CHAPTER 1

Introduction

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The urban is old: cities have existed for thousands of years, but they have been transformed by the arrival of nation-states over two centuries ago ...

The future of globalism looks pretty sure and well laid out ...
The main difficult question is the future of the people.

– Göran Therborn, *Cities of Power* (2017: 1, 356)

Scholarship on African cities has been proliferating over the past two decades. This is testament to the growing acknowledgement of the importance of cities in an increasingly urban age. This Introduction commences with an outline of Africa's urban reality today. Subsequently, an overview of contemporary urban scholarship calling for Global South and African approaches to this reality is offered before turning to that proposed by Therborn's *Cities of Power*. The principal framework to structure this volume and its various case study chapters is based upon his publication. Its primary theme of seeking relationships between the national, the popular and the global in capital cities today is outlined and the notion of refractions of these forces introduced. The chapter concludes with the structure of the volume.

In sub-Saharan Africa, urbanisation has grown exponentially. From 1995 to 2015, Africa's urban population doubled from 236 million to 472 million. Over the next decade, this population is projected to become larger than Europe's (559 vs. 555 million). It will also be larger than that of Latin America and the Caribbean (536 million) (Moreno 2017; UNDESA 2019).

Urban growth has been associated with social, economic and political development. In 1900, life expectancy in Africa was estimated to be 24 years – today it has reached 63 years. Literacy rates tripled from 23% in 1970 to 65% in 2010. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) multiplied by five times from 1995 to 2015, with an expanding share of industry and services as part of total GDP. Africa's average GDP growth was about 5% per annum (1996–2015) – substantially higher than in the 1970s and 1980s. The resource boom of the first decade of the 2000s brought

a renewed sense of hope for the continent, translated in the notion of 'Africa rising.' Two-thirds of African governments now encourage different forms of political participation and 40% have strengthened their safety and the rule of law (2000 to 2012). It is clear that Africans living in urban settings will remain a force driving socio-economic transformation. At 40% urban, African cities contribute 50–70% of the continent's GDP (Moreno 2017; UN-Habitat 2018).

It is, however, only a few who benefit from the advantages of urbanisation. Cities fail to provide sustainable space for all – physically, as well as in the civic, socio-economic and cultural dimensions attached to collective space. Africa's primarily youthful labour force is projected to expand from 400 million to 1.2 billion between 2000 and 2050 but its economies are unlikely to produce enough jobs for this rapidly expanding population. A majority of the urban population continues to live in sprawling slums and informal settlements. Half of the countries on the African continent have a slum incidence of at least 60% and more urban residents are poorer today than in 1990. Urban planning in these cities has not been able to keep up with urban growth and development. Only 56% of this growth in African cities is currently planned, while this was 68% in 1990 (Moreno 2017). At the same time, efforts to plan and transform cities into 'world-class', 'smart' or otherwise 'modern' cities through mega housing and infrastructural development projects have increased (Croese et al. 2016).

As a result, African cities have fragmented and polarised (Bekker & Therborn 2012). Seven of the ten most unequal countries in the world are located in Africa, most of them in southern Africa (Moreno 2017; UNDP 2017). Global trends such as the rise of new global powers from the South, corporatisation, the digital revolution and climate change have important implications for the performance and social polarisation of African cities and the ways in which governments are able to address developmental agendas and challenges. Political decentralisation has been incomplete at best, and stagnant or regressive at worst, while popular protest has been on the rise (Mo Ibrahim Foundation 2017).

Contemporary urban studies in Africa manifestly locate their investigations within a postcolonial context. Many scholars argue that there is a need to turn away from the modernist approach of mainstream European and American scholarship which has typified Northern cities as modern and developed and African cities as developing along the same modernising route – attempting to catch up whilst struggling with rising inequalities, absence of proper planning and pervasive informality, both in shack settlements and in the informal sector. A Global South approach is called for that could lead both to multiple modernities as well as multiple rationalities that underpin contemporary life (Harrison 2006; Pieterse 2010; Parnell & Robinson 2012).

Schindler (2017: 198) has proposed a Southern urbanism approach, focused particularly on 'a persistent disconnect between capital and labor, which gives rise to urban governance regimes geared toward the transformation of territory rather than the "improvement" of populations.' Mbembe and Nuttall (2004) have called for the writing of the social back into our understanding of African 'life forms.' And Ananya Roy (2011) has called for 'subaltern urbanism,' revealing the subaltern spaces and subaltern classes in the cities of the South.

The most influential disciplines in these contemporary African urban studies are human geography and planning. The doyen of these studies, Mabogunje (1990),

laid the foundations for a pluralist approach to urban studies incorporating spatial analyses with post-modernist methodologies. His work also proposed a pro-market and developmental policy agenda at urban level, particularly to address poverty and high inequalities in African cities (Filani & Okafor 2006).

The pervasive informality in African cities has been illuminated by two geographers who argue that formal local planning has been notoriously lax in many of these cities and, as a consequence, has led to the 'sprawling of illegal and extra-legal land uses and practices, with the informal business and housing sectors overtaking the formal sector in many cities' (Kamete & Lindell 2010: 911). The term 'informal' has been used in many discourses. 'Moreover, informality takes on different forms at different times and in different places, making each interpretation of the term highly specific ... Alternative ways of framing these developments are called for' (Bekker & Fourchard 2013: 9).

Nevertheless, the inequalities flowing from this complex informality have been illustrated above. These inequalities, moreover, have been shown to widen further by using the concept of spatial justice where space in the African city is defined as including both its local representations in maps and symbolic artefacts, as well as its physical attributes. Confinement of life in an informal settlement is hereby given local meaning (Gervais-Lambony & Dufaux 2009).

Myers, in his publication entitled *African Cities* which bears the subtitle, *Alternative visions of urban theory and practice*, argues that, despite this title, it would be incorrect to promote the idea that African cities make up one unique type. He also remarks that

Strangely, political science seems only an occasional presence in African urban studies, when it ought to be a central field in our analyses, because these are such fascinating years for urban politics in Africa. (Myers 2011: 198)

In like vein, Freund (2007: 165) has argued that most scholarship on African cities has been that of social scientists rather than historians. He shows convincingly that cities in Africa have been established and endured for all of recorded history. His publication offers an overview of African urban life during the colonial period and summarises scholarly approaches to postcolonial Africa in a fashion similar to that reviewed above. Furthermore, he concludes his historical overview with three historical city case studies that illustrate both the divergencies as well as continuities of postcolonial urban Africa. These are Touba in Senegal, Abidjan in the Ivory Coast and Durban in South Africa.

The inspiration for this book draws on the works of Göran Therborn, in particular, from his publication *Cities of Power* which addresses the urban at a global level and bears the subtitle *The Urban, the National, the Popular and the Global*. As will be shown below, there is a fundamental historical point of departure to his analysis: globally, capital cities have travelled down one of four main routes to national statehood. To illustrate his use of the political in the study of cities in Africa, moreover, the following extract detailing the informality and sprawl of many modern African cities is drawn from one of his earlier publications (Bekker & Therborn 2012: 202):

It was now that Africa became the continent of slums. But the crisis and its effects were nevertheless managed by the state – the central state – not

the city. African capitals and other big cities did not collapse into general misery. They polarised, between the large, impoverished majority and a tiny political clique around the president and around business protégés of the president ... Political power has in this way become the crucial agency of social polarisation. The ruthlessness with which political posts are fought for, even under electoral auspices, is rational, given how much wealth and privilege is at stake.

Cities of power: The urban, the national, the popular and the global

As outlined in the preface to this book, Therborn argues that, historically, nation-states have constituted the drivers of modernity and thereby transformed the nature and function of cities, particularly their capital cities. However, this has not taken place in a uniform fashion. There were, he argues, four main routes to national statehood:

- the European route of ‘states of princes’ to ‘states of nations’,
- the New World settler secessionist route,
- the colonial and postcolonial route and
- the top-down route where modernisation was reactive.

The influence of the rise of the nation-state – and its associated institutional and architectural arrangements – upon capital cities has been extensively researched in Europe and European settler states (Hall 1998; Therborn 2002; Le Galès & Therborn 2010). What is less well-known are the similarities and differences of these influences in other world regions.

Rather than distinguishing between cities of the global North and the Global South or, for that matter, insulating cities of Africa as a category of their own, Therborn maps out these four routes to nationhood. This also enables comparisons to be made of cities across continents. Accordingly, *Cities of Power* may be used to outline a context for our study of Africa’s capital cities. Most of the fifty-four nation-states on the continent are ex-colonies. Most of these ex-colonies have attempted to ‘nationalise colonialism,’ either by transforming the colonial capital into a national capital, by opting for a new capital or by building a capital from scratch. However, most capital cities are distinguished by an enduring duality between the ex-colonial and the indigenous city, in turn leading to the emergence of a sharp division between a small political elite and the large popular masses.

As an historical case study in Asia, the postcolonial route followed by Jakarta is illustrative. Indonesia’s claim to independence in 1945 descended – particularly in Jakarta, the colonial capital – into violent conflict between nationalists and the Dutch colonisers until 1949 when the Dutch grudgingly recognised their ex-colony as a fully independent Republic. This resulted in ‘the first example of victorious rupture with colonial rule,’ exemplified in the former colonial capital (Therborn 2017: 116). The first president, Sukarno, was both a militant nationalist and a modernist. Symbolic nationalism in the capital included two monuments, one – the Monas – embodies early Hinduist Javanese culture, the other – the Irian Jaya Liberation monument –

commemorates the Indonesian takeover in 1963 of Dutch colonial Western New Guinea. A new sports stadium, a national independence mosque and a new parliament building represented the turn toward modernism in the built environment of the capital. The colonial names of streets and squares were all changed. Two of Jakarta's central boulevards acquired the names of two heroes of the anti-colonial struggle. During the sixty-year post-independence period, however, little progress has taken place in the burgeoning residential areas of the urban poor – the *kampung*. Recently constructed elevated highways for motor traffic from outlying affluent suburbs into the city centre illustrate the continuing divide between an elite and those living in the *kampung*, '[a] new postcolonial form of urban dualism,' in Therborn's words (Therborn 2017: 118).

Few African countries – Ethiopia being the prime exception – qualify as having been modernised reactively from above, where threats to their independence by European and US imperialism were asserted and led to an imposition of modernity. This is most evident in their capital cities, where traditional hierarchical institutions and cultural continuity from their pasts have endured.

Bangkok may be used as a second case study in Asia, in this case illustrating the top-down route where modernisation is reactive. As capital of Siam in the 18th century, Bangkok became the capital city of Thailand in the early 20th century. Sandwiched between British Burma to the west and French Indochina to the east, the Thai monarchy shared power until the 1950s with both elected as well as military governments. The architectural expression of Bangkok as capital began with palaces, including the Dusit palace built by Italian architects with imported marble. During the 1930s and 1940s, a monument to democracy was constructed and annual Constitutional Celebration Fairs were organised. After a military coup in the 1950s, earlier urban iconography returned with a renewed emphasis upon the monarchy and the king. Today, Bangkok reflects urban dualism, but in a fashion different from ex-colonial capitals: many neighbourhoods include 'still-living indigenous cultural institutions, royal and other, alongside its Westernized lowlife [sic] of fast food, cheap drinks and prostitution' (Therborn 2017: 154).

Nevertheless, across all of Africa, the influence of nationalism upon capital cities – symbolically and politically, architecturally and in terms of urban iconography – has been deep and enduring. In the 21st century, the rising influence of global capitalist forces – particularly as the digital revolution broadens its reach into urban Africa – will alter but not extinguish the influence of the national. Therborn agrees that competition between the global and the national is taking place but argues that the claim of a severe weakening of the nation-state is unwarranted. Globalised shifts in the architectural design of capital cities, including new business districts, new transnational businesses, massive infrastructural programmes and so on, are often driven by 'local nationalists' rather than a global elite. Hence, the 21st century shows not only the intertwining of the national and the global, but also that '[t]hey are distinct but [...] not necessarily incompatible' (Therborn 2017: 355).

The processes of nationalism and of globalisation in turn interrelate with urban communities, both in terms of their life chances and living conditions as well as their possibilities of expressing voice and agency. In nation-states that have followed the two pathways of nationalisation, of colonialism or reactive modernisation, mobilisation

from below is particularly difficult to achieve in their capital cities. The reasons are clear: urban dualism in both cases – the deep divide between the elite and the urban poor in the first case and between the elite and communities living out a traditional lifestyle in the second. However, according to Therborn (2017: 356,357):

[T]here are two reasons for moderate optimism ... the recent return of popular urban revolutions... [and] the possibility of urban reformism ... Ordinary people are not going away. They will continue to disturb the vision of global image capitalism. Their chances of social transformation are better in cities than elsewhere.

Refractions

The overarching theme of this book, as outlined above, involves the relationships between the national, the popular and the global as points of departure in studying capital cities in Africa. Moreover, these relationships are further shaped by the prism of refractions. Indeed, we are not only interested in interrogating how and why within African capital cities we may think about the intertwining of the national, the popular and the global, but also how, as in physics, these forces are amplified, adapted or dispersed and what this means for how power operates, how it is manifested or how it is resisted.

In an age of ‘dissonance’ (Simone & Pieterse 2017), the boundaries in urban Africa between the global and the national, between the public and the private, and between the formal and the informal are increasingly blurred. While taking into account that Africa has always been global and that it has shaped the rest of the world as much as it has been shaped by it (Hodgson & Byfield 2017), 21st century globalisation has produced different modes and models of ‘worlding’ (Roy & Ong 2011) that are distinctly local.

Central in shaping such modes and models is the continued ‘shadow of hierarchy’ or the ways in which the national continues to wield power in spite of discourses and commitments to multi-scalar, collaborative and participatory good governance (Harrison 2017). At the same time, national power is continuously contested by forces that operate both within and outside of the state. These include traditional authorities which operate in urban areas all across the African continent and play an important role, at times challenging, at times complementing, the role and power of the state (Marrengane 2017). Resistance can also emerge from inside the state, revealing its multiplicity and porosity and the constant negotiations that take place within and between different scales of government. Popular protest, in turn, appears both to be on the rise and simultaneously dispersed, showing a spectrum of social mobilisation which, depending on and in response to different acts of the state, can range from formal, organised resistance to leaderless street politics, virtual defiance through social media, and even acts of waiting (Oldfield 2017).

Structure of the volume

This book materialises from a conference hosted by the Stellenbosch Institute of Advanced Study (STIAS) and the African Centre for Cities (ACC) on 1 August 2017,

entitled 'Refractions of the National, the Popular, and the Global in African cities.' It draws on a selection of the contributions presented during this conference, which brought together over 30 scholars from across the African continent and beyond. In addition, several young African academics were invited to contribute, especially colleagues who participated in the study on 'African Turn-around Cities,' supported by the Partnership for African Social and Governance Research. Accordingly, the case studies in this volume predate the global Covid-19 pandemic.

The principal framework used to structure this book is taken from Therborn's *Cities of Power* and its three urban themes. In addition, two earlier edited publications have provided the scaffolding for this book: *Capital Cities in Africa: Power and Powerlessness* published by CODESRIA and HSRC Press in 2012, and *Governing Cities in Africa: Politics and Policies* published by HSRC Press in 2013.

The first publication focused on capital cities in a number of African countries, and traced how the power vested in them has evolved through different colonial backgrounds, radically different kinds of regimes after independence, waves of popular protest, explosive population growth and in most cases stunted economic development. The nine different capital city case studies drew attention to the tension between the symbolic power of capital cities on the one hand, and their political powerlessness vis-à-vis their national governments, on the other.

The second publication – on governance – employed a lens focused on the city rather than on the national government. Issues of policy, practice and service delivery were studied both top-down as well as bottom-up, at city level. The book was organised in two parts, the first entitled 'party politics and the politics of identity' and the second 'urban public policies: problematizing informality.' Rather than employing case studies of individual cities, each chapter focused on a specific theme and its manifestation in several cities. Accordingly, each has been written by several authors.

Both publications cover case studies of cities from across sub-Saharan Africa, including former English, French as well as Portuguese colonies.

This volume builds on these characteristics. In addition, it connects the elements of the national and the popular to the global, asking how national, popular and global forces come together, clash or interact in the African capital city and what kind of practices or imaginaries are produced in the process. Each of its three thematic sections comprises a number of case studies of African capital cities. Each section, moreover, is introduced by brief editorial commentary.

The first thematic section addresses how the national and the nation-state is manifested in the capital city. To what extent is the political and the social character of the national-state regime expressed in the capital city and its governance? Featured chapters discuss tensions and contradictions between national and local government, extending this discussion to the city regional level in the north African region. It explores the urban challenges that local governments face and the ways in which these either close off or open up space for other actors within or outside the state to participate and contribute by responding to these challenges.

The second thematic section addresses the nature and impact of popular forces that have mobilised and made themselves heard in the African city in recent years. The chapters analyse different popular forces and practices, including resistance from inside the state by government officials, the changing role of formal civil society and

the rise of informal tactics and street politics combined with the use of social media to challenge state power and structures from below.

The third thematic section analyses a range of urban infrastructural development projects and policies in the cities of Luanda, Lagos and Addis Ababa in order to explore how local political interests, politics and priorities relate, incorporate or respond to global urban development plans, policies and imaginaries. The chapters show the different ways in which the global and the local intersect in the contemporary African city and explore the continuities and discontinuities from colonial to postcolonial times.

The concluding chapter seeks to refract through these themes by reflecting on contemporary urban scholarship not only on Africa but also globally as well as on other continents. It draws on the African capital city case studies in this volume to illustrate these refractions without claiming to exhaust the terrain. The continent today is the least urban on an increasingly urbanised globe. Accordingly, in all probability, urban scholars will progressively situate Africa at the start of a process of large-scale urban transformation, a process that will deeply influence its future.

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