

Newsletter No.2 - April-May 2018

Religious Urbanisation in Africa

RUA Project

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RELIGIOUS URBANISATION IN AFRICA



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About the Religious Urbanisation in Africa project

Religious Urbanisation in Africa (RUA) is an international multidisciplinary project led by the university of Kent (UK), in partnership with the universities of Toronto, York, Kinshasa and Lagos. Its principal objective is to explore the links between religion, development and urbanisation in sub-Saharan African context.

The RUA Project is part of the British Academy [Cities and Infrastructures Programme](#) funded by the Global Challenges Research Fund ([GCRF](#)).

Urbanisation and development are usually conceptualized through secular frameworks. In recent years, however, the economic and social impacts of urban religious actors and faith-based groups have been significant, in particular in developing countries. For instance, many sub-Saharan African cities have been transformed by revivalist forms of Christian religiosity that promote - often spectacular - visions of urban development.

These visions often involve the creation of large self-contained spaces built on the urban

periphery, in addition to providing basic infrastructure, health and education facilities.

Taking as case studies Lagos and Kinshasa—the most populated and fastest growing cities in sub-Saharan Africa—our project explores how these religious urban models engage with challenges of infrastructural development, urban social cohesion and inclusion, safety and sustainability. We are focusing on the following questions: How are religious and spiritual visions of the ‘ideal city’ materially articulated in actual religious urban developments and how do these cohere with or challenge existing modes of planning and development? Do religious urban spaces and infrastructures ameliorate or exacerbate everyday challenges faced by residents?

To explore the impact of religious urbanisation and provide both an evidence-base and practical recommendations aimed at promoting functioning civic urban culture our project includes [three dedicated research work packages](#) and [one policy work package](#)



Spotlight on the Kinshasa team

Aurélien Mokoko-Gampiot is the postdoctoral researcher in charge of the fieldwork in Kinshasa. Floribert Ntungila leads policy engagement and dissemination activities aided by Yannick Mbilu and Guylaine Ekengola, who are also collecting qualitative data in selected sites. Jean Mbo Vanga and Freddy Gebengbassa Nzege Mboba are the researchers assisting with the survey of selected health and educational facilities/infrastructures.

Research activities are divided into three distinct stages. The first stage (completed) comprised a series of interviews and meetings with NGO/INGO professionals and policy experts and stakeholders in the fields of health, education, development and urban planning in Kinshasa. These stakeholders shared their perception of the various challenges and opportunities relating to religious urbanisation and development and identified policy priorities about the

existing and potential role of FBOs in urban and infrastructural development. The design of research instruments incorporated the input of relevant stakeholders, who thus informed the direction of the research. During the second stage of the project (ongoing), the research is focusing on educational/health sites and infrastructures run by religious organisations. To reflect the diversity of the Congolese religious landscape we have selected a wide range of religious actors among Pentecostal, Catholic, Kimbanguist and Muslim communities and organisations. Dr Mokoko-Gampiot and Dr Ntungila are conducting interviews with members of FBOs and with religious actors involved in the running and development of selected sites as well as users of these sites. Urban ethnography and participant observation are also being conducted in and around each of the selected religious sites and infrastructures.



Aurélien Mokoko-Gampiot holds a PhD in Sociology from the University of Rennes II (France). His research focuses primarily on the intersection of religion, migration and race in the African diaspora. Aurelien is the author of three books on this subject, drawing upon his long-standing work on the Kimbanguist church: *Kimbanguism and Black Identity*; *The Kimbanguists in France: Messianic Expression of an Afro-Christian Church in a Migratory Context* (both published in French by L' Harmattan in 2004 and 2010 respectively); and *Kimbanguism, An African Understanding of the Bible* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017). He has also published several articles on the topic of 'Black Judaism' and its articulation with issues of identity and ethnicity. Dr Mokoko-Gampiot is currently affiliated with several research programmes in France, the US, and the UK.

José Mangalu Mobhe Agbada holds a PhD in Demography from the Catholic University of Louvain (Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium). He is currently a Lecturer in the Department of Population Sciences and Development at the University of Kinshasa and acts as Deputy Dean within the Department. José previously worked as a survey team leader for the MAFE project, which studied migration between Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa and led by the French National Institute of Demographic Studies, INED.





Floribert Ntungila-Nkama is Lecturer at the University of Kinshasa and Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Economics. He holds a PhD in Political and Social Sciences from the Catholic University of Louvain (Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium). His doctoral work on suburban development and the appropriation of urban space in Kinshasa (DRC) was published (in French) by the Presses Universitaires de Louvain. Floribert is interested in questions of structural transformation, social/urban change, health economics and environmental challenges as well as African urbanisation dynamics in general.

Freddy Gbengbassa Nzege Mboba is a postgraduate student in Development Programmes and Projects at the University of Kinshasa. He is also Research Assistant at the Higher Institute of Medical Technology of Yakoma. Freddy has led several research surveys in Kinshasa and across DRC and authored several articles on reproductive health and microfinance among other topics.



Jean Mbo Vanga holds a BA in Demography from the University of Kinshasa and is a nursing graduate of the Higher Institute of Medical Technology. He is currently researcher and teaching assistant at the Department of Population and Development Sciences of the University of Kinshasa.

Yannick Lubongo Mbilu holds a master's degree in macroeconomic policy management. He is currently research assistant for the Public Economics Research Centre at the University of Kinshasa. He has worked as assistant for several research projects and has co-published several articles.



Guylaine I. Ekengola is research assistant in the management of economic policy training programme (GPE, University of Kinshasa). She holds a BA in economics. She has conducted research on the management of Congolese forests in a context of globalisation. Guylaine previously worked as a project manager in marketing and has led surveys for the microfinance firm FINCA.

Case studies: the Kimbanseke hospital and Misericorde clinic

The Kimbanguist hospital and the Misericorde clinic are both among the 10 case study sites of the RUA project

The Kimbanguist hospital

is located in Kimbanseke municipality in the south-eastern part of Kinshasa. Opened in 1974, it was originally a smaller centre born out of the need of members of the Church to create their own healthcare facilities. Indeed, in the 1960s the Kimbanguists were marginalised and excluded from Catholic schools and health facilities, the only ones that existed at the time in the DRC. The construction of the health centre took place under the supervision of Joseph Diangienda, the first spiritual leader of the Kimbanguist church. The centre operated until 1985. Thanks to the financial support of external partners -especially Israeli, American and Belgian- it was later converted into a hospital.



Overview of the entrance

Officially inaugurated in 1988, it is now partially managed by the Congolese state which has an agreement ('convention') with the Kimbanguist Church.



The recently renovated morgue

The Misericorde clinic is located in the Kinkole municipality of Kinshasa, a peripheral zone of the Congolese capital. It was established by the Nouvelle Jerusalem church and was initially a key driver of local urbanisation. Its construction was initiated and financed by diasporic members of the Church based in Belgium who wanted to carry out projects and assist populations as part of their religious 'vision for development' for the DRC. After several years of construction works, the centre opened in the spring of 2017, but not all wings have been completed. In addition to the clinic to be extended, this religious organisation already has 1,200 members in three parishes across the country and is planning additional projects locally.



View of one of the clinic's buildings

The clinic was built on a large plot of land where other medical facilities and a place of worship will be built in the future.

Past events

-RUA Lagos team workshop in Lagos,
12 April 2018



Workshop at the UNILAG with the RUA Lagos team

-RUA members contribute to research
methods teaching at the University of Lagos,
April 2018



Research methods class with UNILAG students, module convened by Dr Akeem Akinwale

-Field visits to RUA stakeholders, April 2018: CEE-Hope, working on urban community rights and RecyclePoints, an environmental NGO. Both working in partnership with FBOs in Lagos



CEE-Hope works with vulnerable communities in the poorer areas and informal settlements in Lagos



Meeting with RecyclePoints, environmental social enterprise

-Project workshop in Canterbury, Kent, UK - 10 May 2018

The team held an internal meeting, reviewing data gathered so far and working to ensure commonalities of approach in the Lagos and Kinshasa-based case-studies.



Xavier Moyet presenting his work to the RUA team.

-International symposium 'Moral Economies of Development in Urban Africa'
Canterbury, UK - 11 May 2018

The RUA research team held a one-day symposium at Canterbury Cathedral Lodge, focusing on 'Moral Economies of Development in Urban Africa'. The meeting brought together scholars from three continents to discuss emerging themes raised by our project. The aim of the open symposium was therefore to bring project members together with other experts in order to evaluate progress so far, and to consider wider intellectual, methodological, and policy issues raised by the research.

In the first session, 'Planning Worlds and Urban Visions', David Garbin (University of Kent) and Simon Coleman (University of Toronto) expanded upon the three main themes structuring the research project: 'Connectivity/Inclusivity' in the production and use of religious urban space; 'Imaginations of the Ideal City'; and 'Trust and Moral Economies'. They placed the symposium in the light of a wider discussion of the contemporary utility of moral economy, including its drawing on debates over both moral geography and political economy. Then Gareth Millington (University of York) provided an analysis of policy documents dealing with urban infrastructures (e.g. UN-Habitat, UN Economic Commission on Africa, African Economic Outlook), highlighting their treatment—or more often non-treatment—of religion: Gareth indicated how such reports tended either to ignore the relevance of religion to urban infrastructural development, or to focus on religion as an 'extreme' and 'anti-modernizing' force.



Left to right: Marloes Janson, Thomas Akoensi, Paul Tremlett, David Garbin, Daisy Emoekabu, Gareth Millington, Martin Legallais, Immaculata Nwokoro, Aurelien Mokoko-Gampiot, Michael Calnan, Ben Jones, Xavier Moyet and Simon Coleman

In the second session, 'Place-making and Religious Urbanisation', Immaculata Nwokoro (University of Lagos) explored religious urbanisation from the perspective of urban planning in Lagos. She noted that such themes are highly topical but as yet little explored in the context of a Lagos that is expanding at great speed, with religious organisations deeply engaged in constructing religious infrastructures of great size and ambition. Immaculata pointed out that Lagos provides a striking context of operation for religious organisations, given that it acts as a religious melting pot, commercial and financial hub, and dynamic urban agglomeration. She was followed by Xavier Moyet (University of Toronto), who presented data on the socio-spatial dynamics of Covenant University's campus in 'peripheral Lagos', discussing the campus's combination of considerable ambition (for instance to be one of the world's top-ten universities by 2022) and its enclaved/gated character, with its focus on disciplining students in the context of a privatized, infrastructurally well-equipped, space.

The meeting brought together scholars from three continents to discuss emerging themes raised by our project.

In the third session, ‘Socio-spatial Mobility and Politics of Belonging’, Thomas Akoensi (University of Kent) provided the perspective of a criminologist on the continued operation and salience of ‘traditional justice mechanisms’ in the context of an Accra slum. Thomas indicated the complex motivations for resident to draw on such mechanisms in this ‘moral’ space, including the desire to avoid becoming visible to a legal infrastructure perceived to be corrupt, as well as the opportunity to deploy systems of reconciliation that have the capacity to take into account the specific, local consequences of verdicts. Then Ben Jones (University of East Anglia) reflected on his work focusing on the construction of ‘leisure practices’ by younger, unemployed Ugandan men who perform urban styles of leisure while being rooted in broadly rural circumstances. Ben made the point that such apparent ‘idleness’ was viewed sympathetically by other members of the community, including older generations, in contrast to certain neo-liberal political and academic assumptions over individual responsibility. In the final session, Simon Coleman (University of Toronto) provided an overview and critique of work examining the relationship between Pentecostalism, urbanisation and development, arguing that contemporary forms of

Pentecostalism maintain a complex but productive relationship to both the city and practices of development—a relationship that in Anna Tsing’s terms might be described as ‘frictional’. Then Marloes Janson (SOAS) provided an overview of forms of mixing and mutual influence among Pentecostal and Muslim communities in Lagos and its environs, showing how such communities should be understood less in terms of syncretism (implying the maintenance of firm boundaries) and more as shifting assemblages. Two discussants completed the day, with David Garbin and Paul Tremlett (Open University) introducing comparative themes. David discussed the concept of the ‘alter-city’ and noted the capacity of religious groups such as Pentecostals both to occupy literal and metaphorical spaces of uncertainty, and to suggest the possibility of exercising agency within such spaces. Drawing on his work in Manila, Paul examined the role of religion in creating urban imaginaries through a number of media, ranging from streets to televised or virtual media events. All papers combined three basic dimensions, in the spirit of the research project: empirical data (both qualitative and quantitative); attempt at theoretical synthesis and innovation; and consideration of social policy implications.

Future events

- RUA project workshop, University of Lagos, 20 June 2018
- RUA panel at the Lagos Studies Association (LSA), University of Lagos, 22 June 2018
- RUA project workshop with community and religious leaders of the Makoko informal settlement in Lagos, 23 June 2018
- International seminar on research methods, University of Lagos, 25 June 2018
- International symposium Lagos, University of Lagos, 26 June 2018