

*The Making of Urban Africa: Contesting and Negotiating the Colonial and Postcolonial State.*

Two common perceptions are largely shared in both academic and expert circles on Africa and Africa's cities. The first one suggests that African urbanization process is ontologically different from the rest of the world. Africa's cities are portrayed as sites of disorder and chaos, as ungovernable and as powerless in the face of massive in-migration, of shrinking formal economic activity or are perceived like African states, as "failed" or "fragile", unable to implement public policies and dominated by a series of self-regulatory systems working outside state regulations. A second common assumption is to see Africa's cities as non-layered historical places partly because unhelpful historical categorizations have dominated aspects of urban history and the urban studies literature of the continent. Analyzing urban Africa in relation to the history of the state helps to both reconsider the role towns and cities have played in the long history of state-formation and explore the effects and limits of state action in the making of and in shaping the continent's cities. Uneven relationships between state and non-state actors and the difficulty to draw a distinct line between the two may help considering the urban as a political environment in which the state is contested, negotiated and produced on a daily basis. In stressing this centrality of this relation, this paper would like to contribute to some of the critical issues of the continent on informality, on patronage, on violence and statecraft.