

Chapter 9

African Cities Cultural Heritage, Urban Fragmentation, and Territorial Spatial Development

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary African city tends to become a geographic platform for establishing and showing a territorial spatial–social identity. This shows that global openness and accessibility may run parallel to closed and fragmented cultural clusters. Urban scholarship calls for a broader orientation in the field of cultural heritage dynamics, with a focus on the following: citizenship and identity, economic creative activities and innovation, the impact of popular culture, and the interface between traditional societal perspectives and open attitudes regarding contemporary interwoven cultures. Against this background, African cities have always been meeting places for people of different cultures, education, and talents. The contemporary African city is an open milieu, where ideas from a diversity of cultures and nations come together. The major challenge for a modern African city will be to turn possible tensions in such a intercultural milieu into positive synergetic energy.

African cities have long since been symbols of civilization, economic and scientific progress. (Jacobs, 1969) famously characterized cities as catalysts for technological innovation and economic advancement, generating surpluses and investment in their surrounding areas. Writers such as (Cronon, 1991) and (Rees, 1992) have recognised that cities are also nodes of vast consumption, creating what (Rees, 1992) sees as ecological footprints through the extinction of resources from immense areas beyond their boundaries. In social terms, cities like in Africa, can be characterised as magnets attracting heterogeneous mix of human activities, encouraging new forms of individual interaction and collective association. Thus, cultural heritage evolution in these circumstances can likely be experienced as people step out of their daily environments into adopted spaces acting as sites of cultural clusters. Here too, interaction is of a prosaic nature, but these sites work as spaces for cultural heritage displacement and urban fragmentation.

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This effectiveness lies in placing people from different backgrounds in new settings where engagement with strangers in a common activity disrupts easy labelling of the stranger as enemy and initiates new attachments. These are moments of cultural interruptions, offering individuals the chance to break out of anchored relations and notions, and through this, to learn to become different through new patterns of social interaction within territorial spatial developments. If African cities do not permit distinct cultural groups to develop desired urban forms, functions, and spaces adapted to their different cultural needs, it may lead to the alienation of the groups and the eventual loss of their culture. Also this outcome would intensify the destruction of communities and create more isolated, fragmented urban spaces, a particular problem with the Nigerian community in Johannesburg, South Africa, (Jacobs, 1969). Therefore, urban planning policies and the management of the coexistence of people within shared spaces of neighbourhoods, cities, and regions, are considered to be a critical capacity for the collective growth of an ideal contemporary African society.

The cultural and socio-regional multifaceted notion of contemporary African cities meanwhile seem to challenge the sense of a common national or regional identity. Urban fragmentation is becoming a new trend. What does it take to embrace different kinships or nationalism? This question too is influenced by classism (popular, organised and institutional), differentials of inequality, corrupted leaders at the helm of affairs and deprivation, discourses of rural-urban migration, communal rights and patterns of cultural contact. This chapter discusses the possibilities for 'inter-regionalism' at this broader level. The term is used to stress cultural respect and dialogue, and it contrasts with versions of multifaceted nationalism that either stress cultural difference without resolving the problem of communication between cultures, or versions of cosmopolitanism that speculate the gradual erosion of cultural difference through inter-kinship mixture, massive corruption and hybridisation. The literature on kinship, culture and national citizenship tends to discuss these possibilities at the level of national rights and obligations, individual or collective. In this chapter, the author will emphasis on everyday communal lived experiences and how local negotiations of difference; on macro, meso and micro-cultures of place and space draw from abstract rights and obligations. Local structures and resources have a direct impact on how these distinctive individual, communal and inter-personal experience interact. This focus on the macro, meso and micro-cultures of place and space is not intended to privilege bottom-up or local influences over top-down or general influences, since all sets make up the grain of places and spaces. It is intended to privilege everyday enactment as the central site of the individual with communal identity and attitude formation. The chapter also includes a micro-version; a discussion of the nature of the local spaces in African cities, like Lagos, Nairobi, Johannesburg etc. in which inter-cultural exchange can occur, and then goes on to discuss the aspects of cultural heritage synergies within territorial spatial developments which sustain kinship and urban fragmentation.

Since the 2002 release of his bestseller, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, (Florida, 2002) has become the acceptable face of a new brand of economic geography. He has provided countless urban promotions with a legitimating storyline to convince councillors and citizens. The branding of Cities; high density communal areas, high-rise structures, iconic buildings, boutique hotels, endowed museums, financial hubs, Wi-Fi access and bicycle lanes are the means to future economic success. All this intervention can be seen as steering and facilitating by new economic geographers such as (Overman, 2001) for whom agglomeration makes size itself (through economies of scale and network effects) a driver of the success of large cities like; New York, London, Milan, Toronto etc.

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