Preface

The aim of this second instalment of the *African Cities Reader* is to provide a space to illuminate emergent urbanisms of Africa in its continental and diasporic richness. The leitmotif of the contemporary globalising era is mobility, which references the incessant circulation of goods, services, ideas, technologies, imaginaries and money.

African cities are uniquely marked by disjunctive flows and circuits, but in ways that amplify both the intensity of mobility, and its shadow, fixity. The violent reverberations of colonialism in the processes of city living and building ensure that most urban dwellers are entangled in relationships of movement – as protagonists in migratory journeys or as economic or social funders of the journeys of others.

The concomitant costs and logistics are ubiquitous and demanding and they simultaneously generate conflict and co-operation, complicity and duplicity, cohesion and instability, all of which enhance a profound sense of entanglement and the desire for escape. The cultural worlds that are born of these processes remain largely invisible in the academic literature on African cities, although they live at the core of contemporary social and economic life. And this is to say nothing about the tedious movements, circulations and negotiations that are required to get by, or high, or down, or connected within any city. Moreover, when the possibility and necessity of movement is so extremely circumscribed by all manner of barriers, obstacles, fixtures, detours, dead-ends and disappointments, how can we fundamentally recast the trope – mobility – of the contemporary moment?

The ensemble of work between these covers serves up a different perspective on the dialectic of mobility. It offers a multitude of entry and jump-off points that encourage us to think differently about the relational scales, speeds and times that co-exist in the reproduction of urban space. Some of the work veers into theoretical discourse; other pieces offer artistic accounts of the phenomenological implications of forced migrations met with violence and barbed wire; others present poetic insights into the minutia of repair work associated with intensified mobility, with an ironic acknowledgement that so much mobility is interrupted by infrastructural failures and mechanical disrepair.

What is abundantly clear across these pages is that many urban worlds await to be explored and accounted for by paying closer attention to the details of social practices, political manoeuvres, economic ambitions and symbolic registers. The paradox of greater mobility and intensified barriers in African cities has an impact on all classes and social groups, and moreover, play out in the imaginaries of individual actors who 'live' our cities or try to escape them. We encourage you to enjoy this multi-directional exploration and hope it will take your own thinking and practice to a place deeply felt. As with the first *African Cities Reader*, we are struck by the constitutive emergence of pluralism, cosmopolitanism and diversity across Africa.

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