

## Los Angeles and African Cities: Comparing and Contrasting Development Processes

My Aunt Stella believes that all African cities are like L.A. and will eventually look just like L.A. in the future. Stella's claim is one that became popular after Ed Soja published his book entitled *Postmetropolis*. In this book Soja introduces the idea of the developed city of L.A. being a *Postmetropolis* that has resulted from many development processes, and he argues that other cities will reach this same final incarnation once they are developed cities. Garth Myers refutes this argument in his book "African Cities: Alternative Visions of Urban Theory and Practice", and identifies five themes of African Cities that do not align with Soja's theory of the L.A. postmetropolis. This paper will begin with a discussion of Soja's analysis of the L.A. postmetropolis, then discuss Myers' themes of African Cities, and end with an analysis of the two visions that refutes Aunt Stella's argument. I will begin with Soja because he argues that what has happened to L.A. is a ubiquitous process that is happening to cities all over the world. He identifies six discourses of L.A.'s postmetropolis; Postfordist, cosmopolis, exopolis, fractal, carceral, and sim.

The first two discourses, postfordist and cosmopolis, are general characteristics that are born out of globalization. The postfordist discourse refers to postindustrial economics structuring cities. Postfordism is a result of deindustrialization in the US, a process that is ongoing still today. Cities were no longer industrial urban nodes that were built around mass-production assembly line plants. Urban markets shifted their focus from manufacturing to various sectors such as information technology, service and white-collar industries. L.A. became a city of multiple production nodes that traded globally. Globalization is also characterized as a cosmopolis, a city of extreme diversity economically and culturally. The cosmopolis replaces city structures with postcolonial, informal, and cosmopolitan structures. Global trade has become the purpose of L.A thus globalization becomes the culture of the city and social structure. People organize themselves in the global market and the city also becomes spatially organized as a world city.

Soja's next two discourses, exopolis and fractal, are more characteristics of cities that result from globalization. Sprawling suburbs and exurbs grow outside of the city and the city no longer looks like the traditional model. These two discourses represent the fragmenting of cities and shattering of the city as a unified spatial realm. Suburbs outside of L.A. in the San Bernardino Valley, East L.A., and Orange County continue to grow in population and sprawl out spatially. The boundaries of L.A. are pushed out and suburbs begin to be their own exopolis. L.A. became a decentralized city with multiple suburbs with populations the size of cities. Suburbs of L.A. began dissociate themselves from the city and claim their own municipal powers. One example of this is the 'exit privilege', a way for neighborhoods to secede from the city of L.A. and control some of their own municipal services. 'Exit privilege' was born out of Lakewood, a residential white middle-class neighborhood that decided they didn't want to pay taxes for services from the city. With 'exit privilege' Lakewood was allowed contract out services from L.A. country such as firefighters and garbage. Neighborhoods like Lakewood chose to cut themselves off from the city of L.A. because it was perceived to be failing because of poverty, diversity, and racial tensions. 'Exit privilege' worked as a good source of revenue to the county, but it played a huge role in decentralizing the city of L.A.

Some legislation was passed in Southern California that led to further fragmentation of L.A. Homeowners throughout neighborhoods of the region wanted to avoid integration and protect their wealth. They claimed that diversity in their neighborhoods would decrease their property values and bring crime to the neighborhood. Two laws were passed that fragmented L.A.; Proposition 13 and Proposition U. Proposition 13 was passed with the idea that homeowners could preserve their wealth through static property taxes. The legislation allowed property tax to not increase beyond their assessed level even if the housing value went up tenfold. Property taxes are the single biggest funder of K-12 education and Proposition 13 put the state into economic distress because schools in wealthier neighborhoods were better off, while schools in poorer neighborhoods scrambled to find resources. Proposition U was another bit of legislation that promoted sprawl and fragmentation of L.A. Proposition U was a rationale for housing developments to build out rather than build up. Low-level density neighborhoods wanted again to preserve their property values so Proposition U created zoning ordinances for

low density. Both of these propositions are reflective of the exopolis and fractal discourses of cities because they decentralized L.A. and promoted instability in the city and region. This fragmentation continued to be popular in L.A. that decentralization began to leech into the daily lives of citizens, characteristics of Soja's last two discourses.

Soja's final two discourses are 'carceral' and 'sim', both characterized as hyper-regulation of cities even down to an individual level of regulating personal mobility. Mike Davis best describes this in his book "City of Quartz", in a chapter entitled *Fortress L.A.* Davis describes L.A. as a carceral city that grew out of crime and gang activity being sensationalized by the media. As mentioned above, suburban neighborhoods worked to become their own impenetrable enclaves. This trend continued to be popular and gates and walls started popping up all over the region as segregation grew. Gated communities work as signals to outsiders that influence who goes to those places and who the intended users are. This trend carried over into public space as well. Davis describes a "destruction of public space" (Davis 2006, p. 226) that occurs through the mechanization of public spaces. Design in architecture signal who can use certain spaces, what sort of behavior is acceptable, and circulate people's movement in space throughout the city. There is also the element of constant surveillance in L.A. because of fear of crime. Davis calls this "The Panopticon Mall" (Davis 2006, p. 240) in reference to Michel Foucault's description of watchtower prison design. The metaphor of 'panopticon' means that everyone is under constant surveillance, with no privacy, and that socially we become subjects in a city that are constantly being watched. The two discourses of a carceral archipelago and simcity reflect growing privatization of urban space and restructuring of our images of what the city is.

Soja's work on dissecting the urbanization of L.A. is quite extensive and a brilliant revelation of intensive processes that have occurred in L.A. that are difficult to pinpoint. His claims of the L.A. postmetropolis being present worldwide are subject to scrutiny however. Myers' 5 themes of African cities acknowledge characteristics of development processes that may be similar to processes in L.A., but the cities are very different. Soja's discourses may account for minor variations in each city, but overall the postmetropolis is a fairly rigid,

homogenous idea that do not leave room for innovation and unique processes that occur in other countries. Myers argues that the cities he has studied in Africa each should be an example of results of development processes. He argues that Lusaka, Dar es Salaam, and Accra are all cities that can be different examples of how development creates new cities. His argument refutes the idea of L.A. being the standard example of a world-class city that has fully developed to its potential in the global economy. Myers identifies five themes of African cities are postcolonialism, (i)n(f)ormality, governance, violence, and cosmopolitanism.

The first theme, postcolonialism, is one of the biggest issues in African cities today. African countries were the subject of imperial colonizers from Europe and South America through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Colonialism came from ancient practices that continued to be used in Europe around 1500 A.D. Colonialism had political, economy, and geographical effects on shaping Africa's space and people. Politically colonizers worked to control and influence a nation over other peoples and territories. Economically imperial rule was a system of government that sought to defend an unequal relationship of commodity exchange. The politics and economics of colonialism were to exploit and facilitate an economic interest to benefit the colonizing country. Geographically colonialism controlled territory and cultural space, forming new kinds of territorial and psychological strategy that did not work in the interest of African peoples. Colonialism bred widespread inequality, underdevelopment, and poverty throughout Africa (Myers 2012). With the spread of democracy and liberalism worldwide, colonization was no longer morally acceptable (Spruyt 2000). Colonialism became delegitimized within two decades and African countries were left in a state of confusion and disorganization left by the systems imposed on them by their colonizers. Abandoned by imperial countries that organized them and being held up to a new global standard of development, Africans scrambled to find new ways of organizing their states and building their own economies. Out of this process came many informal aspects of African cities.

Myers' second theme of African cities is the interconnected working of formality and informality. Decolonization and post-apartheid Africa left cities throughout the continent with the task of organizing themselves in a legitimate, formalized way, but this was not easy to

comprehend or successfully implement. Informalities popped up all over Africa in cities, squatter settlements, and informal economies. Dierwechter analyzes the dreams and plans of building the 'Post-Apartheid' city by bringing new structures to formal and informal places in the article "Dream, Bricks, and Bodies: mapping 'neglected spatialities' in African Cape Town". Dierwechter looks at how cities in Africa work to integrate people by building market facilities and other structures that are meant to welcome people, but this process comes from a modern, entrepreneurial approach of integrating people into new formal systems (Dierwechter 2004). There is much debate as to whether introducing formal systems into informal spaces will bring people a quality of life that is better or worse. Formal systems often end up working in a way that imposes on people, mandating that in order to succeed in a system you must behave in a certain way (Dierwechter 2004).

It is important to note that informality refers to the legitimacy of an activity, not the nature of it. In Accra the city has a massive informal economy of scrapping, reusing, and refurbishing electronic waste. This informal market has create a network that stretches across Ghana, the continent of Africa, and the global economy. E-waste scrap laborers are laborers that work informally in Ghana. They receive shipments of e-waste in both legal and illegal ways and the e-waste economies "provide income for over 64 million people in the 'developing' world" (Grant 2010, pg. 599). The informal economy is a way that African people found they could organize themselves and compete in the global economy. Although it is seen as illegal and illegitimate to the Western world, it is seen as legitimate to the marginalized poor. E-waste is a source of value in Ghana in many forms of production, and many products that come out of e-waste go back into the global economy. It is important to note that the informal marke of e-waste is not a linear, one-way process, but a very complex, interconnected network between informal and formal economies of multiple entities across the continent.

Governance is the third theme of African cities, and it is tied in closely with informality. With the expansion of informal markets and informal settlements comes the question of how to govern such spaces. The question of governing African cities is already a confusing one with decolonization and post-apartheid Africa. Again the question comes up of whether organizing

formal African cities will be better or worse for people. Myers discusses cases of African cities where governance is still very much in the trial stages. Some formal systems implemented have turned out to fail or be incomplete, which can lead to acts of violence by frustrated and exasperated Africans. Violence is Myers' fourth theme of African cities due to the instability that has come with decolonization. While African cities are working to organize themselves they are also having formal systems imposed upon them that create chaos, increase poverty, and widen inequalities in Africa. These negative effects carry over into his fifth theme of African cities; cosmopolitanism. As colonialism became illegitimate with the expansion of a global free trade market, imperial rule over African cities was diminished. Decolonizing Africa was great in the moral sense, but in the economic, political, and cultural sense Africa was suddenly a new player in the global system. Their level of poverty has not increased, and in many cases it has decreased, but African people have become more exposed to global products and global culture.

It is clear that through the history of Africa, Soja's homogeneous ideals of the 'Postmetropolis' are results that are place-specific to L.A. Not only are they place-specific but they are based out of Westernized processes of industrialization, democracy and liberalism that have not occurred in Africa in the same way. Industrialization has yet to be a market in Africa as it once was in the US. Democracy and liberalism led to the end of imperialism in Africa, but also left the continent in a state of disorganization that African cities are still working to overcome. As we have seen through Myers' case studies, Africa has not gone through the same processes of urbanization and development that L.A. has gone through. Africa, its cities, and people are very unique cases, even from each other, and their development processes are not really like L.A. at all. African cities cannot have a Western standard imposed upon them in terms of how they should develop because the idea of decolonization and liberating countries must leave room for cities to develop themselves as unique players in the global economy. So far cities like Accra, Dar es Salaam, and Cape Town have found their own paths to development that should not be discarded as legitimate because they do not fit a Western standard.

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