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African cities and violent conflict: the urban dimension of conflict and post conflict dynamics in Central and Eastern Africa

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ABSTRACT

This article forms the introduction of a special issue on the relation between dynamics of violent conflict and urbanisation in Central and Eastern Africa. The aim of this collection of articles is to contribute to a profound understanding of the role of 'the urban' in African conflict dynamics in order to seize their future potential as centres of stability, development, peace-building or post-conflict reconstruction. This introduction argues for the need to bridge both the 'urban gap' in African conflict studies as well as the 'political' gap in African urban studies. Building on empirical and analytical insights from multi-disciplinary research in different African conflict settings, the author presents urban centres in Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, DR Congo, South Sudan and Kenya as crucial sites of socio-spatial and political transformations and productions. The main argument running through its analysis is that emerging urbanism in the larger Great-Lakes region and its Eastern neighbours present fascinating lenses to better understand the transformative power of protracted violent conflict. This will be demonstrated by elaborating on the conflict-induced production of urban landscapes, urban governance, and urban identities. Finally, this will lead us to crucial insights on how protracted regional dynamics of political violence, forced displacement, militarised governance and ethnic struggles strongly reinforce the conflictual nature of emerging urbanisation and urbanism.

Understanding the urban dimension of violent conflict

Over the past two years, Sub-Saharan Africa experienced several phases and forms of upsurges of violence. Violent dynamics such as the heavy fighting in South Sudan's capital city of Juba, post electoral protests and brutal killings in Bujumbura, Burundi, bombings in the city of Bamako, Mali, violent urban uprisings in Congo's cities of Goma and Kinshasa, confirm two tendencies: (i) that violent conflict is not in decline in this part of the world, and (ii) that urban centres represent critical arenas in and over which this violent conflict occurs. These cases demonstrate how violent conflict takes multiple forms, producing a series of regional destabilising effects through massive forced mobility, increasing militarisation of political struggle and state

fragmentation. As 'safe havens' for those seeking protection, as concentrations of public administrative and the military apparatus, and as symbolic bases of state sovereignty and public authority, urban centres present a magnification of these multiple conflict outcomes. Therefore, it seems crucial to explicitly pay attention to the key role of urban centres and urbanisation while investigating current trends of violent conflict. The other way around, while investigating processes of urban growth and development in cities like Juba, Goma or Bujumbura, conflict dynamics of forced displacement, militarised violence, ethnic politics and state decline are crucial to understand emerging urbanism[1] in these regions. In countries like Uganda, South Sudan or the DRC, there is for example a direct correlation between urban growth and waves of regional forced displacement.[2] Further, the nature of socio-economic or political networks within urban neighbourhoods is often strongly connected to conflict dynamics on the national or regional level.[3] In other words, we need to look at cities to understand on-going conflict and violence as much as we need to look at conflict-dynamics to understand current urbanisation processes in this part of the world.

This observation forms the starting point for this special issue, in which the complex inter-connectedness between urbanisation and violent conflict will be the main focus throughout the analysis of a variety of case-studies situated in Central and Eastern Africa. Briefly, violent conflict in this article refers to a diversity of conflicts on the continent, broadly categorised as 'civil' and 'civic', as defined by Beall and Goodfellow as part of their proposed analytical framework to understand violent conflicts' implications for African urban areas.[4] The first category points at violent struggle between organised armed groups within sovereign boundaries for territorial control, political representation and public authority. 'Civic conflict' then refers to diverse forms of violence outside a 'warfare' context, most of the time taking place in urban environments, involving both conventional forces and irregular combatants (such as criminal gangs, militias, terrorists or warlords). As scholars like Mary Kaldor have argued[5] (and as this special issue equally demonstrates): these two forms of violent conflict often overlap in African cities, displaying a complex proliferation of violent forms of conflict.

The papers presented draw on research from DRC, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Kenya and South Sudan. Although they do not fit as a region into one particular thematic or analytical box (such as 'conflict – post conflict', or 'weak – strong' states) through their various forms of violent conflict, these countries share a number of common characteristics such as neo-patrimonial state rule, ethnic translations of struggles for political representation, militarised politics and the proliferation of violence (within the regime or more general within society).[6] The destabilising effects of the protracted crisis in the Great Lakes region are being felt until today, reinforced by upsurges of violence in Eastern Congo and South Sudan. While Uganda and Rwanda are regionally perceived as 'stable' post-conflict regimes, post-electoral violence in Kenya or Burundi demonstrate that as long as these regimes do not resolve issues of unequal access to rights, citizenship and land, violence and instability always linger (often within urban environments). This special issue includes some cases on post-conflict transition to touch at long-lasting urban effects of protracted violent conflict and to understand the role and potential of urban centres in 'building' peace.[7] Although these cases indicate that a clear distinction between 'conflict' and 'post-conflict' is not always easy to be drawn, we want to get to a better grasp on issues such as the parallels between the role of urbanisation in political

mechanisms of conflict as well as post-conflict interventions.[8] The significance of urbanisation as a political mechanism is not only expressed through elites' roles in urban planning or land governance schemes in cases like Juba or Beni,[9] but also through the trajectories towards or in some cases struggles over an agglomeration's administrative and political recognition as being 'urban'.[10] The issue of obtaining the so-called 'city status' in a context of war or post-war transition appears to be a powerful tool for urban dwellers, elites, armed groups and state administrations in their political agendas.

Urban settings in this region (with some exceptions) are characterised by a fast and largely un-controlled growth, multi-layered urban governance, ethnically fragmented cityscapes, informality, multiple urban cultures and identities, inadequate basic urban infrastructure, unequal access to public goods and at the same time diverse forms of social networks and bottom-up coping mechanisms. Apart from a broad variety of forms of violent conflict, this special issue also represents a rich diversity of cases of established (larger, 'primary') cities as well as 'secondary' urban centres.

The African encounter of conflict studies and urban studies

A collective effort to come to a better understanding of the complex interactions between dynamics of urbanisation and violent conflict seems crucial, given the fact that within academia the two dynamics are often treated separately, with the disciplines of urban studies and conflict studies not always interacting with each other. Countries such as South Sudan, Sudan, the DRC and Uganda are being represented though case-studies within both disciplines, yet studies drawing from cross-cutting insights are rare.[11] Conflict studies focusing on the Great-Lakes region and its Eastern neighbours historically have mainly been focusing on 'the rural', being for a long time the main theatre of violent confrontation. Studies on rebel governance or armed groups' mobilisation in the DRC for example, on ethnic violence in Rwanda and Burundi, on informal trans-border war economies between Uganda and its neighbours, or violent displacement in South Sudan, have in common that conflict dynamics and their socio-economic, spatial, political, cultural and humanitarian impacts have been analysed from a dominant rural perspective.[12] While some of these studies take the city as their spatial (rather than analytical) starting point, the relationship between urbanisation and dynamics of violent conflict is only very exceptionally addressed as the main topic of inquiry.[13] The 'rural' focus in dealing with conflict dynamics has been reinforced by the close involvement of humanitarian agencies in the knowledge production on conflict dynamics in this region.[14]

At the start of the new millennium, two academic trends caused a renewed interest in the 'urban' in contemporary African dynamics of violence and conflict in Africa. First, the fast urbanisation process of the African continent caused a resurgence of academic interest in African cities.[15] Growing research on urbanisation in Africa – from urban studies, anthropology, human geography, architecture and social sciences – accompanied studies by humanitarian, development and policy agencies to seek answers to complex challenges arising from a fast and largely un-planned urbanisation. Second, academic theories on the 'new wars' thesis[16] within conflict studies generated a new interest in the urban dimensions of contemporary violence and conflict, reflected through the concept of 'urbanizing warfare'.[17] With a key focus on those cities that became themselves the main theatre of violent conflict, cities were being presented as the 'new' central

battlegrounds of political contest, violent oppression, insurgency or ethnic struggle.[18] These two academic 'streams' met and interacted around the topic of urban violence and insecurity. From both sides, urban violence has been extensively elaborated as a crucial feature to understand African urbanism in a context of political instability.[19] Recent interest in African dynamics of urban (violent) uprisings and social protest has further reinforced interactions between urban studies and conflict studies.[20]

Despite the fact that the academic literature that emerged from these renewed interests has offered fascinating insights in the city as a distinct space of violent contestation, the analysis of the relation between urbanisation and violent conflict continues to contain a number of significant gaps. While mainly focusing on urban manifestations of violence and conflict, analyses have failed to understand the more complex interactions between conflict and urbanisation, such as the emergence of new urban centres in conflict areas, or the complex functions of cities in regional agendas of peace-building interventions. A useful contribution to enable a broader understanding of these complex interactions has been offered by Beall, Goodfellow and Rodgers.[21] Their work, based on a wide range of urban settings of civil and civic conflict, presents a useful framework to understand the multiple roles urban centres and processes of urbanisation can play.[22] This special issue builds on their approach in order to shed light on the diverse impacts of violent conflict on African cities, as well as on the diverse roles and functions urban centres occupy within dynamics of war and violence. The case studies in this special issue beautifully demonstrate how urban centres can become symbolic targets for armed groups, represent sites of security and protection, key hubs in war economies and in the mobilisation of armed groups, and hosts of humanitarian assistance. Yet, while arguing for a better urban understanding of current conflict (and post-conflict) dynamics, we explicitly want to go beyond the analytical category of the 'city' and will dedicate special attention to the dynamic and transformative process of urbanisation. With regards to dynamics of violent conflict (as well as peace), it is not only important to recognise cities as 'crucial places where conflict and peace takes place',[23] but also to understand how processes of urbanisation in themselves become a crucial feature shaping dynamics of conflict and post-conflict reconstruction.

Violent conflict and urban transformation: beyond 'negative urbanisation'

The case studies in this special issue present a more nuanced picture of conflict-induced urbanism than the one that emerges from most studies on the 'classic' cases of African 'conflict' cities, such as Monrovia, Tripoli, Mogadishu or Nairobi.[24] In our attempt to look beyond the mere destructive and destabilising effects of civil and civic conflicts, we want use the urban lens to investigate the transformative force of violent conflict.[25] In order to understand how conflict dynamics such as protracted violence, forced displacement, humanitarian assistance and peace-building interventions profoundly reshape and redefine local landscapes and societies, an urban perspective offers fascinating insights.[26] As this collection of articles demonstrates, violent conflict not only puts cities under pressure, it also creates openings, opportunities and capabilities for new urban constellations to unfold.[27]

The transformative power of violent conflict is strongly reflected in – but is not restricted to – the processes of urbanisation and rural-urban transformation. As

demonstrated by Bakewell, Branch, McMichael and others,[28] and has been confirmed by several cases in this special issue, violent conflict and (forced) displacement in countries like Uganda, Rwanda, South Sudan and the DRC lead to an (often fast and uncontrolled) urbanisation of formerly rural societies. This transformative process, reflected in the rapid growth of existing cities, the emergence of boomtowns or the urbanisation of refugee settlements, gives shape to the production of new urban identities, landscapes and institutional arrangements. The emergence of 'anti-gangs' in the streets of Goma, or the formation of ethnic urban clusters in Bukavu, are examples of how dynamics of violence, crisis and insecurity produce new urban constellations in the DRC. The urban economic effects of the Congolese conflict are very diverse; scholars have revealed how militarisation, violence and forced displacement have drastically transformed rural as well as urban livelihoods.[29] Wartime urban economic growth in Goma, Beni, Bukavu or Butembo provides stories of booming real estate markets and emerging entrepreneurial elites making big money out of the international peacekeeping presence and aid industry.[30] Through 20 years of violent conflict, urban centres in Eastern Congo along the borderlands with Rwanda and Uganda have developed from provincial towns into booming cross-border trading hubs and central nodes in (political) economic networks that connect the mineral-rich Congolese hinterlands to the global markets.[31] Gulu town in Northern Uganda as well as Juba in South Sudan have transformed into humanitarian hotspots within the regional networks of aid and post-conflict intervention.[32] As such, conflict dynamics not only redefine urban economic, political and socio-cultural landscapes, but also redefine the roles and positions of urban centres within regional, national and global dynamics of war and peace.

In order to fully understand the interaction between urbanisation and violent conflict we not only need to recognise the transformative power of conflict, but also the transformative capacities of cities. The productive power of violent conflict, as observed through different urban stories in this special issue, is being reinforced by this capacity of cities as 'laboratories of change'.[33] Cities across the globe have historically played an important role as drivers of social, political and economic transformations; 'they are social melting pots, nodes of regional and international communication and transportation, engines of economic growth, seats of political power and iconic cultural spaces.'[34] In her article on urban 'inventions and interventions', Jenny Robinson emphasises transformation as a generalised condition of contemporary city life, part of the basic circumstance of urban existence.[35] This special issue demonstrates that it is important to look beyond the destructive impact of protracted violence, and instead recognise the productive capacity, or what Kaldor and Sassen call 'urban capabilities', that continue to emerge from urban conflict zones. Emerging boomtowns or the development of new urban markets around the humanitarian industry are illustrations of these 'productive capacities'.[36] Recognising this transformative power of violent conflict and urbanisation helps us to go beyond Maninger's idea of 'negative urbanisation' that emerges from demographic pressure, resource scarcity and cultural fault lines, generating even more violence, ethnic clashes and deprivation.[37] This said, it is equally important to prevent ourselves from reproducing the very same normative approach on conflict and urbanisation, as what emerges from the 'productive capacities' of war and urbanisation cannot simply be framed as 'positive urbanisation'. The binary interpretation of African urbanism – often reproduced in academic as well as policy literature – as being on the one hand the outcome of chaos, crisis and failure

and on the other hand the outcome of inventive creativity, represents a trap of either fatalism or glorification.[38] Although our evidence strongly supports Simone's observations of cities as 'laboratories of change', it also clearly confirms his arguments about urbanisation always being about contest and struggle.[39] The ways in which cities like Bukavu or Bujumbura transform throughout violent conflict into fragmented ethnic enclaves illustrate this.

Finally, going beyond a normative approach also implies a critical interrogation and application of the term 'transformation' in our analysis of the relationship between violent conflict and urbanisation. Informed by a number of debates within urban and conflict studies as cited above, our academic understanding of transformation needs to be differentiated from the widely used, policy-oriented understanding of 'urban transformation' in Africa that stresses on the one hand the challenges of rapid urbanisation in terms of sustainability, and on the other hand the processes of turning these challenges into opportunities.[40] The same applies for the policy-oriented approach on 'conflict transformation' in Africa. The dynamic transformative interaction between violent conflict and urbanisation emerges from the cases of Beni, Goma, Juba, Gulu, Kitchanga, Bujumbura, Nairobi and Bukavu, Byangabo and Nyamatain in different ways. As much as the wars in South Sudan, Rwanda, Burundi, Eastern Congo and Northern Uganda have left their profound impacts on cities, urban growth and the process of urbanisation has influenced dynamics of violent conflict as well as post-war transition. Urban centres, whether popular neighbourhoods in Nairobi or mining towns in Eastern Congo, present critical economic, electoral and military resources that armed groups or political elites may access.[41] The heavily contested decentralisation process and recognition of boomtowns in the Kivu provinces as 'cities' are a clear example of how the process of urbanisation shaped violent 'autochthony' struggles in the region.

Investigating urbanism through landscapes, governance and identities

The different papers in this special issue strongly indicate the multi-dimensional character of urbanisation and urbanism. A study of the urban aspects of violent conflict dynamics thus calls for a multi-perspective approach, investigating its spatial, social, political, as well as cultural dimensions. In what follows, I examine urban landscapes, urban governance and urban identities as entry points to investigate violent conflict and its urban transformations.

Contested cityscapes: violent conflict and reconfigurations of the urban space

Spatial processes are at the core of urbanisation.[42] The built infrastructure and physical morphologies of cities are a first crucial aspect in the analysis of conflict cities. This spatial perspective is perhaps the most valuable contribution of urbanists to conflict studies. Urban landscapes – in urban geography often referred to as 'cityscapes' or 'townscapes' – are a crucial starting point to investigate the transformative power of violent conflict, as they both produce and are products of social and political transformation.[43] For example, protracted situations of civil war, violence and forced displacement in settings like Eastern DR Congo, South Sudan or Uganda led to profound reconfigurations of local and regional geographic landscapes, reflected through an increased mobility of populations, urbanisation of previous rural areas, and increased pressure on land.[44] One of the

outcomes is the changing interaction between urban and rural milieus; violent conflict can on the one hand reinforce the rural-urban socio-economic divide, or on the other hand can reinforce the blurring of these divides and the merging of these two 'life worlds' in 'rurban' constellations.[45] Other examples of complex urban 'geographies' of violent conflict are boomtowns or new urban centres, emerging from refugee concentrations,[46] or from slum areas emerging from increased urban pressure following the influx of refugees and IDPs.[47] The impact of forced mobility on urbanisation is a topic that has been increasingly studied in Central and Eastern Africa, investigating how the urban presence and integration of displaced people transforms the local urban patterns of land use, land access and the social and demographic composition of urban neighbourhoods.[48] The issue of land is central in a spatial reading of urbanisation in a conflict or post-conflict setting, especially in a region where access to land historically is and remains a vital aspect of local livelihoods, identity and citizenship. Much academic attention has been paid to the relation between violent conflict and access to land in the DRC, South Sudan and Uganda.[49] Most of this research focuses on rural areas, and very few studies focus particularly on urban land conflicts in this region.[50] McMichael investigates how dynamics of civil war have affected urban land conflicts in Juba, South Sudan. Contrary to the focus on the ethnic character of land conflicts in conflict regions, she reveals how ethnic discourses on land conflicts actually conceal the strategies of powerful actors.[51] Our special issue further demonstrates how dynamics of militarisation and war have reinforced this inherently political nature of contested access to land.

The interaction between violent conflict and the dynamic destruction, production and reproduction of the physical urban landscape can also be observed from the transformation of urban public space into military camps or humanitarian offices, or the transformation of refugee settlements into urban residential areas. Urban dynamics of civil as well as civic conflict are often very 'spatially' translated, resulting in (ethnically) fragmented urban neighbourhoods or violent struggles over urban public space. In violent claims for public authority or citizenship, the urban material space is often actively used in strategies of different actors involved.[52] Examples are the role of urban neighbourhoods, road infrastructure and roundabouts in territorial strategies of authority, and legitimacy by armed groups or urban gangs.[53] Further, the urbanisation process itself, with its spatial and administrative techniques of planning, appropriation, location and relocation, appear to be a crucial political mechanism applied in times of both conflict and post-conflict reconstruction. Processes of urbanisation in Uganda, South Sudan and Rwanda equally demonstrate how the territorial politics of spatial control are not uniquely used by armed groups in their strategies of power; they are likewise being reproduced in a post-conflict period by regimes in order to establish their legitimacy and control.[54] As such, it is crucial to recognise cities as dynamic spatial arenas, and to pay attention to spatial practices and agency exercised by all actors involved in conflict and post-conflict dynamics.

Fragmented urban governance: conflicting agency and the politics of urbanisation

To understand the relationship between dynamics of violent conflict in Africa and the changing nature of urban regulatory practices or the establishment of public authority, a critical investigation into practices of governance is vital. By 'governance' I refer to a

set of regulatory practices that arise from the interaction and contestation between multiple actors and institutions.[55] Within urban studies, the concept of 'urban governance' is used on the one hand to investigate the legal and administrative framework for 'managing' the policies of urban planning, and on the other hand to point at the day-to-day organisation, beyond the state framework, of urban public service provision.[56] In studies on African urbanisation, urban governance has often been analysed from a context of informality and a limited state authority, in which governance is much more than a social contract between the state and its urban citizens, as many of the governance practices are being exercised by non-state actors such as citizen-associations, informal committees, youth gangs, etc.[57]

In the academic literature on contemporary politics, the countries of the Great Lakes region and its eastern neighbours often appear in the dynamic debates on 'hybrid governance',[58] pointing to the involvement of non-government actors such as warlords, economic big men, NGOs, customary authorities and youth gangs in practices of governance or the exercise of public authority. In those countries where the state is physically weak, public goods such as protection or justice are being provided by local and international actors working beyond, in between, and in collaboration with the state.[59] In a general context of the absence of state monopoly on these key governance responsibilities, the proliferation of non-state governance actors has increasingly been investigated under the different terms of 'ad hoc governance', 'non state political order', 'real governance', 'twilight institutions', 'pirate governance' and 'hybrid public authority'.[60] They all move beyond state-centred accounts of political order and the straddling between formal and informal, state- and non-state actors and institutions. Urban areas form an interesting site from which to investigate these hybrid forms of governance, as they offer considerable manoeuvre space for an extremely varied set of political, civil, economic, and military actors – local and transnational, as well as formal and informal.[61] At the same time, multi-layered governance is a general characteristic of current urbanism globally, as cities have become sites of intense struggles between disparate interests and multiple stakeholders, 'whose ideas, influences and actions together ultimately shape today's urban realities.'[62]

Urban governance in African cities in this context of hybridity and institutional pluralism has been described by scholars such as Lourenço-Lindell and Simone as being extremely fragmented.[63] African cities can in this sense been viewed as arenas in which fragmented power groups lay competing claims on political, economic, spatial and social legitimacy and control over the city, resulting in a divided urban society where key actors continuously challenge one another's legitimacy to govern urban space.[64] Cities such as Nairobi, Kinshasa, Goma or Bujumbura display patterns of urban governance that are very unstable and fragmented, encompassing multiple sites of power where legitimacy and authority are being exercised and contested.[65] Sometimes these struggles can turn violent and form the basis for different forms of urban civic conflict. This violent potential is very case-dependent, and is heavily influenced by the nature of actors and organisations involved. Goodfellow and Lindemann have demonstrated that it is not hybridity itself but rather the particular political nature of institutional multiplicity in Uganda that caused violent clashes between the Ugandan state and Buganda customary authorities.[66]

On the other hand, dynamics of violent conflict strongly reinforce these struggles and have sharpened ethnic, social, and religious fault lines within urban societies. In long-term situations of violence and instability such as observed in South Sudan and the DRC, the

total fragmentation of the politico-military landscape translated itself in deep social fragmentation on the local level, strongly affecting the cohesion between and within different communities.[67] The effects of long-term militarisation of societies, the circulation of weapons and the proliferation of violence in everyday life have also enforced the role of violence in mechanisms of competing power. Violent conflict thus stimulates urban fragmentation but also renders it more violent. Further, violent conflict also changed the nature of actors involved in exercising urban governance and public authority. Dynamics of war, military interventions as well as humanitarian- and peacebuilding interventions have introduced a variety of 'new' actors such as armed groups, formal and informal protection entrepreneurs, self-defence groups, peace-keeping forces and humanitarian agencies to practices of urban governance.[68] Through the papers in this special issue, these new forms of urban agency emerging from a protracted situation of violent conflict and actively involved in the everyday production the cityscape are extensively illustrated. Finally, violent conflict dynamics also influence the nature of urban governance, in the sense that it has brought the issue of protection and security to the core of claims on legitimacy and public authority. From the cases of Nairobi, Goma, Kitchanga and Kigali, it is argued that provision of security forms the basis on which different actors claim their rights to control the city.[69]

Finally, focusing on politics and practices of urban governance provides us with critical insights into the relation between the city and the state, and between the process of urbanisation and state formation/decline. The transformative power that violent conflict has on state power and legitimacy can be well studied from an urban perspective, since African cities are being presented as both embodiments of state building as well as state failure.[70] The increased contest between the Congolese state and customary institutions over the provision of land points at the increased erosion of state institutions through 20 years of violent conflict.[71] On the other hand, the way in which urban self-defence groups reproduce state languages and registers in their exercise of public authority refers to urban forms of production of 'stateness' or 'statehood' from below.[72] Yet, it is important to look beyond the city as the spatial arena of state processes in order to understand urbanisation in itself as a strong mechanism of the production of the state. Crucial in the understanding of the relationship between urbanisation and violent conflict in Central and Eastern Africa is the recognition of urbanisation as a political process. Where conflict studies lack an urban angle, urban studies lack a political angle, and tend to consider urbanisation as an a-political process.[73] As others and myself have argued elsewhere, the process of rural-urban transformation, besides being an administrative, spatial, demographic and economic process, is equally highly political and central to dynamics of state formation and power contestation.[74] Rwanda's interwoven agendas of urban planning and state-building, and utopian urbanisation policies as part of peace-building strategies in Northern Uganda and South Sudan, are but a few examples of this.[75] The case of the Kitchanga boomtown in Eastern Congo, where its urbanisation process is actively used in ethnic strategies of territorial control, forms an extreme magnification of the politics of urbanisation.[76]

Urban cultures and identities: transcending or reinforcing violent conflict?

When speaking with urban inhabitants in African cities about what differentiates their habitat and life world from their rural surroundings, the issue of culture and identity is

often discussed. This, of course, is a global phenomenon not restricted to the African context; the 'distinct' urban cultures emerging from 'the city life' have been at the core of theories on urbanity and urbanism.[77] Global connections, cosmopolitan identities, freedom and modernity are some of these classic features often associated with urbanism. Urbanity often emanates imaginations, dreams and projections of progression.[78] Utopian urban planning initiatives in Juba, Kigali or Gulu reflect hopeful future promises of stability, development and peace.

Their openness and cosmopolitanism makes urban centres attractive to those seeking to escape rigid cultural boundaries associated with 'the rural'. This openness and the quality of the city as a cultural 'carrefour' offers a variety of identities compared to the rural setting; in the city, plural and 'patchwork' identities are the norm.[79] Because of the weakness of the infrastructure that connects people and goods between rural and urban areas, the 'divide' remains relatively big in many countries in Central and Eastern Africa. As already mentioned, conflict dynamics have a complex impact on this rural-urban divide. Through dynamics of ethnic violence, urban centres building on their culture of openness and cosmopolitanism have often been multi-ethnic islands within ethnically fragmented regions. Yet, the cosmopolitan character of these cities needs to be nuanced: although housing multiple ethnic or religious groups, these groups may live in divided urban landscapes.

Particularly relevant for the countries represented in this special issue, the literature on the place and role of ethnicity in African politics demonstrates that ethnic identity remains a crucial aspect in the neo-patrimonial redistribution of resources, in political representation, and in dynamics of violent mobilisation.[80] Violent mobilisation of ethnic identity is not restricted to settings of civil war, as post-electoral violence in for example Kenya demonstrates. The mobilisation of ethnicity has however become very explicit in the different episodes of armed conflict in the region, with ethnic identity being used as a source of mobilisation for armed groups, as a source for political exclusion, and as a source of protection. War and violence have profound repercussions on the definition and re-definition of one's social and political relations and boundaries based on identity and have deepened ethnic cleavages.[81] Violent conflicts have consolidated ethnicity as rigid social framework as well as a source of protection, and this has also left its impact on urban identities. Notwithstanding the fact that many cities in this region have long functioned as attractive safe havens, the openness and multi-cultural aspects of urbanity have been overshadowed by the growing urban integration of discourses of ethnic exclusion. In case of crisis and intense competition over economic, political and social urban resources, identity often becomes a matter of 'rights', 'belonging' and urban 'citizenship'. In Eastern DRC for example, in the towns of Goma, Bukavu, Beni and Kitchanga, the discourses of 'autochthony' that distinguish 'original' from 'foreign' inhabitants define people's 'rights' to the city.[82]

As others and myself have argued elsewhere, to understand the transformative impact of violent conflict on urban identities, it is important to pay attention to both processes of identity politics 'from above' as well as 'from below', and to equally investigate the role of (often ethnic) identity in urban livelihood strategies in a context of instability and violent conflict.[83] In order to socially, politically and economically 'navigate' fragmented cityscapes to access a job, a piece of land, education, and politics, identities play a crucial role.[84] As productive social 'laboratories', cities are also fertile grounds for the emergence

of 'new' identities that transcend ethnic boundaries, based on aspects of shared urbanity, reflecting shared resilience, success or exclusion.[85] In the region under study for this special issue, through protracted dynamics of violent conflict, violence has become an increasingly important element in urban identity formation. The relationship between violence and social mobility in the case of urban youth in conflict environments has been researched extensively.[86] Regional dynamics of war, instability and militarisation have reinforced the proliferation of violence at all levels of urban society. In cities like Bukavu, Nairobi, Juba and Goma, regional civil war has resulted in violence increasingly being legitimised as a means of collective and individual assertion; there is a direct link between 'the uncertainty of urban life' and the 'the certainty of violence'.[87] In many urban as well as rural contexts, violence has become not only a means of survival but also a way of life.[88] Both encompassing progress and insurgency, urban identities have been perceived by academics and policymakers alike as both drivers of conflict and of peace.[89]

Conclusion

Investigating urban landscapes, governance arrangements and emerging urban identities in a region characterised by protracted regional violence, instability, militarisation and conflict has offered original perspectives that provide a better understanding of the spatial, political and social transformative effects of violent conflict. Further, it has brought about fascinating insights into the complex roles of cities and urbanities in conflict and post-conflict dynamics, and revealed urban transformative capacities through individual and collective spatial, political and social agency.

This special issue has demonstrated that cities and urban centres in Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, DRC, South Sudan and Kenya represent critical arenas of socio-spatial and political productions of violence and stability, war and peace. This profound urban investigation is not only a crucial step in coming to an understanding of long-term societal effects of violent conflict, it is equally crucial to assess the dynamic role of the urban in processes of post-conflict trajectories. While we have elaborated extensively on violent conflict and urban transformation, policy makers increasingly investigate the potential of cities in 'conflict transformation'.[90] In the city of Goma (Eastern Congo) for example, after decades of an almost exclusive 'rural' focus, development-, humanitarian- and peace-building agencies, in their responses to conflict dynamics that sought peace and change, have now increasingly invested in an 'urban' approach. Urban characteristics, capacities and so-called 'capabilities'[91] are being capitalised upon, to 'foster sustainable change'.[92] International donor-funded campaigns as well as local urban civil society actions are increasingly being framed within urban peace-building narratives, translated through the *amani* label (Kiswahili for 'peace'), to be found all over the city at action banners, football shirts and in music lyrics.[93] The yearly organised (and largely donor-funded) *AMANI festival*, gathering urban youth from Goma and its transnational neighbours around music, dance and performance, is a colourful celebration of Goma as the urban symbol of peace.[94] These events are reflections of a broader tendency to use urban landscapes and cultures as fertile grounds for conflict transformation.[95]

Representing Goma's urban community as the ultimate vector for tolerance, cohabitation and peace is however in sharp contrast to ethnic fractures, weak institutional

frameworks and fragmented governance, which together produce forms of urbanism that are not only the product of conflict dynamics, but in themselves sometimes contribute to local conflicts. In the case of Goma, violent conflict clearly reinforced the intensity of urbanisation and reinforced its inherently conflictual character.[96] What the articles of this special issue demonstrate is that in a context of instability and institutional fragmentation, urbanisation is a highly political process. It is through the use of urban land in spatial politics, the political mobilisation of urban identities and the politics of urban institutional multiplicity that the interaction between dynamics of conflict and urbanisation manifests itself for further analysis.

Before applying an urban approach to humanitarian or policy-oriented mechanisms of conflict transformation, a clear understanding of these urban aspects of violent mobilisation, state formation, identity politics, forced displacement and territorial control is critical. Considering urbanisation as a political process, entrenched in dynamics of violent contest, and approaching cities as critical locations of state formation and social transformation will be necessary to tap into the potential of cities as laboratories of change.

Notes

1. In contrast to the term urbanisation, which refers to the dynamics process of rural-urban transformation, urban growth and development, urbanism refers to the particular ('distinct') way of life unique to the urban setting. According to Beall and Fox, 'urbanism refers to the unique social, cultural, economic and political dynamics that arise in densely populated human settlement'. See, Beall and Fox, *Cities and Development*.
2. Whyte et al., "Urbanisation by Substraction"; Martin and Mosel, "City Limits"; Büscher, "Ongoing Crisis in Eastern Congo"; Branch, "Gulu Town in War … and Peace."
3. Van Overbeek and Tamás, "Autochthony and Insecure Land Tenure," in this special issue; Mathys and Büscher, "Urbanizing Kitchanga," in this special issue.
4. Beall and Goodfellow, "Conflict and Post-war Transition in African Cities." Their heuristic framework presents three types of conflict: sovereign, civil, and civic. Given the nature of the cases presented in this special issue, I chose to restrict our focus to the latter two categories.
5. Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*.
6. Yet, this is not to say that these dynamics are 'specifically African', and by no means are they distinctly different from other parts of the world.
7. Cottyn, "Small Towns and Rural Growth," in this special issue; Badiey and Doll, "Planning Amidst Precarity," in this special issue; Büscher et al., "Humanitarian Urbanism in a Post-conflict Aid Town," in this special issue.
8. Björkdahl and Bukceley-Zistel, *Spatializing Peace and Conflict*.
9. Peyton, "Wartime Speculation," in this special issue; Badiey and Doll, "Planning Amidst Precarity," in this special issue.
10. Van Overbeek and Tamás, "Autochthony and Insecure Land Tenure," in this special issue; Mathys and Büscher, "Urbanizing Kitchanga," in this special issue.
11. Branch, "Gulu Town in War … and Peace"; Büscher, "Conflict, State Failure and Urban Transformation"; Bartlett et al., "City Growth under Conflict Conditions."
12. Some examples are: Jourdan, "Mayi-Mayi"; Hoffmann and Vlassenroot, "Armed Groups"; Gorsevski et al., "Analysis of the Impacts of Armed Conflict."
13. These exceptions are mainly to be situated within the increasing interest in the urban effects of massive forced displacement in the broader Great Lakes region. See for example Whyte et al., "Urbanisation by Substraction"; Branch, "Gulu Town in War … and Peace"; Bakewell and Bonfiglio, "Moving Beyond Conflict."
14. Büscher and Vlassenroot, "Humanitarian Presence and Urban Development."

15. See for example Simone, *Urban Africa*; Enwezor et al., *Under Seige*; Locatelli and Nugent *African Cities*; Myers, *African Cities*; Parnell and Pieterse, *Africa's Urban Revolution*.
16. Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*.
17. Sassen, "When the City Itself Becomes a Technology of War."
18. Steyn, "Identity in Conflict."
19. Anderson, "Vigilantes, Violence and the Politics"; Beall and Goodfellow, "Conflict and Post-war Transition."
20. Branch and Mampilly, *Africa Uprising*.
21. Beall et al., "Cities and Conflict in Fragile States."
22. Through my earlier work, their framework has served as an important basis to argue for an explicit urban lens through which to study conflict dynamics in countries such as the DRC.
23. Björkdahl and Buckley-Zitsel, *Spatilizing Peace and Conflict*.
24. Hoffman, "The City as Barracks"; Menkhaus, "The Crisis in Somalia"; Myers, *African Cities*.
25. Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers, *War and Social Transformation*; Duffield, *Global Governance and New Wars*; Cramer, *Civil War Not a Stupid Thing*.
26. Büscher, "Reading Urban Landscapes."
27. Kaldor and Sassen, *Cities at War*.
28. Bakewell and Bonfiglio, "Moving Beyond Conflict"; Branch; "Gulu in War … and Peace"; McMichael, "Land Conflict and Informal Settlements"; Whyte et al., "Urbanisation by Substraction."
29. Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers, *War and Social Transformation*; Jackson, "Making a Killing."
30. Büscher and Vlassenroot, "Humanitarian Presence and Urban Development"; Peyton, "Wartime Speculation," in this special issue.
31. Vlassenroot and Büscher, "Borderlands, Identity and Urban Development."
32. Branch, "Gulu in War … and Peace"; Büscher et al., "Humanitarian Urbanism in a Post-conflict Aid Town," in this special issue.
33. Simone, *Urban Africa*.
34. Beall and Fox, *Cities and Development*, 2.
35. Robinson, "Inventions and Interventions."
36. Büscher et al., "Humanitarian Urbanism in a Post-conflict Aid Town," in this special issue; Mathys and Büscher, "Urbanizing Kitchanga," in this special issue.
37. Maninger, "The Urbanisation of Conflict."
38. Beall and Goodfellow, "Conflict and Post-War Transition"; Büscher, *Conflict, State Failure and Urban Transformation*.
39. Simone, *Urban Africa*.
40. See for example the World Bank discourse on this matter: http://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2016/12/19/urban-transformation-good-governance-and-enhanced-service-delivery (accessed on 17 November 2017).
41. Schuberth, "Hybrid Security Governance," in this special issue; Mathys and Büscher, "Urbanizing Kitchanga," in this special issue.
42. Parr, "Spatial Definitions of the City."
43. Büscher, "Reading Urban Landscapes."
44. Mathys and Büscher, "Urbanizing Kitchanga," in this special issue; Badiey and Doll, "Planning Amidst Precarity," in this special issue; Büscher et al., "Humanitarian Urbanism in a Post-conflict Aid Town," in this special issue.
45. The 'rurbanisation' of the urban periphery refers to the integration of rural landscapes and practices in an urban environment; see Trefon, "Hinges and Fringes."
46. Mathys and Büscher, "Urbanizing Kitchanga," in this special issue.
47. Van Overbeek and Tamás, "Autochthony and Insecure Land Tenure," in this special issue; Schuberth, "Hybrid Security Governance," in this special issue.
48. Bakewell and Bonfiglio, "Moving Beyond Conflict"; Bartlett et al., "City Growth under Conflict Conditions."
49. Van Acker, "Where Did All the Land Go?"; Pantuliano et al., "The Long Road Home"; Onegi, "Post Conflict Land Insecurity."

50. Lombard and Rakodi, "Urban Land Conflict in the Global South."
51. McMichael, "Land Conflict and Informal Settlements."
52. Büscher, "Reading Urban Landscapes."
53. Hendriks, "The Politics of Everyday Policing in Goma," in this special issue; Schuberth, "Hybrid Security Governance," in this special issue, Mathys and Büscher, "Urbanizing Kitchanga," in this special issue.
54. Cottyn, "Small Towns and Rural Growth," in this special issue; Badiey and Doll, "Planning Amidst Precarity," in this special issue.
55. I use Nokilas Rose's non-normative definition of governance as

> an emergent pattern or order of a social system, arising out of complex negotiations and exchanges, between 'intermediate' social actors, groups, forces, organisations, public and semi-public institutions, in which state organisations are only one – and not necessarily the most significant – amongst many others seeking to steer or manage these relations.

Rose 1999, cited in Blundo and Le Meur, "Governance of Daily Life," 6–7.

56. McCann, "Governing Urbanism."
57. Myers, *African Cities*.
58. Meagher et al., "Unraveling Public Authority"; Meagher, "The Strenght of Weak States."
59. Hoffmann and Kirk, "Public Authority."
60. Menkhaus, "Governance without Government"; Blundo and Le Meur, "Governance of Daily Life"; Lund, "Twilight Institutions"; Simone, *Principles and Realities*; Meagher et al., "Unraveling Public Authority."
61. Brenner, *New State Spaces*.
62. Bayat and Biekart, "Cities of Extremes," 823.
63. Lourenço-Lindell, "The Multiple Sights of Urban Governance"; Simone, *Principles and Realities*; Büscher, "Urban Governance Beyond the State."
64. Lourenço-Lindell, "The Multiple Sights if Urban Governance."
65. Schuberth, "Hybrid Security Governance," in this special issue; Van Acker, "From Rural Rebellion to Urban Uprising?" In this special issue; Büscher, "Urban Governance Beyond the State."
66. Goodfellow and Lindemann, "The Clash of Institutions."
67. Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers, *War and Social Transformation*; Haynes, "Religion, Ethnicity and Civil War."
68. See Hendriks, "The Politics of Everyday Policing in Goma"; Oldenburg, "Agency, Social Space and Conflict-urbanism"; Büscher et al., "Humanitarian Urbanism in a Post-conflict Aid Town"; Cottyn, "Small Towns and Rural Growth"; and Schuberth, "Hybrid Security Governance", all in this special issue.
69. Schuberth, "Hybrid Security Governance"; Hendriks, "The Politics of Everyday Policing in Goma"; Mathys and Büscher, "Urbanizing Kitchanga"; and Cottyn, "Small Towns and Rural Growth," all in this special issue.
70. Beall et al., "Cities and Conflict in Fragile States."
71. Peyton, "Wartime Speculation," in this special issue.
72. Hendriks, "The Politics of Everyday Policing in Goma," in this special issue.
73. Sapotichne et al., "Is Urban Politics a Black Hole?"
74. Vlassenroot and Büscher, "Borderlands, Identity and Urban Development"; Beall and Goodfellow, "Conflict and Post-war Transition"; Mathys and Büscher, "Urbanizing Kitchanga," in this special issue.
75. Badiey and Doll, "Planning Amidst Precarity," in this special issue; Cottyn, "Small Towns and Rural Growth", in this special issue; Büscher et al., "Humanitarian Urbanism in a Post-conflict Aid Town," in this special issue.
76. Mathys and Büscher, "Urbanizing Kitchanga," in this special issue.
77. King, *Spaces of Global Cultures*.

78. De Boeck and Baloji, *Suturing the City*.
79. Murray and Myers, *Cities in Contemporary Africa*.
80. Braathen et al., *Ethnicity Kills*?
81. See for example Jackson, "On 'Doubtful' Nationality."
82. Mathys and Büscher, "Urbanizing Kitchanga," in this special issue; Van Overbeek and Tamás, "Autochthony and Insecure Land Tenure," in this special issue, Peyton, "Wartime Speculation," in this special issue.
83. Berenschot and Schijf, *Etnisch geweld*.
84. Lourenço-Lindell, "Informality and Collective Organising"; Simone, *The Social Infrastructure of City Life*.
85. Hendriks, "The Politics of Everyday Policing in Goma," in this special issue.
86. See for example Christiansen et al., *Navigating Youth*.
87. Pedrazzini, *La violence des villes*.
88. Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers, *War and Social Transformation*; Hoffman, "The City as Barracks."
89. Björkdahl and Bukceley-Zistel, *Spatializing Peace and Conflict*.
90. Referring to the process of achieving peace, by which conflict transformation differs from 'conflict resolution' by its emphasis on a better understanding of the nature of conflict itself.
91. Kaldor and Sassen, *Cities at War*.
92. See for example "Goma: City of Peace." http://www.internationalcitiesofpeace.org/cities/goma/goma.html.
93. Büscher, "Reading Urban Landscapes of War and Peace."
94. See https://www.amanifestival.com/en/ (accessed 31 Ocober 2017).
95. See Bollens, "Urban Planning and Policy."
96. Büscher, "On-going Crisis."

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