

*Spaces of Aspiration, Liberation and Exclusion: The Politics of Urban Space in an African Democracy*

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The dissertation situates Gaborone, the capital of Botswana, in a wider theoretical perspective related to the study of comparative urban politics. Questions posed in the dissertation include: how is the pervasive social and economic inequality maintained in Gaborone? What formal and informal methods are employed by the State to organize and marginalize the population of urban poor in the city? What role does informal cultural politics have in creating contemporary notions of citizenship and identity amongst the residents of Gaborone? How are class, race and social conflicts enacted in the urban geographies of space, discourse and imagination?

To interrogate these theoretical issues, I combine the qualitative methodologies required for in-depth ethnography with an interdisciplinary body of social and political theory. This approach allows me to move beyond the focused case study of Gaborone and make broader comparative linkages both in the Southern Africa region, as well as elsewhere in the globe. In the first half of the dissertation I trace the forty-year history of the planned capital of Gaborone in terms of the formal policies and regulations guiding the colonial and post-colonial planning and development of the city. One of the primary assertions made here is that in spite of the efforts made by the independent government of Botswana to alter the divided socio-economic landscape of Gaborone, there is little difference between the colonial and the post-colonial city, as economic inequality and the social and political marginalization of the urban poor remains largely unchanged in both contexts.

The latter half of the dissertation builds on the themes and conclusions covered in the preceding chapters by considering four locations throughout the city. These sites are: a popular Western style shopping mall, the oldest urban slum in Gaborone, the town's central plaza, and a well-traveled street corner frequented by illegal immigrants looking for work. Taken together, these four locales capture a mosaic depicting the organization of power in the discursive and physical spaces of Gaborone. A narrative of these sites illuminates the contemporary prevalence of inequality and poverty existing adjacent to lifestyles of extreme affluence and prosperity, which characterize the conflicts and possibilities of urban citizenship in Gaborone. More significantly, the questions asked of Gaborone related to consumption, citizenship and inequality suggest broader cultural, political and policy implications for emergent urban centers across the world.