Mobility, Belonging, and Governance in Africa's Urban Estuaries

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There has recently been considerable fanfare about the global urban age.[1] As the majority of people worldwide become urbanized, cities will chart our future politics and societies. Across sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere in the developing world, scholars and policymakers have greeted widespread urbanization with considerable trepidation.[2] To be sure, the numbers are daunting. Although estimates are imprecise, Africa's urban population may double in the next 20 years from 294 million people in 2000 to 742 million by 2030. By 2050 that number may double again to 1.2 billion.[3] Widespread urban growth is all but inevitable regardless of how much leaders wish to halt urbanization through investment in rural areas. Many scholarly and policy debates are haunted by the specters of anomie, violence, and social fragmentation that informed Kaplan's "Coming Anarchy" almost 20 years ago.[4] Some counter the projections of unending and uncontrolled growth, challenging global figures and calling for temperance among the more Malthusian alarmists.[5] More technocratic accounts call for improved urban management and governance. Such calls, while necessary and largely self-evident, are often unrealistic, driven more by authorities' normative visions of what cities should be than by the desires and realities of people and processes now occupying them.

In the rush to respond to real or imagined numbers, observers often overlook the distinctive nature of sub-Saharan African urbanization and the sociopolitical forms it engenders. Rapidly expanding and diversifying urban

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populations—which continue to be characterized by high levels of mobility and limited interaction with formal state institutions—necessitate reconsidering the meaning of integration, citizenship, and public engagement. While we must be wary of speaking in metaphors, the notion of the estuary captures the distinctiveness of a given space shaped by multiple agents, bound largely by their transience and marginalization. It also points to the diverse and complex forms of regulation that bring together competing and occasionally complementary authority systems.[6]

Many of these estuarial zones in and around cities initially appear ungoverned and remain largely beyond the reach of elected officials and constitutional orders. Yet these are not typically anarchic spaces. Violence and exploitation may well be the social expressions of new political orders. Elsewhere emerging regimes are decidedly less violent, accommodating enormous social heterogeneity and mobility in relatively peaceful conviviality. A more holistic, worm's eye perspective on governance in the new urban spaces demands that we speak of regulation beyond states as the norm, not as a temporary deviation or failure.[7] In doing so, we must reconsider what kinds of politics matter: while national or regional politics continue to be important, so too are the micro-level processes taking place at the urban or suburban level. In all cases we cannot view these processes in isolation since they too are shaped by translocal and transnational connections that create normative orders we have only begun to imagine.

The Nature of African Urbanization and Emerging Urban Estuaries

Analyzing the future of African urbanism requires first understanding the fundamental demographic and economic dynamics at work. These trends can then be compared to the longstanding presumptions underlying migrant integration and urban governance. In doing so, a form of urbanization and social formation emerges that at once resonates with elements of the U.S. and European experience and uncovers forms of citizenship and political organization that may be unfamiliar and unsettling.

As noted above, debate continues over the scale of African urbanization and the effect of migration on urban growth. While the United Nations Human Settlements Programme and other organizations project that Africa will cross the 50 percent urban threshold in the coming decade, dissenters suggest a slower rate.[8] Others note that migration has been overplayed and that growth is largely due to a natural increase—or alternatively, that the figures capture oscillating movements that have been ongoing for decades, which is not true urbaniza-

tion. They highlight how in countries such as Kenya, the urban population as a percentage of the total population appears to be declining. If this is the case, then why are African cities garnering so much attention, and why do visitors and residents alike marvel at their expanding sprawl and seeming unruliness?

In many ways, debating the shifts between rural and urban primacy and the role of migration in urban growth only distracts us from the incontrovertible facts. Regardless of whether more people live in cities than in rural areas, growth rates in both remain generally high, resulting in significant absolute increases in urban residents.[9] This trend occurs even where urban populations may be declining relative to rural ones. Similarly, even if migration means that much of the growth is partial or temporary, there is little doubt that people are regularly present in cities—and they are helping to transform the politics and economies of the countries where they reside. Given the precariousness of land tenure, the constant search for economic opportunities, and a number of other factors, people also remain highly mobile within cities. A disaggregated gaze helps crystallize the importance of these dynamics. While not all cities will become the next Lagos or Cairo, populations in many cities and smaller towns are growing dramatically; mobility, thus, remains a defining factor in characterizing African urbanization.

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A number of characteristics and qualifications are important in understanding urbanization in sub-Saharan Africa. First, the data available for characterizing rates of urbanization and migration across the African continent are of variable—mostly poor—quality. Indeed, the debates mentioned above often stem from issues of data quality. Although macro-level trends are clearly evident from national censuses and other sources, including satellite photos and other means of evaluating settlement patterns, such sources have their limits. Rarely do they reveal the multifaceted and social nature of human mobility. If nothing else, an examination such as this one should reveal the importance of developing more fine-grained, spatially disaggregated information on demographic trends that goes beyond enumerating people or assessing their material and health status.

Second, although international and domestic forms of migration are megatrends within sub-Saharan Africa, human mobility nonetheless is not the sole or even the primary driver of the expansion of the continent's urban spaces. Although fertility rates are often lower in urban areas than in rural areas, they remain relatively high.[10] In Johannesburg, one of the continent's wealthiest cities

and one with relatively high population growth rates, migration, and immigration account for just one quarter of total growth. However, this percentage is considerably higher when examining Ekhureleni, an adjoining municipality.[11] This alone asks two tasks of observers: that we situate migration patterns within broader demographic trends and that, where possible, we spatially disaggregate our discussion, drawing attention to those municipalities, neighborhoods, or "zones" most affected by human mobility.

Three characteristics warrant attention in considering the relationship between urbanization and African socioeconomic and political formations. First, unlike the urbanization of previous generations, current population growth in African cities is not accompanied by rapidly expanding labor demands. Despite remarkable growth rates over the past decade—at least when economic growth is measured in terms of GDP per capita—this trend has not translated into widespread employment opportunities.[12] While high levels of informal and petty trade have long characterized African cities, we are just beginning to see large metropolises—or at least large sections of them—where there are only slim prospects of formal or even regular wage earning.

Second, urbanization is dramatically uneven. Even within sub-Saharan Africa there is not a singular story. Eastern Africa was only 21 percent urbanized in 2008. Central Western Africa was 42 percent urbanized, Southern Africa 46 percent.[13] We often focus on the continent's economic capitals such as Accra, Nairobi, Johannesburg, or even Duala.[14] However, the most rapid growth is happening in secondary cities, small towns, and cities on the urban periphery.[15] This is especially the case when we look at migration-related growth. For many years, for example, Kenya's fastest growing settlement was not Nairobi itself, but Ongata Rongai, a small trading post located just beyond the edge of Nairobi's administrative borders. Similarly, Johannesburg has grown more slowly than Ekhureleni, its more affordable if less prosperous neighbor to the east.[16] Theodore Trefon speaks about "the suburbs of the suburbs" in Congo, spaces that just a few years ago bore the outward appearance of villages or other rural settings.[17] Such periurban growth is not only the consequence of new arrivals to the city, but also due to people moving out of the city centers. In some instances these are the countries' elite, well-connected, or upwardly mobile individuals who are evacuating inner-city neighborhoods in favor of the space and security new periurban estates and gated communities provide.[18]

This discussion about the location of urbanization leads to a final point regarding the intersection of urbanization and formal institutions. According to J.M. Lusugga Kironde, 70 percent of Dar es Salaam's urban residents were living

outside of formally planned areas by 1979.[19] This was due in part to the severe anti-urban bias of the government that wished to discourage urbanization and avoid legitimizing that which had already occurred. However, de facto urban spaces have outpaced planning and regulatory initiatives almost everywhere.[20] Such initiatives have done little to slow urban expansion in terms of population or geography—the type of expansion that further evokes the Malthusian dystopian vision conjured by the prospect of an ever-expanding pool of the urban unemployed. To be sure, the most rapid urban transformations often occur in spaces where centralized states are either absent, frustrate local residents' economic and social projects, or are overtly hostile to the poor and newly urbanized. As such, nearly all expansion of African cities is mainly manifested in slums: "between 1990 and 2000, slum areas grew at a rate of 4.53 percent whilst overall urban growth rates were 4.58 percent in the same period."[21]

This article will focus on the combination of high growth, continued movements, and relatively weak formal regulatory infrastructure seen in urban Africa. In his 2011 book *Arrival City*, Doug Saunders draws attention to the suburban nature of migration and urbanization. He states that while we typically speak about urban growth in aggregate, even within a city particular zones tend to house the vast majority of new arrivals and highly mobile people.[22] Diepsloot, an area just outside of Johannesburg that was farmland about 15 years ago, illustrates these trends. This area was established originally to temporarily house a few thousand people displaced by urban development programs and shifting agricultural practices. It now hosts tens of thousands of people from across the country as well as from its neighboring countries, including Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and even Kenya and Somalia.[23] Similar transformations are occurring along the edges, and sometimes in the middle, of cities such as Kinshasa, Nairobi, Maputo, and elsewhere. These urban estuaries—largely unregulated meeting places of multiple human flows—are at once unstable and fertile grounds.[24]

Much like natural estuaries where the interaction between tides and rivers create unique and dynamic ecosystems, these urban gateways generate distinct sociopolitical forms through the multiple movements and dynamics taking place within them. In these zones, cultural and linguistic heterogeneity are often the norm, not the exception. Urban estuaries are generating greater disparities of wealth, language, and nationality, along with diverse gender roles and life trajectories, among other effects. With these changes come intergenerational tensions in both migrant sending and receiving communities as social roles change. This type of "globalization from below" reflects a potentially fundamental sociopolitical transformation. Through the geographic movements of various peoples

into, out of, and within cities, urban spaces that for many years had only tenuous connections elsewhere are now becoming nodes in national and diaspora networks of social and economic exchange. But these are not unified or stable communities; rather, they are communities consistently being reshaped by the movements of new people, events taking place elsewhere, and the interactions of those meeting on Africa's city streets.[25]

The obvious question is whether these diverse patterns of social life and regulation are themselves transient and whether they parallel previous patterns, such as the hybrid orders that characterized rapid urbanization in Europe or North America. For example, Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* and Martin Scorsese's *Gangs of New York* depict the high levels of transience, inequality, and violence now seen in many African cities. A number of factors—some already discussed—suggest that while the current regimes may be transient, they are unlikely to settle into state-centric orders similar to those seen in London or New York. Perhaps the most obvious difference stems from the compression of time and space engendered by the connections and regular shifts between rural (or periurban) and urban areas. For a significant number of domestic migrants and a smaller number of international ones, urban spaces serve more as stations in ongoing journeys than as final destinations. For many migrants, the primary goal is to extract urban resources to subsidize the "real" life they live or imagine elsewhere. Indeed, in many instances spouses and children remain elsewhere while single men and women earn money in the cities to sustain them. Although new arrivals may establish second urban families, ethnic and political ties elsewhere may prevent full social integration into the communities where they reside. Intentions to retire in the countryside or move elsewhere further limit their financial and emotional investments. When migrants arrive seeking protection from conflict and persecution, they often return home or move on when conditions allow. This ongoing orientation to multiple peoples and places inculcates migrants in a permanent temporariness in which they actively resist incorporation.[26] Given the insecurity of land tenure, the possibility of violence, and ongoing economic deprivation, migrants often maintain feet in multiple sites without firmly rooting themselves in any one.[27]

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What we see in these environments are populations in which the possibility of a strong, central social or political authority is deeply challenged. So too

is the possibility of achieving—should anyone want to—a strong, territorially bound set of allegiances that could entrench and embed state institutions. Although Africa's colonial and post-colonial cities have been the one geographic site where state powers are most evident, they are rarely able to provide for or are interested in the enforcement of strong regulations in systematic ways across an urban space.[28] Moreover, with only a limited capacity to provide services such as education, health, and security, the state offers little incentive to residents for engagement. Harassment by politicians or the police only bolsters such reticence. Even in South Africa, arguably the continent's strongest state, these processes are negotiated on the ground through panoply of rationalities and calculations, sometimes involving laws and state actors but not always in predictable ways.[29]

Integration and Authority

So where does this leave us? Is this the atomized disorder that Kaplan described many years ago?[30] In an article about patterns of social integration and solidarity, Dan Bulley tries to address this issue by suggesting that where everyone is both guest and host, everyone is a hostage—no one sets the terms of engagement, and all are subject to everyone else's will.[31] Jacques Derrida proffers the term "hostipitality" to connote the hostility such situations of coerced hospitality tend to generate.[32] Hostility and a manifestation of nativist rhetoric is certainly one possible outcome. Indeed, at first glance it explains what has been among the most visible reactions to immigrants and outsiders across countries in Africa. Few in South Africa will forget the 2008 violence in which more than 60 were killed and 120,000 displaced in a melee driven by violent efforts to claim space in the name of one's ethnicity, political party, or nationality.[33] But it is a facile explanation at best to claim that there are no productive or potentially beneficial systems of membership and authority simply because the sociopolitical order does not resemble those in urban centers elsewhere.

The remainder of this article reviews the means and technologies through which varied forms of belonging and systems of allocating rights and privileges are taking shape in environments with weak institutions and few dominant social groups. First, broad indicators of social capital—a precursor to the formation of bounded (if not spatially defined) identities—will be considered. Second, the role of religious affiliations will be explored before touching on other forms of membership and organization: tactical cosmopolitanism and a kind of market-based liberalism. These are but examples of the multiple social and political regimes that are now taking shape.[34]

Religious, cultural, or economic collective participation can be important mechanisms for forging the social connections necessary to entrench common social and political institutions within a population. However, given African urban populations' volatility and translocalism, social networks are often spread thinly across many people and places. As such, it comes as little surprise that there are remarkably low levels of trust between various ethnic groups and national groups.[35] What is more important for our purposes, however, is the limited trust and bonds within these groups. Even among citizens in both Johannesburg and Maputo, levels of social capital—the amount of trust for each other and the transparency of their institutions—are strikingly low.[36] Nairobi offers a slightly more trusting environment, although here too the data reflect deep tensions. Networks of clans, neighborhoods, or coreligionists undoubtedly exist, but these are often fragmented and purely instrumental, organized without an explicit recognition or sense of mutual obligation to those beyond familial boundaries.[37] Instead, they are often limited to assisting others in overcoming immediate risks or returning a corpse to a country or community of origin.[38] Neither migrants nor the ostensible host population present a community or set of overlapping institutions that are engaged in a collective project. These may eventually cohere into some form of widespread norm or implicit sense of a collective enterprise but, given the populations' dynamics and the limited engagement with common institutions, such an outcome seems particularly unlikely. Instead, groups continue to convene together over specific events—a burial, a police attack, an eviction—but remain highly tactical and reactive, often unable to engage in strategic broader action to shift laws, attitudes, or address structural obstacles.

Religion is the one notable exception to the relative absence of social organization among the populations under discussion. Throughout Europe and Asia, religious institutions have played central roles in binding populations to each other and often in excluding everyone else. Where the state has weak influence, religious institutions can help generate alternative subjectivities and publics. A combination of factors, however, including the increasing heterogeneity of the urban population, effectively denies the possibility that religious institutions can serve a similar role in contemporary African cities. Among the Nairobi citizenry we surveyed, for example, 65.6 percent were Protestant, 30.6 percent Catholic, and 2.7 percent Muslim, with only 0.3 percent associating with no religion. In Johannesburg, the sample was 59.7 percent Protestant, 14.1 percent Catholic, 6.8 percent Muslim, and 18.8 percent unaffiliated.[39] While urban Africans are strongly religious, the denominational divisions within those affiliations mean religion may divide more than unify. The often fractured and

conflict-ridden relationships among churches—organizations often oriented more towards profits than prophesy—potentially deny possibilities for shared ethics and mechanisms of mutual support.

Along with the sheer diversity of competing claims for religion and belonging, the liturgical content of many churches serves to further undermine the possible emergence of a territorially bound or state-centered subjectivity. This is perhaps most visible in the ever expanding pool of Pentecostal churches operating within Africa's urban centers. At one level, these inclusive and often massive institutions offer the possibility of bridging barriers between various groups. As one Zimbabwean migrant in Johannesburg stated, "In the church, they help us in many ways, no matter where you come from, they just help you."[40] While many churches offer a sense of salvation in the form of "health and wealth," they are distinctly post-territorial in their outlook. It is important to note that many migrants build on their strong connections to institutions in Nigeria, Ghana, Congo, and the United States. For many of the churches' founders—who are themselves migrants—their current pulpit is merely a place through which they can enter a global social universe. Others are sent on a mission to Kenya, Mozambique, or elsewhere to help counter postcolonial malaise—including corruption and state oppression—with a message of truth. Moreover, while they may preach tolerance, many of these churches generate a set of translocal and often antipolitical tenets of belonging. These fragmentary and often conflict-ridden sources of religious authority further deny the state—or indeed even a single church—the possibility of naming what is good and the direction the collective should follow.

Religion, at least as described above, provides a mechanism that allows people to be in a place but as neither host nor guest. In this way, participation in religion is a form of tactical cosmopolitanism on the part of migrants.[41] Recognizing ascendant forms of exclusion levied against them, migrants draw on a variegated language of belonging that makes claims to the city while positioning them in an ephemeral, superior, and unrooted condition through which they can escape localized social and political obligations. These are not necessarily grounded in normative ideas of openness or intended to promote universal values. Rather, migrants practically and rhetorically draw on various and often competing systems of cosmopolitan rights and rhetoric to insinuate themselves, however shallowly, in the networks and spaces needed to achieve their specific practical goals. These include pan-Africanism, human rights rhetoric, and the language of elite cosmopolitanism—of being global players in the new age. Unlike transnationalism, which is often about belonging to multiple communities

or shuttling between them, these are more decentered tactics that enable migrants to participate in many worlds without being bound by any one.

In Ongata Rongai, a rapidly growing region on Nairobi's periphery, a remarkable means of denying simple categorization between hosts and outsiders has emerged.[42] Although technically outside of the city, the settlement's proximity to main transport routes and the availability of land has made it an attractive space for migrants moving out of Nairobi and those moving toward it. The land's original inhabitants were Maasai—at least as understood by almost all of the site's current residents—but they have largely evacuated the settlement, selling off their land and taking their cattle elsewhere. In their place groups from all over Kenya have moved in. Although the Kikuyu are the largest group numerically, they by no means dominate the space or make exclusive claims to it. Indeed, no one does. In stark contrast to sites across urban Kenya, there seems to be a remarkably high level of ethnic mixing and peaceful conviviality in Ongata Rongai. Access to residential housing and business premises appears to be determined almost completely by market mechanisms, apart from the Olekasasi estate, which had become the preferred destination for the Somalis. When interviewed, officials and landowners all spoke of the need to ensure ethnic mixing and some level of conviviality.[43] This is not a form of integration managed by the state but by private landowners (often absentee) wishing to protect their investments without relying on suspect or expensive state institutions.

Rongai's market-driven schema does not even rely on regular coercive threats to maintain the order. Rather, residents have recognized the dangers of ethnic chauvinism in a space that no one group can dominate and, in response, they developed a kind of liberal ethos that provides everyone equal access. Here, discrimination is not based on one's origins, political affiliations, or religion, but rather on a willingness to play by unwritten and diffuse rules based largely on market principles. Although free markets effectively and notoriously disguise inequality, power, and other restrictions on freedoms, they nonetheless contrast with deeply seated and exclusive ethnic spatial patterns seen elsewhere. By allowing people to retain ethnic, religious, or other forms of extra-local loyalties—both religion and ethnicity remain highly visible in Rongai—residents may also inadvertently generate a kind of radical multiculturalism in which everyone is a sojourner, resulting in fewer ethnic or religious bases for exclusion.

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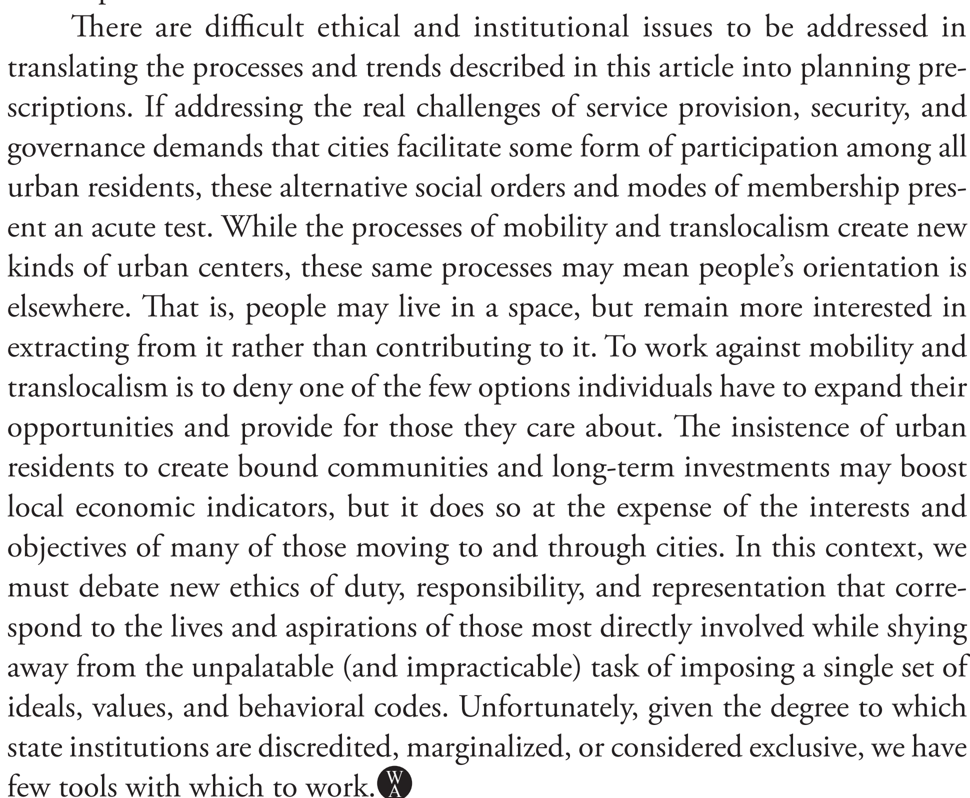
If nothing else, the paragraphs above suggest some of the possible means though which long-term residents, domestic migrants, and noncitizens are finding their way in a new and ever-changing estuarial landscape. Even domestic migrants may have as little in common with the people they find in the city as those coming from across international boundaries. The rapid expansion of urban populations and its concentration in particular urban gateway neighborhoods call into question the use of the term "locals" or "hosts" as typically employed when discussing migrant integration. It also suggests that the mechanisms through which rights to space and other resources are rationed vary and are often not state-centered. The ethics behind them—when regulatory systems are coherent enough for them to be identified—are similarly complex and deserving of careful consideration and attention.

Concluding Notes on Governance and the Challenge of Participation

The forms of belonging and sociality that we see emerging across many African cities are, as described in the previous pages, often side effects of efforts to achieve other economic, social, and even political goals. As such, they are not unified or strategic movements seeking to create an alternative, articulated order, although over time they may coalesce into such. Rather, they are a motley collection of actions undertaken by groups that are often fragmented by language, religion, legal status, and mutual distrust. However, they are able to swiftly combine disparate segments of the population according to current necessity and do so in ways not premised on their moral worth necessarily being realized through national membership.[44] Indeed, perhaps one of the most critical characteristics of the new forms of social mobilization taking shape is the degree to which they generate sociospatial forms of regulation and politics not centered on the state or formal political institutions. As Latham notes, such orientation and authorities do not spell the end of states, but rather suggest that we see them as one among many strategic actors operating across sub-Saharan Africa's urban landscapes.[45]

These alternative systems of regulation and the orientation of a population seeking usufruct rights or opportunities for transit raise broader questions. These questions concern issues of rights and duties associated with belonging, the meaning of citizenship, and the possibility of employing the forms of political participation that we typically see as inherent in pro-poor planning and accountability in local government. Much of the philosophical literature on cosmopolitanism and participation—a form of inclusion that recognizes, if not celebrates, diversity—demands mutual recognition and a set of at least minimal,

reciprocal obligations among all residents as well as a set of common rules for government engagement. While many authors focus on the state's obligations to build inclusive societies and others speak about countering xenophobia or other forms of discrimination, these imperatives typically stem from a model of political community comprised of parties that at least minimally recognize each other's legitimacy and right to space. In environments where significant elements of an urban population—both citizens and aliens—exist outside states' cognition or in direct opposition to states' policies, the terms of engagement are significantly altered. Without the presence of an alternative moral authority, increasingly heterogeneous normative frameworks will operate within Africa's urban spheres.



There are difficult ethical and institutional issues to be addressed in translating the processes and trends described in this article into planning prescriptions. If addressing the real challenges of service provision, security, and governance demands that cities facilitate some form of participation among all urban residents, these alternative social orders and modes of membership present an acute test. While the processes of mobility and translocalism create new kinds of urban centers, these same processes may mean people's orientation is elsewhere. That is, people may live in a space, but remain more interested in extracting from it rather than contributing to it. To work against mobility and translocalism is to deny one of the few options individuals have to expand their opportunities and provide for those they care about. The insistence of urban residents to create bound communities and long-term investments may boost local economic indicators, but it does so at the expense of the interests and objectives of many of those moving to and through cities. In this context, we must debate new ethics of duty, responsibility, and representation that correspond to the lives and aspirations of those most directly involved while shying away from the unpalatable (and impracticable) task of imposing a single set of ideals, values, and behavioral codes. Unfortunately, given the degree to which state institutions are discredited, marginalized, or considered exclusive, we have few tools with which to work.

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37. Vedaste Nzayabino, "Spiritual Ecology: The Role of the Church in Territorialising Belonging and its Impact on Integration of Migrants in South Africa" (MA thesis, Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, 2009); Marc Sommers, *Fear in Bongoland: Burundi Refugees in Urban Tanzania* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011).

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39. The foreign-born population in Johannesburg was more evenly divided with 39 percent Protestant, 28.5 percent Catholic, 26 percent Muslim, and 6.3 percent associating with no religion.

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