



HAL
open science

Book Review: For the city yet to come: changing African life in four cities

David M. Smith

► **To cite this version:**

David M. Smith. Book Review: For the city yet to come: changing African life in four cities. *cultural geographies*, 2006, 13 (3), pp.486-486. 10.1177/147447400601300320 . hal-00572003

HAL Id: hal-00572003

<https://hal.science/hal-00572003>

Submitted on 1 Mar 2011

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

many of these points, and establishes this text as an important contribution to the study of East and West in the muddled and contested spaces of everyday colonial interaction.

*School of Geography
University of Nottingham*

STEPHEN LEGG

For the city yet to come: changing African life in four cities. By Abdoul Maliq Simone. Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press. x + 297 pp. \$23.95 paper. ISBN 0 8223 3445 3.

This book is about life in contemporary African cities. Its central theme is that the difficult process of making a living in such places prompts people to engage in a variety of formal and informal arrangements, involving creative improvisation as opportunities for personal or group advantage present themselves. As the author explains, this invokes 'attempts to look at how African cities become a locus for the elaboration of translocal economies unfolding and deployed within logics and practices that stand aside from the usual notions of growth and development. Far from being marginal to contemporary processes of scalar recomposition and the reimagination of political communities, African cities can be seen as a frontier for a wide range of diffuse experimentation with the reconfiguration of bodies, territories, and social arrangements necessary to recalibrate technologies of control' (p. 2). As this suggests, a central feature of the processes involved is their spatiality. There are four case studies: the *Projet de Ville* in Pikine, a suburb of Dakar in Senegal; *Winterveld*, a largely informal collection of settlements in South Africa; Douala in Cameroon; and Jidda in Saudi Arabia. These are followed by discussions of historical background on African urbanization and general observations on the contemporary urban scene.

The case studies provide a fascinating account of how people make out in these cities. The emphasis is on how specific actors may reach and extend themselves, or propel themselves outwards from the everyday circumstances and places to which they are accustomed, within economic, political and social structures which may be far from transparent. Two reservations have to be made. The first concerns the method adopted: despite references to structured interviews with key participants in one case study and discussions with nearly 100 people from different walks of life in another, the actual voices and personal stories of Simone's elusive informants hardly ever appear. The second concerns the absence of maps, which would have helped readers unfamiliar with the cases in question to appreciate their spatial structure, such as the relationship of *Winterveld* with Bophuthatswana and Pretoria in the peculiar geography of apartheid. The more general chapters draw on a wide range of examples to portray urban life in ways which challenge much conventional wisdom in geography and development studies. Overall, this book offers a wealth of empirical detail and subtle interpretations, providing much food for thought for anyone interested in the way cities are changing, not only in Africa but also in other parts of the underdeveloped world.

Queen Mary, University of London

DAVID M. SMITH