

Swilling, M., Simon, M. & Khan, F. 2003. 'My Soul I Can See': The Limits of Governing Africa's Cities in a Context of Complexity and Globalisation. In McCarney, P. and Stren, R. (eds.), *Governance on the Ground: Innovations and Discontinuities in Cities in the Developing World*. Washington DC and Baltimore: Woodrow Wilson Centre Press and Johns Hopkins University Press: pp.220-250.

'My Soul I Can See': The Limits of Governing African Cities in a Context of Globalisation and Complexity

Clean!
Clean of what?
When a blind beggar sits at a street corner
and strums his battered guitar
and sings
 "Though I'm blind
 My soul I can see."

Oswald Mtshali, A Ballad of Eloff Street

1. Introduction

Mtshali's famous poem about Johannesburg's main street was written during the apartheid era. It questions the illusion created by apartheid, and suggests that the blind and poor are better able to see the soul of the city. But now that apartheid has gone - as has colonialism in the rest of Africa - are we really any closer to 'seeing' and therefore understanding the soul(s) of the African city? This paper suggests that we are not. We argue that the reason for this lies in our remarkably persistent attachment to forms of urban modernity that originated in European and American contexts that cannot be compared to the cultural, political and economic contexts shaping African cities today. The problem with the imported prescriptions for achieving urban modernity in Africa is that they imply a simplistic linear conception of urban development that must suppress the tension between, on the one hand, the tendency to rationalise, codify, and make transparent the functions of clearly delineated institutions and governance processes and, on the other, the tendency to intensify highly idiosyncratic, often nonformalised, creolised, hodge-podged social orders and territories that ambiguate any clear reading of what is going on. These latter arrangements also obscure any sense of there being clearly defined alternatives or opposing choices. From Ajengunle to Gayatri Mayo to Phola Park to Chateau Quatorze, what one sees is not what one gets.

Why is the nice ordered neo-liberal simplicity of the ever-rational individual making choices in the market confounded by the tenacity of unpredictable ambiguities that undermine the apparent benefits of economic "freedom"? Because the former assumes an economy built on the assumption that individuals sustain themselves and their dependents by performing a single dominant etched out economic function, where the urban system that codifies roles and obligations in law is backed by legitimate sanction, and where identities are massified

into homogeneity by socialisation and communication systems that condition everyday life from cradle to grave. When these conditions do not exist because urbanisation has taken place without economic individuation, where governance is rooted in corrupt repressive rather than legitimate codification, and where multiple modern and non-modern identities co-exist within a variety of discursive systems, then some clues emerge as to where to look to make sense of African cities and how they are (un)governed.

In line with the intentions of Phase III of the Global Urban Research Initiative (GURI), this paper is primarily about the way African cities – and in particular Southern African cities - change and what needs to be done to influence the governance of these changing urban processes¹. To achieve this objective, it is necessary to bring into relief the underlying aspiration for modernity that provides the rationale for many governance and development approaches and to counterpose this to a far more complex and ambiguous set of perceptions about African urbanity.

2. Globalisation, Glocalisation and the African City

¹ . The following papers were commissioned by the Graduate School of Public and Development which was the institution that co-ordinated the Southern African component of Phase III of the Global Urban Research Initiative:

Robbins, S., "In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king': Development and Power Brokers in an Informal Settlement in Cape Town", March 1997.

Lekorwe, M. and Hope, K.R., "Urban Governance and Management: Case Study of Gaborone, Botswana", March 1997.

Egumbo, P. and Joas, S., "The Limits of Governing African Cities in a Context of Globalisation and Complexity: Case Study of Oshakati Town", March 1997.

Mbiba, B., "Limits to Urban Governance at the Local Level in Zimbabwe: A Focus on Harare", May 1997.

Khan, F. and Hemson, D., "Shifting Spatial, Institutional and Economic Scales: The Political Mediation of Globalisation and Industrial Policy in Post-Apartheid South Africa - Deliberating Local Economic Development in Durban", 1997.

Simone, A., "African Urbanity and Globalisation", 1997.

Ogude, J. and Rule, P., "Imagining Johannesburg: Hell, Gold and Paradise", 1997.

Olivier, A., "Local Government Restructuring in the Cape Metropolitan Area: Governance and Development in the Post-Apartheid Local State", May 1997.

Wooldridge, D., "Overview of the Organisational Change Process in Greater Johannesburg", 1997.

Not many still take seriously the simplistic notion - even panacea - that globalisation is merely the realisation on a world scale of an integrated capitalist system that binds the world together into an agreed competitive market. Whether we are listening to the globalbabble of the missionary protagonists of the borderless “new economic order” held together by “free trade agreements”, or the globalpessimism of the “world system” analysts who proclaim the final “victory” of global capitalism, we need to accept that globalisation manifests itself as a complex set of paradoxical dualities.²

Globalisation has transformed cities. Whereas cities have traditionally been administrative and/or economic centres, they are now increasingly located in a deterritorialised network of flows, exchanges and concentrations across borders of all kinds, be they territorial, cultural, or sectoral.³ But the upshot is a new set of tensions and ambiguities, not the cleansing image of competing homogenous cities as neo-liberal orthodoxy suggests. Accordingly, cities have become:

- incubators of particularities or local features that constitute a kind of symbolic capital that can be translated into comparative advantage, that can attract mobile capital, investment, attention, population or conversely, that lose these things, or become a dangerous sub-context that refuses to conform to national norms or produce compliant national citizens;
- nodes in complex networks of interactions among cities that work to constitute a kind of transnational urban space, where the primary reference of cities are other cities regardless of their location, and thus establishing a circuitry of movements of all kinds, and making those whose residence and labour exists largely outside of such movements increasingly irrelevant despite the fact that they occupy the same urban spaces as the new 'insiders'; and
- nodes in the reconfiguration of needs, social connectivity, ethical practice, and what it means to have alternatives.

This ‘brave new world’ where global economic competition is spatially located in a globally distributed set of localities is a vision that informed the agenda of the Habitat II Conference in Istanbul in 1996. As one United Nations advisor put it, the focus of the City Summit will be on “creating a level playing field for competition among cities, particularly across national boundaries; on understanding how cities get ahead in this competition; on global capital transfers, the new economic order and the weakening of the nation state ...”⁴

To play the competing cities game, the urban management textbooks place new emphasis on the need to:

² . McGrew, A., “A Global Society?”, in Hall, S., Held, D., Hubert, D., Thompson, K. (eds.), *Modernity*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1996, pp.478-9. See also Giddens, A., “Affluence, Poverty and the Idea of the Post-Scarcity Society”, in *Development and Change*, 27, 2, 1996, p.369.

³ . Clark, D., *Urban World/Global City*, London and New York, Routledge, 1996, p.9.

⁴ . Quoted in Bond, P. and Mayekiso, M., “Developing Resistance, Resisting ‘Development’: Reflections from the South African Struggle”, in Panitch, L. (ed.), *Socialist Register 1996*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1996. See also Blakely, E., *Planning Local Economic Development, Theory and Practice*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, 1994; and Peck, J. and Tickell, A., “Jungle Law Breaks Out: Neo-Liberalism and Global-Local Order”, in *Area*, 26, 4, 1994, pp.317-326.

- identify structural links between household conditions, local economic practices, and housing and urban development policies with national sectoral strategies for economic development, regional planning, public health, social welfare, technical infrastructure, science and technology;
- organise key indicators and field procedures for the characterisation of the physical environment, including geo-morphology, geo-technics, hydrology, climatology and general surveys on resources potentially usable in development, as well as health and sanitation;
- define and detail planning, administration and management procedures, as well as define regulation and liberalisation procedures and typical technological alternatives for infrastructure development, e.g. public-private-partnerships, service provision and the overall economic sustainability of cities.

But when these tools of conventional urban management wisdom are understood against the background of the dynamics of African cities themselves, they appear far too simplistic and rational to withstand the complexities of unpredictable patterns.

Postcolonial relationships in African cities are fraught with tensions and disjunctions. On the one hand, there are the efforts of independent states to constitute modern cities in reference to prevailing forms of Western management, architecture, and urban production inspired inevitably by the great traditions of western modernity. On the other, are the efforts urban majorities, almost always disenfranchised and marginalized, make to constitute modern African cities and compensate for the massive inadequacies in the state's ability to provide basic urban services.⁵

It is clear that most African nations live a precarious existence. Real incomes have fallen at an annual rate of 1% since the 1980 's and minimum wages have fallen between 50 and 70% during this time. It is likely that 22 million jobs will be created between 1985-2020, far short of the 380 million necessary to target unemployment to below 10%⁶. Even though 1995 was the first year in six of positive per capita growth rates and an overall economic growth projected at 3.8 %, African share of foreign direct investment continued to decline (with eight countries experiencing net outflows of FDI and 22 others having inflows of only \$1-2 per capita). Growth rates of 6-8% are necessary to make any dent in stemming the tide of widening poverty⁷. Median level debt-to-export ratio is at 479% and the continents share of world trade stands at a paltry 1.5%.⁸ At the centre of this economic crisis lies the African city as the traditional and contemporary nodal point of transportation, migration, financial transaction and politico-administrative control.

While it can be argued that what urban Africans have been doing is mostly compensating for the hardships they confront, there is a pervasive sense of missed or near missed opportunities.

⁵ . For an early attempt at understanding this dynamic see Cooper, F., *Struggle for the City*.

⁶ . World Bank, *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth*, Washington DC, The World Bank, 1989.

⁷ . Africa Policy Information Center, *Annual Review 1996*, Washington D.C., 1997

⁸ . Global Coalition for Africa, *1995 Annual Report*, Washington D.C., 1995.

There is an urban social resourcefulness that has not been engaged but, instead, has been battered and whose resilience has been significantly diminished. While African cities still have enormous vitality and a buzz of entrepreneurial and cultural energies, increasingly large measures of desperation and fanaticism⁹ creep into and come to define these energies. Despite the political volatility, economic crises, and precariousness in social cohesion and individual health that have come to characterize most African cities, a basic sense of functionality still persists. People move to and fro across an increasingly differentiated and fragmented urban space, basic resources are secured and distributed, thousands of rituals are observed. Yet there is also an overwhelming sense of precariousness; a sense that things continue to work in some way but that the ability and opportunities to change how they work has narrowed to almost nothing, and that future trajectories are now outside of anyone's control.

Many African neighborhoods seem to be endowed with certain forms of social capital which on the surface correspond with the ingredients often purported as key elements of urban local development strategies.¹⁰ For if entrepreneurial development in the current context of globalization requires localities to substantiate face-to-face contact as a means of generating diverse, collectively-held beliefs and mobile networks of affiliation reinforced by substantiated histories of coalition and trust, then many African urban contexts would certainly embody those characteristics. In part, the problem is that the identities of many African urban residents are still largely derived from references outside the cities in which they live, i.e., either the rural areas from which they have migrated or the West.¹¹ But at the same time, the majority of these same residents are unable to really draw upon these references as concrete guides for day to day living in the city.¹² The results of this problem of references are that cities grow increasingly fragmented at exactly the moment when new exchanges among diverse groupings, points of view and experience become more and more needed.¹³

⁹ . Fanatic in the sense of expressing the purpose of certain activities in an extremist language, such as the welfare support obtained from pentecostal churches and Islamic organisations by the members of these movements, or the cultural styles of gangs that combine Rasta haircuts and Harlem clothing as their macho symbols.

¹⁰ . See Pieterse, E., "Draft Input Paper on Social Capital and Community Initiatives", unpublished mimeo, April 1997. Also see Putnam, R., "Democracy, Development, and the Civic Community: Evidence from an Italian Experiment", in Serageldin, I. and Taborof, J. (eds.), *Culture and Development in Africa*, Proceedings of an International Conference held at World Bank, Washington D.C., April 2-3, 1992, pp.33-73; and Moser, C., *Confronting Crisis: A Summary of Household Responses to Poverty and Vulnerability in Four Poor Urban Communities*, Environmentally Sustainable Development Monograph Series, No. 7, Washington D.C., World Bank, 1996.

¹¹ . See Bauman, G., *The Miri of Nuba Mountains*, London, Claredon, 1987; Baker, J. and Pedersen, P.O. (eds.), *The Rural-Urban Interface in Africa*, Uppsala, The Scandinavian Institute for African Studies, 1992; ; Lucas, "The State, Civil Society and Regional Elites: A Study of Three Associations in Kano, Nigeria", *African Affairs*, 93, pp.21-38; Rowlands, M., *The Domestication of Modernity in Cameroon*, forthcoming.

¹² . Vogel, J., "Culture, Politics and National Identity in Cote D'Ivoire", *Social Research*, 58, 2, pp.439-456.

¹³ . Shaw, T., "Ethnicity as a Resilient Paradigm for Africa: from the 1960s to the 1980s", in *Development and Change*, 17, 4, pp.5877-6006; Young, "Evolving Modes of Consciousness and

In many important ways, the city fails to exist in Africa. National authorities, external observers and intervenors, and even local populations tend to approach African cities not as truncated versions or even failed simulations of external notions of urban modernity, but as the densification of essentially localized conglomerations of ethnicity, histories of settlement, and estates with often feudal characteristics. The particular characteristics of different residential spaces and the diverse fragmentary elements which make African cities what they are, tend to be represented by some development agencies as collections of hundreds of villages in close proximity.¹⁴ Of course the fact is that it is primarily in African cities that things change, i.e., behaviors, language, economies, and social configurations. Yet, the prevailing and institutionalized attitude toward urban space, and the refusal to acknowledge and address the whole city as a particular kind of African organism, severely curtails what those actual changes are able to mean and what they are able to affect in terms of the structures of governance, social and economic production. The consequences of this approach in South African cities are particularly tragic because instead of seeing the city as an integrated whole, the sprawling rationality of the vast middle class suburbs are regarded as the norm while the rest becomes a kind of “pre-normal” condition that must be attended to by the development specialists.

The elaboration of some overarching sense of the urban in Africa is thus increasingly dependent upon the actions and sensibilities of Africans in the diaspora. The nature of this elaboration is, in turn, complicit with the appropriation of migration --and the particular facility Africans demonstrate at reconstituting a version of Africanity in Western (and now increasingly South African) global cities -- as an important resource in the usually low-level servicing of the management and regulatory apparatuses for what Sassen calls the global network of production sites and financial markets.¹⁵ The sites in between, i.e. cities in Asia, Latin America and the Arab world, however, largely remain unconsidered by African cities, and thus the very spaces with whom relationships could very well go a long way in consolidating at least a psychological coherence to African urbanity are negated by the tragedy of the persistence of a Euro-centric urban modernity.

The difficulty in reading the urban social field is that the very real social disintegration taking place, the rise of ethnonationalism and parochial conflicts also acts as a masking operation for practices which connect communities to a wide network of interdependencies and groups. The visible “wholeness” or “intactness” of neighborhoods, ethnic and religious

Ideology: Nationalism and Ethnicity”, in Apter, D. and Rosberg, C., *Political Development and the New Realism*, Charlottesville and London, University of Virginia Press, 1994; Randrianja, S., “Nationalism, Ethnicity and Democracy”, in Ellis, S. (ed.), *Africa Now: People, Policies and Institutions*, The Hague, DGIS, 1995.

¹⁴ . GRET, *Local Urban Development in Africa*, Paris, GRET, 1995; Chaplowe, S. and Madden, J. (eds.), *The Emerging Role of NGOS in African Sustainable Development*, New York, World Sustainable Agricultural Association/UN-NADAF, 1996.

¹⁵ . Sassen, S., “Urban Impacts of Economic Globalisation”, in Brothie, J., Batty, M., Blakely, E., Hall, P., and Newton, P., *Cities in Competition, Productive and Sustainable Cities for the 21st Century*, Melbourne, Longman Australia.

groups is simply a point of reference, a means of establishing nodal points in larger networks.¹⁶

These larger networks or cross-community ties do not imply any essential stability, as the eventual structures of networks are fluid and ever-changing. As a result, urban communities must increase their exposure to being “buffeted” and fragmented by the competing demands and influences they are exposed to while seeking to connect themselves to different “stories” throughout cities, to larger networks of production and exchange. At the same time, they must continuously re-piece together provisional mechanisms for maintaining a coherent sense of who they are and stabilizing the interactions of people--residents, workers, affiliates-- that collectively participate in thousands of different connections.¹⁷

Where the city begins and ends is now difficult to determine, as it is also difficult to ascertain how any city is one city instead of hundreds of quarters and neighborhoods. In other words, what is the definition(s) of the urban system, and therefore how does one govern and manage it. Various dimensions of the city become impenetrable, a reality which may take various forms. The combination of increased insecurity, poverty and the informalization of survival may make certain quarters of the city seemingly unavailable to understanding or control. On the other hand, the complexity and increasing informalization of the networks of power and influence at work in terms of decision-making also make urban realities impenetrable.

Rather than seeing the apparent absence of “good” institutions as the clearest sign of state weakness or political or economic immaturity, strong institutional forms may in fact be consolidated in between what may appear on the surface as distinct domains--between government, civil institutions, communities, the private sector, etc. Those lines that formally define the outlines of “weak” administrative functions and civil society organisations may instead act as “internal” markers of rather solid arrangements that take place over a broad set of diverse actors, territories and identities. Even if such institutional structures are too informal or provisional to actually qualify as “institutions”, they reflect a specific way of practicing politics not easily changed by the present orientation of the international financial institutions to develop enabling environments and appropriate institutions of urban management.¹⁸ The same dynamic applies to the inability to turn urban informal sectors into engines of growth.¹⁹

¹⁶ . Simone, A., *In Whose Image: Political Islam and Urban Practices in the Sudan*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994.

¹⁷ . Gupta, A. and Ferguson, J., “Beyond Culture: Space, Identity and the Politics of Difference”, *Cultural Anthropology*, 7, 1, pp.6-24, 1992; Appadurai, A., “The Heart of Whiteness”, *Callaloo*, 16, 4, 1993; Banva, M., “Transnationalism”, *Current Sociology*, 41, 3, pp.1-95, 1993; Clifford, J., “Diaspora”, in *Current Anthropology*, 9, 3, pp.302-338, 1994; Watts, M., “A New Deal in Emotions”, in Crush, J., *Power and Development*, London and New York, Routledge, 1995.

¹⁸ . Roitman, J., “The Politics of Informal Markets in Sub-Saharan Africa”, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 1990; Amundsen, I., “Afropessimism: A Response from Below?”, in Ofstad, A. and Wiig, A. (eds.), *Development Theory: Recent Trends*, Proceedings of the NFU Annual Conference, Report 6, Bergen, Michelsen Institute, 1993; Mbembe, A., “Prosaics of Servitude and Authoritarian Civilities”, *Public Culture*, 5, 1, 1992, pp.123-145; Azarya, V., “Civil Society and Disengagement in Africa”, in Harbeson, J.W., Rothchild, D. and Chazan, N. (eds.), *Civil Society in Africa*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 1994; Chabal, P., “Democracy and Daily Life in Africa”, *International Affairs*, 70, 1, 1994; Ekeh, P.P., “The Public Realm and Public Finance in Africa”, in

In Africa, there has been an increasing transference of regulatory powers from the regional to the local level, replacing a state-driven discourse with a municipal one.²⁰ The international financial institutions, which have financed and even authored much of the trend toward decentralization, emphasize that it provides greater opportunities for the regulation, technical and financial support of urban development.²¹ But when the decentralization of political power is also linked to the trend towards the privatization of service delivery, a political vacuum is created which amplifies the actual and/or potential incompatibilities between profit-making and the social good. Additionally, where local government leaders collude in diverting public funds into private pockets, local government does not necessarily ensure accountability or trust. To make matters worse, there is no evidence to support the notion that civil society automatically provides an alternative to local government. As the state has greatly reduced its role as provider, in many cities the majority of urban residents have done little to step in, as if government failures have demoralized their efforts and led people to internalize the lack of accountability and effectiveness.²² There is, of course, the counter trend as well: associations of various kinds have formed to take over such services as

Kinyanjui, K., Himmelstrand, U. and Mburugu, E. (eds.), *African Perspectives in Development*, Nairobi, E.A.E.P and London, James Curry, 1994; MacGaffey, J., "Civil Society in Zaire: Hidden Resistance and the Use of Personal Ties in the Class Struggle", in Harbeson, J.W. et. al., op. cit.; Dawha, E.M.K., "'Yan Daba' and 'Yan Dauker Amarya': the Emergence of Mafioso and Societal Menace in Northern Nigeria", *IFRA Ibadan Newsletter*, 5, 1, 1996, pp.112-14.

¹⁹ . Anheier, H.K., "Economic Environments and Differentiation: A Comparative Study of Informal Sectors in Nigeria", *World Development*, 119, 6, 1991, pp.651-670; Bibangambah, J.R., "Macro-Level Constraints and the Growth of the Informal Sector in Uganda", in Becker, J. and Pedersen, P. (eds.), op. cit; Grey-Johnson, C., "African Informal Sector at the Crossroads: Emerging Policy Options", *African Development*, 18, 1, 1992, pp.65-91; Meagher, K. and Yunusa, M.B., "Limited Labour Absorption: Conceptual and Historical Background to Adjustment in Nigeria's Urban Informal Sector", Discussion Paper No. 28, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 1992; House, W.J., Ikiaru, G.K. and McCormick, D., "Urban Self-Employment in Kenya: Panacea or Visible Strategy", *World Development*, 23, 1, 1993, p.149-162; Peters-Berrie, C., "Urban and Informal Sector Program: Putting Development Policies into Practice: The Problems of Implementing Policy Reform in Africa", Working Paper 63, Geneva, World Employment Research, International Labour Organisation, 1993.

²⁰ . Kanvinga, K., et. al., *The New Local Level Politics in East Africa: Studies in Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya*, Uppsala, Nordiska Afrika Institutet, 1994; Rothchild, D. (ed.), *Strengthening African Local Initiative: Local Self-Governance, Decentralization and Accountability*, Hamburg, Institut fur Afrika-Kunde, 1994; Swilling, M. (ed.), *Governing Africa's Cities*, Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 1997.

²¹ . World Bank, *Urban Policy and Economic Development: An Agenda for the 1990s*, Washington D.C., The World Bank, 1991; Cohen, J.M., "Capacity Building in the Public Sector: A Focused Framework for Analysis and Action", *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 611, 3, 1992, pp.407-422; Dillinger, *Decentralizing the Provision of Municipal Services*, Paper 16, Washington D.C., Urban Management Programme, The World Bank, 1995.

²² . Uduku, N.O., "Promoting Community Based Approaches to Social Infrastructure Provision in Urban Areas in Nigeria", *Environment and Urbanisation*, 6, 2, 1994, pp.57-78; Craig, G. and Mayo, M. (eds.), *Community Empowerment: A Reader in Participation and Development*, London, Zed, 1995.

housing construction, transportation (including road maintenance), waste disposal, and education.²³

While globalisation sets the context for the accelerating marginalization of communities throughout Africa, this both implicitly accords spaces of autonomy for an often richly textured reconfiguration of social life, and ensures the growing distance of these communities from the resources necessary to sustain these efforts. The focus of future development strategies, therefore, must be on the need for greater articulations between local initiatives and diverse social groupings across the urban system as a whole in order to mesh together increasingly complex patterns of survival, development and governance into a larger more coherent urban form premised on its own organic identities rather than contrived attempts to imitate urban modernities from other contexts.²⁴

3. Urban Modernity Versus African Urbanity

Marshall Berman's great and classic text revealed the intimate connection between the rise of modernity as the aesthetics of the middle classes that were created by the industrial revolutions, and the drive to transform pre-modern cities into paragons of urban modernity.²⁵ This powerful movement - complete with Faust as its mythical hero - has its origins in Haussman's Paris, Peter the Great's St. Petersburg, and the New York that Robert Moses built. But it gets mass produced in the incarnations of Le Corbusier's one dimensional urban modernity that inspired the urban design of cities from Atlanta to Brazilia, and in Africa from the formalised working class suburbs of many African cities, to the contrived new capitals like Abuja.

But when it comes to explaining the crisis of the African city, this is often done by comparing where African cities are with the presumed desirability of urban modernity and all that this implies at the political, economic and cultural levels. If citizens of African nations and urban residents would only be more "serious" about improving their living environments, stop supporting corrupt leaders, and work harder -- in other words, become more productively urban (i.e, disciplined, yet imaginative or rationally individualist yet cooperative) -- then nations and cities would at least start acquiring a worthiness for the investment deemed crucial for their survival. The assumption is not without validity. But without allowing or enabling cities to become instruments for "vocalizing" these multifaceted ideas and actions, it is never clear what their actual or potential trajectories are. What do people do in the face of their frustration to make what is important known? How do

²³ . See the various papers presented at the conference on *Associational Life in African Cities: Urban Governance in an Era of Change*, Bergen, Nordic Africa Institute and Chr. Michelsen Institute, 28-30 August, 1998.

²⁴ . The notion that what is required is a qualitative shift from the image of random and fragmented pieces to a conceptual framework that grasps the deep complexities of a coherent set of patterns is an organic image that resonates with the way African cities are experienced and is remarkably similar to new theories of complex systems - see Capra, F., *The Web of Life*, New York etc, Anchor Books, 1996.

²⁵ . Berman, M., *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, New York, Penguin, 1988.

residents go about trying to keep certain aspirations, visions and social practices alive in an urban context which, for the most part doesn't take them seriously? What, then, does civic responsibility mean under these conditions?

In many cities, including (and some may think especially in) Africa, it is rather notions of civic irresponsibility which make up the locus around which everyday life is actually propelled. There are many instances of such irresponsibility. For example, to demonstrate that one is adequately doing the job expected by the terms of formal employment is to operate against the opportunities and access to a "market" in which "real" remuneration for services is possible (to be able to "couple" responsibility with remuneration). So while the public school teacher may not be paid for months, or when she is paid receive almost nothing, she, nevertheless, reports regularly to her duties, exerting just enough effort to cultivate a clientele for private lessons after school hours that will enable her to pay the bills. The same situation prevails in public institutions of all kinds. What a modernist morality may regard as the corrupt collapse of public and private responsibilities becomes the generally accepted means of survival in a context where strict adherence to public responsibilities could undercut survival.

In part, this practice has a lot to do with the nature of responsibilities persons and households face. The economy of shifting responsibilities is not easily balanced. In order to fulfill some responsibilities, many of which cannot be questioned or made a matter of discussion, shortcuts have to be taken in other places. An older brother must pay for a younger's schooling, no questions asked; two years rent for a parents quarters must be paid in advance, no discussion. But when certain spheres of life are viewed as areas where no discussion is possible (for example, meeting certain family obligations) a sense of "irresponsibility" is promoted in others. Because if the nature of such responsibilities cannot be discussed then a range of options for generating portions of the economic support currently provided by calling upon family obligations (without explicitly calling upon them) are not pursued or thought of. This practice of non-discussion, in contexts of overall economic decline, could increasingly parochialize everyday interactions, and identifies other aspects of the public sphere as a space of incessant discussions and negotiations. Here, the settling of invented and arbitrary obligations, in the face of arbitrary impositions of authority, must always be discussed.

There is the irresponsibility of broken cities where the absence of resources for maintenance and investment is compounded by public behavior. There is laxness in the discarding of waste, in how structures are left half-built and how public property is "appropriated" for private use.

There is the irresponsibility and perhaps a disrespect displayed by a range of authorities toward the modalities of community cohesion sustained by local neighborhoods. For example, rituals and community assemblages are converted into spectacles through their financing and redundancy by political interests and parties, especially in times of elections.

There is the irresponsibility of conspicuous consumption as the way to signify class position. The irresponsibility here rests not so much in the display of luxury items, but in the sense that the very acquisition of luxury items acts to deplete the material resources of a class who

otherwise are forced to conduct everyday life in a manner not radically dissimilar from that of other classes.

In most cities the access to shelter, food and any kind of livelihood is increasingly precarious for larger segments of the population. In this context, the only way any order in everyday life can be preserved is through endless improvisation and the anticipation of things not working. This, of course, is a constantly shifting terrain lacking clear landmarks for either guiding determined individual actions or for even recognizing the culmination of failures to survive.

There seems to be an almost cartoon universality in the predominance of church and mosque-infested public spaces existing alongside the various distributors of alcohol, sex and cheap food, and foreign-owned, dank and overpriced basic commodity shops staying open at all hours which characterize poor urban communities nearly everywhere. Solidarity is always compensatory, an economy of insults added to injury, social repairs, comings and goings, ruptures and truces which become methods to mark a series of returns--from the brink, from illness, from wounds. Something manages to keep going, even if there are many casualties along the way: There are "returns" to households, love affairs, friendships, camaraderie, business deals, dinner tables. And the sometimes staggering sense of loss perhaps serves to make those returns mean something, even if people have not really left to go anywhere, even if people do not have the means or determination to exceed the limitations of their various ghettos.

Households have pretended to keep the street outside the front door, as the street becomes increasingly vicious, in part, because of the efforts made to keep it out. And if the household inside borders on becoming indistinguishable from the street outside, there is always the church, the prayer meeting, the mosque to reinforce solidarities that often can find no application outside of these contexts. No wonder then that the largest and fastest growing social movements in Africa are the Pentecostal movements of Central and Southern Africa, and the Islamic movements of North and Eastern Africa. For even when they contribute to a less debilitating ordering of life inside households, between generations and genders, there is no new ground in which to engage the manipulative and rough realities of a beckoning street which a reinvigorated family life operates in face of.

In short, urbanity in African cities is not a function of the unfolding linear logic of a generic urban modernity, but rather behaviours, dynamics, activities and processes whose own logics are explicable in terms of the specificities of African cities. Those whose faith lies in the possibility of replicating an urban modernity that derives its inspiration from an external context are constantly confounded by the brutalities required to maintain this façade for the few while the majority remain outside the processes and patterns this entails. Even those urban elites who tend to be the most vocal champions of urban modernity, depend on its antithesis to sustain their desperate hungry drive upwards and sideways through the dense complexities of urban networks. And in so doing they reproduce the ambiguated dualisms that seem set to remain the distinctive feature of African cities for a long time hence. In the next section we demonstrate this phenomenon and its implications for urban governance via case studies of Durban harbour, Marconi Beam in Cape Town and housing in Harare..

4. Development Delusions: Durban Harbour, Marconi Beam and Harare's *Start Paying for your House Scheme*

Three cases of locality-specific development drawn from the commissioned research highlight the ambiguities inherent in the dynamics of local development processes. They are the cases of Durban harbour, Marconi Beam in Cape Town, and housing finance in Harare. All three point to the centrality of institutions as the primary mediators of policy intention and implementation actions, but in a way which reveals the highly contested nature of these institutions.

Durban Harbour

Durban is a highly complex fast growing metropolitan area on South Africa's East coast with a total population of 3,2 million in 1995 which is expected to grow to 3,6 million by 2000.²⁶ Numerous studies and policy processes initiated from within and outside Durban have focused on the future growth of the city, partly because it has been assumed that growth will generate the resources needed to meet the unmet development needs of up to 50% of the population of the area. All these studies concur that the large relatively modern port is the key to Durban's economic future.²⁷ The Centre for Development and Enterprise, a business-linked policy advocacy organisation, has for instance proposed that the development of the harbour into an efficient and modernised regional port should be the first priority in the city's local economic strategy. This depiction of the port as the central driver of an unfolding market-based economy contrasts drastically with its depiction by the local press as the entry point for illegal imports that are undermining local manufacturers, and is contradicted by the leaders of wildcat strikes by casual workers who have been getting progressively poorer.

Durban harbour is South Africa's busiest port with about 65% of all container traffic (about 1 million containers annually) going through its facilities. It operates beyond full capacity and handles more containers than other large Southern ports like Sydney and Melbourne. Approximately 350 businesses employing 24 000 people who earn around R1 billion (\$250 000) annually depend on the port. Furthermore, hundreds of businesses are indirectly dependent on activities supported by the port. Measured by efficiency criteria such as turnaround times, the port is regarded as successful and on a par with modern ports elsewhere in the world.

It has been estimated that in theory, if the port continues to increase the number of containers it handles annually by 80 000, this should lead to the growth of 1000 new jobs per annum and generate wider knock-on effects in related businesses. This is thought possible on the grounds that the policy of economic deregulation and export oriented growth pursued by the South African Government will lead to a massive increase in both imports and exports, much of which will go through Durban harbour.

²⁶ . Centre for Development and Enterprise, *Post-Apartheid Population and Income Trends*, Johannesburg, Centre for Development and Enterprise, 1995, p.12.

²⁷ . This discussion of Durban harbour is taken entirely from Khan, F. and Hemson, D., op. cit., p.33 ff.

In reality, the practical effects of this overall policy framework have been massive tariff reduction on imports and extensive deregulation of the port itself. Tariff reduction has allowed the large-scale importation of goods that were previously produced by Durban manufacturers which, in turn, has led to plant closings throughout the Durban metropolitan area. Deregulation has resulted in diminished controls by port authorities over the loading, storage, transportation and processing of goods through customs and excise. Furthermore, to cut costs, port management has increased its reliance on casual labour.

Taken together, tariff reduction, deregulation and casualisation have combined in unintended ways to reconfigure who benefits and loses from the way the port is managed. The winners are clearly the established importers and a new breed of tough small operators who have mastered the art of corruption. Both groups avoid paying their tariffs, which means that technically the goods they are bringing in are illegal imports. Organised crime syndicates who may be linked to some importers are also effectively running large-scale container theft operations from within the deregulated port system.

A Government Commission has revealed colossal losses to the state caused by poor revenue collection by the customs authorities and breakdown of control over illegal imports. Parliament was told in 1996/97 that 95% of all imported produce effectively falls within the technical definition of “smuggled goods”, i.e. goods that are either undeclared, or their value understated. It is estimated that the state loses about half its potential revenue from customs and excises charges on containers due to fraud, i.e. an amount of about R6, 8 billion for 1995/96. Severe understaffing, low skill and poor infrastructure in the customs and excise authority are blamed for the problems, as is the corruption of poorly paid officials who have no interest in increasing state revenue.

Container theft gangs use false documentation and forged number plates to literally drive out of the harbour with loads of containers filled with the most valuable goods. Container robbers have hijacked Johannesburg-bound trains. In all cases, container thieves clearly have inside information as to what each container contains - information that could only have come from local shipping agents and receiving clerks who have been corrupted or are permanent members of the syndicate. Another strategy is to avoid paying taxes by using false documentation that shows that the goods are destined for countries outside the Southern Africa Customs Union and then selling the goods in South Africa.

The deregulation of the stevedoring business and the breakup of stevedoring monopolies in favour of numerous small stevedoring businesses has resulted in the disintegration of a permanent unionised stevedore workforce, often with access to training opportunities. In its place has emerged a complex network of labour brokers who supply casual labour to hard pressed small businesses who staff up or down according to the contracts they get. The result is a chain of hustlers: from the importers trying to get their goods through the system, to the small business leaders hustling for contracts to move the goods, to the labour brokers who take a cut off the wages of the casual labour they supply to employers, to the deals that get made as the goods go through customs and excise, and then beyond as containers get targeted by thieves who have paid officials, stevedores and contractors for information about the most valuable containers.

Whereas containerisation has been accompanied by increased job security and upskilling of permanent workers in other ports around the world, in Durban the opposite has occurred as the permanent workforce has shrunk and casual labour increased. The result has been an ongoing set of violent wildcat strikes by casual workers against the labour brokers. Most of these workers are barely better off than the unemployed and many sleep on the streets around the docks. The welfare institutions that used to cater for white seamen and stevedores around the docks have been converted into nostalgic waterfront-type yuppie and tourist facilities. To survive, the daughters of many underpaid casual workers service the tourists with sex and their brothers run drug syndicates. The result is a changing urban form around the docks as the street takes over where stable employment leaves off. Whereas unions used to have two or three major employers to deal with in highly structured Industrial Councils, they must now try to force a large number of small employers to agree on employment terms that are a fundamental threat to the way these small employers operate in practice.

Although deregulation of port service provision and tariff reduction form part of the overall policy framework of economic liberalisation within a global economic framework, the effects in practice are now perceived by Durban's manufacturers, labour unions and local press as a serious threat to Durban's local economy. As Portnet forges ahead with its newfound management practices (deregulation, contracting out, casualisation, etc) - often in the name of "black empowerment" - to cut costs and increase efficiency of service for the shipping industry and the export-import industry, the losers are clearly beginning to articulate a very different picture about the role the port plays in practice in Durban's metropolitan economy.

In summary, the notion that "growing the port will grow the city" is clearly compelling and seductive for Durban's new political elite who must find ways of generating resources from an enlarging tax base to meet the development needs of the voting public. It also enlarges the size of the economic elite as the port system opens up opportunities for "black business". The quantitative targets that are so favoured by development planners tend to define the growth of the port in terms of increased throughput of containers and they correlate this with the number of jobs this will create. This then is assumed to benefit the wider metropolitan economy. On closer inspection, however, tariff reduction, Portnet's management practices, the poor and corrupted capacity of the regulatory authorities and the increased power of organised crime have combined to undermine the metropolitan economy by making it possible for importers to bring in goods more cheaply than what they can be manufactured for in Durban, and by destroying the organised labour force. This paves the way for an urban system and urban culture that is organised around short-term gains, corruption, informalisation and global-local relations premised on transient movements through the system rather than on the building of durable long-term commitments as the basis for a stable generative urban system.

Whereas the case of the Durban harbour reveals how translocal economic imperatives (the need to get more containers through the port more efficiently) can transform one element of the local urban system (in this case the port) to the detriment of the wider urban system, the case of the Marconi Beam housing development in Cape Town demonstrates how upwardly mobile modernising urban classes remain dependent on informal urban systems for the resources they need to afford the benefits of urban modernity.

Marconi Beam, Cape Town

Marconi Beam is an area in the middle of a conservative white suburb in Cape Town. Nelson Mandela launched the Masakhane ('Let's build together') Campaign there because it was seen by the new Government as an icon of urban modernity in formation. Its origins go back to the 1980s when mainly homeless 'Coloured' squatters established a settlement in "die bos" (the bush) called Cukutown. During the early 1990s the settlement expanded as Xhosa-speaking African people moved into the settlement. By 1991 it comprised about 3000 people and had been officially recognised as a development area rather than a 'black spot' to be removed from white suburbia. A complex partnership between Central Government, Local Government, private sector developers, NGOs and community groups was established to supervise the development of the area. 1200 formal houses for a slightly upmarket group were constructed in an area called Phoenix and 1000 serviced sites with core structures was established for the lower end of the market in an area that came to be called Joe Slovo Park after the first Housing Minister of the first democratic government.

By 1997 there were three settlements: Phoenix which was inhabited by lower middle class white and Coloured residents, Slovo Park which was inhabited by Xhosa-speaking working class and informally employed people, and the old Cukutown made up of about 400 shacks inhabited by a wide range of working people waiting to move into houses in Slovo Park, unemployed people with nowhere to go, the indigent old who had found a place to stay for a while, largely homeless street children, gangsters who needed the protection of informal anonymity, sex workers passing through, and a mix of traders from shop owners to shebeen (informal pub) operators. The impenetrable informality of Cukutown meant that its inhabitants were able to evolve a localised urban culture within a space that was not regulated or controlled by any outside authority. However, this was temporary because the understanding that had been reached between Phoenix, the white suburbs, Slovo Park and Cukutown residents was that as people moved from Cukutown into the Slovo Park houses, their shacks would be demolished leading, eventually, to the complete eradication of informal housing in the area.

It was a plan that suited the non-racial vision of the old and new entrants to urban modernity: for the whites, property prices would return to their old levels once the shacks were gone and the new areas absorbed into suburban culture; for the Coloureds, having their 'own place' in suburbia was more than enough and once Cukutown was gone, so the shebeens, gangsters and prostitutes would move out; and for the Africans who were moving into Slovo Park, for some this was the realisation of a long promised urban dream, but for others it meant having to find the funds to pay the bond repayments and service charges. For the Coloureds, whites and employed Africans, Cukutown was the unserviced foul smelling haven of gangsters, shebeen owners, street children and prostitutes. The unfolding logic of urban development was to gradually bury it below the image of tarred roads, grassed front lawns, clean shopping malls, laughing children walking safely to school and all the other associations of urban modernity.

To give substance to this image, the urban elites that represented these constituencies had agreed to abide by municipal by-laws that outlawed shebeens in Phoenix and Slovo Park.

(Presumably they all suffered the illusion that heavy drinking in illegal shebeens was the cause of urban crime.) What they ignored was the fact that quite a number of relatively well off people who moved from Cukutown to Slovo Park were owners of the shebeens and depended on revenue from the shebeens for survival when they lived in Cukutown, and continued to depend on this revenue after moving to Slovo Park to help pay for their new residences. Furthermore, the new urban elites also chose to ignore the possibility that some Cukutowners would not demolish their shacks behind them after moving to Slovo Park because either they intended to return after selling their Slovo Park units in order to realise their government subsidies as cash, or they intended renting out their shacks to newcomers in order to help with the bond repayments and service charges in Slovo Park.

There are indications that the Slovo Park-based shebeen owners who are not allowed to open shebeens in Slovo Park will try to retain their shebeens in Cukutown. In order to make sure that the shebeens remain a viable source of revenue to subsidise the costs of living in Slovo Park, the shebeen owners have an interest in making sure that Cukutown does not disappear. The best way to achieve this would, of course, be to encourage others to keep their shacks to rent out to newcomers to the area, and to assist the poorest of the poor to realise their government subsidies as raw cash by selling their Slovo Park units and moving back to Cukutown. In so doing, the shebeen owners will have effectively ensured the survival of Cukutown as a protected space where the poorest of the poor, the marginalised, the wrecked and increasingly the illegal “aliens” from neighbouring countries can continue to survive anonymously and largely without paying for staying in the city. The result will be that classically African compact between those whose survival depends on anonymity and those who profit from protecting the informal spaces that ensure anonymity. In the end, of course, the outcome will not be the idealised crime free suburbia that is so central to the imagination of urban modernity (with Phoenix, Slovo Park and the white suburbs conjoined by neatly defined, linked and legally sanctioned identities), but a contrived mockery where one element of the part that conforms to the dream must surreptitiously depend on the part that was supposed to disappear as the linear logic of urban development rolled out beneath the Masakhane flag. As local politics comes to revolve around these contradictions, the irony is that there is a real possibility that Cukutown may once again become the target of police raids as surrounding (now multi-racial) elites try to achieve what the white elites attempted (albeit with illegitimate sanction) a decade ago, namely to “clean out” the unwanted, the poor and the “violent” from the comfort zones of suburbia. What form resistance to this social re-alignment will take is impossible to predict because much will depend on who gives leadership and how.

Whereas the Durban Harbour and Marconi Beam cases reveal the way the unintended consequences of policy and planning decisions can vitiate what may appear at first to be a rational relationship between goals (local economic growth) and means (deregulation, tariff reduction), Zimbabwe’s Start Paying for Your House Scheme was intentionally corrupted by the political and bureaucratic elite to finance its own suburban proclivities.

Zimbabwe's Start Paying for Your House Scheme

During the early 1990s Zimbabwe’s Ministry of Public Construction and National Housing (MPCNH) embarked on a centrally driven programme to construct houses for civil servants.

Known as the New Thrust, the Ministry managed the programme to demonstrate to local governments what government agencies could do to meet housing needs. After concluding that the New Thrust was a success, the MPCNH decided to extend the programme to meet the housing needs of the homeless. However, unlike the early 1990s, by the mid-1990s a World Bank designed Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) was well advanced in achieving severe fiscal cutbacks in social expenditure, including support for housing. In order to resolve this, the MPCNH developed the Start Paying for Your House Scheme (SPYHS) in 1995 which invited homeless people to start making financial contributions to a fund on the understanding that new houses that were built would be allocated to those who had paid in the highest amounts.²⁸

The SPYHS attracted considerable interest, with Z\$2 million collected within three months of the start of the programme. Large numbers of homeless people converged on MPCNH offices to make their contributions. By the end of 1995 a fund had been created of Z \$40 million from contributions throughout the country. The funds collected were then used to finance housing construction. However, when it came to allocating the houses, the practice differed substantially from the initial intention. Instead, the interests that controlled allocation decisions during the New Thrust programme were still in place which meant that houses were allocated according to the same procedures (and therefore criteria), namely to senior government officials (many of whom had made no contributions to the fund.) The weak and threatened independent press in Zimbabwe periodically published startling revelations of how the fund was used to finance costly houses of senior politicians and officials, including the allocation of Z\$1,9 million to assist the First Lady to build a Z\$6 million home. The Commissioner of Police, Minister of Foreign Affairs and relatives of the President all appeared on a list of people who had fraudulently benefited from misused funds. Not surprisingly, the networks of homeless people that were mobilised to participate in the scheme were rapidly demoralised and in the absence of strong social movements and with a judiciary that favours the executive's interests rather than the protection of human rights, they reverted back to atomised defeatism in the face of arrogant officially sanctioned kleptomania.

The significance of the story of Harare's SPYHS is the connections between the implementation of a World Bank Structural Adjustment Programme, corruption and urban development. Structural Adjustment Programmes are often linked to "good governance" on the grounds that fiscal restraint denies politicians and bureaucrats access to excessive public funds to service private needs. However, the SPYHS story shows how corrupt bureaucratic and political elites find responses to fiscal restraint that leaves private appropriation of public resources intact: the only thing that changes is the way the funds are collected - instead of redirecting compulsorily collected public revenues, those who controlled the housing construction and allocation system were able to manipulate the home hunger of the homeless by getting them to "voluntarily" contribute to the excesses of the elite in the name of "participatory development". Not surprisingly, these "contributions" have trickled off and anger has yet to emerge from the generalised sense of disillusionment amongst those who got so excited back in mid-1995 when the scheme was announced. One can only imagine the effect this will have on any future effort to build trust between civil society and the state

²⁸ . This account of the SPYHS story is taken from Mbiba, B., op. cit.

around development initiatives. More importantly, what it reveals is how far the elite really are prepared to go to construct a particularly offensive and excessive form of corrupted urban modernity. The mind boggles when it comes to pondering what form resistance to this could possibly take, not least because social movements normally emerge to protest private subversions of public responsibility and not the reverse!

Trends from the Cases

All three cases reveal the contrast between the rationality of official policy prescriptions for urban development and how things turn out in practice as vested interests with the power to manipulate social relationships capture and direct resource flows. What is of interest here is not the traditional focus of policy analysis on the unintended consequences of well intentioned policy implementation. Rather the concern here is with the persistent denial of complex relational patterns at the outset of the process that allows policy formulators to abstract these patterns and their consequences from the recommendations that inform official action. Our argument is that this is due to the fact that these policies rest on epistemological assumptions that are deeply rooted in the compelling rationality of a particular image of urban modernity that local elites find most useful indeed when it comes to presenting their interests as synonymous with the general interest of the entire society. In all three cases, the outcomes described were only possible because these elites were able to simultaneously conjoin their commitments to well-intentioned policies with exploitative and irresponsible practices in a way that not only denied the losers a language for articulating viable alternatives, but also incorporated them into a system that they came to depend on for (at least parts of) their survival and even compliance (possibly with the exception of the wildcat strikers in Durban Harbour). These dynamics raise the urgent need for a form of knowledge that does not rely exclusively on the technical rationality of logical argumentation that has proven so mystifying in practice. As Flyvbjerg has argued, we must complement this kind of knowledge with an understanding of context where we confront the "play of Machiavellian princes, Nietzschean will to power, and Foucauldian rationality-as-reationalisation".²⁹ For us, this means rethinking the most salient feature of African cities, namely their complex "relational webs".

5. Relational Webs

Section two contextualised the struggle to define the African city, section three homed in on the ambiguities of African urbanity, and section four revealed the interplay between policy intentions and outcomes due to the way vested interests mediated resource flows by manipulating relationships and networks. The central argument in this section will be that a relational perspective may provide a more appropriate way of approaching the social fabric of African cities

²⁹ . Flyvbjerg, B., *Rationality and Power: Democracy in Practice*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1998, p.225. Bernt Flyvbjerg's book is a detailed urban case study of Aalborg in Denmark that explored the relationship between the rationality of development plans and the power relations inscribed in the context that plans don't take into account resulting in outcomes that contradicted policy intentions.

The remarkable attachment of urban elites and countless communities in Southern African cities to the grand visions of urban modernity that most have only seen idealised in movies, textbooks and magazines is such that they are prepared to settle for an empty facade of this dream, behind which are reproduced all the relationships that they love to hate so much. The result is a tragic split between what it takes to aspire to live in the gleaming promised land of individuated wealth and the suppressed darkness of complex stressful relations upon which the lie depends. The real issue, however, is how does one explain the persistence of this split.

What appears to be the unwillingness to deal directly with the complex intricacies of social relationships in the cities is, of course, both what it appears to be and more. There is undoubtedly much absurdity when it comes to 'majestic' displays of authority and pomp, to say nothing of the time and resources consumed. The efforts that communities make to address their own understandings of globalisation often get stuck in a disembodied theatrical performance of what passes as power, authority and modernity. The appearance of majesty, importance, and efficacy, as manifested through spectacle, formality, bureaucracy, ceremony and the facades of urban modernity (mansions, luxury cars, etc), are corrupted and made banal as they now can be applied to countless occasions and locations. Rooms full of empty hand-clapping grandiose ceremonies, and excess consumption, are well known. They are, however, well seen through by everyone, and are taken seriously simply because they are so empty, i.e. as governance becomes pure style and urban development a fraud, no qualifications, no prerequisites are necessary. Combined with the arbitrary nature of violence in all aspects of African society, the surface compliance of the masses to the incontestability and majesty of the regime and its elites thus, according to Mbembe, act as a way to defuse its power.³⁰ In short, the spectacle is supported because in the absence of viable alternatives, the collective mockery of the caricature is an act of self-recognition.

Also, on closer inspection, increasingly urbanised African societies may not be as 'conservative' as they appear. More precisely, the seemingly claustrophobic sense of convention may be reproduced, not so much as the legacy of marginalised, underdeveloped societies, but as a means of 'officiating' practices of survival that are increasingly ad hoc and unconventional. What appears as convention is simply then a necessary ploy to provide structurally volatile and contentious societies with a semblance or illusion of coherence. The conventions remain forceful only because people do not pay attention to what they are really doing.

Certainly a highly fluid reorganization of households, family social networks and kinship categories is taking place which gives many urban neighborhoods a sense of impenetrability, despite the intentions of those making these changes to institutionalize and give some permanence to them. It is nearly impossible for anyone, let alone outside observers, to have any clear sense of what is going on inside communities. Certainly in many urban neighborhoods with hundreds of thousands of residents, it is a question just what government of any level or type actually controls. These ambiguities in the organization of social life at the neighborhood level contribute to enhancing the speed and mobility of transactions, resources and alliances. The reason for this is that when conditions change, there is no need to waste time dismantling any formal arrangements that have become redundant and to re-

³⁰ . Mbembe, A., op. cit.

assemble others to suit the new conditions. Instead, the reading of the new context, adjusting, responding and acting accordingly becomes a single movement accomplished almost without thinking as one provisional set of arrangements is replaced by another set that is equally provisional in nature. For if no clear roles and channels of exchange are institutionalized, and it is understood that it is necessary to be as opportunistic as possible, then almost everyone is available to do something out of the ordinary so that things can happen very fast, if not necessarily efficiently.³¹ It is a process of keeping communities on their toes, but also vulnerable to implosive disruptions - where 'real' solidarity, coherence, and functionality must be re-pieced together almost on a day to day basis, even though people may have a strong sense of what they are obligated to do and how they are obligated to behave.

Unfortunately, when it comes to alternative futures, the complexities and relational dynamics inherent in the governance and development of African cities are not the central focus of the dominant approaches. The formal governance and development prescriptions of the 1990s rest on a critique of the organisational principles of the "hierarchy", i.e. the principles that were dominant during the Weberian golden age that really lasted from the late c.19th up until the neo-liberal revolution that began in the late 1970s. The alternative set of organisational principles that are now current are essentially principles of the "market", i.e. competition, the contract, single purpose authority and individual performance – or, as the slogan puts it, "isolate, assign and measure".³² As the discussion thus far has attempted to demonstrate, an approach is needed that takes seriously the intimate connection between 'glocalisation', complex 'collibrated'³³ urban processes and patterns, and the highly ambiguous and provisional relationships that hold together African organisations and societies.

Unfortunately, due to the dominance of either hierarchical and/or market organisational principles, the debate about African cities - and Southern African cities in particular - has not incorporated a rich literature that seeks to place the question of 'relational capital' at the centre of its normative perspective,³⁴ or to use more conventional language, a set of

³¹ . The best example is how the largest urban market in the world operates, namely Luanda's market where it has been estimated that 500 000 people participate in the daily ritual of moving in thousands of tons of goods into the city each day, and moving them out of the city by nightfall with no single centralised organising agency – or even groups of agencies - in place charge with responsibility for planning, coordinating and financing this phenomenal feat. The only way it works is through constant adaptation to even the slightest change in any part of the system. Nor can this be explained via the categories of public choice and market theory because it is not methodological individualism that makes it possible, but rather the relational inter-dependencies between all those involved in this vast web of seething transactions.

³² . For a review of these paradigm shifts see Swilling, M., "Changing Conceptions of Governance", paper commissioned by the South African White Paper on Local Government , August 1997. See also Mintzberg, H., "Managing Government: Governing Management", in Harvard Business Review, May-June 1996, pp.75-83. For a review of the neo-liberal economic assumptions underlying current governance and development approaches, see Schmitz, G., "Democratization and Demystification: Deconstructing 'Governance' as Development Paradigm", in Moore, D. and Schmitz, G. (eds.), *Debating Development Discourse: Institutions and Popular Perspectives*, London, Macmillan, 1995.

³³ . Dunsire, A., "Modes of Governance", in Kooiman, J. (ed.), *Modern Governance*, London, Sage, 1993.

³⁴ . An exception may be the way into this via the social capital discussion addressed by Pieterse, E., op. cit..

organisational principles derived from the logic of the “network” organisation.³⁵

The entire discussion up until this point has been to demonstrate how profoundly relational African cities really are. The tragedy, however, is that this is seen as an obstacle, something to be overcome rather than a point of entry for how we should think about and change the governance and development of African cities.

The common response of city leaders across the developed and developing world to ‘globalisation’ has been to make their localities ‘attractive to investors’, the international business community, global decision makers and their sidekicks, tourists, etc. – essentially, a response that derives from a market perspective. An alternative approach has emerged which emphasizes the need to mobilise diversity as a source of both social cohesion and urban economic competitiveness and to work with the urban social fragments and hybridity generated by ‘in here-out there’ mingling. This relational approach with its emphasis on hybridity and mingling seeks to demonstrate why social relations matter to economic and political activity and how this comes about. It does not imply a focus specifically on formal organisations. It emphasises how organisations - a firm, local government, a public agency, a pressure group, a household - are activated by the way people-in-relations realise procedures and activities. In this activating work, an organisation is connected to, and embedded in, the web of relations, a social ecology, which forms the social environment of the various participants.³⁶

The perspective presented here has implications for urban economic interventions. City governments may strive to improve the benefits of the ‘coexistence of relational webs’ within their areas - or promote the interests of particular actors and their strategies or just maintain the status quo. But as Healey et. al. argue, they are not the sole locus for addressing the concerns people have with respect to managing coexistence in shared spaces.

“Urban management is thus not merely a job of governments. It is the product of the way people in households, firms and agencies seek out ways of making links and establishing common cause with those of similar agendas or some mutuality of interest. Through these processes ... new alliances are formed to influence the terms of coexistence, and influence what local and national governments do. These affect not only the agenda of urban management... they also affect the styles and processes of management. Thus, as the agencies of formal urban politics - city governments and political parties - struggle to adjust to new circumstances, they are often under active pressure to respond to these new agendas and ways of doing things. At the same time, they too are within *relational webs* in which typically there are higher

³⁵ . See, Castells, M., *The Rise of the Network Society*, Oxford (UK) and Cambridge (US), Blackwell, 1996; Mintzberg, H., op. cit., Capra, F., op. cit., Broucart

³⁶ . The “new institutional economics” is essentially saying the same thing by emphasising transactional costs as the factor that is ignored by neo-classical economics – see North, D., *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990.

tiers of government seeking to shape what they do.”³⁷

If there is any merit in the conceptual approach outlined above, actions should focus not just on the provision of goods and services or enabling others to do so, but on the building of links both in social relations and in discourses, between the relational webs in the urban arena. The notion that local government leaders should define their leadership role in terms of the building of relational webs is not only new, but it effectively means that they will have to learn about what it will take to do this in practice on a day-to-day basis.³⁸

Building relational webs is critical especially in the cities of the developing world. Cities, particularly large cities in the developing world are complex entities embodying a dynamism that encompasses and transcends narrow sectoral arenas. For Amin and Thrift, ‘holding down the global’ cannot be merely reduced to a narrow set of supply side ‘economic fundamentals’.³⁹ Social and cultural factors including relationships of trust; a strong sense of common industrial purpose; social consensus; local institutional support for business; and agencies and traditions encouraging innovation, skills formation and the circulation of ideas are crucial factors that lie at the heart of success in the context of ‘glocalisation’. These factors are best summed up in the phrase ‘institutional thickness’. The essential features of this institutional thickness include a strong institutional presence; high levels of interaction amongst the network of institutions in a local area; the development of sharply defined patterns of coalition resulting in both the collective representation of what are normally sectional and individual interests, and the socialisation of costs and control of potentially corrupt or excessive rent seeking behaviour; and, the development among participants in the institutional webs of a mutual awareness that they are involved in a common enterprise.

Arguing along similar lines, Allan Wallis has summed up the changing nature of local governance from a US perspective in a way that seems to go beyond both the hierarchical and market assumptions about the role of local government in the urban development process.⁴⁰ Echoing similar trends in Europe,⁴¹ he refers to three new trends that characterise the “third wave” in local governance:

- the increased involvement of the private and non-profit sectors in governance structures and service delivery;

³⁷ . Healey, P., Cameron, S., Davoudi, S. and Mandani, A., “Introduction: The City - Crisis, Change and Invention”, in Healey, P., Cameron, S., et. al. (eds.), *The New Urban Context: Managing Cities*, London, John Wiley and Sons, 1995, p.19, (author’s emphasis).

³⁸ . See Bennington, J., “New Paradigms and Practices for Local Government: Capacity Building Within Civil Society”, in Kraemer, S. and Roberts, J. (eds.), *The Politics of Attachment*, London, Free Association Books, 1997.

³⁹ . Amin, A., “Placing Globalisation”, paper presented at the RGS-IBG Annual Conference, Exeter, 7-9 January, 1995.

⁴⁰ . Wallis, A., “The Third Wave: Current Trends in Regional Governance”, *National Civic Review*, Summer/Fall, 1994, pp.290-309.

⁴¹ . See Kooiman, J., op. cit., and Stoker, G., “Governance as Theory: Five Propositions”, paper presented to Enjeux Des Debates Sur La Gouvernance, Universite Lausanne, 29-30 November, 1996.

- a new type of elected leadership that is willing and has the skills to negotiate complex multi-stakeholder partnerships to mobilise resources and build communities;
- an increasing use of facilitated discussion to developed shared vision, resolve conflicts, make decisions and develop consensus between different interests inside and outside governing structures.⁴²

Wallis argues that the changing nature of the capacities for local governance referred to above is linked to the following shifts in the way cities are governed:

- “governance vs. government”: this represents a shift from formal structures to less formal processes for setting policy and mobilising action;
- “cross-sectoral vs. uni-sectoral”: no longer a leading role for government, but public, for-profit and non-profit partnerships to mobilise resources;
- “collaboration vs. coordination”: no longer coordination of what everyone does, but collaboration to ensure that each stakeholder achieves specific tasks within a larger regional effort;
- “process vs. structure”: instead of masterplanning via formal structures, the emphasis is on the organisation of ongoing processes for public, for-profit and non-profit stakeholders to reach agreement on vision, goals, objectives and implementation strategies;
- “networks vs. formal structures”: actions and organisation tend to occur via ever changing networks, with strong networks clustered around a stable core of institutions.⁴³

Taken together, Wallis is referring to governance capacities and trends that depend on a relational culture. Although new and spreading in the US context (and not so new in other developed world contexts such as Northern Italy), it is cause for some debate in societies where this relational culture cannot always be assumed. By contrast, it is a tremendous irony indeed that as the bastions of urban modernity in the developed world turn to (post-modern) relational ways of governing in response to greater complexity and uncertainty, local governments in highly relational environments like Southern Africa tend to deny in the name of a contrived rationalist modernity what may be their greatest strength, namely the implicit conditions within urban communities for a relational approach to governance. Although the relational webs in African cities are recognised and, indeed, generally assumed as a given, the urban elites tend to exploit these relations to build resource bases for a contrived (and parasitical) urban modernity rather than mobilising these diverse energies for a generalised authenticated and indigenous set of urban visions that could drive the emergence of a set of urban forms that take seriously the voices, values and needs of the urban majority. The result is that relationships are ambiguated, provisional, truncated and constantly reinvented as they are strained by the requirements of introverted survival within ever changing disconnected interstitial hidden abodes. If the building of non-exploitative relational webs rather than purely contract-based markets or hierarchical modernities became the language and focus of local governance, then maybe relationships could become more supportive, less violent, more talked about, more inter-dependent and yes, more reciprocal and trusting. The challenge, therefore, is to liberate African local governance from the rationalist delusions of

⁴² . Wallis, A., op. cit., p.291.

⁴³ . Ibid., pp.292-3

positivist modernity so that it can be allowed to embrace more readily that which can only be denied, but from which there is no escape.

6. Conclusion

The analysis of the dynamics of African cities – and Southern African cities in particular - that has been developed in this paper opens up new ways of thinking about social action and development intervention. Put crudely, if a hierarchical approach resulted in an emphasis on law, institutions and vertically integrated authority, and a market approach has emphasised individuation, institutional delineation, competition, contracts and enabling, what are the consequences of an approach that aims to build trust-based and reciprocal relational webs as the basis for governance and development? Even if the elite attachments to urban modernity could be deconstructed in African cities, the task would remain as to how to build up a set of leadership capacities within local governments, NGOs, CBOs and – indeed – the for-profit sector that would reinforce the opening up rather than exploitative closure of relational webs.⁴⁴ The rest of this conclusion maps out an agenda for capacity building agencies that are actively engaged at city level in Africa.

Firstly, we need to incorporate Lisa Peatie’s call for a “phronesis” approach⁴⁵ because this is about an epistemology that subordinates abstraction to context. She points out that phronesis is the third form of knowledge that Aristotle referred to but which was eclipsed by the other two during the evolution of Western Thought, namely episteme (universal knowledge) and techne (making things). Phronesis is not about building universal explanations, nor is it about being able to do things. It is about building practical wisdom out of the complexity of context. This, in turn, helps undermine the kind of grand theory that large powerful institutions love to grab hold of in order to justify the imposition of panaceas that must deny any form of complex contextual specificity. Peatie, citing Flyvbjerg, refers to the need to develop the capacity for analyses that address value questions (What should be done and why?) and power relations as expressed in each context. More specifically, this will mean that researchers and actors will need to get “close” to - and even “climb into” - their contexts. This, in turn, will entail a focus on minutiae for their own sake and not just as phenomena for theory testing; on the relations embedded in practical activity rather just the objectively observable habits of “everyday life”; and on the development of cases to demonstrate “practical rationality” through experience rather than through generalisation. If knowledge construction proceeds along these lines, then a much more nuanced and authentic appreciation of context becomes possible as the basis for posing and answering the “*how*-questions” and not just the “*why*-questions”.

Secondly, we need to revisit the way we communicate by questioning the traditional formats of development speak and policy analysis. Recent methodological discussion has tended to emphasize post-positivist approaches that rely on qualitative rather than quantitative

⁴⁴ . We have used the notion of openness here in the Popperian sense, i.e. an experimental non-teleological plurality.

⁴⁵ . See Peatie, L., “An Approach to Urban Research in the 1990s”, in Stren, R. and Bell, J., *Perspectives on the City*, Toronto, Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto, 1995, pp.392-393.

information and data.⁴⁶ If complex context-specific relations are to become the subject of local governance in African cities, then a holistic non-reductionist focus on dynamic integrated patterns rather than the narrow breakdown of the city into discreet parts may well provide a more useful “way in” for activists and policy makers. To achieve this, we may well give greater attention to storytelling as the alternative to development speak. It has been recently argued that storytelling has been such an enduring method over the millennia across all civilizations precisely because stories are often the best way of communicating very complex concepts, values *and emotions* in remarkably simple ways.⁴⁷ Only stories can be both simple and highly complex at the same time. There is evidence that stories – or cases if you mean management learning cases rather than the traditional sociological ‘case study’ – tend to be more common in cultures where ‘phronesis’ underpins how the society learns. It is not surprising that private sector management education throughout the world has built capacity for managing through storytelling since at least the 1950s. And it is orally communicated stories that shape and express the kinds of relationships in African cities that have been discussed in this paper. What a tragedy, then, that the public management and development sectors have tended to do the opposite by building up elaborate policy languages that serve only to legitimize elite practices rather than energize entire societies to learn about themselves. It may well be time to learn how to build capacity across all levels of society through storytelling.⁴⁸

Finally, although learning networks have been around for some time now, and although there are dozens of local government associations internationally, it may well be time to find ways of building governance capacities in African cities by establishing structured learning networks of local governments. The best international precedent is the University of Warwick Local Government Consortium that consists of 30 local governments from across the United Kingdom. A new initiative in South Africa called the Local Governance Learning Network funded by the Open Society Foundation has been launched which brings together 15 South African local governments and the cities of Maputo (Mozambique) and Windhoek (Namibia) into a structured learning network organised along similar lines to the Warwick network. In both networks, the learning process is structured so that it flows from innovations that originate from within each local government which then get replicated through the rest of the network via facilitated workshops, research papers written up by

⁴⁶ . See Fischer, F., "Beyond Objectivity: Policy Inquiry as Interpretive Practice." *Policy Studies Journal*, No. 3, 1997; "Participatory Expertise and the Politics of Local Knowledge: A Postpositivist Perspective." In *The Political Context of Collective Action*, ed. by Ricca Edmundson. London: Routledge (forthcoming 1997); "Participatory Expertise and the Politics of Local Knowledge: A Postpositivist Perspective," in *The Political Context of Collective Action: Action, Argumentation, and Democracy* (Sage Publication, forthcoming)

⁴⁷ . See Lessem, R., 'The Art of Research - From Case Study to Creation Story', unpublished mimeo, Wits Business School, University of the Witwatersrand, 1996; Cory, D. and Underwood, P., "Stories for Learning", and Brown, J., "Dialogue: Capacities and Stories", both in Chawla, S. and Renesch, J., *Learning Organisations*, Portland, Productivity Press, 1995.

⁴⁸ . For the best reflection and review of attempts to do this in South Africa at the Graduate School of Public and Development at the University of the Witwatersrand, see Schutte, L., "Case Teaching in Public and Development Management", Masters Thesis, Department of Education, University of the Witwatersrand, October 1996.

researchers and (in the South African case) an IntraNet organised via a Website. The network's organisational infrastructure and ongoing "knowledge management" is handled by the Local Government Centre at the University of Warwick in the UK case, and by a special purpose NGO that has been created by three South African Universities in partnership with local government and NGO stakeholders in the South African case. In both cases, the network is held together on the basis of trust-based relationships and the notion that each local government can make more strategic gains by sharing and learning than from competing and hoarding information. This both builds network-type relational webs in practice and demonstrates the gains to be made if this became a more generalised approach within each city.

In short, phronesis, storytelling and learning networks have already started to be used as organising principles for building democratic local governance in some Southern African cities. The next task is to monitor the way this works to glean lessons that could be used to establish similar networks elsewhere in Africa and the world.