

CITIES OF POWER

THE URBAN,
THE NATIONAL,
THE POPULAR,
THE GLOBAL

GÖRAN THERBORN



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In this brilliant, very original survey of the politics and meanings of urban landscapes, leading sociologist Goran Therborn offers a tour of the world's major capital cities, showing how they have been shaped by national, popular, and global forces. Their stories begin with the emergence of various kinds of nation-state, each with its own special capital city problematic. In turn, radical shifts of power have impacted on these cities development, in popular urban reforms or movements of protest and resistance; in the rise and fall of fascism and military dictatorships; and the coming and going of Communism. Therborn also analyzes global moments of urban formation, of historical globalized nationalism, as well as the cities of current global image capitalism and their variations of skyscraping, gating, and displays of novelty.

Through a global, historical lens, and with a thematic range extending from the mutations of modernist architecture to the contemporary return of urban revolutions, Therborn questions received assumptions about the source, manifestations, and reach of urban power, combining perspectives on politics, sociology, urban planning, architecture, and urban iconography. He argues that, at a time when they seem to be moving apart, there is a strong link between the city and the nation-state, and that the current globalization of cities is largely driven by the global aspirations of politicians as well as those of national and local capital.

With its unique systematic overview, from Washington, D.C. and revolutionary Paris to the flamboyant twenty-first-century capital Astana in Kazakhstan, its wealth of urban observations from all the populated continents, and its sharp and multi-faceted analyses, *Cities of Power* forces us to rethink our urban future, as well as our historically shaped present.

Cities of Power

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The Urban, the National,
the Popular, the Global

Goran Therborn



PUSTAKA PERDANA



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*The city...is the point of maximum concentration for the power
and culture of a community.*

—Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (1938)

*Architecture is a kind of eloquence of power in forms - now
persuading, even flattering, now only commanding.*

—Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Skirmishes of an Untimely Man' (1888)

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Introduction:

The Urban, the National, the Popular and the Global

This is a book about meetings and relationships between four social forces: the urban, the national, the popular and the global. We shall be watching how they meet and how they change the urban habitat during the lifetime of the national, up until now. The urban is old: cities have existed for thousands of years, but they have been transformed by the arrival of the national in the form of nation-states, just over two centuries ago. The national transformation of cities has focused on the urban centre of the nation-state, its capital, which is the object of this study. Mostly pre-national cities of different kinds were changed into national cities, but sometimes nation-states built new cities for themselves. Nation-states arrived at their chosen capitals along different historical pathways and after long or short, rough or smooth journeys. These historical experiences left enduring marks on each capital city.

Nationalism and nation-states were part of a much larger epochal change, the rise of modernity as a new historical era, rejecting authorities and institutions of the past (inner-worldly ones above all) and trying to create new societies, new cultures, a new world. The national and the global first met in this context, as global nationalism. Major meeting-places of this encounter were the national capitals, which now had to adapt to global models of a capital 'worthy of the nation', taking in the avenues of Second Empire Paris, the infrastructure of London, in some places the Mall and the Capitol Building of Washington.

Nations developed and changed and the constitutive elites of nation-states were faced with popular challenges from the ascendancy of originally subaltern classes, ethnicities/races and gender groups. Occasionally these challenges were strong and successful enough to create distinctive popular moments of power, manifested in urban history. National struggles for power could take extreme and violent forms, not only destructive and ephemeral, like wars and riots, but also, for a time, forms cemented in the capital city, which we shall also look at.

In recent times the global has taken centre stage, first of all in the form of global, transnational capitalism. To not a few contemporary authors, the national is on the verge of becoming an extinct species, particularly in big cities. We shall look into those claims, sceptically but seriously, trying to disentangle the intertwined dynamics of the global, the national and the local in the new style of globalist urbanism, of verticality, novelty and exclusivity. At the very end we shall venture a glance into the future of our four forces.

Underlying my interest in the choreography of the urban, the national, the popular and the global are old analytical interests in forms and relations of power and in meanings, ideology and symbolic forms. Cities affect us by their spatial structuring of social relations and by their provision of meanings of social life. This might be seen as urban power, but cities in the nation-state era are not actors of power of the same weight as the national, popular and global forces. Cities of our time had better be approached as manifestations and representations of power. Our main research question here is: What kind of power does the urbanity of the capital cities under investigation manifest and represent?

The study is global and historical, from the first national capitals, revolutionary Paris and Washington, D.C., up to today and the flamboyant new capital of Kazakhstan, Astana. But it is, of course, neither an encyclopaedia of the capitals of the world nor a world history of power. It deals with a set of significant examples of the four major kinds of nation-state and national capital formation in the world, with some historical moments of power change and with how capitals of the different national types have had to confront the challenges of popular and global moments.

This has been a project long in coming, arising out of free time in Budapest in 1996, as the incumbent of a temporary European Chair of Social Policy at the ELTE University and many times interrupted by

seemingly more urgent obligations. It was initially inspired by a history of the drama of the city's Heroes' Square.* A first study analyzed the processes and symbolic transformations which turned major dynastic residence cities of Europe into national capitals. Due to a couple of editorial mishaps it was published only in 2002.¹ Then I managed to get some funding (from two now-defunct Swedish public research funds, FRN and HSRF, and from the INTAS of the EU, also passed away) and to link up with urbanist colleagues of various disciplines from all over the world, resulting in a series of joint regional publications. As always, my research is the product of an individual craftsman, not an industrial output by a factory of research assistants.

* Andras Gero, *Modern Hungarian Society in the Making* (Budapest, 1995), chapter 11. The square and its Millennium Monument, at the end of the city's main boulevard, were a frequent destination of my walks.

t Regional projects launched as part of this work include one on Eastern European capitals organized as a Helsinki conference, with the generous support of Markku Kivinen and Anne Haila and published as *Eastern Drama: Capitals of Eastern Europe 1830s-2006* in a special monographic section of the *International Review of Sociology* 16:2 (2006); a second Eastern European project with EU funding, together with Larisa Titarenko of the University of Minsk, Anelie Vosiliute of Vilnius and Afgan Abdullayev of Baku, focusing on Baku, Minsk and Vilnius and reported in a Russian book edited by Titarenko, *Postsovietskie Stolitsy; Minsky Vilnius, Baku* (2009); a collaboration with Fernando Perez Oyarzun at the Catholic University in Santiago, Chile, on a Latin American-US conference in 2007, which did not issue into a publication but was fruitful in itself; a workshop on Southeast Asian capitals in Bangkok in 2008, co-organized with K.C. Ho of the National University of Singapore and published as a section of *City* 13:1(2009). Thanks to Laurent Fourchard of the University of Bordeaux and Simon Bekker of Stellenbosch University, South Africa, I got access to French Africanist workshops, out of which Bekker and I could organize a conference on capital cities in Dakar in 2010. It was published as a book, in association with the African research network CODESRIA: Bekker and Therborn (eds), *Power and Powerlessness: Capital Cities in Africa* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2012). Finally, there was a global collective effort. Professor In Kwon Park and the *International Journal of Urban Sciences* asked me to guest edit a special issue on cities and power, which materialized in March 2015 (vol. 19, no. 1). Routledge published the issue as a book in 2016: G. Therborn (ed.), *Cities and Power*.

Alongside the collective joint projects, my work on cities of power has also included some individual essays: 'Transcaucasian Triptych' (*New Left Review* 73, 2007), on Tbilisi, Yerevan and Baku; 'Identity and Capital Cities: European Nations and the European Union, in F. Cerutti and S. Lucarelli (eds), *The Search for a European Identity* (2008), on Brussels and the competition for the capital of the EU; and 'Modern Monumentality: European Experiences', in J. Osborne (ed.), *Approaching Monumentality in Archaeology* (2014).

Without original intention, this book has become part of a tetralogy of global studies, which started with *Between Sex and Power: Family in the World, 1900-2000* (2004). It was followed in 2011 by *The World: A Beginner's Guide* and in 2013 by *The Killing Fields of Inequality*.

For me this book has been an immensely stimulating and enriching learning experience, one which included, of course, the opportunity to visit the cities treated here. Critical analyses of power more often make one angry than happy. But I do hope that I will be able to convey also something of the excitement at learning about cities and their diversity in time and space.

During this long process, I have piled up an enormous debt of gratitude. My wife, Sonia Therborn, has accompanied me on most of my often strenuous urban explorations since she retired from clinical psychology (and often before) and has transferred her sharp psychological eye onto urban anthropology, enlightening a myopic macro-sociologist.

Perry Anderson's characteristically kind and generous encouragement of my first venture into urban studies gave me both courage and motivation to continue. Anne Haila brought me into a most inspiring network of urban scholars working on 'urban science' for the European Science Foundation. Markku Kivinen, director of the Helsinki Alexander Institute, was crucially supportive, both of my first regional workshop and in providing me with an interpreter and companion to Astana. At the end of my stint as co-director of the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences, my colleague Bjorn Wittrock granted me the opportunity to bring together a set of eminent urban scholars as fellows for a year or a semester. This was an enormously stimulating time together with Simon Bekker, Swati Chattopadhyay, Kumiko Fujita, K.C. Ho, Laura Kolbe, Abidin Kusno, Fernando Perez Oyarzun and Karl Schlogel and the start of lasting personal friendships as well as of the cooperation mentioned above.

The various joint regional projects involved working, together with effective, generous and interesting co-organizers: Simon Bekker, K. C. Ho, Fernando Perez Oyarzun, Larisa Titarenko and an impressive array of scholars.

A long list of informants have helped me by sharing their knowledge of their city. After all these years, I have to apologize that any list would have been incomplete. Several informants are footnoted below and are here publicly thanked for their kindness. Several people even organized

guides or brief research assistance for me: Judith Bodnar in Budapest informed me of many things and connected me with Judit Veres, Chang Kyung-Sup, who also personally accompanied me several times in Seoul, Anand Kumar in Delhi, Alan Mabin in Pretoria, Enzo Mingione put me into contact with Alberto Violante in Rome, Jo Santoso in Jakarta, Alicia Zicardi in Mexico. Swedish embassies in Cairo, Harare, Ljubljana and Singapore have been very helpful, as have the Norwegian legations of Lilongwe and Maputo. Special Russian-language help in Astana as well as collegial companionship was provided by Tapani Kaakkuriniemi and, on a second trip, by Larisa Titarenko. In Paris, Edmond Pretceille has been both a helpful colleague and has taken me around the *banlieue*. Patrick Le Gales, with whom I once wrote an article on European cities,² has been a very inspiring paragon of rigorous urban scholarship.

*Ljungbyholm, Sweden
Midsummers Eve 2016
Goran Therborn*

1

Cities, Power and Modernity

Cities and Power

Cities emerged as concentrations of power, and of wealth, some five thousand years ago. Lewis Mumford once defined a city as a ‘point of maximum concentration for the power and culture of a community’,¹ and later began his list of ‘chief functions of the city’ with ‘to convert power into form’.² Cities now contain more than half of humankind; power and wealth are reaching unprecedented degrees of planetary concentration. At the dawn of planetary urbanization, understanding the inscriptions of power in our built urban environment is not only a scholarly, but, even more, a civic imperative.

Despite Mumford’s declarations, power has slipped out of the grasp of mainstream urban history and social science more often than not, or it has been relegated to the past. After the Baroque, Mumford’s own interests veered to technological and economic change. A recent (and good) collective work with the seductive title *Embodiments of Power* both starts and stops with the Baroque.³ Leonardo Benevolo’s monumental *History of the City* makes the European revolutions of 1848 a divide between the ‘liberal’ and the ‘post-liberal’ city, but Benevolo loses most of his interest in power after 1848.⁴ The late Sir Peter Hall presents a cultural axis in *Cities in Civilization*, but his Book Four on the ‘urban order’ is not very concerned with the political order.⁵

The great historian-cum-sociologist Charles Tilly was a sharp critical analyst of power, but a resolutely materialist network structuralist with little interest in meaningful forms, whether of cities - which he mainly saw as sites of capital concentration - or of states. He never grasped, or thought important, the difference between Baroque, absolutist, dynastic states and states of nations, with their national capitals.⁶ In his view, after Charles V's imperial abdication in 1557, nation-states began to get priority', particularly after 1700.⁷

Synergetic encounters of political theory/history and urbanism have been few and fragile enough to allow the great urbanist, Peter Hall, to get away - twice or thrice, first in 1993, then in 2006, with a paperback repetition in 2010⁸ - with the following typology of capital cities:

1. Multi-function capitals
2. Global capitals
3. Political capitals
4. Former capitals
5. Ex-imperial capitals
6. Provincial capitals
7. Super capitals

With all due respect, this list reminds me of a list of animals which Michel Foucault, without citation, claimed Jorge Luis Borges had excavated from an ancient Chinese encyclopaedia, according to which the animal kingdom comprised the following types:

- a. belonging to the Emperor
- b. embalmed
- c. tamed...
- e. sirens
- f. fabulous...
- j. innumerable...
- n. which from afar resemble flies⁹

In the currently prevailing urban discourse, power is submerged in conceptions of economic nodality, certainly a legitimate and important research topic in itself - but with city power measured by the zip codes

of major corporations and/or business services firms.¹⁰ For all its other merits, which are many and have been deservedly applauded, this approach has two limitations in a context of cities and power. Its economism leaves out the power manifestations of the urban built environment itself. Even the most imaginable capitalist city is not only business offices and their connections to business offices elsewhere. Second, the political economy conception of world/global cities seriously underestimates the power of states in the current world.* After all, this is a world where the latest US president (Barack Obama) has been at war for the whole of his two terms of office, longer than any president in US history, making war in seven different countries of the world.†

The analytical framework deployed here - forms of state formation and their consequences, combining structural and symbolic perspectives on the city, identifying and exploring moments of major historical urban change worldwide - does not seem to have been used before. But no claim to originality is made with regard to studying power dimensions of contemporary cities. Apart from the vast monographic literature, which will be referred to repeatedly below, there are a number of distinguished comparative contributions. As this is not an academic thesis requiring a literature review, I shall confine my collegial respect to a short list only.

The portal work in the modern field is Lawrence Vale's *Architecture, Power and National Identity*, a masterly study of architecture and capital city design in a wide range of national contexts, focusing on capital complexes' of governmental buildings, with a critical political sense and the professional eyes of a city planner.¹¹ Contemporary and intercontinental in scope are also Wolfgang Sonne's deep-digging Swiss dissertation (*Habilitation*) *Representing the State*¹² on the early-twentieth-century design of some capital cities, from Washington to New Delhi, and the

* A critique of some, in my view extreme and untenable, claims of the political economy approach to urban studies is given in my 'End of a paradigm: The current crisis and the idea of stateless cities', *Environment and Planning A* 43: 272-85. But I would like to add that I consider Saskia Sassen and Peter Taylor great urban scholars, from whom I have learnt much.

† The Obama regime has 'intervened' militarily in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Pakistan, Somalia, Syria and Yemen. See the *New York Times*, 16 May 2016, 1, 4. True, making war has not been Obama's only preoccupation, but it has been surprisingly important for a Nobel Peace Prize laureate.

'Command of history and knowledge of the real world inform Göran Therborn's thinking, making him one of the world's most engaging and intriguing sociologists. *Cities of Power* focusses our attention on the places where transforming events happen and helps us understand the current tensions between states and people, capitals and peripheries, populism and elitism, nationalism and globalism'

Felipe Fernández-Armesto, author of *Our America: A Hispanic History of the United States*

PRAISE FOR GÖRAN THERBORN

'Therborn is a highly conceptual thinker, allying the formal rigor of his discipline at its best with a command of a vast range of empirical data. The result is a powerful theoretical structure, supported by a fascinating body of evidence'

Nation

'At a time when historians and economists tend to retire behind the barricades of their increasingly specialized professions, answering the big comparative questions about the pathways into and out of modernity, the global processes of inequality and the forces of possible change have been largely left to the sociologists. In my view, Göran Therborn, probably Sweden's most distinguished social scientist, has made more essential contributions in these fields than anyone else, by a combination of analytical lucidity, common sense and an extraordinary command of international comparative data'

Eric Hobsbawm, author of

