# AFRICA'S URBAN FUTURES

An International Conference co-organized by the University of Geneva and the
Swiss Society for African Studies

**University of Geneva, 15-16 September 2022**



Organising Committee

**Higor Carvalho, Armelle Choplin**
**Didier Péclard & Stéphanie Perazzone**

## PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

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**Thursday 15 September 2022 Uni Mail, Room MR070**

**10h00**      Registration, coffee

**10h45**      Welcome by conveners | Didier Péclard, Armelle Choplin and Stéphanie Perazzone

**11h00**      **Opening Keynote: Prof. Jennifer Robinson, University College of London**

12h30      Lunch break

**14h00**      **Panel 1: The government of urban spaces**

**Chair:** Didier Péclard (Université de Genève)
**Discussant:** Dennis Rodgers (Geneva Graduate Institute)

**Karen Büscher** (University of Ghent) and **Stéphanie Perazzone** (Université de Genève)
**Laurent Fourchard** (CERI-SciencesPo, Paris)
**Patrick Belinga** (Université de Genève)
**Kasper Hoffmann** (Copenhagen University)

**17h30**      **Film: *Trouble Sleep*, by and with Alain Kassanda**, followed by a Q&A with the film director and **André Chappatte** (Université de Genève)

19h30      Conference dinner (upon invitation only)


**Friday, 16 September 2022**

**9h00**      **Panel 2: Urban (Afri)capitalisms. Uni Mail, Room MR2160**

**Chair:** Stéphanie Perazzone (Université de Genève)
**Discussant:** Jon Schubert (University of Basel)

**Higor Carvalho** (Université de Genève)
**James Christopher Mizes** (Université Paris-Dauphine)
**Sylvia Croese** (University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg)
**Momar Diongue** (Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar)
**Julien Migozzi** (University of Oxford)

12h30      Lunch Break

**14h00**      **Panel 3: Imagining Africa's Futures. Uni Mail, Room MR2160**

**Chair:** Armelle Choplin (Université de Genève)
**Discussant:** Katherine Gough (Loughborough University)

**Liza Cirolia** (African Centre for Cities, University of Cape Town)
**Hervé Roquet** (Université de Genève)
**Émilie Guitard** (CNRS-PRODIG, Paris)
**Pauline Guinard** (Ecole Normale Supérieure Paris)
**Dolorès Bertrais** (Université de Genève)
**Chloé Buire** (CNRS-LAM, SciencePo Bordeaux)

**18h00**      **Concluding Keynote Speech & Film *(The Tower)*: Filip de Boeck (University of Antwerp) & Sammy Baloji, *tbc*. Uni Mail, Room MR070**

20h      Conference dinner (upon invitation only)

# DETAILED PROGRAMME

## Thursday, 15 September

**11:00 Opening Keynote**

*Jennifer Robinson*, UCL, London

### Transcalar urbanisation: Navigating power relations and hierarchies in urban developments

**Abstract**
Drawing on a range of cases of urban and infrastructure developments in three cities (Dar es Salaam, Lilongwe and Accra), this paper probes the complexities of planning and implementing urban development across actors ranging from powerful sovereign entities, major multilateral agencies, financing institutions, governments characterized by various political persuasions, and a wide range of other actors (including community based organisations and residents) shaping and reimagining urban territories. Relations amongst some of these actors are framed in part through institutional hierarchies. But the complexities of urban development in the contexts studied mean that the scalar politics of institutions is cross-cut, and often side-stepped, through a diverse set of power relations, personal associations, technical formations and discursive and practical rationalities seeking to secure project delivery and value creation. The paper considers how the power relations shaping urban infrastructure developments are constituted in the process of planning and implementation (or not). Seen from the territories of urban and infrastructure developments, urbanisation processes are both transcalar and emergent. This has implications for securing developments and achieving wider public benefits from them, such as land value capture or contributing to livelihoods and wider economic activities across the city. Can different actors leverage these emergent transcalar networks drawn into urban territories of development to shape outcomes? This possibility might offer an alternative to developmental interventions seeking to reform and regularize inter- governmental hierarchies.

### 14:00 – 17:00   Panel 1: The government of urban spaces

*Karen Büscher* (UGent) and *Stéphanie Perazzone* (UNIGE)

### The Dynamics of Hidden Urbanization in Eastern DRC
*New Towns, Conflict and Politics*

**Abstract**
This presentation seeks to provide a clearer empirical and conceptual understanding of the profoundly political character of rapid urbanization in Sub-Saharan Africa. We focus on two 'hidden (secondary) towns' in eastern DRC – Rubaya and Minova – that have recently emerged as unplanned urban settlements in the Congolese rural hinterlands as an outcome of the country's rural-urban reconfigurations in a context of mineral exploitation, war, and forced displacement. This 'booming' cities have no official administrative status, and are at the centre of fierce competition over resources, people and control. Based on collaborative ethnographic fieldwork in both cities and the provincial capital-cities they are formally attached to, we study the political dimensions of urbanity from an interdisciplinary and bottom-up perspective. More specifically, we argue that these 'hidden towns' are both political arenas in their own right and constitute vital nodes in much broader political-economic networks that reach far beyond the geographical confines of eastern DRC.

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*Laurent Fourchard,* Centre for International Research, Sciences Po Paris

### A Provisional Power : the National Union of Road Transport Workers in Lagos and Ibadan (Nigeria)

**Abstract**
The concept of twilight institution proposed by Christian Lund in 2006 has re-examined the porous boundaries between the state, the bureaucracy and the social world in highlighting the plurality of local political landscapes where power relations and service providers are negotiated in daily social encounters. Despite the fact that twilight institutions help to move beyond ready-made understanding of the state and the informal, despite its global circulation outside its place of elaboration (the post structural adjustments period in West Africa), this concept is rarely used in comparative urban studies. It however opens up the possibility to emancipate oneself from a too Western vision of

the urban and the state and to develop an understanding of the making of a provisional authorities in African metropolises. This paper explores in particular the functioning of a typical twilight institution - the National Union of Road Transports Workers, NURTW - a new born union which was given increasing power in governing the motor parks of the country in a context of state reduction promoted by the 1980s structural adjustments programmes. Today the Union has become a key authority between the state and urban popular classes using collective transports. The paper is based on observations and interviews realized with unionists in several motor parks of Lagos and Ibadan. Three dimensions help to understand the twilight character and provisional power of NURTW. 1. In a context of state deregulation of transport, it explores increasing regulations of motor parks by the union which constitute the basis for an authoritative and provisional power rather than the place of classical understanding of power unions. 2. NURTW members act on a daily basis at the frontier between the legal and the illegal in cooperation with local governments and the police. 3. NURTW members provide protection to the drivers working in their motor parks against police extorsion but have simultaneously developed new managerial techniques to expand their profits at the expanses of the drivers and its most vulnerable workers.

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*Patrick Belinga*, UNIGE

### Gouvernement du foncier urbain et violence du développement au Cameroun. Le processus d'indemnisation dans le cadre du Programme gouvernemental de construction des logements sociaux à Yaoundé

**Abstract**

À partir de la problématique des expropriations d'une cinquante de familles effectuées dans le cadre du Programme gouvernemental de construction de logements sociaux à Yaoundé, j'analyse précisément comment une certaine compréhension du « développement » constitue une modalité concrète de l'exercice de la domination au Cameroun. Deux niveaux d'analyse seront proposés. Le niveau d'une « police par le haut », tout d'abord : la violence policière et pénitentiaire sur les familles ayant exprimé leurs mécontentements au sujet des expropriations a été légitimée à travers l'instrumentalisation du complot (Pommerolle, 2015) qui consiste à considérer toute idée de revendication sociale comme contraire au projet de paix du président Biya et, donc, comme subversive et opposée à l'ordre public et au développement de la Nation. Pour le dire laconiquement, il s'est agi de soupçonner et punir au nom de la paix et du développement. Le niveau des modes d'incorporation de la répression « par le bas », ensuite : après avoir subi ou été témoins de la violence policière, les populations mécontentes développent au quotidien des discours dénonciateurs. Mais ni les uns ni les autres ne visent à fomenter du désordre, à s'opposer au projet de développement ou à la paix proposée par l'Etat, permettant par-là que s'effectue une forme d'autosurveillance de leurs « prises de parole » (de Certeau, 1994) contre le gouvernement.

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*Kasper Hoffmann*, University of Copenhagen

### Land rights and Inequality in Urban Conflict Zones

**Abstract**

Property rights is a pressing issue across cities in the Global South. In cities marked by armed conflict, issues related to property rights are even more pressing and concerning. Violence, instability, rapid population growth, and land speculation compound tenure uncertainty in cities in the Global South, especially for the urban poor. But how is the uncertainty of land rights distributed socially in such contexts and what are the consequences? These questions are still understudied in cities marked by violent conflict. I this article, we empirically explore property rights through a detailed case study of Bukavu, a city situated in the war-torn province of South Kivu, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (henceforth; Congo). We show in this article, that there is a distinct pattern of property rights which reflects and reinforces the city's structural inequalities and injustices. Drawing on original survey material and extensive ethnographic fieldwork, we show that wealthier, better connected, and better educated households, hold more secure property rights than poorer, less connected, and less educated households. We argue that two key social practices generate uncertain and unequal property rights in Bukavu today: the commodification of property rights and the political economy of patron-client relations. Hence, when it comes to property rights, people are not equal before the law in Bukavu. Rather, having money, being educated, and knowing the right people conditions people's ability claim effective land rights.

# Friday, 16 September

*Higor Carvalho*, UNIGE

### African cities: the last global frontier for financial accumulation?

**Abstract**
Africa has been seen as the last frontier for planetary urbanization and, more recently, as the last frontier for capitalism. Capitalism, on the other hand, has for the last decades been marked by the hegemony of financial accumulation, its ultimate form under neoliberalism and globalization, and has found in space production a way to nourish itself by unlocking 'land values' and extracting rent gaps. Having this broader perspective in mind, the intervention will hence discuss how this global financialized capitalism may settle in Africa, with a special regard on African cities, finding in their production alternative places for its reproduction, a topic that has been for long neglected by academic researches. Building on my previous researches and on ongoing doctoral investigation, and will mix theoretical discussion and empirical findings to discuss how the production of space in Sub-Saharan African cities may become the new spatial fix for rentier capital flows.

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*James Christopher Mizes*, Université Paris-Dauphine

### Securitizing Social Housing in Dakar: Financialization or 'Property for All'?

**Abstract**
In December of 2021, Senegal's sovereign wealth fund, FONSIS, announced its partnership with the International Financial Corporation (IFC), to form a special-purpose financing vehicle, Kajom Capital, to address the urban housing crisis in Dakar. Kajom—which means "future" or "tomorrow" in Diola—aims to facilitate "access to property for all" by making rent-to-own housing contracts available to residents in both formal and informal employment. And these contracts for future revenue streams will then be pooled as financial assets available for purchase by private institutional investors. An increasing array of scholars are now arguing that the growth of such financial arrangements in the Global South is a new geography for an old, familiar process of American-style financialization. Yet this framing doesn't quite capture what is at stake in financial devices like Kajom Capital: such devices bring together African financial institutions, African currencies, African households, and African investors to create a novel form of urban housing finance on the continent. And as a financial device aimed at solving urban problems, the creation of Kajom Capital raises a number of concerns for the study of cities. For example, will the introduction of this device mark a shift in how poor people in Dakar access housing? And how do Senegalese financial experts understand the risks of experimenting in West Africa with a form of financial instrument once at the center of a "global financial crisis" ?

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*Sylvia Croese*, University of the Witwatersrand

### Understanding the limits of local government financialization in Africa: urban development finance and the World Bank in Dar es Salaam

**Abstract:**
Much attention has been paid in recent years to the range of different transnational actors and corporations involved in the design, financing and construction of large scale urban real estate and property development in ways that bypass existing cities and urban governance systems in Africa. This paper instead engages with the (literature critical of the) ways in which global actors seek to contribute to the development of existing cities by funding infrastructure development and regulatory reform in order to improve urban service delivery and facilitate local access to new financial tools and global capital. The paper draws on research conducted on the World Bank funded Dar es Salaam Metropolitan Development Project (DMDP, implemented between 2015-2022), as part of a multi-year comparative project on the transcalar politics of large-scale urban development in urban Africa, to interrogate the ways in which

the roll out of the World Bank's growing urban development portfolio in Tanzania is shaped by local political actors and interests. Specifically, the paper foregrounds the dominant role played by national government actors and agencies in channeling and territorializing urban development finance in ways that limit the fiscal autonomy of municipal governments and thereby the pace and form of local government financialization and the type of infrastructural investments and governance that global urban development finance may produce.

*Momar Diongue*, UCAD

### The new city of Diamniadio in the Dakar metropolitan area (Senegal): a financing model in the process of being invented

**Abstract**

In the processes of spatial transformation underway in the metropolises of the South, the question of financing is a major issue in a global economy dominated by financial capital in search of projects (Massiah, 2019). New cities such as Diamniadio in Senegal require substantial funding that exceeds the investment capacity of public authorities. In African metropolises where there is no shortage of major urban projects, the challenge for political authorities lies in their ability to make them operational in the short and medium term by mobilising funding from private actors and partner states. This paper examines the financing model of the new city of Diamniadio, located in the outskirts of the Dakar metropolis. The analysis first focuses on the financing of the new city, its actors, their profiles and their investment logic. It then examines the links between the financing model, the principles of planning and regulation, and the mechanisms of urban development in the new town. Finally, the last point deals with the effects of this financing model on urban production in Senegal, focusing on land, which the public authorities are increasingly considering as a new privileged instrument for financing urban development.

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*Julien Migozzi*, University of Oxford

### The good, the bad and the data: credit scoring, real estate investments and the remaking of post-apartheid city

**Abstract**

Over the last two decades, the South African housing market experienced the rapid adoption of real estate technologies such as credit scoring, which enables banks and institutional investors to operate a data-driven selection of home-seekers based on financial behaviors, wherein moral categories distinguishing the "good" from the "bad" are adopted by market professionals. This presentation first investigates the institutional and technical factors behind the contemporary large-scale, automated classification of people in South Africa, rooted in the country's pioneering status for surveillance and biometric governance. Then, I will explain how this adoption of credit scoring participates to the financialization of housing: first, by enabling the diffusion of western financial infrastructures such as mortgage securitization; second, by allowing the unprecedented emergence of corporate landlords, who use credit scoring to select tenants and manage financial risk. Finally, I will demonstrate how this reconfiguration of the market is renewing patterns of urban segregation by transforming the post-apartheid city, in particular through the emergence of new neighbourhoods around the urban edge, in the context of enduring and extreme levels of racial segregation.

### 14:00 – 18:00      Panel 3: Imagining Africa's Futures

Liza Cirolia, *University of Cape Town*

### Putting the 'e-' in everything: a techno- ambivalent reading of Africa's platformed futures

**Abstract**

In 2021, Google's 'Africa Investment Fund' made its first investment: a Ugandan tech start-up called 'SafeBoda'. As the name suggests, SafeBoda, aims to improve passenger safety in the 'boda boda' (motorcycle taxi) sector by creating an on-demand e-hailing platform. SafeBoda is part of the proliferation of digital platforms in African cities. From e-mobility to fintech, most of these platforms deploy a development gospel, positioning technology in service of African urban problems. In this paper I reflect on this platformization in the context of informal economies. To make the below four points, I draw on collaborative research on fin-tech platforms in Cape Town, motorcycle delivery platforms in Kigali, Nairobi and Cape Town, and ICT finance across Africa. First, I argue that platforms are not simply implanted, but adapt, circulate and localize. This reality challenges readings of platforms as simply neo-colonial or 'the financialization of everything'. Second, I show that the rise of platforms is impossible without extensive investments

in supranational, sovereign and urban infrastructure, such as cables and data centres. In other words, large technical systems are reconfiguring rather than falling. Third, I argue that platformed work reconfigures labour economies, creating new livelihood opportunities. In this sense, they are both destructive and constructive, often manufacturing opportunities for coordination and mobilization which were previously impossible. Finally, platforms cater to a wider diversity of users, across value chains and class hierarchies. While undeniably searching for the techno-frontier, this reality challenges assumptions that platforms are exclusive or fail entirely to service developmental imperatives. It is with this in mind, that I suggest an ambivalent reading of these platforms and their role in shaping the future of African cities.

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*Hervé Roquet*, UNIGE

## Lagos, capital of the 21st century: phantasmagoric materialities, imaginary enclosure and the reappropriation of urban futures.

**Abstract**
Dominant imaginaries of urban 'smart' futures often presume a dual materiality made of various digital technologies and concrete towers. This dual materiality of the future city is visible in the present through technologies, infrastructures, artifacts and substances on which (and with which) urban futures are already projected and constructed in the 'urban now'. Our paper theorizes and analyzes the performativity of this dual materiality using its present-day empirical manifestations in several West African cities (Lagos, Dakar, Cotonou) where our fieldworks are located, and following Benjamin's conceptualization of cities as places of modern *phantasmagorias*. We start by defining and actualizing this concept, presenting its particular relevance to understand the hyper-mediated 21st-century city from the emplacement of the West African urban context. We then focus on the substance of concrete and the related iconic architectural form of the concrete tower in the West African urban corridor, we characterize this materiality as phantasmagoric. Thereafter, we turn toward the simulation dispositive of the virtual reality (VR) headset and its performative function as an icon of (hyper-)modernity. We conceptualize VR as both a phantasmagoria and an ideal type of the digital materiality of the hyper-mediated 'smart' city projected on African urban futures. We show that this dual materiality of urban futures gains to be understood as constitutive of a 'smart city' phantasmagoria producing imaginary enclosure. We further present and discuss the possibilities of reappropriation, hybridization and subversion of these dominant enclosing imaginaries at the local level of West African *makerspaces* and *fablabs*.

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*Emilie Guitard*, CNRS/UMR Prodig, Aubervilliers

## From Rosewater to Ilé-Ifè: Urban Futures in Africa Imagined from Nigeria

**Abstract**
In speculative fiction, African cities are conspicuous by their absence. Urban futures have most often been thought of from North America[1][2]. Nevertheless, in recent years, new cultural productions by Afro-descendant and African novelists, filmmakers and artists propose to imagine African cities in the future, within the framework of Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism[3]. In both movements, Nigeria occupies a prominent place, both as the country of origin of some of these thinkers of urban futures in Africa and as the setting par excellence for the African cities of the future. This presentation will focus on the numerous cultural and artistic works taking the megacity of Lagos as a laboratory of African urban imaginaries in the future. Alongside other references presenting African cities in the future[4], we will first see how these cities are still often imagined as being bogged down by their current problems (demographic explosion, growing inequalities, decay of infrastructures, criminality, environmental damage, etc.)[5]. But we will also look at more recent and optimistic projections of African cities into the future, such as Birnin Zana, capital of the kingdom of Wakanda in *Black Panther*[6], Mbanza, capital of the kingdom of Katiopa imagined by L. Miano[7], or Lagos and Ilé-Ifè described by N. Okorafor in the future[8]. Finally, we will consider the concrete impacts of these imaginations of the urban future in Africa on major urban development projects, such as the Eko Atlantic district in Lagos or Akon City in Senegal, which refer more or less explicitly to imagined « Afro » and « Africanfuturist » cities.

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*Pauline Guinard*, École normale supérieure (Paris), UMR LAVUE / UMR Pacte (délégation)

## Eko Atlantic City/Bar Beach (Lagos): a future that does not come, a past that does not pass

**Abstract**
Initiated in 2007 in Lagos, Eko Atlantic City is an 820 ha land reclamation project from the Atlantic Ocean, conceived in direct reference to Dubai. This urban megaproject is supposed – according to its promoters – to embody the future of Lagos, while protecting the current city from the risk of submergence linked to coastal erosion and rising water levels. Although the reality of this city designed for Nigerian and international elites is slow to materialise, its effects are very real for the people who lived, worked or frequented this space when it was still a beach called Bar Beach. The disappearance of Bar Beach had indeed material and immaterial consequences for many Lagotians: residents and workers who were evicted without compensation, families and friends who came to relax on this public beach on Sundays, local residents who enjoyed the proximity of the sea breeze, or people who came to pray on the beach. If Eko Atlantic City now protects Victoria Island from flooding, even if it means pushing the risk further east, the beach still haunts the city. Whether through its landscape, literary or memorial traces, Bar Beach is still there. Or rather, Bar Beach is no longer there, but it is everywhere, wherever the inhabitants of Lagos can access the ocean. Its disappearance has thus led to its spatial, social and temporal diffraction.

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*Dolorès Bertrais,* UNIGE

## Behind Green City Discourses and Urban Planning in Kigali: taking *plant agency* into account

**Abstract**
This presentation seeks to analyze how Kigali has become a Green City model in Africa in less than a decade and how it might inspire other cities in Africa and abroad as they rethink urban futures. Policy mobilities played an important role in building the city of Kigali and in its dissemination. Green, smart, clean and safe, Kigali is becoming a popular political destination for the exchange of "good practices". This research discusses the significant role of the implementation of the 2050 Master Plan designed by competent authorities, international and local urban planning experts, private developers and inhabitants. Policy leadership seems to be one of the key aspects of this rise. This presentation points out that more than all these "good practices" and their dissemination, non-human, particularly vegetal, aspects have played an underestimated role up to now. Indeed, the various landscape entities - from the micro scale (the kitchen herb garden) to the macro scale of the city (wetlands, urban forests) - characterize the power of action or plant agency - around us and in us in the Kigali context. Beyond their aesthetic, decorative character, the vegetal elements with which the human community (and other fauna) interacts also impose constraints in return. They are increasingly resembling 'subjects,' 'stakeholders,' or 'actors' (Gibson & Baylee, 2018). "If you cut a tree, you should grow two trees", said to me an inhabitant told me in speaking about tree cutting. A general reflection could be usefully engaged on the plant agency paradigm in the Rwandese context, a strong foundation on which to realistically build a vibrant, attractive and truly inclusive Green City.
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*Chloé Buire*, CNRS

## 'Kakwaku's Stories' - an experience of collaborative filmmaking in the periphery of Luanda

**Abstract**
Since the end of the war in 2002, and despite tangible infrastructural development during the oil boom (2004-2014), Angolan citizens' insatisfaction is growing. On the streets of Luanda, the youth has become more vocal to denounce socio-spatial injustices and articulate political claims for economic redistribution and democratic reforms. Amongst the key items on their agenda is the implementation of locally-elected governments (autarquias), provided for in the constitution but constantly postponed by the central state. In order to understand the internal dynamics of these groups, I have conducted immersive and participatory fieldwork in Luanda between 2019 and 2022. This paper presents one of the outcomes of this research: a documentary film (available here: https://youtu.be/1jcQnF-cQdM) made with an organisation called Projecto AGIR, an influential community-based advocacy group in the struggle for autarquias. Our film shows the multiple facets of social activism in Cacuaco, one of Luanda's poorest and most populous municipalities. Bringing together the political discourses of the activists and first-hand testimonies collected among ordinary city-dwellers, we orchestrated a choir that questions the meaning of citizenship. The paper shows that the methodological constrains of documentary filmmaking helped us to disrupt the ideological unicity habitually displayed within Projecto Agir and allowed the creation of an unforeseen space for intersubjectivity that redefines the borders of knowledge production. If, as a researcher, I took advantage of the filmmaking process to refine my understanding of popular politics in Luanda, my six fellow filmmakers also expanded their own personal trajectory, within activists' circles and beyond.