Eastern Congo as part of integrated approach to post-conflict reconstruction.

Necessary to turn opportunities of fragile peace into sustainable development and to tap into the potential of cities as laboratories of change
IN CASE FURTHER QUESTIONS:

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