

COMPARING CAPITALS

THE MAIN THEORETICAL frame for analysing cities over the last two decades has been the notion of the ‘Global City’—an urban studies paradigm which runs in tandem with official, pseudo-scientific rankings of where is the most Global (is yours an Alpha or Beta Global City?). These cities, which usually grew out of imperial entrepôts—London, New York, Shanghai, Barcelona, Mumbai, Rio de Janeiro, Sydney, Lagos—are the spokes of global networks of media, tourism, ‘creativity’, property development and, most importantly, finance capital. Of that list, only one—London—is the capital city of a nation-state, although Rio is an ex-capital and Barcelona a devolved one. Göran Therborn’s *Cities of Power*, although it doesn’t let itself get bogged down in the issue, is explicitly a riposte to the idea of the Global City, and the peculiar *Monocle*-magazine vision of trans-national, interconnected, intangible (yet always apparently locally specific) capitalism that it serves to alternately describe and vindicate. The ‘economism’ of Global City studies, he argues in his introduction, ‘leaves out the power manifestations of the urban built environment itself. Even the most capitalist city imaginable is not only business offices and their connections to business offices elsewhere.’¹ *Cities of Power* is instead an analysis solely of capital cities, as built and inhabited ‘forms of state formation and their consequences’. In an unusual move for a sociologist, Therborn pursues this study for the most part not through local economies or societies, but through the architectural and monumental practices of representation and expression of power.

This can’t entail a total break with the Global City narrative, given that some of the cities which feature heavily in the book fit both descriptions, loci at once of state formation and representation, and major centres of financial capitalism—London being the most obvious, but including also Tokyo, Paris, Madrid, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Cairo.

Much of *Cities of Power*, however, devotes itself—in an era which, at its more goofily utopian times, likes to announce the abolition and irrelevance of nation-states—to cities which have been explicitly designed to serve solely as national capitals and embodiments of national culture and power: Washington, Canberra, Pretoria/Tshwane, Ottawa, Brasília, New Delhi, Islamabad, Abuja, The Hague, Beijing, and the heavily subsidized, relatively poor post-1989 German capital, Berlin. In keeping with Therborn's work over the past twenty years, which has consistently employed the same framework, each of these cities is allocated to one of the four 'pathways to modernity' that make up the master typology of his sociological thought, as either European capitals, settler capitals, colonial capitals or capitals of 'reactive modernization', in societies that never succumbed to Western domination, but were forced to transform themselves to resist it. Modernity here is defined simply as an orientation to the present and the future, rather than to a traditional past, and a modern polity as any nation-state, of the kind first founded in America and France in the late eighteenth century. Distributed across these different zones, the various capitals are analysed in a dual optic, structural and symbolic, looking at their spatial layout, functionality (provision of basic services), patterning of buildings, architecture, monumentality (sculptures etc.), and toponomy. Throughout, attention will be paid to 'closure', 'weight', 'size', 'distance', 'symmetry', 'verticality', as key expressions of built power.²

After considering how all these have been put in play in the differing paths to modernity, *Cities of Power* moves on to the special cases of capitals under Fascism and Communism, surveys the impact of popular movements on (or in) seats of government across the world, and ends by asking what changes 'Globalism' is bringing to the capitals of nation-states. Therborn acknowledges early on that this is not a standard means of discussing power in his own field, and cites various architectural studies as preferred precedents (Deyan Sudjic's *The Edifice Complex*, Rowan Moore's *Why We Build* and my own *Landscapes of Communism*). But this is not a book of architectural history. Its ambitions lie elsewhere: *Cities of Power* sets out to put the nation-state and (literal) nation-building back at the heart of capitalism, as opposed to a history made up of

¹ *Cities of Power: The Urban, the National, the Popular, the Global* (henceforward CP), London and New York 2017, p. 9. In the text, 'imaginable' comes before 'capitalist', a lapse unfortunately typical of the very poor editing of this well-written book.

² CP, p. 18.

trade networks and port-side melting pots. Therborn's intention is not encyclopaedic, as he points out. But the scope of his study is sweeping enough. Of the 193 countries represented at the UN, the capitals of over eighty figure here, spanning every continent. Few thinkers display such a genuinely global range.

Some of the difficulties posed by the enterprise are visible at the outset. First of all, it involves a reckoning with the question of architectural style, an unfashionable one in architecture for some time, where it is widely held to be a facile and irrelevant sideline to the more crucial questions of use and form (an unconvincing disavowal, to be sure, but an enduring one) and discussed in sociology, if at all, largely through semiotics. 'The style chosen is loaded with meaning . . . the European Gothic of the Westminster Parliament is the style of the "free-born Englishman", the Gothic of the Strasbourg Münster or the Kölner Dom is *echt deutsch*, that of the Vienna City Hall is the style of autonomous cities, in the Flemish tradition. Neoclassicism is Republican in Washington and imperial in Paris and St Petersburg.'³ This is of course exactly the problem, the fact that this multivalence of meanings can be applied to exactly the same styles, with only the most minimal differences (in this list, for instance, the stodgy, simplistic bombast of Washington classicism seems less 'Greek' than the delicacy and colour of its Petersburgian cousin, which implicitly suggests unexpected things about the taste of absolute monarchies and republics).

The European pattern

Europe's major cities are partly, though not exclusively, situated in the 'city-belt' that emerged in the Late Middle Ages along the Mediterranean, the North Sea, the Baltic and the trade routes between these. Those 'transformed princely cities' that have become capitals, however, are not always to be found along these routes. Parched, inland Madrid, east German Berlin, Warsaw in the middle of the featureless Mazovian plain, are more typical than Britain's seat of power, which attained its national status through a merger between the royal city at Westminster and the typical trading metropolis of London. Amsterdam is capital only in name, with both government and monarchy in The Hague (which, accordingly, receives more detailed discussion in the book). What truly

³ CP, pp. 17–18.

distinguishes European capitals in Therborn's analysis is their deeply unusual condition of historic preservation and modernity at once, both a model of continuity with the architectural past—with even the ultra-modern, violently redeveloped Brussels centred on its historic, Gothic-baroque Grand-Place—and a 'world pioneer of modernist breaks with past authorities'. He ascribes this not so much to greater levels of conservation within Europe itself, but to what it did to cities elsewhere, a 'paradox . . . mainly explained by European imperialism', as it 'was the only part of the world which did not have its pre-modernity conquered, shattered or fatally threatened and humiliated'.⁴ Europe has, then, both a particular form of urbanism and a symbolic 'repertoire' made up of a progressive succession of architectural styles—antiquity, Gothic, renaissance, revivalism, modernism. Therborn's analysis of these styles is not as strong as it could be, as we shall see—there is more to say about capitalist power's expression in the layout of Golden Age Amsterdam than the fact that the hulking baroque Town Hall is the largest building, and the simple cataloguing of 'which is biggest' (Royal Palace, Parliament, Town Hall, Guildhall?) cannot substitute for a more sophisticated discussion of scale and spatiality.

These cities—London, Paris, Amsterdam, Madrid, Lisbon—are (or some time ago became) the capitals of stable nation-states, with the exception of linguistically promiscuous Brussels. However, Therborn is astute in stressing how much this apparent picture of continuity breaks up as soon as the analysis pans out beyond the Latin-Germanic European core. Over the last century, a series of linguistic and ethnic cleansings and substitutions, violent or otherwise, have taken place in most capitals east of the Elbe or on the other side of the Adriatic. Among those capitals which have undergone such a shift are Bucharest (with a largely Greek upper class in the 19th century), Sofia, Skopje, Athens (each of them Turkish or Muslim to some degree at the start of the 19th century), Riga, Tallinn, Prague and Budapest (all dominated by German speakers), Bratislava (Hungarian), Vilnius (Polish/Yiddish), Kiev and Minsk (Russian/Yiddish) and Helsinki (Swedish). 'Only three or four among twenty future capitals had by the mid-19th century an ethnic majority from their coming nation: Warsaw, Ljubljana, Zagreb and perhaps tiny Tirana.'⁵ While some of these cities have had to create new monumental spaces to enshrine the dominance of the ruling ethnic group (some,

⁴ CP, p. 33.

⁵ CP, p. 55.

such as Athens, over 150 years ago; others, such as Skopje, in the last five years), it is worth noting that this discontinuity can go alongside impressive architectural continuity, as the likes of Budapest, Vilnius or Tallinn, ethnically transformed and architecturally pickled, make clear.

Only those capitals which were still part of the Ottoman Empire in the second half of the 19th century have become unrecognizable: between 1860 and 1940 they underwent a process of ‘de-Orientalization and Europeanization, for which architects and city-planners were invited from Germany, Austria and sometimes France (especially to Bucharest) and . . . Italy in the case of Tirana’. Sofia’s main mosque became a Russian military hospital, then a National Library, then the National Museum; ‘only as a temporary stopgap could the Bulgarian king think of living in the *konak* of the Ottoman governor’.⁶ Entire cities could not or would not be changed—Belgrade’s layout remains largely Turkish, and Sofia’s other, larger mosque is still extremely prominent in the city centre, although Therborn does not mention it—but major gestures were made in the representational centres to create the new image accordingly. This was done especially impressively in the three avenues around Athens’s ‘Academic Trilogy’, a series of handsome and powerful neo-Hellenic institutions designed first by Danish and German, and then by Greek, architects. Overall, Therborn judges the contemporary Balkan capitals to be uniquely discontinuous with their pre-modern past, not just in Europe but anywhere in the world.

In the settler zone

If few of his particular depictions of European capitals are new, their running together is perhaps less familiar. More striking, however, is the analysis of settler capitals that follows, especially Washington, DC, too often seen as a citadel of Enlightenment and democracy. Therborn has considerable fun dismantling the pretensions of this pompous city, constructed around an at least partly slave-built Capitol, kept deliberately underdeveloped for a century, and a long-standing black-majority city in modern times. Although L’Enfant’s invited plan sketched out an exemplary rationalist city, for much of its history DC was not particularly ‘urban’. Jefferson envisaged merely a ‘federal town’, and considered that cities were ‘pestilential to the morals, the health and the liberty of

⁶ CP, p. 54.

man'. Accordingly, Washington 'remained, in fact, a rustic area of separate villages for more than half a century'; and in Frederick Douglass's words, it was 'southern in all its sympathies and national only in name. Until the War, it neither tolerated freedom of speech nor of the press.'⁷ The Potomac silted up, and foreign visitors such as Charles Dickens stopped only to mock the city as an empty folly. Only after the Civil War did it grow beyond wide avenues with nothing on them, radiating from the Capitol to nowhere in particular. It is also a national-scale demonstration of something peculiar to the United States—federal capitals that are by no means the largest or most important city in their State, an outgrowth of Jefferson's distrust for the likes of Philadelphia and New York, with administrative centres like Albany keeping the purse strings for the great cities, in often antagonistic and racially freighted relationships. Black DC, meanwhile, is treated as a 'secret city' within the capital, with 'no part in the city's official layout and monumentality'. And that monumentality is deeply odd. Statues of the Great Men of the two parties, Jefferson (Democrat) and Lincoln (Republican), are 'large quasi-religious monuments to political leaders [that] have hardly any contemporary near equivalent outside Pyongyang.' Likewise, the city's many, varied and enormous war memorials—'only in Moscow is there anything similar'.⁸

The other settler capitals, all of them to varying degrees the expressions of European power in allegedly virgin territory, are of less note. There is Canberra—in Therborn's view, not shared by all locals, a good garden-city plan run down by parsimony but eventually finished properly with a National Hall of Memory based on the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus—and there is Wellington, with its belated half-Maori national museum, Te Papa ('our place'); and, even more shrug-shouldered and reluctant, notwithstanding its Victorian Parliament Hill, there is Ottawa. Then we have the Latin American capitals basing themselves on Lisbon, Madrid or Paris in varying degrees. The outlier here is the extremely complex Mexico City, with its ancient foundations and archaeology and its 20th-century iconography by Rivera in the National Palace. In a category of its own of course lies Brasília, a Latin American pioneer in being interior rather than coastal, and an entirely unique project in its architectural expression, in Lúcio Costa's abstract *plan piloto* and Oscar Niemeyer's enduringly photogenic government buildings. While admiring the scale

⁷ CP, pp. 74–5.

⁸ CP, pp. 76–7.

of the city's ambition, Therborn is puzzled. 'What is the power message of Brasília?' he asks. 'First of all, that Brazil is a nation committed to radical change and development—but without indicating what kind of change and development, apart from a belief in automobiles and their possession of cities.'⁹ It is also a city built by a developmentalist regime and designed by a Communist, yet doomed from its inception to extreme inequality—while the districts for civil servants were trumpeted for their egalitarianism, outrageously, Costa's plan envisaged no permanent provision for the builders, who were instead put in temporary camps which inevitably became slums.

This is a fair indictment, and Therborn is also keen to point out that the result has not been some sort of modernist Potemkin city, empty, crumbling and cracked (as Robert Hughes's *The Shock of the New* notoriously claimed) but a success at least on the same terms as Washington, DC. However, Brasília also makes clear again the limitations of the sort of symbolic analysis Therborn favours. Niemeyer's government buildings were, as far as the architect was concerned, full of meaning, elemental and sexual, specifically designed with the barren surrounding landscape in mind, and intended to be both eternal and modern. We don't have to take Niemeyer's laboured bodily metaphors (the architect was apt to describe his projects in a soft-porn language of breasts and buttocks) seriously to see that there is potential meaning here, as much as in the more obvious representational monumentality to which Therborn pays so much attention.

Colonial to post-colonial

Cousins of the settler capitals are colonial capitals, which can be distinguished from the previous two forms in the total reliance of their foundation and development on extreme levels of violence, exploitation and racial segregation, and sharp levels of inequality which largely persist, although usually in a less obviously racialized form, in the present day. In another outbreak of cataloguing, Therborn divides these into three types: already important, ancient historical/capital cities, which can be found especially in North Africa and Asia (Algiers, Delhi, Baghdad); entirely colonial foundations, based on imperialist trade centres (Luanda, Singapore, Manila, Nairobi, Accra, Léopoldville/Kinshasa,

⁹ CP, pp. 102–3.

Salisbury/Harare, Batavia/Jakarta and, in a rare example of a retained colonial name, Brazzaville); and a third category of new, consciously post-colonial capitals such as Lilongwe, Abuja and Islamabad. Colonial practice was unambiguously based upon spatial hierarchy, to a far greater degree than European or settler capitals—in French planning, there was a colonial *ville* and a native *cit *, in Portuguese an upper city and a lower one; in the Belgian case, we find ‘the planning rule: at least 400 to 500 metres of separation (i.e., beyond the flying range of mosquitoes), with a vertical dimension, Europeans on top.’¹⁰

Delhi is one of the more complex examples: a historic city in India’s interior, supplemented with a starkly planned imperial capital, New Delhi, which expressed colonial power in having everything radiate from the Viceroy’s residence, with its retinue of 6,000 servants:

The central axis of the new Delhi, built alongside the old, was the Kingsway, a long, wide processional avenue running from an All-India War Memorial Arch to the majestic, if stylistically rather bastard, Vice-Regal Palace on top of Raisina Hill. Around it was a spacious, leafy garden city of white mansions and bungalows, socially graded by size and by distance to the Palace.¹¹

Therborn applauds the fact that few of the countries whose shapes were inherited from the carve-up conferences of European colonialism have attempted to create racially and linguistically exclusive nation-states on the European model (forgetting the enormous cost in violence that repressive enforcement of their arbitrary boundaries has so often involved); but he is surprised by how little of an architectural and spatial break many colonial cities have made with their imperial inheritance.

New Delhi is a case in point, as ‘plans to change the layout of space and buildings were all rejected in the end’;¹² the only major intervention into what is still officially called the Imperial Zone has been the recent Parliament Library, an attractive and restrained modernist building slotted into the hierarchical, axial plan. Nehru’s main contribution to New Delhi, Therborn claims, was to insist that the Viceroy’s Palace would be occupied by the powerless figurehead President, not by the Prime Minister. New Delhi attempted an unusual fusion of European and indigenous styles—here, the slightly camp ‘Wrenaissance’ baroque and Mughal architecture were both based on a protrusion of grandiose

¹⁰ CP, p. 109.

¹¹ CP, p. 110.

¹² CP, pp. 110–1.

domes, a development that should have been credited to the great Edwardian imperial architect Edwin Lutyens, whose relatively talentless *confrère* Herbert Baker is given more attention. This attempt at a synthesis was also tried in the Senegalese capital Dakar by its French masters, mingling streamlined modernism and the unusual style of local mosques; though these fusions were uncommon, by and large. Dakar is also credited for a relatively impressive ability to regulate and build infrastructure in its slums, which dominate many post-colonial capitals.

In the ex-colonial capitals, a ruptural monumentality is surprisingly rare. Jakarta under Sukarno created some memorial ensembles that expressly tried to give new symbolic and rhetorical content to the capital city the Indonesian resistance movements had wrested from the Dutch: the national monument, Monas, is a phallic and yonic symbol of not just pre-European but pre-Muslim derivation, placed alongside the Socialist Realist heroics of another monument commemorating the liberation of Irian Jaya—one of them founding Indonesian statehood in deep indigenous traditions, the other grounding it in current struggles. The two major exceptions are modernist capitals founded as the power centres of new independent countries: Islamabad, replacing Karachi as capital of Pakistan from 1963, and Abuja, capital of Nigeria since 1991, displacing gigantic Lagos. Strangely, Therborn pays scant attention to the military-bureaucratic grid of Islamabad, its streets literally ranked by the pen-pushers who live there, or the prominence, as its largest building, of the US embassy's vast black fortress, an expression of geopolitical power he might have remarked on in other capitals such as Baghdad.

He is more struck by a total lack of interest in creating the precedents or evocations that would be expected in a country founded specifically as an Islamic state and a capital called Islamic City; 'there was never a question of resurrecting some traditionalist Islamic city', he notes, and the capital was planned by the exceptionally prolific Greek modernist firm Doxiadis Associates, with representative buildings by the American eclectic Edward Durell Stone and the Japanese Brutalist Kenzo Tange. The results 'bear witness to Muslim modernism', though also to the fact that progressive and confident capitals do not correlate to particularly successful states; or as he delicately puts it, Islamabad is 'an indicator of Pakistani potentialities but not a predictor of national outcomes.'¹³ Abuja

¹³ CP, pp. 114–5.

shares the greenery and spaciousness of Islamabad but is architecturally more crass, distinguished mainly by its 'extreme ecumene' in the naming of streets, a subject which is given its proper attention throughout the book. Every Nigerian military ruler, including Sani Abacha, has their street, as do Winston Churchill, Mao Zedong, Tito, the Australian right-wing premier Malcolm Fraser, and de Gaulle; 'Vladimir Lenin takes you to John F. Kennedy'.¹⁴ What does this middling high-rise city, clean and orderly, say about Nigeria compared with massive and uncontrolled Lagos, however? Apart from pride at its greater modernity and the competing sizes of its mosque and cathedral, Therborn has little to report.

Therborn's capitals of reactive modernization combine aspects of most of the preceding three types. Latterly, this field has become marked by the use, as in East Asia, of 'globalizing' as an active verb, something the capital and the power it embodies does, rather than something that is done to it; Japan/Tokyo is the ambition, Egypt/Cairo the more common result. Historically, reactive modernization was a risk, and some of the capitals that attempted it have been failures of one sort or another—Addis Ababa, or Kabul, which tried twice, once in the 30s, with Albert Speer as the prospective architect (until he got the call from Hitler) and again with Soviet assistance in the 1970s. Japan and its Korean colonial city of Seoul were for the most part hugely successful; some were defeated, as with the crushing of 19th-century Egypt/Cairo, and some first failed and then succeeded—the Ottoman Empire, with Istanbul as its capital, had less tangible results in modernization than Turkey, where Ankara was the seat of power.

What makes Tokyo unusual is that, despite some early engagement with English architecture in particular, it is not a visual exemplar of 'catching up with Europe' in any major sense, and has never been, unlike Cairo, a 'little Paris' of European-style Beaux Arts boulevards. The city appears visually uncoordinated, based on a tradition of obsolescence which has its roots in Japanese building practice going back centuries, the great diversity of buildings on its streets making it look much messier than it actually is, a metropolis held together by an exceptionally extensive and functional infrastructure. Ankara, by contrast, the second attempt at a modern Turkish capital—once it meant being the hub of a nation-state, rather than of a multicultural trans-continental Empire—was derived

¹⁴ CP, p. 136.

from the architectural and spatial example of European Fascism. Its first architects were largely German and Austrian, bringing to bear approaches they had learned in expressing German power to the new Atatürk cult. Some modernists were involved, most notably the mercurial Expressionist and socialist Bruno Taut, but the main figure was the Austrian Clemens Holzmeister, who decisively influenced the 'National Republican Architecture' of Kemal's capital, which developed by the end of the 1930s into something 'akin to that favoured by Italian Fascism'.¹⁵ The 1935 Security Monument was designed by the Nazi sculptors Anton Hanak and Joseph Thorak, its burly dead-eyed nudes the sort that have mostly been excised from urban space in their original source.

Fascism and dictatorships

Necessarily, a book about cities of power deals in the expression of authority, and authoritarianism. In his discussion of the fascist city, Therborn doesn't find a wholly different paradigm to the 19th–20th century bourgeois city. Although at first he declares that only Germany and Italy fully fit the description, the differences between practice in the two countries turn out to be huge. The definition is then expanded outwards towards Franco's Spain, and far-right dictatorships in Indonesia, Chile and Argentina, with Myanmar less obviously dragooned into their company. Displacements to build his boulevards aside, Mussolini's Rome comes off rather well by comparison with the rest. The style of the regime, exemplified by the notorious unfinished exposition site EUR, was 'clearly modernist and clearly monumental, but by no means megalomaniac'.¹⁶ The details of the projects from the time speak their connection with fascist ideology and Mussolini's personal pretensions, the large-scale building programme to commemorate the bi-millennium of Augustus Caesar designed to vindicate the Duce's presentation of himself as imperial heir. For the most part the streets, squares and public buildings constructed between 1922 and 1944 survive, partly because the majority of them were reasonably intelligent and serious as architecture and planning, and partly because of the real institutional continuity of the state in the post-war era, with comparatively little renaming and only minor symbolic purging of the city in the aftermath of its liberation. 'Fasci (Roman *littorio*) and fascist-era dating (from 1922) have remained in post-fascist Rome', as they have in most large Italian cities. This was not a matter

¹⁵ CP, p. 157.

¹⁶ CP, p. 215.

of inertia, but hostility to the very idea of any iconoclasm in the fascist capital. ‘On 17th April 2015’, Therborn notes, ‘there was a brief debate, raised by the President of the Chamber of Deputies, about whether the 70th anniversary of the defeat of Fascism might not be the proper occasion to take out the obelisk devoted to Mussolini *Dux* in the Foro Italico. The question did not even come to a vote before being buried.’¹⁷ This reluctance to tinker with the legacy of far-right urban authoritarianism has been—with one enormous exception—a general pattern.

The exception is, of course, Berlin. Very few major buildings were erected there between 1933 and 1943, and there are fewer survivals. The Reichskanzlei, intended as a stop-gap before larger plans were developed, Speer’s intention to terrify visitors limited to the seemingly endless processional routes of its interiors, was destroyed in 1945. The Luftwaffe Ministry, the Reichsbank, and in the suburbs the Olympic Stadium, all survive (as do Tempelhof Airport and the chillingly blank square at Fehrbelliner Platz), each in a thin-lipped, bare classical style perhaps best compared to a more humourless spin on British Neo-Georgian.¹⁸ As in all accounts of Nazi Berlin, this is a mere side-story to the narrative of Germania, Speer and Hitler’s impossible imaginary capital, designed on an utterly demented scale, and where it is hard not to agree with Speer’s father (also an architect), who told his son, ‘you’ve all gone mad’. The plans were kept secret at the time, and only revealed after the war. However much this ludicrously bloated amplification of the Beaux Arts might have been at the very limits of plausibility, Therborn correctly notes that, like the real fascist Rome and Berlin, Germania would have remained a capitalist city—a large chunk of Hitler’s ideal Berlin consisted of offices and emporia for private businesses. The same declension is even more obvious in the case of Madrid, where Therborn traces the gradual de-radicalization of the Falange to a ‘normal’

¹⁷ CP, p. 215.

¹⁸ Therborn dwells little on the obvious contrast in architectural and urbanist quality between Nazi Berlin—whose buildings were, Olympic Stadium and Tempelhof aside, witless banalities notable only for their size—and fascist Rome. He ascribes the difference partly to Mussolini’s commitment to modernization, though there is no reason that this should have been accompanied by modern architecture, as it evidently was not in, say, New Delhi. The divergence could be explained by the legacy of the Renaissance and Baroque, or by the Hitlerian commitment to a cultural as well as political counter-revolution against bourgeois democracy.

right-clerical capitalism, from the Speer-does-the-Escorial of the Air Ministry through to the still authoritarian-traditionalist but speculative Edificio España, to the Avenida del Generalísimo (now Paseo de la Castellana), originally envisaged as a showcase of authoritarian classicism but by the end of the 1960s the central business district of Madrid, with corporate skyscrapers indistinguishable from those of La Défense or the City of London.

Extending his survey outside Europe brings Therborn to Myanmar's currently unfinished capital Naypyidaw, the Abuja to Yangon's Lagos. 'Normal city streets are eight lanes wide and thoroughfares have twenty lanes', which is wider even than was envisaged for Germania.¹⁹ In Jakarta, he finds that Suharto's New Order showcased itself at the 'Crocodile Pit', the site of the botched coup of 1965, before the dictator's bloodbath in alleged response. The main memorial space there remains the Museum of PKI Treason, with its friezes and sculptural groups depicting wholly fictional Communist crimes. Jakarta is unusual in still having monumental spaces which celebrate and justify the slaughter of fascism's victims, but the enormous scale of that violence and brutality didn't coincide with the creation of any sort of EUR, let alone a Germania. The 1970s–80s dictatorships of Argentina and Chile similarly limited themselves to small gestures, such as Pinochet's refusal to restore the bombed-out presidential palace in Santiago, and the erection of a 'national altar' in front of it. In these post-fascist capitals, Therborn finds a striking absence, especially by comparison with all the Museums of Communism across post-Communist Europe. There is no Museum of Fascism or of Dictatorship in Rome or Madrid (where it is only in the last two years that there have been major proposals for renamings and statue removal), or in Athens.²⁰ Smaller spaces dedicated to the victims of the military regimes exist in Santiago and Buenos Aires. In this context, Berlin stands out. No other capital city has given over so much of its urban space to commemorating the crimes committed in the name of its titular nation. Germany's monuments to national guilt remain, however,

¹⁹ CP, p. 230.

²⁰ The Museu do Aljube–Resistência e Liberdade in Lisbon, opened in the former headquarters of the PIDE secret police, beside the city's cathedral, with exhibits on the repressions of Salazar and Caetano, the underground resistance to them, and the colonial wars in Africa, has escaped Therborn's notice, perhaps understandably given its recency.

pointedly selective, like its reparations for them—billions poured into funding and arming Israel, but no such compensation for Greece, or a square inch in the city recalling Nazi pillage and brutalization of a country subjected to successive German diktats today.

The Communist legacy

By comparison with the Fascist city, the Communist city has much more right to be considered an urban formation all of its own, although there are some unexplored similarities with 'reactive-modernizing' capitals such as Ankara, and explored affinities with the more democratic rhetorical architecture of Red Vienna. Aside from the High Stalinist era (roughly 1935 to 1954) in the USSR and its satellites, Bucharest under Ceaușescu and Pyongyang since the development of 'Juche' in the 1970s, Therborn finds that 'real socialism' was not the Potemkin construct it has so often been accused of being, but largely a pragmatic power regime responding to the genuine problems of what Rudolf Bahro called 'non-capitalist industrialization'. Even the 1935 General Plan for Moscow, built around the skyscraping Palace of the Soviets—the only Soviet project approaching the ludicrousness of Germania—Therborn deems sensible and conservative. Between the return of building in 1924 and the consolidation of Stalinism a decade later, Moscow hosted projects that were extremely radical, both formally and socially, such as Konstantin Melnikov's workers' clubs and Moisei Ginzburg's communal apartment buildings, inserted into the city's traditional concentric street layout rather than breaking with it. This was not necessarily their intention, but the result of their regulation by older professionals such as Alexei Shchusev, the designer of Lenin's Assyrian-Constructivist Mausoleum. Compared with their laudable achievements in individual buildings,

the Soviet avant-garde was much less impressive in their garrulous conceptions of the city, on one hand flipping out into utopias of minutely regimented communal housing and on the other hand, de-urbanizing and evacuating most of the Moscow population into 'green' garden villages.²¹

This is true enough, though it is arguable that a 'garden city' of some sort was more suitable for the quasi-rural, dispersed capital that Moscow

²¹ CP, p. 241.

remained until the mid-30s than the Haussmannian megacity that was built on top of it.

Therborn argues that there were four salient parts of ‘Communist’ urbanism—class, nation, authoritarianism and terror. In his view, the first of these meant that, compared with right-wing developmentalist regimes and even most north-western European welfare states, there was a high degree of spatial equality and little segregation. This is an inaccurate description of High Stalinist practice, but was true enough before 1934 and after 1954. Nationalism, which endured in face of the obviously coerced nature of Communism in, say, Romania and Poland, meant the superficial use of ‘national form’ to express ‘socialist content’. A major example was Warsaw’s Palace of Culture and Science, for some decades the tallest building in Europe outside Moscow. Designed by a Soviet architect and erected by Soviet builders, this ‘gift from the Soviet Union’ of a skyscraper, modelled on the seven already put up in Moscow, was nonetheless—unlike its Russian forebears—a public rather than ministerial or private building, at the insistence of the Polish Communist leadership. This distinct shift of function was, Therborn argues, more important than the facile motifs the Soviet designers borrowed from 16th-century Polish Mannerist attics, which are ‘recognizable only to architecture buffs’.²² Similarly, Budapest, Prague, Sofia and Berlin all embarked on fairly specific paths, rather than simply reproducing a Muscovite urban model. As for the third and fourth dimensions of the Communist city, the authoritarianism sharply lessened after 1953 and terror largely disappeared, but ‘the human damage was, of course, beyond repair’,²³ and underdevelopment was never quite conquered, impressive public provision coexisting with endemic consumer shortages.

The concentration on capitals in *Cities of power* is perhaps a little deceptive here. The typical processes of urban Stalinism are better seen in new towns such as Eisenhüttenstadt or Dimitrovgrad, or industrial extensions like Nowa Huta and Ostrava-Poruba, than in Prague or Sofia. Outside the Warsaw Pact, distinct forms developed in New Belgrade, both a modern dormitory and ‘Yugoslavia’s Ottawa or Canberra’, or Maoist Beijing, which Therborn presents as surprisingly lacking in rhetoric and monumentality, with very few figurative sculptural memorials, ideological activity limited to a few distinct spaces—Tiananmen Square, the

²² CP, p. 256.

²³ CP, p. 247.

Ten Great Buildings of the late 1950s, and Mao's Mausoleum (and later, under Deng and his successors, 'iconic' skyscrapers for the state media). Hanoi has been similarly restrained. Pyongyang is the major exception, with its programme of immense memorials to the Kims and the Juche idea, and follies such as the 100-storey, still unopened Ryugyong Hotel. Pyongyang's architecture comes partly from Moscow (a palatial Metro), partly from Beijing (a fusion of Asian architecture with Soviet classicism), and partly from the clean, rational high-rise example of Singapore. Therborn is rather impressed, though pointing out that this is a showcase city, with North Korea's poverty concentrated elsewhere. Havana, on the other hand, has famously left the Americanist metropolis that the revolutionaries inherited at the end of the 50s almost untouched, aside from an eclectic scattering of monuments to Lenin, Lennon and Che—but with greater levels of public participation in urban development than any other 'real socialist' city, particularly through the Havana Workshops of the late 1990s. The Communist city, for all its many flaws, 'ended before it could connect with kindred tendencies' in contemporary urban activism and best practice (if not always real practice) to 'create compact cities, public and non-motor transport, and cheap public housing'.²⁴

What followed has generally been dispiriting—the gross kitsch of Yuri Luzhkov's Moscow, the attempt by Warsaw developers to crowd out the Palace of Culture and Science with Western-style skyscrapers (this had already begun in the early 1960s under Gomułka), the many Museums of Communism and Communist oppression, ranging from flimsy in Berlin, sophisticated in Tallinn and Prague (built around the 1950s National Memorial that includes the Gottwald Mausoleum), and stridently propagandistic and distortive in Budapest, Riga and Vilnius. The latter trio have removed most of their Soviet memorabilia, where others—Berlin, Moscow, Minsk, and, until recently, Kiev—were more circumspect. A pregnant feature of the new cityscapes has been a revival of monuments to pre-war dictators—Horthy in Hungary, Piłsudski in Poland, Ulmanis in Latvia. Plans to honour Tiso and Antonescu in Slovakia and Romania have so far stalled, foreign investors remaining wary of their complicity in the Judeocide. The pattern, like that in most post-fascist capitals, offers confirmation that the discourse of totalitarianism has served largely to legitimize the political right. One final and paradoxically more hopeful example may be the recent German Occupation Monument in

²⁴ CP, p. 280.

Budapest, an exculpatory memorial that seeks to portray Hungary, an Axis power, as a mere victim in the Second World War. It almost immediately elicited a counter-memorial, with flyposters and regular protests drawing attention to its dubious history and legitimization of the current authoritarian Fidesz government. Contestation has made of it, uniquely, something of a 'living monument'.

Social democracy

From below, popular combativity and aspiration, and from above, capitalist globalization earn the two longest chapters of *Cities of Power*. Therborn begins his exploration of the first with 'Municipal Socialism', a Victorian formation grown out of a semi-serious description of the Liberal Party's 'gas and water socialism' (originally limited for the most part to Birmingham and Glasgow, not London, whose experiments in this field came later). There follow the great early 20th-century pioneers in the architectural expression of moderate socialism: the Dutch socialist council leader Floor Wibaut's sponsorship of the decorative fairyland of Amsterdam School architecture (here taking precedence over The Hague), and, of course the famous interwar housing programme of 'Red Vienna', at once symbolic—with buildings rhetorically conceived as citadels of proletarian power, full of grand portals and turrets named after heroes of the workers' movement—and structural, rehousing tens of thousands of Viennese workers in flats of superior quality with extensive communal facilities. Here, though, Therborn's fondness for monumental literalism leads him into error:

There was no love lost between Communism and Austro-Marxism, but there is clearly a certain affinity between Karl-Marx-Hof and Karl-Marx-Allee based on a common heroic socialism and an idea that only the best is good enough for the working class.²⁵

This may be true on an architectural level, but it is also superficial. Karl-Marx-Allee in Berlin—originally Stalinallee, the grand boulevard designed for Stalin's birthday, whose punitive work norms led directly to the uprising of June 1953—was a facade, behind which lay a thin layer of flats, and behind that, at least initially, hidden fragments of the bourgeois city. Karl-Marx-Hof was very different. Behind the 'fortress'

²⁵ CP, p. 169.

shown to the world were schools, a park, a public bath, polyclinics, and so forth. This was real mass workers' housing, whereas the flats in Karl-Marx-Allee were allocated to privileged groups—which, in this case, included Stakhanovite workers but not the mass of its ruthlessly exploited builders. The rhetoric of architecture can be a mask for the realities of practice. Similarly, Therborn judges post-war Vienna's housing in terms of a rhetorical shortfall: specifically the shift from the tragic grandeur of Karl-Marx-Hof to Per-Albin-Hansson-Siedlung, a conservative little *völkisch* estate named after the Swedish Social Democrat. But this was far from the end of the story: Viennese social housing continued into the spectacularly provisioned high-rises of the early 1970s Alt-Erlaa estate, where a small rent could get you facilities superior to the majority of luxury flats in contemporary London and New York; or experiments in feminist planning such as the Frauen-Werk-Stadt of the 1990s—both exceptionally radical, but lacking in flagpoles and heroic statuary.

Therborn's sensitivity to the achievements of social democracy elsewhere is in general very welcome, as is his knowledge of the ways in which these differed regionally. The quality of Swedish public housing he holds to have been much higher than British—in a telling footnote he recounts how a Swedish colleague who moved to Britain in the 60s shocked his new colleagues by innocently informing them that he was looking for council housing. The comparison is wholly correct if the contrast is between Birmingham or Manchester and Malmö or Gothenburg, but doesn't hold up as well as Therborn thinks it does between London and Stockholm. But he doesn't lay the blame for what went wrong on architects. In a rare and commendable moment of anger in this even-tempered book, he describes as 'obscene' the reduction by the historian Charles Jencks of the 'tragic experiences' of Anglo-American public housing to 'polemics about architectural style'. Across Europe, from the 60s onwards, mass fabrication of high-rises for the less well-off became a ready object of class contempt. As Therborn puts it, 'cheap modernism for people held to be cheap became a cheap target for expensive architectural critics'. But 'architecture cannot trump sociology. Rather, architecture is sociology turned into built form.'²⁶ Proof comes from a rare positive export in this era from the imperial centre to its former colonial periphery: 'The progressive ideology behind the dismal practice of British public housing seems to have inspired the world's most extensive

²⁶ CP, pp. 302–3.

and successful public-housing construction in a capitalist economy'—Singapore, with 82 per cent in council-built housing, albeit of a kind that is, unlike in British practice, sold, not rented.²⁷

On the other hand, when he moves on to the latest of the popular movements to have held serious municipal power in a major European capital—the Greater London Council under Ken Livingstone—Therborn comes unstuck. His discussion of this experience, indebted to Doreen Massey's *World City*, makes significant mistakes. He seems not to know that the GLC—which he mis-identifies as London's first elected city government—possessed considerably fewer powers than the London County Council founded in 1889, which it had succeeded in 1965. The LCC, especially from the 1930s to the 1960s, when it was under unchallenged Labour rule, was committed to a programme that aimed, in Herbert Morrison's apocryphal words, at 'building the Tories out of London' via schools, job-creation schemes, and housing of exceptional quality. The GLC was a truncated version of this, and in the 1980s combined its impressive multicultural, feminist and socialist cultural programmes²⁸ with a belief that municipal housing was problematic, and best replaced with provision by housing associations and co-operatives, a much older idea. Its monument is the Coin Street Community Builders estate around the Oxo Tower in Lambeth, almost opposite St Paul's, along the Thames. This guarantees very good low-income housing to people who can prove that they'll be good members of the co-operative that runs it. Whether this is more or less radical than the mass housing of the ICC is a matter for debate.

Iconographically, social democracy was never very ambitious. In Brussels, equestrian statues and ensembles of aristocratic and bourgeois power were supplemented by Constantin Meunier's straining, realist (and near-derelict) Monument to Labour. Workerist friezes decorate Oslo's 1930s City Hall. Red Vienna's Monument to the Republic, depicting its Socialist founders, was reconstructed in 1948. Cautioning against political determinism, Therborn finds the most prominent tribute to a socialist in any West European capital to be the flamboyant

²⁷ CP, p. 172.

²⁸ Though not always well-informed: the semi-fascist, rigidly monocultural Hindu RSS was given an enormous grant for a temple-cum-cadre training centre, Livingstone afterwards admitting 'we were just very ignorant'.

likeness of the trade-union leader and, briefly, Communist MP Jim Larkin on O'Connell Street, right in the heart of Dublin—in the North-West European country which has perhaps the weakest of all its labour movements (though he might also have noticed the modernist high-rise Liberty Hall erected by Ireland's largest trade union nearby, for thirty years Dublin's tallest building). Since this is perforce, to paraphrase one of Therborn's best-known books, mainly a study of 'what the ruling class builds when it builds', urban movements that do not build—the libertarian explosions of the 1960s onwards—receive less attention, as they have not created spaces of urban power, though the likes of the Dutch Provo movement did manage to defeat a fair few. *Cities of Power* does include such legendary confrontations as Jane Jacobs' battle against New York's quango vizier Robert Moses, 'arguably the most vicious and racist of urban planners', albeit not one who planned a capital city.²⁹ Washington, DC had a minor equivalent—the Three Sisters Bridge, part of a freeway being rammed through black areas of the city along the Potomac, which was defeated after a concerted popular campaign. Similarly, there are some permanent legacies of the post-1968 alternatives—Christiania in Copenhagen, Italian social centres, the squatland of Kreuzberg—some of which Therborn notes are now tourist attractions. This is one area where he might have lingered a little longer, although his judgements here are well-considered.

Reform and revolution in the South

Pre-war municipal socialism, post-war social democracy and (glimpses of) eco-anarchism are the lesser European side of Therborn's canvas of popular movements. More politically significant today are two developments outside Europe, to which he devotes more extended attention. The first of these are insurgent movements for 'urban reform' in some of the largest capitals of the Global South. Here he singles out the capture of the mayoralty of Mexico City by Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the rise of the Common Man Party led by Arvind Kejriwal in Delhi, and the administration of Joko Widodo in Jakarta: successful in each case in the teeth of the established order, and in each case a potential trampoline to national power. He provides most detail of the successful social policies—septuagenarian pensions, supplementary health care, participatory budgeting—stemming from the Mexican experience

²⁹ CP, p. 199.

under AMLO. In Delhi, free water and electricity for the poor have been comparable achievements of the AAP. *Cities of Power* suggests that movements of this kind have a major future ahead. For what they prefigure is ‘a kind of coalition politics which may constitute one of the most realistic left-wing strategies of the twenty-first century’—one which has ‘two pillars: middle-class revulsion at political and bureaucratic corruption and poor people’s demand for respect and social support.’³⁰

Secondly, the world has seen, predating and accompanying these movements of reform, the ‘unexpected return of urban revolutions’, which Engels thought outdated by the 1890s, the military now capable of crushing any armed rising in Europe, and the middle class no longer willing to have any part in one. Yet from Tehran to Manila, Buenos Aires to Bishkek, not to speak of Tunis and Cairo, Bucharest or Kiev, urban risings have successfully toppled regimes that looked formidable—if only in the case of Iran followed by anything like radical social change. What has enabled this revival? Therborn sees three conditions: a regime that both lacks constitutional legitimacy, and is internally hollowed-out or divided, whose forces of repression refuse to back it against mounting street protests, in a period or a zone where Cold War ideological polarities no longer operate. Conversely, where such regimes are insufficiently divided, as in China in 1989 or Syria today, and where they are still constitutional (France in 1968 or contemporary Spain), they can usually put down or hold off rebellions against them.

Socially speaking, the revolutionary upheavals of this period are cousins of the urban reform movements, since they too display ‘a large, volatile middle class—overcompensating for the decline or stalling of the working class’, with a ‘potential for democratic urban street protest’ that has proved capable on more than one occasion of ‘rallying sections of the precariat and the unemployed’.³¹ However dramatic in form, the upshot of these revolutions has so far, Therborn notes, been typically dubious or dire in substance. Another set of officers, another group of oligarchs, are back in power in Egypt and Ukraine, with variations elsewhere; neither the post-Soviet ‘colour’ revolts nor the Arab Spring have yielded much benefit to their populations. Yet, he writes,

³⁰ CP, p. 193.

³¹ CP, pp. 202–7. Readers of this journal will recall leading arguments in Therborn’s manifesto, ‘New Masses? Social Bases of Resistance’, NLR 85, Jan–Feb 2014, pp. 7–16.

this bleak academic conclusion is not the whole truth. The urban revolutions, the failed as well as the briefly successful ones, were popular movements of generational imprint, moments of challenge to rotten powers, of collective strength and community: ‘festivals of the oppressed’, as Lenin said. They remind us that even 21st-century cities are not reducible to global business services, luxury consumption and privileged ‘creativity’, or, alternatively, slum misery. At some moments, cities can turn strangers into a people, consumers into citizens.

Memories he suggests may outlive the otherwise depressing outcomes of, say, the 2014 revolution in Kiev.³²

‘Globalism’

Cities of Power ends with critical reflections on the new globalism of capital and its national constructions, focusing on the influential pan-national modernist think-tank, the CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne), active from the 20s to the 50s and important long after, but also taking in the contemporary phenomenon of competitive skyscraper developments, the extent of urban inequality within capitals, and the culture of ‘image capitalism’. Therborn derives his analysis of CIAM largely from Eric Mumford’s study *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism* (2000), tracing its gradual shift from an explicitly socialist movement to a technocratic organization whose principles, via multinational firms such as Doxiadis Associates, would become the norm in much post-colonial urbanism and in the peripheral housing estates of the Global North. The watering down of its politics intensified as it crossed the Atlantic, along with many of its members (Siegfried Giedion and Walter Gropius in particular), but the tragedy was that its suspicion of private property and its non-hierarchical model of the city were largely irrelevant when building necessarily bureaucratic and class-segregated cities like Brasília and Islamabad. So too its purist architecture became, via Mies van der Rohe’s office buildings, the house style for mid-century American capital.

Skyscrapers were not initially part of CIAM’s ‘International Style’ (as MOMA, somewhat questionably, called it)—the eclectic historicist architecture, commercialism and lack of planning of mid-century skyscraper cities (none of them capitals) were complete anathema to its vision of a rational city. Tracking skyscrapers in capital cities is

³² CP, p. 208.

necessarily a different story to that of their sprouting in ‘Global Cities’ (again, with the obvious exception of London). Here the ‘skyscraper index’ is not the famous algorithm predicting that the world’s tallest buildings will go up just before the stock market comes crashing down—the only capital-city skyscrapers to fit that model are the Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur. Ironically, Stalinist Moscow was influential in the development of the capital variants: it erected Europe’s first major skyscrapers in the late 1940s with the neo-Gothic Seven Sisters. Like the towers of today—which are rarely just headquarters for private business, and often resemble vertical malls—the Seven Sisters consisted of two hotels, two ministries, two blocks of luxury flats and one university. Similar experiments have included the Palace of Culture in Warsaw, various media headquarters in 21st-century Beijing, Tokyo City Hall, and, in an unusual recent European example, the neo-classical high-rise ministries built this decade in The Hague.

Many European capitals have insisted on strict height limits, however, with skyscrapers limited to certain districts in Paris, Madrid and the Baltic States, or blocked altogether in Stockholm, Rome, Prague, Budapest. Only London and Kiev have allowed a relative free-for-all. Post-1989 Berlin has been especially strict (Therborn is wrong to ascribe the drab forty-storey hotel on Alexanderplatz to recent property development; it was built under the DDR in 1969). High-rise housing, meanwhile, has undergone a striking metamorphosis as its class clientele has changed, from proletarian housing in the 1960s to ‘luxury flats’ in contemporary London: a change he ascribes to a dialogue with East Asia, where, since Seoul in the 80s, tall has meant bourgeois. The suspicion Therborn shows towards skyscrapers-as-measure is welcome:

While skyscrapers are indicators of *urban* capitalist power and ambitions—and, at one time, of Stalinist aims of emulating them—they are not very reliable as pointers to capital power *per se*. Some of the world’s most powerful corporations, like Apple, Microsoft and Walmart, have their headquarters in rustic (though well-connected) locations and are characterized by a pronounced horizontality.³³

If architecturally speaking the new Globalism has tended to spell frenetic leaps of verticality and exhibitionist pursuits of novelty, Therborn’s final emphasis falls more on its third trademark, as he sees it, exclusivity—

³³ CP, pp. 318–9.

the spread of gated communities from their original home in California to national capitals, where they form the most reliable indicator of the degree of urban inequality; reliable comparative data is otherwise, as he notes, hard to come by. Not, of course, that these Green Zones of the wealthy are in any way peculiar to seats of government. But they are tokens of a more general alteration. Undeniably,

The global capitalist moment in urban history means a major shift in city power and a dramatic change in the cityscape. The most important shift of power, however, is not from the national to the global. It is the shift from the people, the citizenry, to capital, national and global. The prime aim of a global city is not the satisfaction of its inhabitants, that of a global capital city not to represent the nation and its citizens, but to attract foreign capital and consumer spending, to benefit (some sectors of) national capital and to compete with other cities for the title of Miss Capitalist Universe.³⁴

The agents of this transformation, Therborn argues, are not themselves extra-territorial, but should be conceived by antithetical analogy with the nationalism (and print capitalism) of *Imagined Communities*:

Current urban globalism is not so much a rule of cities by foreign or transnational capital as a striving by local upper and upper-middle classes and their urban managers and real-estate developers to become part of an imagined community of global urbanity. Or, perhaps more exact, of an *imagined tribe*, hierarchical and competitive, of capitalist globality, a tribe of 'wealth creation', display and consumption. This imagined global tribe is dependent on global image capitalism: that is, on a commerce of images through satellite television, global marketing, property websites, stock photography, Facebook, Instagram, movies and magazines like *Cosmopolitan*, *Vogue* and others. This is an image capitalism of a rich world 'lifestyle' of boundless consumption, urban vertical glamour, iconic culture, residences secluded from the local populace, luxury brands and 'world-class' leisure.³⁵

Astana and beyond

In an Envoi, Therborn describes the planned capital of Kazakhstan, under what he sees as the relatively 'enlightened' despotism of Nursultan Nazarbayev. Here can be found nearly all the attributes of the other Cities of Power, realized by major international architects like Foster and Kurokawa: Gothic governmental high-rises from Moscow, a bureaucratic capitalist modernity via Beijing, iconographic donations from Riyadh

³⁴ CP, p. 313.

³⁵ CP, p. 348.

and Ankara. Communism, Fascism, Welfarism, Globalism, all preside to one degree or another in Astana, along with an official multiculturalism. The only thing absent is the presence or influence of any popular movement, any shred or fragment of urban democracy. *Cities of Power* ends by contrasting the image capitalism of the elites prospering in such globalized Xanadus, whose future looks ‘pretty sure and well laid-out’, their impact likely to increase, with the urban revolutions and movements for reform that coexist with them. What of the conflict between these two forces? The only case study in the book is the ‘Battle for London’ that ended with the unconditional triumph of global capital in the Docklands and beyond.³⁶ Declining to take it as paradigmatic, Therborn expresses a moderate optimism: ‘Ordinary people are not going away. They will continue to disturb the visions of global capitalism. Their chances of social transformation are better in cities than elsewhere—and for urban change, capital cities of power turned into cities of transformation are likely to be decisive.’³⁷

For all its critique of *Monocle* globalism, there is a certain dizziness to *Cities of Power*, a breathless whistlestop aspect where every plausible capital city is catalogued and described though seldom at any great length. In my own areas of expertise—London, and the capitals of the former Warsaw Pact—there were several errors, ranging from minor misnamings of architects and districts to more significant mistakes such as the disappearance of the London County Council. I suspect that a specialist on, say, West Africa or East Asia might find similar problems, as with his apparent belief that Maoist China did not tend to rename streets or create permanent monuments. Therborn’s handling of architecture and art, where he confesses to a lack of expertise, is also perforce somewhat limited. This would be less of a problem had the accompanying images been integrated into the text to act as a crutch for lack of descriptive flair, rather than placed in the middle of the book under rather eccentric sub-headings.³⁸ In one passage, he speaks highly of Pretoria/Tshwane’s post-Apartheid Freedom Park, which develops from an abstract space into—on Thabo Mbeki’s insistence—a Gallery of Leaders, featuring Che, Toussaint, Tambo alongside Boer commandos,

³⁶ Recounted at CP, pp. 303–10, far from the chapter on popular movements.

³⁷ CP, pp. 356–7.

³⁸ Not to speak of a glaring typo on the very first page of the plates, inviting readers to contemplate the ‘official residence of the West German Bundeskanzler’.

who are then supplemented with a monumental ‘museum of African cosmology as well as history’. This sounds fascinating, but the evocation does not quite bring the space to life. Elsewhere, veering towards a straightforward listing of features and scales, his tour of the world risks replicating the problems with Global Cities narratives in a different register (‘how representational is *your* capital?’). For the most part, however, the soundness of Therborn’s judgement makes an occasional shallowness forgivable—the larger construction is more important than its sometimes sketchy components.

Inevitably, there is also the problem of cities that are placed into one category but would fit equally well in another, where the overarching four-part taxonomy can have an isolating effect. Is Bucharest an example of a Communist city more than it is an extreme version of the city of reactive modernization? Does it make sense to cleave the fascist from the colonial city, when the British managed to achieve in New Delhi the nearest existing equivalent to Germania? What Therborn’s approach does do, however, is reach into an area which globalist studies and Global City listings absolutely refuse to discuss—the influence of ideology on urban planning and architecture, even, or especially, in the allegedly post-ideological age. It also has the excellent virtue of making it obvious that the authoritarian fate liberals have liked to warn us of over the last couple of years, in the era of Brexit, Trump, Putin, Orbán, has already been built for us, particularly in North America. When you can recognize Washington, DC as already a Pyongyang on the Potomac, then it is harder to see ‘illiberal democracy’ as a sudden irruption of suppressed impulses—rather than something that has always underlaid the practices of capitalist urbanism.