The Process of Urbanisation in Sub-Saharan Africa

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My object being cities in Africa in the long run, my ambition here has been first to try to apprehend as much of the existing scholarly literature on the topic as possible, mainly for about the last fifteen years, emphasising the more recent and pioneering publications, but also paying attention to a number of works or directions of research originating from the end of the 1950s which are used as the basis of our present knowledge. In a previous essay, I had endeavoured to try to delineate the proper definition of what is a city in history, and, thereby, what we mean by the process of urbanisation. Not to lengthen the present text, I do not come back here to how winding my demarche was, how many my questions were, and how difficult it proved to choose the correct answers.[1] I recapitulate briefly here my former proposals before going on. Then I propose a periodisation for the process of urbanisation. At last, I insist on the discrete changes introduced by colonisation.

What about cities?

The urban phenomenon and the process of urbanisation are of a universal kind, whatever may be the many possible variants. Thence, it is arbitrary to use curtailed and isolated concepts, such as the "antique city", the "pre-industrial city" (by the way, I should rather like to speak of the "pre-capitalist" city, meaning by this a city prior to the emergence of the capitalist mode of production resulting from the industrial revolution), the "colonial city", or the "industrial city" (supposed to be, we may hope so, a Western one). Each of these categories (and we may find others, as distinct as they are controversial, such as the "Third World city") is usually asserted by its inventor to be a model, but he has created it from privileged

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[1] C. Coquery-Vidrovitch, "Essai de définition et de périodisation: Les villes précoloniales", *Processus d'urbanisation et composantes sociales de la ville en Afrique*, Paris L'Harmattan, 1987-88 (forthcoming), Actes de colloque. Université PARIS-7/CNRS, December 1985. This article (to be referred to for more references) is summarised in part of my first section here. For a general survey of African urbanisation, see my "Process of Urbanisation in Sub-Saharan Africa from the Origins to the Beginnning of Colonisation", *African Studies Review*, 54, 1 (1991), pp.1-98.

case studies which may care little about other ones, however nearby they may be, since they do not fit with the proposed framework, because they proceed neither from the same history nor from a similar cultural area. Therefore, I prefer defining a city by two more general features:

1. A city results from both a spatial and social process.

- <u>Spatial</u> because a relatively high number of people settle together within a relatively exiguous territory;[2] from this moment, at least part of the inhabitants do not find their subsistence from direct agricultural exploitation. This settlement has proceeded from varied functional reasons - economic, political and/or administrative, and ideological and/or religious ones - and these different factors interfere in a complex way, all the more complex as their interrelations act and vary along time; so they become in their turn variables themselves affected by the very dynamics of urban evolution.

- <u>Social</u>, since the urban centre is not only a pole of attraction and synthesis, but also a powerful channel for cultural diffusion and transmission outside[3] - <u>cultural</u> and <u>social</u> being more or less used as synonymous and understood in a very broad sense, i.e. including the overall characteristics of a given society (social, political, economic, institutional, ideological, etc.).

2. A city expresses the global social and economic complex it results from and testifies for it. Differentiations between cities have issued from history and from geographical and cultural realities, or, better, cities result from time and space. Therefore, for each period of time, and for each cultural and spatial urban gathering, one may discern:

- A prevalent type of production and exchange.
- A model of power and its ideology.
- Forms of urban settlements to be seen as reflecting the global economic organisation.
- And an urbanism, to be seen as the spatial expression of a social process or urbanisation.

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[2] C. Akin Mabogunje, *Urbanisation in Nigeria*, London, 1968, chap. 1.

[3] Cf. Richard Hull, "Urban Design and Architecture in Precolonial Africa", *Journal of Urban History*, vol. 2, 4 (1976), p. 388.

Therefore, everywhere, within all societies, a city - being looked at as a productive or a parasitic one[4] - plays a leading and active role. Being both a social melting pot and a diffuser, it acts as a tool of colonisation for the whole area on which it displays its authority, at worst a coercive one, at best a mere cultural one, just because, as it emerged and grew, it organised and changed the whole of the surrounding countryside and network of minor towns for its own sake.

Why colonisation? First, because at its very beginning and by definition a city is made of newcomers who arrived from elsewhere (being the countryside, another town or a foreign area). Therefore, a city organises contacts and syntheses between the host and invading cultures (the case, for example, of Roman cities in Northern Africa).[5] Properly speaking, they are colonisers organising a new environment. Second, because contrary to the rural background (at least the pre-capitalist one) a town never lives as self-sufficient. Life in town is conditioned by its opening on the outside. Since part of its inhabitants (even a small part) do not directly live on cultivation, the gathering of an agricultural surplus from the hinterland and sharing it between the consumers (notables, craftsmen, officials) has to be organised. This implies a regulating power - a municipal or a state one - which needs and uses the collaboration and brokerage of merchants and traders involving a circulation and opening outwards.

A city is characterised by its <u>accessibility</u>,[6] and, therefore, its <u>heterogeneity</u> (an ethnical, professional, social, cultural one).[7] Of course, within this general framework, the "colonial city" proper of the 19th and 20th centuries appears to be an extreme and specific case, characterised by an overall coercive power centred outside (in the mother country), by a local privileged minority, both a foreign one and institutionally superior to the native one, and besides empowered to impose an outward-oriented culture and economy.

Let us be aware that all the very general characteristics listed above may be applied to every kind of city - whatever may be its time, nature or specificity. True, it is a universal category. Also, we need not

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[4] Cf. B.F. Hoselitz, "Generative and Parasitic Cities", *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 3 (1954), pp. 278-294.

[5] T.G. McGee, "The Rural-Urban Continuum Debate.....", *Pacific View Point*, 5.2 (September 1964), pp. 171-72.

[6] R. Morton-William, "Some Factors in Location, Growth, and Survival of Towns in West Africa", *Man Settlement and Urbanism*, Duckworth, 1972, p. 284.

[7] Cf. The definition by Louis Wirth: "Urbanism as a way of life", *On Cities and Social Life*, Chicago (1964)), p. 66: "A city may be defined as a relatively large, dense and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals."

insist upon the adoption of writing - a criterion which urban historians of the Western world use. I just assert here what I shall analyse later on in full detail: an urban process and urban policy did exist in historical Africa whether or not the people in the urban settlement knew how to write. The differentiation made by Sjoberg,[8] who totally ignored Africa south of the Sahara, seems both irrelevant and formal - according to his theory, the Maya settlements would have been cities because Maya people knew how to write, while let us say, the Inca people would not have had this privilege.

A long-term periodisation for African cities?

We now come to African cities proper. What I aimed at first was to recognise the chronology of an emergence of cities in Africa.

1. My first statement was that, like anywhere else in the world, urban history is an old affair in Africa south of the Sahara. As first V. Gordon-Childe a propos of the Mediterranean world,[9] then Paul Bairoch on the rest of the world[10] well documented it, the emergence of the former cities was coincidental with the beginning of the "neolithic" agricultural revolution. Agricultural revolution and urban revolution were matched, being well understood as one and the other proceeded along progressive and long transitional periods - probably in Africa as late as the 10th century A.D. at least.

But we must not play with words: to each period, to each cultural area its urbanisation. Old cities in Africa were not primary cities. They had nothing in common with the industrial metropolises of the 19th century. If we have to compare, they would rather fit with European early medieval towns, since most of them were neither large nor densely populated, seldom exceeding a few thousands of inhabitants. Even in the case of major trading cities, such as the ports of the Sahel fringe, or the centres of a long-distance trade network in the grasslands or the slave-trade harbours, there were as late as the 19th century only small-sized settlements where the major part of the population went on cultivating, and the urbanism of which little differed from that of the rural settlements: thence,

[8] G. Sjoberg, *The Preindustrial City, Past and Present*, Glencoe (1960), Introduction and chapter 2. Refutation e.g. in: Paul Wheatley, "What the Greatness of a City Is Said to Be" *Pacific View Point*, 4 (1963), pp. 163-188.

[9] V. Gordon-Childe, "The Urban Revolution", *Town Planning Review*, 21, 1 (1950), pp. 3-17.

[10] Paul Bairoch, *De Jericho à Mexico. Villes et Economie dans l'Histoire*, Paris, Gallimard, 1985.

also because of the often fragile nature of building materials, the frequent appearance of a green city close to that of the village.

But the same may be assumed of the ancient stone cities of Southern Africa where cattle-herders reproduced the model of the rural *kraal*, except for some rather unusual pieces of monumental architecture around which the rest of the city was organised (thus proving the existence of an urbanism). Too often the model of the Western monopolies of today consciously, but above all unconsciously, stands behind the statements evaluating a possible old African urbanisation. Thus, Robin Law rightly demonstrates that there probably were no larger Yoruba cities before the 19th century. However, as he subreptitiously shifts from "large" cities to cities proper, he comes to doubt any true previous urbanisation.[11] This sounds like the abrupt statement by Anthony Whitty, asserting that "neither Zimbabwe nor Inyanga reached a stage of development approaching true urbanisation".[12] But what is and what is not a "true" city?

2. Precolonial African cities offer some common features proper to all pre-capitalist cities:

- They were relatively not densely populated.
- Their size was not convincing. There existed, in Africa as elsewhere, large village-centres with several dozens of inhabitants (such as fishing villages in the middle Congo river in the 19th century), but mostly small towns of hardly some thousands.
- They were relatively ephemerous, or at least wandering.

To be unaware of this last point helps us understand a rather perverse Eurocentric bias, according to which a wandering town would not be a town at all (as Wirth's already quoted definition of a "relatively .... permanent settlement" seems to infer: all depends on the actual weight given to this "relativity"!). Generally speaking, most African cities and especially capital cities were also wandering ones; we find this everywhere:

- In Yorubaland, where town wandering is all the easier to follow as the old city kept its previous name through its migrancy (old and

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[11] "Towards a History of Urbanisation in Pre-colonial Yorubaland", *African Historical Demography*, Edingburgh (1977), pp. 260-271.

[12] "Zimbabwe and Inyanga", *Man, Settlement and Urbanism*, P.J. Ucko and G.W. Dimbledey (eds.), London (1972), p. 901.

New Ife, Old and New Oyo, but also many less known other ones).[13]
- In Bantu Central Africa: wandering site of Kibuga, the capital city of Buganda;[14] capital cities of the Kuba kingdom,[15] of Rwanda, Ankole, etc.[16]
- In Ethiopia.[17]
- In Sudan.[18]

This fact, often alleged as a proof of a non-urban precolonial Africa, had nothing exceptional for an ancient capital city; it was common in early medieval Europe, probably for similar reasons:

A. An unusual confluence of people, many of them rulers and well-to-do notables who demanded an unusual amount of foodstuff from the surrounding area, in a general framework of a low-producing economy. This was probably the case for Great Zimbabwe, which was deserted at the midst of the 15th century because of the relatively sterilisation of the ecological environment, unable to face any longer the extraction of too large surplus.

B. Epidemic casualties, always possible in relatively more densely populated areas, where sanitary conditions were still worse than in rural areas.

C. Political exigencies, as the ruler, chief or king had to impose his power personally, residing in turn in his different provinces in as many capital cities, especially when other modes of transmission and communication were desperately slow and uncertain.

D. A military strategy based on mobility and conditioned by possible rapid moves of the military camp privileged as the residence of the chief (obvious case of the emperor in Ethiopia).

E. Possibly (but not necessarily) connected with the previous point, the precarious character, and the extremely unexpensive nature of

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[13] Akin Mabogunje, *Urbanisation in Nigeria*, London, 1968, chap. 2.

[14] Peter W. Gutkind, "Notes on the Kibuga of Buganda", *Uganda Journal*, vol. 24, 1 (1960), pp. 23-30 and *The African Administration of the Kibuga of Buganda*, Mouton, The Hague, 1963.

[15] Jan Vansina, *The Children of Woot*, Madison (1978), pp. 137-140.

[16] Roland Oliver, "Ancient Capital Sites of Ankole", *Uganda Journal*, 23 (1959), pp. 51-65, and 1 (1961), p.117.

[17] Ronald J. Horvath, "The Wandering Capitals of Ethiopia", *Journal of African History*, X, 2 (1969), pp. 205-219.

[18] Christopher Winters, "Traditional Urbanism in the North Central Sudan", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 67, 4, (December 1977), pp. 500-520.

the materials used to build a city, which needed relatively little time and labour.

3. A schematic periodisation. I may propose:

A. Ancient cities: they are the oldest ones, mainly, but still little, known through archaeological evidence. They were pre-islamic cities located in key zones of contact between complementary people and cultures. The oldest known for the moment (besides the possible ancient *emporia* - quoted by the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* - which grew up at Rhapta and elsewhere on the Eastern coast at the beginning of our era under the stimulus of trade from Arabia)[19] is Jenne, probably from the second century A.D., close to the southern border of the Sahara, connecting cattleherders with their cultivating neighbours.[20]

B. Cities borne from the long distance connections with the Arab-Muslim world, closer to the Western knowledge and cultural background, which is the reason why I speak little of them here.

C. Cities of pre-modern non-Islamised Africa, as much in Central and Southern as in Western Africa:

- Old pre-modern cities of Eastern and Southern Africa; the remnant of them were destroyed at the time of the *mfecane*: Great Zimbabwe till about 1450; Khami and Dhlo-Dhlo from the Rovzi period, between the 16th and 18th century;[21] possibly Engaruka (Tanzania) about the same period;[22] Kurrichane (South Africa) before 1825.

- Old Bantu cities of West Central Africa, capital cities of kingdoms such as Lunda, Kongo, Kuba, from the 16th (at least) to the 19th centuries.

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[19] Cf. Gervase Mathew, "The Dating and the Significance of the Periplus of the Erythrean Sea", H. Neville-Chittick and Robert I. Rotberg (eds.), *East Africa and the Orient*, New York, 1975, pp. 147-163, and Neville Chittick, "Kilwa and the Arab Settlement of the East African Coast", J.D. Fage and R.A.. Oliver (eds.) *Papers in African Prehistory,*, Cambridge University Press, 1970, pp. 239-240

[20] Susan Keech McIntosh and Roderick J. McIntosh, "Recent Archaeological Research and Dates from West Africa", *Journal of African History*, 27 (1986), pp. 413-442.

[21] K.R. Robinson, *Khami Ruins (Excavations 1947-1955)*, Cambridge University Press, 1959, and Roger Summers, *Ancient Ruins and Vanished Civilisations of Southern Africa*, Cape Town, 1971.

[22] Hamo Sassoon, "New Views on Engaruka, Northern Tanzania", *Journal of African History*, VII, 2 (1967), pp. 201-217.

- Western African cities, the more prominent and better known of them come from the urban Yoruba, Benin, and Akan cultures.

D. Cities created and developed from the Atlantic long-distance trade, mostly (but far from exclusively) in slaves.

At once we may be aware of the difficulty to delineate well the boundaries between the two and even the three last categories. Premodern ports and cities of the hinterland (Kongo, Yoruba or Akan, but also Hausa and, on the Eastern coast, Muslim Swahili ones more or less conquered by the Portuguese) were of course soon strongly influenced by the Atlantic economic and cultural spread. A direct influence is easy to perceive for the Western as for the Eastern harbours; but large networks were also encouraged within Africa, far in the interior, where an autochthonous urban civilisation based on a hierarchical organisation of trade and markets obviously flourished in connection with the general trends of the outward economy. One discovers here how much we may learn from varied sources which had been till recently little exploited, probably just because they were written in languages less or not practised by the researchers: Portuguese of course, but also Dutch, Danish or Swedish, at a time when these nationalities regularly visited the African coasts.[23]

Western Africa offers a privileged example, probably mostly because it has been more studied than for other reasons, proving the remote past and the complexity of urban realities. The fact is that it looks impossible to draw a static typology of the nature of African cities ("Muslim", "Bantu", "traditional/native" or "colonial" ones):[24] urban models have expanded for many centuries and have diffused everywhere. My proposed chronology is not a suggestive typology, because it involves a cumulative process. Each stratum of cities resulted in its turn from all the previous ones, the accumulation and combination of which was unceasingly favoured by noticeable fluidity of internal African connections (movements of people, goods, ideas and culture).

Thenceforth, one may infer the origins of a phenomenon improperly often considered as an anomaly in Africa: Yoruba urbanisation.

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[23] See revealing studies by Ray A. Kea, *Settlements, Trade and Politics in the 17th Century Gold Coast*, Baltimore, 1982 (chap. 2: "Urban Networks and Central Places"), and John Thornton, *The Kingdom of Kongo, Civil War and Transition, 1641-1718*, Madison, 1983 (chap. 4: "Economy and Politics in the Towns").

[24] As nevertheless Anthony O'Connor proposes it in *The African City*, London, Hutchinson, 1983.

In fact, Yorubaland inherited a remote and varied urban past. Through cultural diffusion, migrations of people and long-distance trade, this area was privileged by its very position, more or less equally distant from the Muslim influence coming from the north and from the Atlantic one coming from south, and successively benefitted from:

- Ancient Sahel pre-Islamic origins,
- Muslim urban streams mediated southward by Hausa city states tradition,
- Atlantic contacts diffused northward through the Benin area, the whole of this long and complex inheritance being progressively absorbed and interpreted by autochthonous people in the form of a probably old urban culture of its own.

4. A general trend in two phases:

In the long run, underneath these different successive influences, one may perceive an urbanisation process along two rather distinct large waves interrupted by a kind of break, if not a gap, with the 19th century standing for a decisive turning point between the two.

A. A first generation of cities appears everywhere in Africa, though with varied forms according to the time and to the place. This first urban wave which has neither to be exaggerated nor minimised, because its relatively minor amplitude fitted with the given conditions and modes of population, of production and of long-distance economic relations of mostly rural and trading societies, was ended or rather interrupted in different ways in different areas:

- In Eastern and Southern Africa, these "lost cities" of the past,[25] though stonebuilt ones, nearly or totally disappeared, destroyed between the 18th and 19th centuries by a conjunction of factors, between the *mfecane* then a ravaging military slave-trading economy (devastation of the Rozvi culture, destruction of Kurrichane, decimation by the Indian Ocean slave trade). Those which survived (such as the Swahili harbours) drastically changed in size and probably in nature.

- In Western Africa, the climax of the Atlantic slave trade, about the same time (end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries) also disorganised the previous networks and the old balance between competing foreign and internal powers. An increasing and more

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[25] Cf. Basil Davidson, *The Lost Cities of Africa*, London, 1957.

and more exclusive slave trade seems to have helped the decay of a previous alive urban civilisation both more or less connected, according to the place, with the Saharan and coastal trade. The phenomenon was probably more or less analogous to the ruralisation which occurred for similar sorts of reasons in the early European Middle Ages.

B. Modern cities as such emerged everywhere throughout the 19th century, i.e. long enough before colonisation proper.

The difference between Southern and Western Africa is probably that a relative discontinuity between old towns - some of them only recently rediscovered on desert sites invaded with bush or forest - and immediate precolonial and colonial cities is in the latter less clear because less frequent. But everywhere the 19th century appears as a formidable time of urban change. Then the whole of the urban heritage combined with new and varied (economic, military, religious) incentives to give birth to a new and extremely vivid urban generation: huge market towns, harbors and capital cities of a larger size, as well in Eastern Africa (with the rapid growth of coastal or inner cities like Bagamayo, Ujiji and Tabora) as in Western Africa (one of the best examples being a new generation of Haus and /or Yoruba new metropolis).

The 19th century urban revolution

It was obvious everywhere, but more or less precocious: as soon as the beginning of the century in Western Africa, but only in the last third of it in Central and Eastern Africa.

1. Western Africa

Once more, Yorubaland is a privileged case, as we benefit from many varied, if sometimes contradictory, studies. Here we come from an urban civilisation made of small centre towns to the flourishing of a number of large cities, each of them expressing an emphasised synthesis between varied and converging social forces: Lagos, a primary harbour; Abeokuta, a market of the hinterland and a regional encounter between forest and grasslands incentive; Ibadan, grown from the varied refugees of the Yoruba wars; Ilorin, a city of exchange and interpenetration between Yoruba and Hausa people; Kano, a Sahelian capital city which became a major cloth manufacture centre; all stand as different models of the 19th century drastic change of:

- A long-distance economic and inter-regional and international trade based, for Kano, on an international growing productive activity, and for all other quoted cases, on the major trading trends increasing both east-westward and south-northward.
- An increasing ethnical, professional, religious, and, in a word, social heterogeneity.
- An expanding and changing urbanism connected with intense migrations accelerated by a growing complementarity between urban and rural areas.

Nevertheless, the Yoruba example is not unique. The establishment of a multi-centred urban network is to be seen in Ashanti, in the Dahomean area, in the Volta and Niger hinterland, and in the Wolof kingdoms.

2. Central and Eastern Africa

In Central and Eastern Africa, at least towards the end of the century, similar phenomena occurred, even if their forms and the social background were rather different. An accelerated urbanisation process surely occurred, favoured by the new trends of commerce and of political issues produced from, among other things, the emergence of the Zanzibar-Oman Sultanate and from the increased internal trade in slaves, ivory and guns. Ports like Kilwa or Bagamoyo, market places like Ujiji and Tabora,[26] state capitals like the Musumba of the Lunda[27] or the capital cities of Kuba[28] could but develop and enlarge under the impact of an increasing international incentive, even if the 19th century urbanism was seriously disturbed by the ravage of an intensified slave trade. Therefore, while ports and market and military centres grew up, on the contrary the rest of the raided people probably scattered in the bush in precarious settlements so as to escape slave raiders and pillage, or were decimated by the spread of rising epidemic diseases (such as sleeping sickness all along the Rift)[29] encouraged by the progress of penetration.

In fact, we know little of this urban history, not because it did not exist, but because we lack scholarly information. What do we know

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[26] Beverley Brown and Walter T. Brown, "East African Trade Towns: A Shared Growth", W. Arens (ed.), *World Anthropology. A Century of Change in Eastern Africa*, Mouton, The Hague, 1976, pp. 184-200.

[27] W. G. L. Randles, "Precolonial Urbanisation in Africa South of the Equator", *Man, Settlement and Urbanism*, op. cit., pp. 891-897.

[28] Jan Vansina, *The Children of the Woot*, op. cit.

[29] John Ford, *The Role of Trypanosomiases in African Ecology*, Oxford Clarendon Press, 1971.

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about the military camps of Msiri, Mirambo or Tippu-Tip or even Rabah, except some scarce descriptions by early travellers or missionaries, not yet really compiled and compared to other (oral, archaeological) evidence? Paradoxically, with few exceptions, on Ethiopia[30], Zanzibar[31], the Kuba kingdom[32], or unpublished theses on Ujiji, Bagamoyo or Dar-es-Salaam[33], or studies focusing rather on market networks and the labour force organisation (plantations, slavery)[34], we know more about the first generation of ancient deserted stone towns or medieval Swahili harbours (Kilwa, Gedi or others), in spite of poor sources and mediocre or no writing, than we do about a possible urban process of military posts and trading centres of the 19th century. At least prehistorian archaeologists have asked the question whether ancient ruins came from a rural-pastoral civilisation or were some kind of an urban vestige.

This silence contrasts with the wealth of West African research on 19th century urbanism, and urges the necessity of promoting research in languages not enough exploited by modern social scientists: Swahili, Arab and Portuguese. In Eastern and Central Africa, too, we may suppose the existence, besides large stable storage settlements such as harbours and major market places, of a series of minor and probably moving small settlements used as caravan stops, porter halts, military posts and wandering slave-trade places, with a hierarchical network of trading centres.

Why should we call these obviously non-exclusively agricultural settlements "towns" in, let us say, the Akan or Yoruba area in the 16th or 18th century, while it would be supposed that only camps could exist in central Africa? Even if the military traumatism has been stronger here, the question is at least worth while asking. As it has been recently proposed,[35] apropos of Ethiopian precolonial towns, there is no reason why they should have to be looked at - as most previous searchers did - as alien anomalous excrescences.

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[30] Several articles by Richard Pankhurst in *Ethiopian Observer* and, i.e.: "Menelik and the Foundation of Addis-Ababa", *Journal of African History*, II, 1 (1961), pp. 103-117. Ronald J. Horvath, "The Wandering Capitals...", op. cit., and thesis by Peter Garretson.

[31] F.B. Pearce, *Zanzibar. The Island Metropolis of Eastern Africa*, 1920, republ. New York, 1967.

[32] Jan Vansina, op. cit.

[33] Thesis by Beverley Brown on Ujiji and by Walter Brown on Bagamoyo, Boston University, c. 1972. Thesis by David H. Anthony on Dar-es-Salaam, Madison, 1983.

[34] Edward Alpers, *Ivory and Trade. Changing Pattterns of International Trade in Eastern Africa in the later 19th century*, Berkeley, 1975, Fred Cooper, *From Slaves to Squatters. Plantation Labor and Agriculture in Zanzibar and Coastal Kenya, 1890-1925*, Yale, 1980.

[35] Donald Crummey, "Some Precursors of Addis Ababa: Towns in Christian Ethiopia in the 18th and 19th Centuries", unpublished paper, 1987.

They were inherent realities of Ethiopian history, born from a rural production based on slavery and ensuring the duration and stability of the whole system by their extractive relationship with their agrarian surroundings. Limits to urbanisation being closely connected to societal limits on surplus accumulation, they could but remain small cities, the average population of them typically not exceeding 2,000 to 4,000 inhabitants at most.

A similar understanding could be applied to Central Africa, where a specific social organisation was promoted, based on women's rural labour while men were massively recruited elsewhere, for the army, the caravans and other types of non-agricultural activities,[36] which may have favoured the occurrence, emergence and growth - in short the history - of a series of small centres more or less diffusing to the traditionally urban Swahili culture. These ones, in their turn, may have resulted in the later selection, by the colonisers, of the first administrative and economic cities of the colonial times.

This is only a hypothesis. But it may suggest more endurance than is usually supposed in general African urban history.

3. Southern Africa

Southern Africa is yet another case. For part of it, the 19th century is already colonial history, under the joint pressure of British occupation and of the internal Boers' progressing. Nevertheless, in a transitional phase between ancient towns destroyed by the *mfecane* and colonial cities proper, we find, at least in Zululand, military settlements (probably more or less similar to the Ethiopian ones) gathering an actually high number of soldiers (boys and girls), women, servants and slaves, whose main occupation was certainly not cultivating. All these non-producers needed to be settled, cared for, fed, served; they involved not only a strong organisation of power, but also networks of transportation and storage of produce, arms and goods of all kinds. They constituted, too, an extraordinary melting pot all the more heterogeneous as many of them came from recently and successively conquered areas. A camp? A military town? Once more, the question has not yet been asked as such.

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[36] On Bunkeya, capital city of the Garenpanze, Msisi kingdom: see Marcia Wright, "The Life of Bwanikwa (1886-1911)" in: Claire Robertson and Martin Klein (eds.), *Women and Slavery in Africa*, London, 1986.

Colonial cities

We would rather speak here of "cities" than of "the colonial city", as we may actually doubt whether we deal with a single model of a city. Surely, they are cities which expanded within a specific coercive framework proper to a colonial regime as finally imposed by the European great powers towards the end of the 19th century - often said "colonial imperialism". It may be described as involving a foreign mother country, with institutional rules imposed by an external power and, on the spot, a more or less significant number of white settlers controlling administration, economics and even, at least, partly religion - in short an organised dependence for economic and political extra-oriented purpose.

In fact, colonised cities have been many. A "colonial city" cannot be reduced to a "White" city as initiated by the legal colour bar enforced in several territories, and first in Kenya, Rhodesia or South Africa. In spite of several temptations based on a sanitary or social argumentation, the idea of a White colonial city[37] is quite irrelevant in Western Africa, either British or French, which never legalised segregation and where a large majority of native people always prevailed in town and were accepted as such.

Nevertheless, from the rather general outline of what is colonisation as defined above, we may infer some specific features more or less common to all colonial cities.

1. Stabilisation of African cities

Colonisation fixed cities whenever they were mobile settlements beforehand. As colonial rule aimed at fixing till then moving populations inside delineated colonial boundaries, so it succeeded in forbidding cities to change. Everywhere wandering capitals disappeared. What is striking is that the phenomenon was not unique to colonial territories (as, for example, the Kibuga of Buganda, which from this moment became a twin-part of the Uganda capital city of Kampala).[38] It occurred, too, in Ethiopia, where the modernising Emperor Menelik decided to create his permanent capital, Addis Ababa, in 1890-91.[39] This means that urban stabilisation was not only a colonial initiative: it was an acceptance of Westernisation.

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[37] As it is suggested explicitly by O'Connor, op. cit., and implicitly by Anthony D. King, *Colonial Urban Development*, London, 1976.

[38] Cf. Peter Gutkind, op.cit.

[39] Cf. Ronald J. Horvath and Richard Pankurst, op.cit.

2. Selection of cities

Contrary to a common feeling, colonisation did not necessarily create cities or, better said, as we have tried to prove from the beginning of this paper, it is an imposture to think of African cities as only emerging with colonisation. The colonising impact on urbanisation was twofold and even more:

- Truly, sometimes the colonisers had to create a new settlement from nothing, organising a military vanguard post in the midst of a troubled area, or a market place aiming at ensuring the primary needs of their occupation forces, and transformed it later on into a administrative centre. New economic incentive and political constraints were also as many incitements for initiating modern settlements: Dakar versus Saint-Louis in Senegal; Cotonou versus Porto-Novo in Dahomey as modern harbours, or new capital cities, such as Nairobi at the terminal point of the railway or Kampala close to Kibuga in Uganda. A case we may compare to is another twin-city twice borne from colonisation: Khartoum, which was first selected as the seat of Egyptian rule in Sudan about 1830 after being adopted as a permanent military camp by Mehemet Ali ten years before, because of the obvious advantages of its situation at the confluence of the Blue and White Nile and close to the Nubian desert. So, already a colonising town, Khartoum was created again as a colonial city from the British reconquest in 1898 onward, to be preferred to Ondurman, on the other side of the Nile, ex-capital of the Mahdists and a typical "native" city.[40]

- Most of the time, colonisers did not create but chose their cities. Efficient harbours or large market centres had existed for a long time, and expanded and multiplied all through the 19th century. There the first colonial cities rooted and grew: such were Lagos, a former metropolis of the Atlantic slave-trade, or Mombasa on the Indian Ocean. Many old Yoruba cities were regenerated (Ibadan, later Ife), but also other market centres of the interior such as Ouagadougou, capital city of the Mossi Mogho-Naba, Bobo-Dioulasso, a large commercial traditional town, etc.

- Therefore, this colonial choice resulted in a consecutive alteration of the previous urban networks. Some cities were selected and grew, but others were neglected and failed or even disappeared. Colonisation not only created cities, it also suppressed part of

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[40] G. Hamdan, "The Growth and Functional Structure of Khartoum", *Geographical Review*, 50 (1960), pp. 21-40.

them.[41] A striking example was Say, in south-western Niger, about fifty miles from Niamey, described by the travellers as a populated commercial and religious centre of several dozens of thousands of inhabitants on the eve of the French conquest, which fell to hardly a few thousands just some years later. Sometimes the decay came later, as for Saint-Louis, which turned for years to a small deserted town once French colonisation preferred Dakar, while it had been, from the very beginning of an early colonisation in the 17th century, a fully alive city and the core of an intense international trade down the river Senegal.

3. Colonial cities as a privileged tool of colonisation

Suffice it here to recapitulate what I wrote in the first part of this paper: cities always have a colonising impact, as diffusers of new political, economical and cultural trends. Colonisation proper only accelerated and distorted the process. For the colonised, both coercion and external forces and temptations proved as many incentives of social change. But colonisers could not do without cities either.[42] Most of their power was centred in the cities, where most of them lived. Colonial cities were governmental centres, garrison places. Western, then Western-style financial and industrial establishments were created there. Major trade and labour markets were urban ones, and migrant workers and other rural people converged there, then brought back home everywhere what they had discovered and absorbed there.

4. Colonial cities as cultural mediators

People migrating to the city founded there some kind of a nuclear family. But they often left behind part of their relatives, possibly including a wife, partly because they could not afford the money for her coming. Even after they look as if they had cut the umbilical string with the countryside, they go on sending money to the village - an average of 20% of their wages. Therefore, the extended family still remains the main source of information, diffusion and acculturation coming from the city to diffuse everywhere.

From the beginning of colonisation times, more and more money, goods, power, people and ideas focussed on cities. Favoured by an

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[41] This important point was first stressed by Hélène d'Almeida-Topor, "Quelques reflexions sur une periodisation urbaine", in: *Processus d'Urbanisation...*", op.cit., forthcoming (see note 1).

[42] Cf. Robert Ross and G. J. Telkamp (eds.), *Colonial Cities. Essays on Urbanism in a Colonial Context*, Introduction, (1985), Leiden University Press.

always growing urban migrancy, "modernisation", as it is often said as if it was synonymous with European rule, this means an accelerated mixture, if not yet a synthesis, of Westernisation and changing so-called "traditional" values, operated there. Indeed, the boundary between the traditional and the modern is artificial, for no successful adaptation, whether in politics, economics or other items can afford to neglect received endowments, the need for change and the potential for combining the old and the new.[43] This was mainly done in towns, giving birth to an actually new African urban culture which is yet neither well known nor well understood, but undoubtly emerged as a powerful mediating force during colonial times. Especially in towns, we have no longer to think of the colonial society in a too schematic way, as a dualistic one, with, on the one side, the white colonisers and, on the other side, the dominated Africans, facing one another with a long-lasting hostility, except for some African collaborators. Given, of course, the fact that colonisation was a coercive order of violence generating a situation of intense and open conflict, this very situation of vivid contradictions generated the necessity of a complex process of adaptation and reassertion: mediators came out, brokers of all nature, standing and ability - cities were the core of their emergence and prosperity.

Of course, this enlarged the phenomenon of brokerage had largely begun before colonisation proper. It began on the coasts with the Portuguese, Dutch, British or French contacts. It began, beforehand, with Arab and Muslim contacts: New knowledge, new ideas, new technologies diffused quite early. The trading cities and harbours on the seaside, to be sure, were as many extraordinary channels for mediation. The difference is probably a difference of degree. Colonisation strongly accelerated the process, through the direct confrontation between the rulers and the dependant. The fact itself of colonial hegemony made the flourishing of brokers a quasi-generalised social process - certainly much more frequent than still we supposed not long ago; and, because of a necessary connection with the mother-country and the international market, all of them were more or less related to the colonial city, which acquired a definitely privileged role as a mediating world, where manifestations of African creativity best developed as many proofs of the reality and frequency of brokers of all kind and size. A proof of it, well-known by anthropologists, is the outburst of an extraordinary variety of urban associations and urban popular arts, among which a completely "new" one: popular painting (Lubumbashi or Dakar).

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[43] See Subbiah Kannappan, "Notes of the Indian Experience", W. Wilson Centre Paper, May 1987, pp. 3-5.

5. Colonial cities as white privilege

European colonisers, officially or not, all agreed on one point: colonial cities were the privileged locus of white people, for politics and policy, culture, and of course financial and economic matters. Africans were thought to be mainly if not only rural migrants. Only those useful to the white power, such as clerks and other salaried auxiliary people, were looked at as "normal" urbanites, or at least their presence in town was accepted because colonisers could not do without them. But neither the colonial power nor the municipal administration felt truly responsible for their accommodation, housing and welfare in town. In Nairobi, for instance, albeit they were the majority, for many years the Africans remained "out of sight" of the eyes of the competing races (Whites versus Indians) except as a source of the indispensable labour supply.

Above all, housing was for years, with few exceptions, reserved for White settlers: thence, probably, a bias tending to identify the "colonial" city with the White city, i.e., the part of the city made of a European-type architecture, planning and mode of living, because explicitly or implicitly reserved to the use of White people. In Nairobi (supposed to be a "colonial city" in the meaning of a White one), as in Dakar (a colonial creation but one whose first inhabitants, the Lebou, had been accepted as such), African housing, including the lodging of African official clerks, was not seriously considered before the late thirties - the only purpose before this time being to push them back far away from the "true" urbanites to a remote district, the Medina in Dakar,[44] or Pumwani in Nairobi.[45] Everywhere social housing was not actually initiated before World War II, even if of course a lot of new African urban settlements had emerged from the very beginning of colonisation, if not partly inherited from precolonial cities.[46]

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[44] Raymond F. Betts, "The Establishment of the Medina in Dakar, Senegal, 1914", *Africa*, vol. 41, 2 (1971), pp. 143-152.

[45] Roger van Zwanenberg, "History and Theory of Urban Poverty in Nairobi: The Problem of Slum Development", *Journal of Eastern African Research and Development*, vol. 2, 2 (1972), pp. 165-203, S.M Kimani, "The Structure of Land Ownership in Nairobi", *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, VI, 3 (1972), pp. 379-402.

[46] Cf.: Thomas S. Gale, "Lagos: The History of British Colonial Neglect of Traditional African Cities", *African Urban Studies*, 5 (Fall 1979), pp. 11-24.

6. Slums as a structural part of colonial urbanism

Therefore, from the very beginning a dualism stood between, if not necessarily two segregated areas of residence, then at least two forms of urbanism: on the one side the European town (the only one to be truly recognised), on the other the African settlements. For these latter, quite clearly a specific vocabulary was used. For example they were called "villages" in French Equatorial Africa, which reveals to which point they were not accepted as part of the city, the pretext being they looked more like rural areas than like a "true" (read "European") city. The truth is that, from the beginning, they were left, or rather abandonned to African initiative. Control was minimal. When it first appeared, it was in a negative way by a coercive destruction, the so-called "deguerpissement" early practised by French colonial city planners; so, too, Pangani in Nairobi was destroyed in 1931 because allegedly it was to be replaced by Pumwani.[47]

In fact, settlements which have too often been looked at as "spontaneous", while one might better say "not controlled" by some kind of official power, being a colonial state or municipal one, are not an originality of today's mushrooming post-colonial cities. They were from the beginning a structural part of colonial urban realities. Slums and shanty towns obviously have become more and more huge and expanded, first after World War II, then after independence with the accelerated rhythm of African population boom and urban migration; but they had been accepted beforehand, and even promoted by the urban colonial policy from its origins, being looked at as an unavoidable evil of a supposed-to-be "traditional" way of life.

7. A "parallel" social sector encouraged from the beginning

Another issue of point 5 is that a considerable part and sometimes majority of African urban population, made of a complex social group recently but non rightly popularised as "informal", is not a new reality. They come, properly speaking, from all those who were not allowed to insert within the official urban market of labour, because they were not directly used as producers or auxiliaries serving the colonial order. Therefore, they were not supposed to have a natural right to become urban dwellers. Legally (when apartheid was installed) or implicitly, they were only tolerated. This involves all those who did not become part of the networks imme-

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[47] See, on this theme, R. van Zwanenberg, op.cit.

diately ruled by and directly articulated on colonial, then post-colonial, western capitalism. These people let aside by the urban colonial order, marginalised in their job and their earnings, of course enormously grew in number as migrations increased and a progressive sedentarisation and stabilisation occurred,[48] making their coming back to the rural areas more and more dubitable. But, as a residential and professional social category, they were produced as soon as colonisation and colonial cities emerged, which of course does not mean that shanty towns and an informal sector were conditioned by colonisation. Everybody knows both of them are nowadays a characteristic of Third World cities, originated or not in former colonial countries. This means only that where colonisation occurred, so-called "spontaneous" settlements and "informal" sectors emerged very early, urged by a colonial coercion and a misunderstanding or rather misuse of concepts and realities such as "traditional" or "native" modes of living, housing, producing, etc. Therefore, conditions for slums, marginality and poverty were quasi-artificially created and developed even before the economic, social and demographic conditions converged to such an issue.

That is why colonial cities, as pre-colonial cities before them in a long-term perpective, involve much of the social and material stuff of which today's African cities were made, even if a recent and drastic change in scale and in functions has resulted in a series of new trends and new features. Again, this is what made this rather long development of my argument necessary, as it provides the background for my fellow researcher, Michel Coquery's, ongoing project to establish a comprehensive survey of the present and future of African cities.

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[48] See for example: Helmuth Heisler, "The Creation of a Stabilized Urban Society. A Turning Point in the Development of Northern Rhodesia/Zambia", *African Affairs*, 70 (1971), pp. 125-145.