

# AFRICAN CITIES

ALTERNATIVE VISIONS OF URBAN THEORY AND PRACTICE

GARTH MYERS



# **AFRICAN CITIES**

**alternative visions of urban  
theory and practice**

Garth Myers



Zed Books  
LONDON • NEW YORK

*African Cities: Alternative visions of urban theory and practice* was first published in 2011 by Zed Books Ltd, 7 Cynthia Street, London N1 9JF, UK, and Room 400, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010, USA

[www.zedbooks.co.uk](http://www.zedbooks.co.uk)

Copyright © Garth Myers 2011

The right of Garth Myers to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988

Set in Monotype Sabon and Gill Sans Heavy by Ewan Smith, London

Index: [ed.emery@thefreeuniversity.net](mailto:ed.emery@thefreeuniversity.net)

Cover designed by Rogue Four Design

Printed and bound in Great Britain by the MPG Books Group



**Mixed Sources**  
Product group from well-managed  
forests and other controlled sources  
[www.fsc.org](http://www.fsc.org) Cert no. SA-COC-1565  
© 1996 Forest Stewardship Council

Distributed in the USA exclusively by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of St Martin's Press, LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010, USA

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior permission of Zed Books Ltd.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library  
Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data available

ISBN 978 1 84813 508 6 hb

ISBN 978 1 84813 509 3 pb

## Abbreviations

AAPS	Association of African Planning Schools
ANC	African National Congress (South Africa)
BNG	Breaking New Ground (Cape Town)
CBD	central business district
CBO	community-based organization
CCM	Chama cha Mapinduzi (Revolutionary Party, Tanzania)
CUF	Civic United Front (Zanzibar)
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
JSP	Joe Slovo Park (Cape Town)
MONGO	My Own NGO
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme (Cape Town)
SCP	Sustainable Cities Program
SMOLE	Sustainable Management of Lands and Environment (Zanzibar)
SUD	sustainable urban development
UMMM	<i>Umoja wa Mradi wa Maji na Maendeleo</i> (Unity in the Project for Water and Development, Zanzibar)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WNLA	Witwatersrand Native Labour Association
ZIFF	Zanzibar International Film Festival
ZILEM	Zanzibar Integrated Lands and Environmental Management
ZSP	Zanzibar Sustainable Program

## Acknowledgments

The inspirations for writing this book are numerous and diverse. I am grateful for the opportunity to conduct research on a project funded by the National Science Foundation Geography Program (2006–08, award no. 0549319), but felt it was important to broaden my book geographically and conceptually from the grant's focus on land reform in Zanzibar, based on what I'd already seen in research elsewhere. I also benefited from participation in the International School at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa, in June/July 2009, and the Cities Alliance Workshop on the State of African Cities Reporting Project held at the African Center for Cities of the University of Cape Town, in April 2009. I am particularly thankful to Sue Parnell, Edgar Pieterse, Jenny Robinson, and Vanessa Watson for the latter opportunity. Besides the NSF funding, I also used funding from the US Department of Education Title VI National Resource Center grant of the Kansas African Studies Center to travel to various cities in Africa during 2008–10. Chapter 1 emerged from the final study tour of Lusaka on the Kansas African Studies Center's US Department of State affiliation grant with the University of Zambia in 2004. The Hall Center for the Humanities at the University of Kansas offered me the sanctuary of a Resident Fellowship in fall 2009 to write Chapters 2 and 3. Chapters 4 and 6 owe their existence to a spring 2010 sabbatical leave from the University of Kansas. Chapter 5 has its origins in the 2006 fall faculty seminar at the Hall Center on Representations of the Middle East that I was invited to co-chair, with Robin Rowland, following the untimely death of our colleague, Misty Gerner, whose idea the seminar was. The Hall Center and the Office of International Programs also supported research that led to the production of one section of Chapter 6. The Nordic Africa Institute assisted me by granting me the opportunity to write a concept paper for their research cluster on Urban Dynamics in Africa in spring 2010, the key ideas of which are found throughout this book. Small segments from articles of mine that have appeared in *Urban Geography*, *African Affairs*, and *Geography Compass* are paraphrased here, and I gratefully acknowledge the permission of each of the publishers for doing so.

I have presented portions of the book or the research behind it in a number of lecture series, conferences, or workshops, including talks at the Nordic Africa Institute (2007 and 2010), Texas A&M University, University of Sciences and Arts of Oklahoma, UCLA, University College London, the Ohio State University, University of Chicago, University of Florida, Colgate University, Binghamton University, Kansas State University, the European Conference on African Studies (Leipzig, 2009), and annual meetings of the African Studies Association in San Francisco (2006) and New York (2008), the Association of American Geographers in Denver (2005), Chicago (2006), San Francisco (2007), Boston (2008), Las Vegas (2009), and Washington (2010), the Institute of British Geographers in London (2007 and 2008), and the Mid-America Alliance for African Studies in St Louis (2006 and 2008) and Lawrence (2007 and 2010). My sincere thanks to all who have commented and critiqued these presentations over the past five years, including Charisma Acey, Onyanta Adama, Bill Bissell, Christian Brannstrom, Deborah Bryceson, Andrew Byerley, Jenny Cadstedt, Jennifer Cole, Steve Commins, Julio Davila, Filip de Boeck, Brian Dill, David Donkor, Rosalind Fredericks, Matthew Gandy, Jacob Gordon, Amanda Hammar, Karen Hansen, Goren Hyden, Peter Hugill, Rachel Jean-Baptiste, Wendy Jepson, Anthonia Kalu, Kalechi Kalu, Stephen Kandeh, Ed Keller, Tom Klak, Miles Larmer, Todd Leedy, Loretta Lees, Charlotte Lemansky, Agnes Leslie, Ilda Lindell, Abdulaziz Lodhi, Tina Mangieri, Gordon McGranahan, Fiona McLaughlin, Claire Mercer, Martin Murray, Heidi Nast, Wilma Nchito, Jeremia Njeru, Simon Nkemba, Rob O'Donaghue, Francis Owusu, Ben Page, Sue Parnell, Edgar Pieterse, Debby Potts, Carole Rakodi, Jenny Robinson, Rick Schroeder, David Simon, Maliq Simone, Jonathan Smith, Ed Soja, Bill Stites, Beverly Taylor, Evalyn Tennant, Leo Villalon, Vanessa Watson, Ian Yeboah, and probably many more people than that. My debt to Ed Soja is obvious from the first chapter, but I thank all of my mentors, stretching from David Vail, Sarah McMahon, and especially Randy Stakeman at Bowdoin through to Ed, John Friedmann, Susannah Hecht, Judy Carney, Ned Alpers, Nick Entrikin, Michael Curry, Jim Coleman, Steve Commins, and most of all Gerry Hale at UCLA, for making me work more than my brain wants to on its own to make my work better, if still never what it could be. Jenny Robinson has read these chapters thoroughly, talked me through the ideas, and offered constant encouragement, challenging me to think harder

## **x | Acknowledgments**

about the material, sharing so much of her world, thinking through life's puzzles together. None of these people above, I hasten to add, can be blamed for any shortcomings this book has – its faults are entirely my own.

My graduate students at the University of Kansas have been a constant source of ideas for the book over the years: Ken Aikins, Almokhtar Attwairi, Emmanuel Birdling, Mohamed Dosi, Victoria Downey, Levi Gahman, Ryan Gibb, Aaron Gilbreath, Ryan Good, Ang Gray, Abdi Gutale, Andy Hilburn, Megan Holroyd, Hilary Hungerford, Ryan Lash, Josh Long, Anton Menning, Cort Miller, Makame Muhajir, John Oakes, Amy Potter, Heather Putnam, Peter Sam, Peter Self, Jamie Shinn, Shimantini Shome, Sarah Smiley, Luke Struckman, and Karen Wetugi. Muhajir has been a cheerful and thoughtful analyst of this project from the beginning. I thank him, and his entire family, for their help and hospitality in Zanzibar on many occasions. Abdi is a great part of any understanding I've gained, however incomplete it may be, of Mogadishu. I thank Anton for my appreciation, however incomplete it also may be, of the US Army in that same city. Peter and Ken helped me immensely in gaining a sense of Accra, as Mokhtar has done with Tripoli, Emmanuel with Maiduguri, and Hilary with Niamey.

Anyone who reads this book will see my debts to Ali Zungu (Ali Hasan Ali) in numerous places, and to Zuhura Abdulrahim Mohamed, and their wonderful children, for their warm friendship and ideas, to say nothing of their hospitality to Sarah, Jamie, Megan, Heather, and others. My other Zanzibari family, Jussy Singh, Parmukh Singh, and Kul Kaur, and all of my neighbors in Kikwajuni, Mwera, and Mazizini, are as ever an inspiration.

I've been blessed with the priceless opportunity to share ideas that have gone into this book with colleagues at the University of Kansas, and their feedback has contributed to its improvement. Byron Caminero-Santangelo, in particular, has read and commented on several chapters and helped keep me sane in the traumas of basketball season. In addition, the comments and suggestions of Glenn Adams, Folabo Ajayi-Soyinka, Shawn Alexander, Elif Andac, Victor Bailey, Jonathan Boyarin, Hannah Britton, Chris Brown, Brian Daldorff, Khalid El-Hassan, Johan Feddema, Tanya Golash-Boza, Majid Hannoum, Susan Harris, Thomas Heilke, Bob Hemenway, Peter Herlihy, Paul Hotvedt, Jane Irungu, Jay Johnson, John Kennedy, Liz MacGonagle, Yoonmi Nam, Ebenezer Obadare, Peter

Ojiambo, Shannon O'Lear, Robin Rowland, Gitti Salami, Pete Shortridge, and probably more colleagues than that have been helpful. As ever, my family, Atlee and Phebe Myers and Melanie Hepburn, have helped me through the long process of producing this book through their encouragement, companionship, and love.

I finally declared myself an urban geographer in 2000. I was sitting in a geography department meeting at the University of Kansas, where the faculty was considering a list of courses that had not been taught in five years for possible elimination from our course list. A class entitled 'Advanced Urban Geography' was on the chopping block because, the chair was saying, we had no faculty members who did advanced urban geography. I sheepishly suggested that, actually, I could teach this course. In the days that followed my rescue of Advanced Urban Geography from erasure, it dawned on me that nearly every publication I had ever had was a piece of urban geography. I started to trace out why I would not have been thought of – or have thought of myself – as an urban geographer. In graduate school, I had taken more graduate course work in urban planning than I had in geography, but somehow, somewhere in the subliminal messages of my trip through the 'LA School' of urban studies during a particularly heady time, my urban geography credentials earned an asterisk, as an exception, even in my own head, because I studied cities in Africa. This is a book about removing the asterisk on cities in Africa.



**Africa**

This map illustrates the continent of Africa with its international boundaries and major urban centers. Key geographical features include the Mediterranean Sea to the north, the Red Sea to the northeast, and the Atlantic Ocean to the west and south. The vast Sahara Desert dominates the northern interior. Major rivers such as the Nile, Niger, Congo, and Orange are depicted. The map also shows the Strait of Gibraltar, the Canary Islands, and Madagascar.

**Legend:**

- international boundary
- - - - disputed boundary
- capital city
- other city or town

**Country Abbreviations:**

- GA GAMBIA
- G-B GUINEA BISSAU
- EQ G EQUATORIAL GUINEA

**Scale:**

- 500 miles
- 1,000 km

1,000km

## Contents

Figures and tables|vi Abbreviations|vii

Acknowledgments|xiii Map|xii

Introduction. . . . . 1

1 What if the postmetropolis is Lusaka? . . . . 21

2 Postcolonial cities . . . . . 43

3 (I)n(f)ormal cities. . . . . 70

4 Governing Africa's cities. . . . . 104

5 Wounded city . . . . . 138

6 Cosmopolitan cities. . . . . 162

Conclusion . . . . . 191

Bibliography|199

Index|233

# Figures and tables

## Figures

- 1.1 The pirates of Ng'ombe . . . . . 22
- 2.1 Nyerere Square, Dodoma, Tanzania . . . . . 44

## Tables

- 0.1 Population estimates for selected cities . . . . . 8
- 2.1 Africa's largest cities. . . . . 52
- 3.1 Percentage of male city residents employed in informal sector  
by shelter deprivation status. . . . . 75
- 3.2 'Slum components' for selected cities . . . . . 76
- 3.3 Percentage of the urban population in those cities' countries  
listed as being slum households in slum areas. . . . . 76
- 3.4 Changes over time in deprivation status for households in  
Cape Town, Accra, and Dar es Salaam . . . . . 87

# Introduction

As African societies urbanize, it becomes evident that they do so in ways that challenge prevailing theories and models of urban geography, sociology, anthropology, and planning. But these are just as surely cities in ‘a world of cities’ (Robinson 2004). My aim in this book is to use African urban concepts and experiences to speak back to theoretical and practical concerns in urban studies and disciplines that study cities more generally, while at the same time contributing to African studies as a field. I am arguing for a revision – a seeing again, and a revising – of how cities in Africa are discussed and written about in both urban studies and African studies.

Most urban social studies are still built on theories utilizing US or European cities to stand as the universal models, or measuring cities in non-Western settings by the models and metrics of the West. As the geographer Jenny Robinson (2006: x) has shown, African cities are still typically studied through the lens of development, or in a manner that remains stuck, as her book’s subtitle puts it, ‘between modernity and development,’ where ‘these “other” cities have been thought to borrow their modernity from wealthier contexts.’ Most of the time, to say that African cities come up short in measurements based on Western indicators in these studies is an understatement. We are more likely to see what the urbanist Edgar Pieterse (2008a: 2) describes as ‘a relentless catalogue of the utterly devastating conditions that characterize the daily lives of the majority’ living in African cities.

Of course, as Robinson’s and Pieterse’s books show, African urban studies is emerging, or re-emerging, in its own right (e.g. Beall et al. 2010; Bryceson and Potts 2006; Demissie 2007a; Freund 2007; Grant 2009; Mbembe and Nuttall 2008; Murray 2008a; Pieterse 2010; Simone 2004, 2010; Simone and Abouhiani 2005; Weiss 2009). There is a significant literature of African urbanization which began more than fifty years ago, and it certainly continued to build throughout all of this half-century (e.g. Epstein 1958; Kuper et al. 1958; Cohen 1969; Mitchell 1969; Cooper 1983; O’Connor 1983; Stren 1985, 1994; Mabogunje 1990; or Simon 1992). In general, though, urban studies retreated to the background on the continent from the late 1960s to

## 2 | Introduction

the early 1990s, even leading some to speak of a rural bias to African studies scholarship (Freund 2007). The last ten years have brought a resurgence of interest in urban Africa in the social sciences and humanities. In this decade, several important historical surveys of urbanization in Africa have appeared, along with intensive and often multidisciplinary studies of individual cities in Africa, and edited volumes examining an eclectic variety of the continent's cities (in addition to those cited above, see: Bekker and Leilde 2006; Coquery-Vidrovitch 2005a; Falola and Salm 2004, 2005; Goodwin 2006; or McDonald 2008). Within virtually every African country, there is also a growing research capacity on urban studies questions, resulting in impressive, empirically rich, and theoretically engaged analyses on many cities, but with more narrow global distribution; for Tanzanian examples, see the works of Fred Lerise (2005, 2000), Wilbard Kombe (2005), Lusugga Kironde (2000), or Tumsifu Nnkya (2007); Nigeria's urban research internally is a library of its own (Adama 2007; Ayeni 1998; Elleh 2002; Ikejiofor 2006); and South Africa, Ghana, Zambia, Cameroon, Senegal, Niger, Kenya, and many other countries have substantial urban research capacity. In this book, I seek to expand on the trend encouraging African studies and urban studies scholars to engage with the vibrancy and complexity of African cities with fresh eyes, and to learn from African scholarship.

### **African cities, African studies, and urban studies**

What is going on in African cities that anyone interested in cities or anyone interested in Africa should care about? Answering this question should immediately appear to be an impossible undertaking. The breadth, diversity, and complexity of the continent and its urban areas seem to make it absurd and reductionist to speak of 'the African city,' or even of 'African cities,' as my title has, as if there is a type, or even several types that belong to a distinct set. Where it once seemed plausible to model *an* African city – even if, as in the case of geographer Anthony O'Connor (1983), one's attempt led to not one but six types – it now seems illogical to shoehorn cities into types just because they reside on the same continent.

And yet over and over again, media voices and scholars alike make exactly this sort of generalizing logic the prevailing mode of thinking about 'Africa' and its cities. What the anthropologist James Ferguson (2006: 2) calls 'this Africa talk' has, as he puts it, 'a certain intensity, full of anguished energy and (often vague) moral concern.' Ferguson

(ibid.: 3) argues that in his discipline of anthropology many colleagues have taken the ‘principled’ but ‘ineffective’ tactic of ‘refusing the very category of “Africa,”’ instead writing about only the narrow corner of the continent that they have come to know. He sees this as an ineffective tactic because it leaves the discussion of ‘Africa’ to the ‘journalistic and policy visions’ that are ‘misleading, factually incorrect, and often racist’ (ibid.: 3).

Other scholarly disciplines, notably political science, continue quite confidently with their discussions of ‘Africa,’ typically as a place of grand and broad crisis. Political scientist Robert Bates tellingly entitled his 2008 book *When Things Fell Apart: State Failure in Late-Century Africa*, and he begins it with these two sentences: ‘In late-century Africa, things fell apart. By way of illustration, consider Figure 1.1, which lists civil wars in African countries from 1970 to 1995, as judged by the World Bank’ (Bates 2008: 1). The figure lists only nineteen countries, on a continent with more than fifty, and its bizarre calculations for what constitutes a civil war, with each year a full year of war across a whole country by the graph, when most were localized geographically and distinct temporally within that year, make it as ‘misleading [and] factually incorrect’ as the journalistic visions Ferguson critiques. For just one example, the occasional skirmishes of the Cassamance region of Senegal which cause that country to appear on Bates’s chart from 1990 straight through to 1995 could not be remotely comparable militarily to the long all-out civil war of Mozambique, 1975–92 on the chart, a war that created millions of refugees and caused hundreds of thousands of deaths. One would be hard pressed to find a serious analyst of Senegal who would describe it as a country in the grips of ‘state failure’ in ‘late-century Africa’ alongside Somalia, just below it on this chart. It is as if the staggering differences between places and circumstances and history and geography just don’t matter – in Bates’s (ibid.: 16–29) aptly labeled ‘fable’ of African politics all of ‘Africa’ is in the throes of ‘state failure’ because of the ‘specialists in violence’ that seek the ‘rewards of predation’ that government leadership offers.

The Africa-wide fable-making is not much different when we come to the discussion of cities. In urban studies, it is often the case that theorists and scholars think and write across the whole of the continent, and often in a way that is ‘obsessed with the less palatable particularities of African [urban] politics and society’ (Chabal 2009: 18). Although there is some evidence here and there of changes, it

## 4 | Introduction

is still generally the case that cities in Africa are ignored, banished to a different, other, lesser category of not-quite cities, or held up as examples of all that can go wrong with urbanism in much of both the mainstream and even critical urban literature. As more and more global urban studies scholarship does now seek to engage with the growing body of work of Africanist urbanists, it is nonetheless still not uncommon to find a token Africa article in edited volumes, written by one of a small handful of scholars, burdened with the tall order of speaking to cities in 'Africa.'

It is impossible and unhelpful to attempt to catalog every major urban studies scholar and her or his shortcomings in relation to Africa. A growing set of exceptions exist to the trends I am suggesting, and it is rather daunting to imagine demanding all urbanists take full account of African cities in developing their analyses. But I think it is vital to highlight some examples of the consequences that flow from the visions of Africa that still prevail in the urban disciplines, particularly urban geography. For instance, in mainstream textbooks of urban geography, African cities are typically discussed in a segregated chapter about 'urbanization in the less developed countries' (Knox and McCarthy 2005: 171) or 'cities in the less developed world' (Kaplan et al. 2004: 399) that is somewhere near the back of the book. In a best-case scenario (Pacione 2004: 429–576), 'urban geography in the Third World' might comprise about a third of the book; but it is still carved out as a distinct, lesser kind of urban geography, and African cases take a back seat to those of Latin America and Asia.

Of course, of necessity such books must simplify and generalize; likewise we can see that the market for most urban textbooks in English is skewed toward the developed West, such that it is unsurprising to find that their coverage of cities in Africa is diminished. Yet the analysis of the 'Third World' in these texts is substantively distinct, too. For instance, the well-researched catalog of environmental problems in Third World cities that comprises Chapter 28 in geographer Michael Pacione's enormous textbook *Urban Geography: A Global Perspective* presents no sense that anyone in these cities does anything about their problems. In fact, the proliferation of community, public sector, and global initiatives aimed at environmental governance in Asia, Africa, and Latin America is astounding. The Western city chapters are by contrast full of juxtaposition of problem with policy. The highly generalized discussion of rampant corruption in Third World urban governance in Chapter 29, similarly, appears without

comparison to widespread forms of corruption of urban governance in more developed cities. And this is a skewing one finds in the best of the mainstream textbook approaches in urban geography.

One might conclude that perhaps the more economic mainstream textbook approaches devalue African creativity or urban cultures, and that a humanistic approach in the field might lend itself to more sensitive theory. Yet humanistic geography is often no more progressive in dealing with Africa or African cities than mainstream urban textbooks; and the reality is that non-Africanists among humanistic cultural geographers don't really even venture into discussions of African cities at all, referencing the continent only as a repository of ancient, backward, rural traditions (Sack 1997: 15; Sack 2002).

The dominant voices of contemporary urban studies, those of critical, progressive, or materialist thinkers, still seem sometimes to be several steps off the mark in their thinking in relation to Africa. Although the urbanist David Harvey has inspired a number of important scholars who work on African cities, he himself has little to say about Africa in most of his works. Where he does make reference to the continent, for instance in his book *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference*, the references are suggestive of the problem with starting from Harvey to try to understand African cities. He notes that as 'places in the city get red-lined for mortgage finance, the people who live in them get written off as worthless, in the same way that much of Africa gets written off as a basket-case' (Harvey 1996: 320). On one hand, this is suggestive of the keen understanding of Africa as a region struggling with misrepresentation as well as underdevelopment evident in several of Harvey's works, such as *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Harvey 2005). On the other hand, the *urban* portion of Harvey's image, 'the city,' clearly belongs to the West here, and, despite his appreciation for the internal heterogeneity of places in general, it is not implied that *parts* of African *cities* would be written off in the manner that parts of Western cities are written off, but that 'much of Africa' is written off that way. And Harvey thus falls into a similar write-off. Harvey belongs at the end of the spectrum identified by Pieterse (2008a: 2) where urban scholars and policy activists gather who 'insist that without addressing the framing conditions of the global economy it is not possible to solve urban poverty.' Henri Lefebvre, Doreen Massey, Saskia Sassen, Manuel Castells, and many other widely cited stars of urban studies, like Harvey, seldom make reference to Africa in their works, or put



## 6 | Introduction

its cities in footnotes and margins, even as they may also belong at this progressive end of the spectrum. This end of the spectrum may be on target about ‘the framing conditions of the global economy,’ but it is continually missing opportunities for seeing African cities as important loci of global processes or generators of urban stories worth telling and worth learning from.

When critical urbanists who have not made a career out of the study of African cities do turn their attention to the continent, what we find in their scholarship may not be much of an improvement. Mike Davis, in *Planet of Slums*, devotes a considerable amount of attention to the continent’s cities. Unfortunately, from the book’s first sentence, which imagines a woman giving birth ‘in the Lagos slum of Ajegunle’ as part of a Dickensian vision of megacities in a Third World hell, it is an extreme portrait (Davis 2005: 1; Fredericks 2009). We read of ‘Kinshasa, Luanda, Khartoum, Dar es Salaam’ and other African cities as growing ‘prodigiously despite ruined import-substitution industries, shrunken public sectors, and downwardly mobile middle classes,’ and in his crisis-driven narrative he notes that ‘the African situation, of course, is more extreme’ (Davis 2005: 16, 18). He uses United Nations (UN) Habitat data for a chart that shows more than 75 percent of the urban population of Nigeria (79.2 percent), Tanzania (92.1 percent), Ethiopia (99.4 percent), and Sudan (85.7 percent) living in ‘slums’ where nearly all other developing countries listed have percentages below the 50 percent mark, without any critical discussion of where these data come from or what really constitutes a slum. Having spent two decades studying Tanzanian cities, I cannot fathom how one would conclude that more than nine out of ten urban Tanzanians live in ‘slums,’ if slums are equated with the ghoulish belching squalor Davis portrays (I discuss these data in Chapter 3 in more detail). Davis (ibid.: 19) is so fixated on exploding slums, with no hope for poverty alleviation, and urbanisms that seem to him comprised mostly of ‘pollution, excrement, and decay,’ that one often loses the valuable insights and broad reading behind the book, such as his dissection of the ‘brutal tectonics of neoliberal globalization’ (ibid.: 174). He is so driven toward the worst of the worst-case scenarios and ‘pathologies’ that we, the readers, can only abandon hope, and turn tail heading elsewhere (ibid.: 128).

Thus, with Ferguson’s argument that African studies scholarship needs to challenge this sort of ‘Africa talk’ in mind, in this book I take on the task of seeing how ‘African’ cities are or can be repres-