

---

## Right to the City, Neoliberalism and the Developmental State in Cape Town

**Marianne Morange**

Translator: Sureeta Narula, Vandana Kawlra

"... what I still had to understand – and it wasn't something that happened immediately – was that it is ridiculous to rail against something that revolts you if you fail to even lift a finger to fight against it. If I came to even slightly "commit myself" (...) [it is] because I was averse to such absurdity: to curse fate and build another life through writing, while doing nothing to build this life anew. All in all, less a matter of passion than logic."

Michel Leiris, *Le ruban au cou d'Olympia*, 1981, Gallimard, page 165

Reflections based on the work by S. Parnell and E. Pieterse, 2010, The 'Right to the City': Institutional Imperatives of a Developmental State, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol. 34, no. 1, p. 146-162

### 1. Urban policies and neoliberalism in South Africa: The context of a scientific debate

In February 2010, the International Journal of Urban and Regional Research published a symposium on "Local governance and participation under neoliberalism: comparative perspectives", coordinated by Valeria Guarnersi-Meza and Mike Geddes<sup>1</sup>. Susan Parnell and Edgar Pieterse, professors at Cape Town University, co-authored an article entitled "The 'Right to the City': Institutional imperatives of a developmental state"<sup>2</sup>. This highly stimulating text – both theoretically and empirically rich – broached the issue of neoliberalism at the local level through the South African example, more precisely that of Cape Town. It was strongly marked by the controversy over the development of post-apartheid urban policies and by the very topical debate on the role of the South African State in the field of development.

Twenty years after the abolition of the apartheid regime (1991) and given the failure of the redistribution exercise promised by the ANC<sup>3</sup>, the reviews are rather bitter. Spatial, social and racial inequalities persist<sup>4</sup> and whatever has been achieved has not lived up to the initial ambitions, political expectations and enthusiasm that set the country ablaze in the 1990s. This relative failure is sometimes attributed to the neoliberal turn taken in the mid-1990s at the national scale (e.g. the analyses by Peet 2002, Bond 2005a and b), and the shift towards neoliberal urban planning (sometimes described as simply entrepreneurial) studied in Johannesburg (Murray 2008), Cape Town (McDonald 2007, Miraftab 2004a and b) or Durban (Narsiah 2002 and 2010). The ANC's internal transition between Thabo Mbeki, a representative of the party's liberal arm, and Jacob Zuma,

---

<sup>1</sup> Outcome of an international research seminar on urban governance, public services and participation, held in March 2007 by the Local Governance Research Unit of Montfort University and the Local Government Centre, Warwick University.

<sup>2</sup> Parnell S., Pieterse E., 2010, The 'Right to the City': Institutional imperatives of a developmental state, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol. 34, no. 1, p. 146-162.

<sup>3</sup> *African National Congress*, the freedom party. See its electoral manifesto during the first democratic elections in 1994, the *Reconstruction and Development Program*, RDP, inspired by the 1955 freedom charter.

<sup>4</sup> The article does not give a detailed description of these but refers, for example, to the analyses by Seekings and Natrass.

incarnating a more social liberalism in the absence of a truly socialist regime (in 2009), constituted an attempt at adjusting and responding to the immense disappointment among the people. However, the disappointment continues and is even worsening as South Africans are aware that they live in the only almost emerging African economy and, for many of them, in rich metropolitan cities.

S. Parnell and E. Pieterse suggested ways to diagnose this failure and requested researchers and practitioners in the city to redraft a more just city program. They are well-known experts in the field of South African urban studies and very active within the African Centre for Cities<sup>5</sup>; they have specifically examined urban policies in Cape Town, which form the basis for an innovative and inspiring illustration of their statements. According to them, there is a need to break away from the post-neoliberal period in order to develop such a program.

Postneoliberalism may be defined in at least three ways that not only differ from each other, but are sometimes even contradictory. It may designate (1) the recomposition of local governance and the redefinition of the State's role after a neoliberal phase or, conversely, (2) the end of neoliberalism, likened to the return of the regulatory State, following a Neo-Keynesian change of direction forced by the financial crisis that began in 2008. Hence, "post" here refers both to a break with history and the political injunction to seize the opportunities offered by this period in order to transcend neoliberalism. In both cases, neoliberalism is understood in its relationship with the State (either by reasserting it or by calling for its transformation, if it is believed that there has been no roll back of the state), and from the economic policy perspective. At another level, postneoliberalism also refers to (3) going beyond neoliberalism as a theoretical analytical framework, deemed ill-adapted to the area observed or as being non-heuristic.

S. Parnell and E. Pieterse's article lies midway between the last two conceptions of postneoliberalism (2 and 3) and combines them in a rather complex manner. It has led to a counter-postneoliberal discourse on the rights-based city, by proceeding with a dual displacement in perspective: it suggests an "alternative" to "neoliberal aspirations" (p. 146), but also to the neoliberal understanding of the city through academic criticism. On the one hand, S. Parnell and E. Pieterse suggest replacing neoliberal "trends" by "a more radical rights-based agenda for cities" (p. 146), by repositioning the issue of public interventionism and the role of the State at the heart of the debate. This agenda refers to the debate on what is called the developmental (national and local) State in South Africa – a project dating back to the mid-1990s, but whose meaning has never been clarified, as the authors remind us (on this notion, see for example Van Donk et al. 2010). They offer to flesh out the "developmental" project. On the other hand, their approach is based on "A rights-based shift beyond urban neoliberalism" (p. 150). They maintain that by focusing criticism on neoliberalism, we would deprive ourselves of the possibility of bringing about changes in urbanistic practices and nurturing them: "We believe it is misplaced to only focus critical attention on the neoliberal tendencies of local states" (p. 150). At the same time, they question certain forms of political activism within the South African social movement whose attacks they deem counter-productive (p. 151): "Grassroots pressure that remains stuck in an oppositional mode without propositional demands tied to concrete institutional reforms ... is unlikely to effectively displace neoliberalism in practice at the local level". They call for a radical stand, but a propositional and not defensive one ("propositional politics", p. 158). In this text, neoliberalism is therefore considered something that is sought to be overcome in order to re-establish fair urban practices, as well as a marginal aspect in such policies, one that should not be placed at the heart of the analysis as it does not help in laying the foundations of a fair, post-apartheid city.

---

<sup>5</sup> Established in 2007, this inter-disciplinary network of research scholars based in Cape Town University proposes fundamental research and discussions between the academic world and the political and administrative spheres in Cape Town.

The text has chosen not to indulge in a theoretical debate about neoliberalism, nor does it define neoliberalism. It postulates that the reader is aware of these debates. It envisages neoliberal urban development broadly as a non-distributing or confiscatory form of action, engendering exclusion and pauperization. Hence, neoliberalism is sometimes associated with governance or government-related issues (managerial practices – p. 147, public-private partnerships – p. 158, "Lean and fragmented institutional state arrangements" – p. 148) and sometimes economic issues, above all through the notion of the recovery of the costs of urban services. Or else neoliberalism is defined in the negative, as something that is contrary to interventionism, redistribution and cross-subsidization – all in all something that is contrary to the social justice that the rights-based agenda presented here seeks to promote: "Increased emphasis on planning, defining public good, regulatory reforms, greater law enforcement, fiscal policies that enable redistribution and cross-subsidization" (p. 150). Neoliberalism is therefore envisaged in its relationship with the State as a form of partial State withdrawal or roll back.

This perspective must be re-positioned in the South African context and in relation to more general debates on neoliberalism. The concept of neoliberalism finds itself at the cross-roads of two areas that give slightly different definitions of neoliberalism:

1. Neoliberalism seen as the contemporary form of capitalism, forged to overcome the 1970-80 crisis of accumulation; it would result in a transformation of the State's role and a restructuring of public action to place it at the market's service. This definition refers to analyses at the national level and to work on the filiation of neoliberalism with German "ordoliberalism". It is particularly well-adapted to countries of the North. In this approach, adaptive mechanisms like a "roll back" (State withdrawal, dismantlement of the welfare State)/"roll out" (extension of new government practices and governance based on new values at the service of capital) exist, going beyond mere State withdrawal.
2. Neoliberalism viewed as an anti-interventionism ideology and a coherent and hegemonic anti-State project related to globalization and dictated to the countries of the South by the Washington consensus – a global discipline purported to be established through deregulation and privatization (structural adjustments of the 1980s in the South) and likely to engender "unequal geographical development" (Harvey 2005). This perspective – close to international political economics and the world systems theory – is particularly well-adapted to the countries of the South.

This dual approach has been theorized and translated at the urban scale by Brenner and Theodore (2002). They underlined the importance of the local variants of neoliberalism (of the "actually existing neoliberalism") and the adjustment processes to distinct and specific local contexts. These processes have sometimes been analyzed in terms of "creative destruction", a term borrowed from the Marxism vocabulary, or as hybridity and "variegation" (systemic variation as a constitutive mechanism of the neoliberalism process, Brenner et al. 2010). Local variants and "path-dependency" mechanisms (the idea of dependency on the "path" of neoliberalism in relation to the specificities of the local context) have therefore been studied in South African cities (Didier et al. 2009, Didier et al., under print, Didier et al. to be published).

However, the notion of neoliberalism ends up posing a problem because these local variations may make a generic neoliberal model unrecognizable (that is, if one exists) – a model believed to have come from Margaret Thatcher or Tony Blair's United Kingdom, from Ronald Reagan or Bill Clinton's USA or Augusto Pinochet or Michelle Bachelet's Chile. It triggers a discussion on the meaning (whether neoliberal or not) of the "Third Way" of British Labor, American Democrats, or German Social Democrats, for instance. Public action in South African cities is the subject of a similar debate and one can understand why it may be problematic to speak of neoliberalization if we limit ourselves to a narrow definition of the term, which refers to first generation Thatcherian anti-Stateism. That is what prompted S. Parnell and E. Pieterse to dispute the relevance of this theoretical

framework for South African cities (Robinson and Parnell 2006): in South Africa, the State (national and local) never stopped playing a central role, especially with regard to urban planning issues, and no clear alternation between "roll back" and "roll out" has been observed, as in the case of the heartland of neoliberalism (Morange and Wafer 2011). Neoliberalization may have directly taken a third path whose meaning remains debatable. But this debate – quite heated in South Africa – has not been broached directly here<sup>6</sup>; however, one must be aware of this context to understand the interventionist perspective of this text. The second part lays emphasis on the importance of public planning and land control, implicitly opposing the triumph of market-led development in the United Kingdom in the 1980s and the rejection of regulation by government planners, for instance by someone like Reg Ward<sup>7</sup> (one of the expressions he used remains well-known until today: "I don't believe in the planning system. I'm opposed to land-use planning; quality does not flow from it"). In another text, S. Parnell and J. Robinson (2010) mentioned their "Postneoliberal interest in the role of the state" (p. 11).

At another level, the interest shown in neoliberalization seems to divert attention from the fundamental issues: poverty appears to be seen as an outcome of both the State's shortcomings (its inability to come up with fair and effective solutions) and its withdrawal, and problems of informality and poverty are seen as being related to development issues, not to neoliberalization. The article therefore suggests that the issue of urban policies should be broached through the prism of poverty and development – an approach deemed more appropriate to give an account of the specificity of South African issues, while also being in line with international development policies and the World Bank's discourse (see, for example, Lautier 2002 for a critical approach to the World Bank's pro-poor discourses).

Finally, S. Parnell and E. Pieterse place the emphasis on public action and on the "South": the State's regulatory capacity-building emerges as a necessary precondition to go beyond neoliberalism (the "paradigmatic shifts" sought, p. 151).

However, there is a third view of neoliberalism: in a Foucauldian perspective, neoliberalism is understood as a form of trans-sectoral rationality (economic, political, social, etc.) based on the naturalization of entrepreneurial values, competitiveness and competition, and the individual accountability of entrepreneurs themselves. Such a rationality engenders "self-led behaviors" and the institution of "monitoring technologies" related to new forms of governmentality (meeting between domination techniques and self-techniques, "behavior of behaviors") (Dardot and Laval 2009, p. 13): "Neoliberalism, before being an ideology or an economic policy, is primarily and fundamentally a rationality and...in this sense, it tends to structure and organize not just the actions of those who govern, but also the behavior of those who are governed". Foucault (2004 [1979]) speaks of "the activity that consists of governing the conduct of men". This transformation is at the service of the perpetuation of the capitalist regime of accumulation, but it does not mean the withdrawal of the State. It refers to the dissemination of neoliberal values in the whole of society and, therefore, also in the sphere of the State which, irrespective of its form, serves as an intermediary for their propagation and becomes one of the architects of this rationality, without necessarily being the main one. This line of thinking suggests envisaging neoliberalism as an

---

<sup>6</sup> The issue is discussed earlier by S. Parnell and J. Robinson (2010) in an article in which they affirm that speaking of neoliberalism does not allow us to understand the totality, nor even the majority, of the South African urban dynamics. What has been contested here is the univocal and systematic mobilization of a theoretical framework conceived in the North and related to the cities of the North, to interpret the changes of post-apartheid urban policies in a context in which the State is strong.

<sup>7</sup> First Director of the London Docklands Development Corporation in charge of the regeneration of the London docks in early 1980s.

overhanging rationality that seems to permeate the predominant values and perceptions, and therefore public policies and therefore invites us, on the contrary, to refocus our attention and not place the State at the core of our analyses.

The counter-discourse on the right to the city drafted by S. Parnell and E. Pieterse therefore opposes a certain form of neoliberalism (anti-interventionism), by once again placing an emphasis on the need for public interventionism, but it does not question the risk that public action may, sometimes, borrow from neoliberal rationality, even if only partially. If we envisage urban policies in Cape Town from the Foucauldian perspective, we can distance ourselves from the current debate as it is being conducted in South Africa and go beyond the problems referred to earlier: rather than questioning the way in which a 'grand neoliberal plan' would probably dissolve into Cape Town's specificities to produce neoliberalism – or perhaps not – we could seek to understand how neoliberalism, as a rationale, is from time to time infused into local action, even when the latter is genuinely aimed at establishing a developmental project. This approach invites us to interpret urban policies in terms of neoliberalism, but by moving away from the political economics' perspective, and considers the sphere of the ideological constraints within which urban policies are deployed. We can try to do so while taking inspiration from the two examples described in this article.

## 2. Transcending neoliberalism? Two examples

The text is based on two emblematic examples of development problems in cities of the South so as to explore an interventionist postneoliberal path: difficulties in access to urban services and the persistence of informality, which would lead to the inability of thinking of inclusive urban planning for poor areas (failings in land use management). The aim, through these two examples, is to show that a criticism of neoliberalism misses the fundamentals, because these injustices can probably be attributed less to neoliberalism than to deadlocks that can be overcome by institutional reforms.

The choice of these two examples enables the authors to cleverly take a stand opposed to the one upheld by literature critical of neoliberalism (especially in South Africa), while at the same time entering into a direct dialogue with it. Anti-neoliberal criticism is in fact focused on urban services (Miraftab 2004b, Smith 2004, Bond and McInnis 2006) that it considers as being emblematic because of the social effects of privatization-corporatization (with discussions on the degree, the nature or the sense of 'privatization'): water and electricity supply cuts, evictions. It is also politically very rousing. On the other hand, urban planning is of barely any interest to neoliberal criticism, which neglects the metropolitan scale and targets, for example, local economic development systems much more (free trade zones, City Improvement Districts, etc.), which produce territorial inequalities and exclusion in the name of economic accumulation (Miraftab 2007, Didier et al. 2009, Morange to be published in 2011), whence, according to S. Parnell and E. Pieterse, a certain degree of shortsightedness (the metaphor comes from us).

### 1) *Urban services*

S. Parnell and E. Pieterse stress the fact that public goodwill to "provide basic service support based on need, not ability to pay" is real, but hindered by "institutional barriers" (p. 152). The City is not seen as being "institutionally well-equipped to redistribute" (p. 153), for two reasons:

- It may lack financial means: To subsidize services, more cross-subsidization may be required; and to do so, the rich would have to consume more, which is not a sustainable model in environmental terms.
- The poor are seen as difficult to identify, because they are considered invisible, confined to informal housing areas. Informality is seen as a hindrance in fulfilling the right to the city because it reflects the absence of State monitoring, identification and enumeration machinery, among others

(p. 153). The institution of forms of monitoring would be a pre-requisite to improve services: the installation of pre-paid water and electricity meters, for instance (fixed tariff for 6,000 liters per month for indigent households, a municipal policy that cannot be conducted without ensuring that the poor are seen by the state – known and supervised).

However, these highly relevant analyses include a number of constraints deemed insurmountable: the principle of covering global costs and the obligation of autonomy and budget balancing, which push local authorities towards entrepreneurial management and ever-greater competition among themselves to find the financial resources. In fact, it is difficult in such a context to imagine greater forms of redistribution between the rich and the poor. The authorities would rather bank on growth because urban competitiveness is at stake. It must also be recalled that the metropolitan merger and fiscal cross-subsidization that it brought about in the 2000s were strongly disputed and that social peace too is at stake. As for consumption-related control mechanisms, they tend to push poor households into practicing their own quota system as far as their consumption is concerned (we are dealing here with the neoliberal style of self-conduct), so that it does not exceed the threshold fixed by the upper echelons on the basis of financial constraints, and not necessarily needs (i.e. if they can be determined normatively). In both cases, justice is thought of in the structural scarcity imposed by a much larger context (which refers to a problem of decision-making levels and dependency on a macro-economic and political environment, often highlighted in literature), and adjustment is done in turn at the household and individual levels. It is the administrative rationale of local governments that the criticism of social movements attempts to break, so as to initiate a political debate on the limitations of a redistribution project under duress.

## *2) Urban and land planning*

The immense landscapes of informality – seen here quite negatively as the cause and syndrome of urban wrongs – are considered to be linked to three problems:

- ❶ Public action is guided by the need to find land that the "poor can afford" – land for which the poor can manage to pay. However, such land is hard to find.
- ❷ The dualization of city planning procedures seems to favor the growth of informality. The 1991 Act 113 (so-called the Less Formal Establishment of Townships Act) authorized local governments to free themselves from national and metropolitan urbanistic norms and rules in poor areas so as to accelerate procedures. This led to "second-class suburbs" (p. 155) in which informality compensated for the lack of facilities, particularly commercial facilities. For the rich – formal cities, for the poor – a malfunctioning informality. This unjust dualization cannot be considered to be associated with neoliberalization but with the replication of urbanistic practices inherited from apartheid and it is considered to stem from the difficulty of breaking with the colonial and apartheid periods: the 1923 Native Urban Areas Act prohibited commercial activities in townships (essentially for tax-related reasons).
- ❸ The more general inability to ensure the respect of city planning rules and municipal decrees in poor areas seems to reflect an unjust renunciation of their role by government authorities.

In this case too, these analyses imply a certain number of presuppositions: the land issue has been envisaged in terms of physical geography and the scarcity of buildable land (constraints related to natural sites and the need to protect the environment that hike up the cost of buildable land). The real estate speculation engendered by urban regeneration policies is not mentioned. The authorities' role is to steer the way in a free real estate market system that one does not envisage reforming or constraining in any way. As for two-tier planning, it too can be considered as a pragmatic response to the injunction of building at lower costs for the poor – a leitmotiv of international housing policies for cities of the South. This refers back to the well-known debate on how impossible it is to make the poor creditworthy within the context of international competition

in which macro-economic wage policies are influenced by the need to maintain a level of international competitiveness (Osmont 1995). Moreover, as the authors have recalled, the deterioration of the housing stock in townships is partially the result of massive privatization of public real estate. This was fast-tracked in the 1990s in order to promote private ownership (we once again see the figure of individual entrepreneurs who must prosper if they know how to make their assets productive) and re-balance municipal budgets through public disengagement (Morange 2006). Finally, tolerance towards informality can be easily understood in a neoliberal framework<sup>8</sup>: informal employment, especially trade, plays the role of a safety valve that is tolerated in certain parts of the city (in poor neighborhoods), but is prohibited in well-to-do areas (that is the significance of the spatial typology in the 2009 municipal decree on informal trade in Cape Town). Therefore, neoliberalization is perhaps not totally foreign to these difficulties.

Within this framework, the spatial confinement of the poor to the peripheries with poor facilities does not pose much of a problem, in fact: all that is needed is to put the responsibility of their individual mobility back on their own shoulders. Neoliberal injunctions with regard to work-related mobility – through discourses on the right to mobility and the individual sense of responsibility of the unemployed – are not too far off (see, for instance, Fol 2005 concerning the same debate in France and North America), with a strong interventionist complexion here (improvement of public transport). Likewise, in terms of facilities (leisure, trade), public discourses emphasize mobility and accessibility to the city centre, for instance with urban regeneration creating "public goods" (Dubresson 2008): everyone will have access to the Green Point Stadium, built in the city centre for the 2010 Football World Cup, and it would have been economically counterproductive to build it in Athlone, a disadvantaged, mixed-race area. Finally, everything depends on the level at which the issue of justice is raised and the rights being referred to: the metropolitan level for employment opportunities and access to urban facilities, or the local level as regards the quality of life related to the immediate environment.

Promoting rights within the framework of economic globalization and globalized competition between cities is therefore necessarily limiting for the latter. In fact, the issue is to understand whether poverty is envisaged as the result of poor integration in neoliberal globalization or of an injunction forcing integration in globalization. This then brings us to the second definition of neoliberalism (see above). On the other hand, in the first perspective, if the City did not have the financial means to do better for its poor quarters, it was because it had not positioned itself well in globalization. To improve this state of affairs, it must show itself to be competitive, which would then limit its room for maneuver, especially with regard to expenditure. Therefore, the idea is to find "a sustainable model of urban poverty reduction based on job creation and economic growth" (p. 149). The choice of laying an emphasis on cities as preferred areas for economic growth (in accordance with the World Bank orientations in its 2009 report on development, see Giraut 2009) amounts to noting the fact that the State must come up with "a transformative agenda in an urban context sutured by capitalist modernity" (p. 158) and place itself at the service of this agenda. This boils down to an attempt at reconciling two agendas – pro-poor and pro-growth – in a globalized environment (Lemanski 2007). This point of view has been reconfirmed and accepted in the text's conclusion: "Making cities of the South work better purely in terms of becoming economic nodes in the global systems of trade, production and consumption is not going to help the poor in those city regions. But failing to make these emerging global nodes work for all their residents may hinder their global progress" (p. 159). The importance given here to accounts-based arguments can be

---

<sup>8</sup> The figure of the small, individual, local entrepreneur is even highly promoted and there are local policies that aim at supporting the "second economy", although the latter is destined to gradually be incorporated into the "first economy", according to a national discourse.

understood – "Return on investment cycles, calculations about affordability and long-term operational maintenance" (p. 159) and, even more directly, competition: "This level of institutional change in urban government is essential if cities of the South are to function resiliently and compete at all in a global economy" (p. 151).

### 3. A reformulation of the "right to the city" influenced by the South African context

The second, very thought-provoking aspect of this article is the way it appropriates the notion of the "right to the city", which it has borrowed from Henri Lefebvre so as to produce an agenda that is very far removed from the "experimental Utopia" dreamt up by the latter<sup>9</sup>. The reference to the right to the city is assumed by the use of inverted commas and the singular noun (in the title), but its author's name never appears. The authors do not claim to be followers of H. Lefebvre. They reappropriate his expression and reinterpret it personally with great originality.

First of all, the notion of rights is interpreted through a liberal prism, translated to the plural and often added to: right to freedom of movement, to urban services, a secure environment, etc. Rights are referred to in the plural: legal, economic and political rights whose respect must be ensured by a regulatory and legal framework. No longer is it the right (in the singular) to the city, but more the citizens' right to take ownership of the city by "making efforts" in "daily life". The aim is to give this right an operational content, though it has a more open and vague dimension in H. Lefebvre's works: "We give particular emphasis to defining those rights whose meanings arise from settlement planning or management-based policies and interventions, what we call 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation rights or 'the right to the city' (p. 147)". These rights, in the plural, are interpreted in terms of the fight against poverty and "poverty reduction"<sup>10</sup> and the notion of the right to the city is placed at the service of a definition of the developmental State.

*This leads to a typology based on the periodization of the development of the contents of these 'rights' in international agendas, since the 1950s:*

- 1<sup>st</sup> generation rights: Political, social and economic rights seen as individual rights; it was the era of the "welfare State", which promoted educational, health and other related policies.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> generation rights: Rights seen at household and district level; it was the era of "fundamental needs" (water, housing, electricity, etc.), the fight against informality and poverty in cities, the Millennium Development Goals.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> generation rights: Rights viewed at the metropolitan scale, transcending the sphere of urban services; security, mobility, the urban environment in the broader sense, transportation, public areas, etc. were to be considered.
- 4<sup>th</sup> generation rights: City-dwellers were to be freed of the threat and risk of war, economic volatility and climate change; the contents of the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation rights expanded.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> generations are goals yet to be achieved. They borrow from the spheres of sustainable development and environmental justice. This typology implicitly falls within the framework of the international debate on development that emerged in the post-war period (and above all, the 1970s, around the notion of human development), but it too was influenced by the more specifically South African context, of which it would be useful to explain some aspects:

---

<sup>9</sup> The reference to the Utopian dimension has not been used here, as it may have been in another, older article with similar contents (see Parnell and Boule 2008).

<sup>10</sup> *Poverty reduction, poverty reduction target.* The text refers constantly to this international goal.



- The fight for political rights was fundamental under the apartheid regime, as testified to by some of its more well-known slogans (e.g. "one man, one vote"), although economic demands were important and influenced by a Marxist interpretation of apartheid as an exploitative capitalist system. In 1991, attention focused on democratization (the patient joy of long waiting lines during the 1994 elections, after almost civil war-like images, was carefully staged). The political claim was consensual and avoiding exposing the internal tensions within the ANC and the tripartite agreement between the ANC, the Communist Party and COSATU (the Confederation of South African Trade Unions) with regard to economic orientations. Twenty years later, as political rights were deemed attained, the debate turned towards the ability to draft a more nuanced agenda of multiple rights. Economic issues, overshadowed for some time, re-emerged and criticism of the neoliberal shift strengthened. These four generations of rights therefore followed one upon the other without replacing each other. The impression given is that of them gradually stacking up and being displaced: economic and social rights were later added to political rights.

- The text is based on a classical interpretation of development – linear and progressive – refuting J. Ferguson and A. Escobar's post-modern attacks on developmentalist mythology (p. 153). It proposes a developmental agenda whose purpose is to lead, in particular, to growth and, implicitly, at the service of human development ("developmental outcomes such as growth", p. 158). It does not discuss the limitations of this conception of development, which has, in fact, been criticized and historicized (Rist, 1996). This perspective has to be accepted to be able to broach the text. In fact, it is assumed by the authors and is in line with their being rooted in South Africa's political debates, marked by the desire to invent a totally new development model, based on the idea of the exceptional nature of South Africa – one that could perhaps even be exported.

- The debate's spatialization (the shift from individual/household rights to 'district' rights) reflects the strengthening of local authorities in terms of their say in development issues – a movement linked to decentralization. The 1996 Constitution established Cities within the sphere of autonomous government (along with the State and Provinces). The incorporation of cities is perceived as a fair historical process. It results in considerable faith in the capacity of the metropolitan level to serve the public good and transcend any intra-urban egoism.

- The reason these rights were not attained seems to lie above all in the institutional weakness ("weak state", p. 150) of institutional and political frameworks postulated as being good. This weakness is presented as being linked to South Africa's post-colonial context: "Obvious in post-colonial contexts where local and provincial governments are rather belated constructions, with limited fiscal and human capacity and with incomplete administrative systems" (p. 150). Cities of the North serve as a counter-model, with their strong capacities in terms of control, statistical measurement, political supervision, etc., where the necessary conditions to ensure that justice is achieved are available. At local level, the State in South Africa is partially exonerated for its inability to provide services to the poor due to its relative youth, which the State in the North is not.

This perspective is far removed from the revolutionary content of the text drafted by H. Lefebvre in 1967, just a few months before the May events in France, and the idea of the citizens in general and the working class in particular taking over urban issues. Here, revolutionary horizons have only been mentioned in metaphorical terms (p. 151): an "institutional revolution in the city". The "paradigmatic shift" that they are hoping and praying for (p. 151) is based on a reformist conception of the right to the city, as a project for the regulation of capitalism. This posture has clearly been accepted: "At this point it is important to clarify our confidence in the role that regulatory reform can play as an element in a larger radical project" (p. 158). The authors speak of collective rights (p. 149) whose unifying factor – whether it is a neighborhood or a socio-economic identity (the poor as a social group) – is not a class identity formulated within the framework of a power struggle with the dominant class. They did not indulge in a Marxist interpretation of "the production of space"

(promoting the value of the use of urban space as against its exchange value, which is a priority in the capitalist production of space) and did not position themselves in the field of power geography. They have not referred to any power struggle in the city, nor mentioned any effects of dominance and exploitation. Just urban policies that work or do not work. Tensions between opposing economic interests are hardly visible. The right to the city would emerge from collaboration between parties, explicitly opposed to the egoism of public-private partnerships (p. 158), without a clear explanation of the modalities of these arbitrations, which of course is not the subject of the article.

In this project, change is operated by the State, whereas H. Lefebvre based his views on a radical criticism of official city planning in the 1960s. He denounced the havoc caused by functionalist and bureaucratic city planning, which was alienating and dehumanizing, the Athens charter and certain State action with regard to cities that repudiated "urbanity", the capacity to appropriate the space and time of city life, and referred to the alienation caused by modern life, particularly for the working class, which was relegated to urban peripheries. H. Lefebvre was radically wary of city planning and the idea of planned cities that is being defended here. Equity, balance and redistribution are never questioned by him; rather, he speaks of a political right that has nothing to do with institutions or the State – and obviously even less with governance, an anachronistic term in 1967.

Finally, S. Parnell and E. Pieterse proceed to translate the MDGs' universalist agenda to the local scale, through a re-interpretation of the right to the city, which is finally above all the State's business, which is very original. Their radicalism stems from a highly voluntarist and universalist humanism (a term they several times lay claim to), which seems inspired by the UN's style, and which they characterize not as radical, but as "more radical" (p. 146, 147, 158). They endorse a "moral platform" (p. 147) rather than a radical agenda in the literal sense (one of systemic criticism and of going back to the roots of problems). They reassert the value of the State's regulatory role, often perceived as weak in DCs, against the idea of self-help by the poor. This change in tack goes hand in hand with a certain international literature (the authors quote a 2000 World Bank report in this regard).

This postneoliberal stand in favor of regulatory State interventionism was popularized by the financial capitalism crisis that occurred in 2008, and was an option explored by certain leftist political movements, or was disputed by certain radical geographers (Peck et al., 2010). The restoration of State legitimacy has been viewed as something that would make it possible to establish an anti-neoliberal agenda, if neoliberalism is seen in its narrowest terms, as being synonymous with the withdrawal (even if partial) of the State. Here too, as part of a neoliberal perspective, one should bear in mind and consider that a powerful metropolitan government may have a neoliberal agenda: for example, the creative and entrepreneurial Greater Paris or Cape Town agenda. And that the metropolitan level has also been selected in the name of competitive regionalism for reasons of positioning in globalization and not of redistribution (or rather, for both reasons in proportions and according to the interactions that must be explained in each local context). And finally, the fact that it is actually in a certain North that neoliberalism is the most marked at the local level, perhaps actually because of the existence of high control capacities (the "roll out" was effective).

#### **4. Perspectives**

Be that as it may, this article sets two highly stimulating challenges before radical geography:

*1. The need for an in-depth study of certain theoretical analyses of neoliberalization*

For example, the linkages between neoliberal reforms of the State mechanism ("roll out") and the weakness/strength of public institutions still need to be examined in greater depth first and in varied contexts, because they are not mechanical. The North-South disparity here is of crucial importance because of financial and institutional constraints specific to the cities of the South. The South African case in particular – mid-way between political ability and powerlessness – makes it possible to consider neoliberalization in terms of political room for maneuver, in fact by re-placing the State at the heart of analyses and, in a way, faced with its responsibilities. The South African State's supervisory capacities are considerable as compared to the rest of the continent and its cities enjoy a strong tradition of urban development and planning as shown by decades of apartheid (1948 - 1991).

This article also raises the difficult question of political intentionality. David Harvey already raised this issue with regard to the entrepreneurial city without actually resolving the problem (1989). In fact, local governance institutional mechanisms are never homogenous nor accepted as such in neoliberalism, any more than local governments are (the authors refer to Larner and Leitner with regard to this point, p. 157). Hence, injustices are not merely related to a cynical gap between discourses and practices. S. Parnell and E. Pieterse very rightly recall how much the discourse on justice has been clear and constant in Cape Town, especially in the 2002 Indigent Policy and the 2006 Economic and Human Development Strategy (see Parnell and Boule 2008). They underline the importance of "commitment from all spheres of government" in this regard (p. 151). The gap between the discourse and practices would therefore be due to the manner in which political arbitration and power is exerted, according to them. The idea would be to examine the areas of tension between the points of view of different actors to promote greater justice (in fact, a definition of participatory democracy could even perhaps be found in this way). In any case, an examination of arbitration modalities and tensions is definitely central to any understanding of neoliberalization processes, something that is rarely studied, as a matter of fact.

Finally, we still need to assess to what extent the arbitration carried out would call the neoliberal rationality into question, if at all. For instance, neoliberalization does not deny the fundamental rights discussed in this article. It claims to serve these rights by guaranteeing that growth would reach all citizens through the trickle down effect, as long as competitiveness is assured. This adaptability (or flexibility) of neoliberal rationality may be considered as one of neoliberalism's structural strengths, which has been theorized in the form of "variegation" (Brenner et al. 2010), as the very basis for its stability, or else as the necessary plasticity for social adjustments (the Third Way), depending on the perspective. The question of the neoliberal rationale's content and modes of dissemination therefore remains unchanged. However, the rationale is by definition vague, necessarily unequivocal, mixed with several other elements and internal contradictions, and is not based on any harmful intention or assumed political discourse. If M. Foucault speaks of rationality, it is obviously to designate an evanescent reality – diffuse and difficult to work out. The difficulty in identifying it does not, however, mean that it does not exist. But while it may be possible to dissect a "constructed" discourse, it is more difficult to analyze manifestations of governmentality. Here, we once again come across self-led behavior (as compared to directly repressive or restrictive ideological and political domination). This raises methodological problems concerning the interconnections between the collective and the individual, discourse and practices, and even between the conscious and non-conscious, and the theorization of power (between fluidity and concrete and physical domination based on media control, economic power, academic domination, etc.). Hence, this text invites us to think about the utility and limitations of an urban policy approach in Foucauldian terms and to reflect on its geographical operational nature as well as the relevance of its expression at the urban scale.

McDonald and Smith (2004) have tried out this exercise (although they do not refer explicitly to M. Foucault, unlike V. Watson, who in the same way did very edifying work on the ups-and-downs and

destiny of spatial planning in Cape Town in the 1990s, as inspired by Foucault). They traced the dissemination of neoliberal values in Cape Town, through a qualitative survey of the City's technical staff in charge of urban services. They describe a "self-reinforcing loop of neo-liberal discourse and practice" which they sought at different levels of government. These approaches offer very fruitful openings while simultaneously raising just as many problems: why be confined to the public sphere, how can the interconnections between the various levels be envisaged, what neoliberalism indicators should be selected when the term itself raises so many problems, how can the sectoral approach be transcended (only services), how can multi-disciplinarity be incorporated, since it is so necessary for such analyses, etc.? Studies then focused on the role of democratic participation in this exercise of power (for instance, in the same IJRR symposium, see the article by Blakeley 2010 on neoliberal governmentality in Barcelona and Manchester, or Morange on democratic participation and the neoliberal control of informal trade in Cape Town – to be published). At the urban level, participation is undoubtedly an obvious channel for the dissemination of the neoliberal rationale, but undoubtedly not the only one. And that leads us to think about a geography or power in the city that transcends the level of direct and visible political confrontation, while also embracing it.

## *2. Taking up a political challenge*

Finally, as S. Parnell and E. Pieterse put it so well, this critical decoding program (as conducted systematically, for example in another context by Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999) can be useful. But it does not necessarily make it possible to go beyond neoliberalism in terms of a political project. M. Foucault formalized the French Left's inability to propose any form of counter-rationale to neoliberalism, not so much in terms of the content of political programs (redistribution, social, etc.), but in terms of a *raison d'être* in the world. It may be imagined that for him, a program aimed at redistribution, the mitigation of inequalities in urban services, or the improvement of the urban environment, however urgent it may be, does not suffice to re-establish a political project likely to knock "neoliberal reasoning" down. From this point of view, he would perhaps agree with S. Parnell and E. Pieterse on the critique of South Africa's social movements, although for other reasons.

The problem in terms of radical geography is therefore twofold: Must we go through this stage of de-construction to undertake counter-construction? Can we develop a counter-rationale without first determining the functioning of the predominant rationale? The question, in short, is of knowing whether or not (partially or totally) the absence of a counter-rationale emerges from the weakness of our critical machinery. But is such a de-construction, even if it is necessary, sufficient? The highly ambitious and valuable work of displacement that this article undertakes shows to what extent vigilance against the naturalization of some of the values and manners of envisaging a just city is difficult. The authors themselves said it: "Implementing a rights-based agenda at the subnational scale necessitates a radical critique of the instruments as well as values of the local state" (p. 159), and, of course, beyond all that, values ingrained in all the citizens.

In such a case, how can we not lose sight of the fundamental aim of all radical agendas: the transformation of the world? By positioning themselves very explicitly within the framework of a progressive project that seeks to transform the city, S. Parnell and E. Pieterse return to this initial and ambitious intention. Whether or not the critical analyses of neoliberalism have abdicated the desire for transformation is far from certain. This raises the issue of the political commitment of research scholars, but above all the forms of their commitment. The denunciation of oppressive systems enables them, to some extent, to barricade themselves within a critical analysis that is detached from immediate issues, and while we may sometimes be tempted to do just that here, we do acknowledge its limitations, along with them. Conversely, failing to consider the structural reproductions of different forms of domination that limit reformism means running the risks related to pragmatism and confining oneself to one's own limits in the reformist field.

Finally, formulating a counter-rationale by drawing inspiration from theoretical frameworks developed at other times raises a problem. Right to the city and Foucauldian governmentality agendas were developed at a time when political mobilizations had another dimension and took on other forms. That calls for re-placing these theoretical contributions in perspective in terms of current issues and, particularly, distancing oneself from the notion of the "right to the city" by taking a look at all it through the prism of current realities, as S. Parnell and E. Pieterse have done in a truly inspiring way. Critical or radical geographies will undoubtedly have to continue these discussions in the future.

**About the author: Marianne MORANGE**, SEDET, University Paris 7 Diderot

**To quote this article: Marianne MORANGE**, « Droit à la ville, néolibéralisation et Etat développemental au Cap » ["Right to the City, neoliberalism and the developmental State in Cape Town", traduction : Sureeta Narula, Vandana Kawlra, FITI PVT. LTD] **justice spatiale | spatial justice** | n° 04 décembre | december 2011 | <http://www.jssj.org>

## References

- BLAKELEY G.**, Governing ourselves: citizens participation and governance in Barcelona and Manchester, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol. 34, n°1, p. 130-145, 2010.
- BOLTANSKI L., CHIAPPELLO E.**, *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme*, Paris, Gallimard, 1999.
- BOND P.**, Globalisation / commodification or deglobalisation / decommodification in urban South Africa, *Policy Studies*, vol. 26, n° 3/4, p. 337-358, 2005a.
- BOND P.**, *Elite Transition: from Apartheid to Neoliberalism in South Africa*, Londres, Pluto and Pietermaritzburg, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005b.
- BOND P., McInnes P.**, Decommodifying Electricity in Post-Apartheid Johannesburg, in H. Leitner, J. Peck, E. Sheppard (eds.), *Contesting Neoliberalism: The Urban Frontier*, New York, Guilford Press, 2006.
- BRENNER N., PECK J., THEODORE N.**, Variegated neoliberalization: geographie, modalities, pathways, *Global Networks*, vol. 10, n°2, p. 182-222, 2010.
- BRENNER N., THEODORE N.**, Cities and the geographies of 'actually existing neoliberalism'. *Antipode*, vol. 34, n°3, p. 349-379, 2002.
- DARDOT P., LAVAL C.**, *La nouvelle raison du monde. Essai sur la société néolibérale*, Paris, La Découverte, 2009.
- DIDIER S., MORANGE M., PEYROUX E.** [forthcoming], The adaptative nature of neoliberalism at the local scale: fifteen years of City Improvement Districts in Cape Town and Johannesburg, *Antipode*
- DIDIER S., MORANGE M., PEYROUX E.**, [forthcoming], City Improvement Districts and 'Territorialized Neoliberalism' in South Africa (Johannesburg, Cape Town), in J. Künkel et M. Mayer (eds.), *Urban Restructuring and Flexible Neoliberalization*, Palgrave Macmillan
- DIDIER S., PEYROUX E., MORANGE M.**, La diffusion du modèle du City Improvement District (CID) à Johannesburg et au Cap, in C. Bénit-Gbaffou, S. Fabiyi et E. Peyroux (eds.), *Sécurisation des quartiers et gouvernance locale. Enjeux et défis pour les villes africaines*, Paris, IFAS-Karthala, p. 85-112, 2009.
- DUBRESSON A.**, « Urbanisme entrepreneurial, pouvoir et aménagement, Les CID au Cap », in A. Dubresson et S. Jaglin (eds.), *Le Cap après l'apartheid, Gouvernance métropolitaine et changement urbain*, Paris, Karthala, p. 183-215, 2008.
- ESCOBAR A.**, *Encountering development. The making and unmaking of the Third World*, Princeton University Press, 1995.
- FERGUSON J.**, *The anti-politics machine: 'development', depoliticization and bureaucratic power in Lesotho*, Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- FERGUSON J.**, The uses of neoliberalism, *Antipode*, vol. 41, n°1, p. 166-184, 2009.

- FOL S.**, *Mobilité des pauvres et rapports au territoire*, Mémoire pour l'Habilitation à Diriger des Recherches, Université Paris I - Panthéon Sorbonne, 2005.
- FOUCAULT M.**, *Naissance de la biopolitique*, Cours au collège de France 1978-1979, Hautes études, Paris, Gallimard-Seuil, 2004.
- GIRAUT F.**, « Les ambiguïtés de la nouvelle doctrine spatiale de la Banque mondiale », *Cybergeo : European Journal of Geography*, 2 October 2009, modified 7 October 2009. URL : <http://cybergeo.revues.org/index22695.html>
- HARVEY D.**, , From managerialism to entrepreneurialism : the transformation in urban governance in late capitalism, *Geografiska Annaler, Series B, Human Geography*, vol. 71, n°1, p. 3-17, 1989.
- HARVEY D.**, *A brief history of neoliberalism*, Oxford University Press, 2005.
- LAUTIER B.**, Pourquoi faut-il aider les pauvres? Une étude critique du discours de la Banque mondiale sur la pauvreté, *Revue Tiers-Monde*, vol. 43, n° 169, p. 137-165, 2002.
- LEFEBVRE H.**, [1968], *Le Droit à la ville*, Paris, Economica-Anthropos (3<sup>e</sup> édition), Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 2009.
- LEMANSKI C.**, Global cities in the South: Deepening social and spatial polarisation in Cape Town, *Cities*, vol. 24, n° 6, p. 448-461, 2007.
- MCDONALD DA**, *World city syndrome: neoliberalism and inequality in Cape Town*, New York, Routledge, 2008.
- MCDONALD DA, SMITH L.**, Privatising Cape Town: from apartheid to neo-liberalism in the mother city, *Urban Studies*, vol. 41, n°8, p. 1461-1484, 2004.
- MIRAFATAB F.**, Governing Post-apartheid Spatiality: Implementing City Improvement Districts in Cape Town, *Antipode*, vol. 39, n°4, p. 602-626, 2007.
- MIRAFATAB F.**, Public-Private Partnerships. The Trojan horse of neoliberal development?, *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 24, p. 89-101, 2004a.
- MIRAFATAB F.**, Neoliberalism and casualisation of public sector services: the case of waste collection services in Cape Town, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol. 28, n°4, p. 874-892, 2004b.
- MORANGE M.**, [forthcoming], Informal trading and the voice of the poor in "regenerating Central Cape Town". Neoliberal control in a post-apartheid entrepreneurial city, in Bénit-Gbaffou C., Lemanski C., Gervais-Lambony P., *The voice of the poor in urban governance: participation, mobilization and politics in South African cities*
- MORANGE M.**, *La question du logement à Mandela City*, Paris, Karthala, 2006.
- MORANGE M.**, « Emergence locale » et régénération urbaine au centre ville du Cap, *Bulletin de l'Association de Géographes français*, n°3, 88<sup>th</sup> year, 2011.
- MORANGE M.**, Wafer A., Neoliberalism and South Africa's Cities: An Appropriate Theoretical Framework?, Researching the South African City Session, annual conference of the Royal Geographical Society - IBG, 31 August-2 September, 2011.
- MURRAY M.**, *Taming the disorderly city: the spatial landscape of Johannesburg after apartheid*, Le Cap, University of Cape Town Press, 2008.
- NARSIAH S.**, Neoliberalism and privatisation in South Africa, *GeoJournal*, n°57, p. 3-13, 2002.
- NARSIAH S.**, The neoliberalisation of the local state in Durban, South Africa, *Antipode*, vol. 42, n°2, p. 374-403, 2010.
- OSMONT A.**, *La Banque mondiale et les villes. Du développement à l'ajustement*, Paris, Karthala, 1995.
- PARNELL S., BOULLE J.**, Utopie urbaine et gouvernement local. La stratégie de développement économique et humain au Cap, in A. Dubresson et S. Jaglin (eds.) *Le Cap après l'apartheid. Gouvernance métropolitaine et changement urbain*, Paris, Karthala, p.252-279, 2008.
- PARNELL S., PIETERSE E.**, The 'Right to the City': Institutional imperatives of a developmental state, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol. 34, n°1, p. 146-162, 2010.
- PARNELL S., ROBINSON J.**, Development and urban policy: Johannesburg's City development strategy, *Urban Studies*, vol. 43, n°2, p. 337-355, 2006.
- PARNELL S., ROBINSON J.**, (Re)theorising cities from the global south: looking beyond neoliberalism, annual conference of the Royal Geographical Society - IBG, Confronting the challenge of the post crisis economy & environment, 1-3 September, 2010.
- PECK J., THEODORE N., BRENNER N.**, Postneoliberalism and its malcontents, *Antipode*, vol. 41, n°1, p. 94-116, 2010.

---

**PEET R.**, Ideology, discourses and the geography of hegemony: from socialist to neoliberal development in postapartheid South Africa, *Antipode*, vol. 34, n° 1, p. 54-84, 2002.

**RIST G.**, *Le développement, histoire d'une croyance occidentale*, Paris, Presses de Science Po, 1996.

**SEEKING J., NATTRAS N.**, *Class, Race and Inequality in South Africa*, Pietermaritzburg, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005.

**SMITH L.**, The murky waters of the second wave of neoliberalism: corporatisation as a service delivery model in Cape Town, *Geoforum*, n° 35, p. 375-393, 2004.

**VAN DONK M., SWILLING M., PIETERSE E., PARNELL S.**, *Consolidating Developmental Local Government: Lessons from the South African experience*, Cape Town, University of Cape Town Press, 2008.

**WASTON V.**, *Change and continuity in spatial planning. Metropolitan planning in Cape Town under political transition*, London, Routledge, 2002.