

Reviving Critical Planning Theory: Dealing With Pressure, Neo-liberalism, And Responsibility In Comm

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Neoliberalism, Urbanization and Change in Africa: the Political Economy of Heterotopias

Pádraig Carmody • Francis Owusu

Abstract

In the much of the popular media, the discourse around Africa has changed. Whereas stories of the "coming anarchy" or the "hopeless continent" abounded a little over a decade ago, it was, until the recent collapse in commodity prices, increasingly seen as the final global investment frontier, with rapid uptake of cellular technology and economic growth. Although much of this growth has been propelled by natural resources, the current conjuncture offers opportunities as well as challenges for African urban areas and raises questions about the role of cities in the continent's future development as they continue to become more deeply informalised. The response of many city authorities to the deepening informalisation of their economies has been to try to connect to the global economy in new ways, through the creation of new financial service, high-tech and elite residential areas. In this paper we explore these developments through the Foucaudian lens of heterotopia. These new developments attempt to erase their associations with the cities from which they originate in favour of new connections outwards. However the creation of these new enclaves is filled with socio-spatial contradictions, which make them unlikely to achieve their ostensible objectives.

Keywords: Neoliberal planning, African cities, heterotopia.

JEL Classification: N97, P21, P47, R19

1. Introduction

One of the defining features of the neoliberal regime of accumulation is inequality. This presents challenges for political regime maintenance in Africa and elsewhere, which increasingly find expression in cities. Cities are centers of capital accumulation globally.

Pádraig Carmody
Department of Geography, Trinity College and Department of Geography, Environmental Management and Energy Studies, University of Johannesburg

Francis Owusu
Community and Regional Planning Department, Iowa State University

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