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**L'Afrique et les défis du XXIème siècle**  
**Africa and the Challenges of the Twenty First Century**  
**A África e os desafios do Século XXI**

إفريقيا وتحديات القرن الواحد والعشرين

**DRAFT VERSION**  
**NOT TO BE CITED**

**Africa's Multiple Challenges in the 21st Century: Democracy,  
Citizenship and Urbanisation**

*Ibrahim Abdullah*  
*University of Sierra Leone*

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There is unanimity among observers about the contradictory outcomes of the much envisaged democratic transitions in early 90s: the seeming changelessness of the political landscape and the palpable failure of multiparty elections to deliver the much hoped for democratic change that the masses had ceaselessly clamoured for. From Zambia to Benin, from Malawi to Cote d'Ivoire, from Congo to Niger, from Kenya to Nigeria, Africa's autocrats were shaken from their long taken for granted right to rule unquestionably, and forced to reconnect, if not renegotiate, the terms of a new social contract<sup>1</sup>. Yet the more it changed, others have argued, the more it appeared the same<sup>2</sup>. Thus from Peter Anyang' Nyong'o's pessimism—'we are much more likely to see democracies survive in economically prosperous countries than in those that are backward and suffering from massive poverty'—to Claude Ake's prescriptive prognosis—'insofar as the democracy movement in Africa gets its impetus from the social and economic aspirations of people in Africa yearning for 'second independence from their leaders,' it will be markedly different from liberal democracy'—it is hard to visualise a middle ground on which to stand on the vexing issue of democratisation and good governance (Nyong'o, 1995: 3; Ake 2001:139).

In what follows, I argue that the major pitfall of the third wave was not so much the lack of a concrete program/plan of action—we need to remember that decolonisation and even independence was forced on some African countries— but the failure to really understand and come to grips with the nature of the democracy (read popular participation) that Africans were clamouring for<sup>3</sup>. Their perceptions of the popular were shaped by the brutal experiences of the structural adjustment policies that were unfolding at the very moment that the liberalisation discourse was being rolled out. This double take on matters affecting their livelihood, nay their

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<sup>1</sup> Much has been written on the so-called third wave but see the following: Crawford Young, 'The Third Wave of Democratization in Africa: Ambiguities and Contradictions'; John W. Harbeson, 'Rethinking Democratic Transitions: Lessons from Eastern and Southern Africa'; Thandika Mkandawire, 'Crisis Management and the Making of Choiceless Democracies,' in Richard Joseph (ed.) *State, Conflict, and Democracy in Africa*, Boulder, Co: Lynne Reiner, 1999; Julius Ihonvbere, 'Where is the Third Wave? A Critical Evaluation of Africa's Non-Transition to Democracy,' *Africa Today*, 43, 4, 1996: 343-368; Peter Anyang'Nyong'o, 'Overview; Africa 2000', *Africa Demos*, 3, 4, 1995:2-4; Jacques Mariel Nzouankeu, 'The Role of the National Conference in the Transition to Democracy in Africa: The Cases of Benin and Mali,' *Issues: A Journal of Opinion*, 21, 1-2, 1993; Claude Ake, *Democracy and Development in Africa*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2001, especially chapter five; Claude Ake, 'Is Africa Democratizing?' Annual Guardian Lecture, Lagos, 1993; Christopher Clapham, 'Democratization in Africa: Obstacles and Prospects' *Third World Quarterly*, 14, 3, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> See among others Ihonvbere and Anyang'Nyong'o cited above.

<sup>3</sup> See Eshetu Chole and Jibrin Ibrahim (eds.) *Democratisation Processes in Africa: Problems and Prospects*, Dakar: CODESRIA, 1995.

individual and collective identities as groups with concrete interests, is central to understanding the aggressive agency displayed by the popular classes throughout the continent in the denouement leading to this second independence. In this context, talk about good governance, smuggled by IFI apologists, totally side-stepped the desire of the popular classes to rewrite history as exemplified in their militant desire for a meaningful existence far removed from the harrowing and brutal experiences of the three decades of independence.

If the first three decades of independence had guaranteed their membership in the proverbial political kingdom, they collectively reasoned their continued reproduction in the neo-colony had to be anchored on the de facto and de jure recognition of their distinctive rights as full members of the nation-state: decent wage, quality education, free health care, affordable housing et al. These quotidian rights, which I dub social citizenship, underline the limits of a democratisation process whose major hallmark hinges on the procedural aspect of democracy: multi-party elections and voting rights without necessarily choosing who to vote for.<sup>4</sup> Key to understanding this aggressive agency is the contemporary salience of not how to vote but rather who could/could not vote!

It is this aggressive agency that Claude Ake sets out to capture when he wrote:

Insofar as the democracy movement in Africa gets its impetus from the social and economic aspirations of people in Africa yearning for 'a second independence from their leaders,' it will be markedly different from liberal democracy. In all probability it will emphasize concrete economic and social rights rather than abstract political rights; it will insist on the democratization of economic opportunities, the social betterment of the people, and a strong social welfare system. To achieve these goals, it will have to be participative and will have to draw on African traditions to adapt democracy to the cultural historical experience of ordinary people<sup>5</sup>.

I argue that the salience of economic and social rights on the part of the popular masses begins to explain the overarching importance of issues coalescing around citizenship: the right to belong/to not belong. I start with the invention and reinvention of citizens and then discuss the invention of the presidential candidate as foreigner as a kind of exclusionary strategy by incumbents to disenfranchise

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<sup>4</sup> See Thandika Mkandawire cited above.

<sup>5</sup> Claude Ake, *Democracy and Development in Africa*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2001, p.139.

potential opponents. I then link up the conversation with an interrogation of Africa's cities—the veritable laboratory for testing citizenship claims—by looking at agency from below in contemporary Freetown. These narratives about exclusion—*inventing and re-inventing citizens*, excluding presidential candidates on the basis of belonging and creating cities without citizens—constructed around the vexing notion of citizenship underline the limit of a democratisation project centred on procedural rules about multiparty elections and governance. The absence of a sustained and rigorous discourse on democracy and citizenship constitutes the major fault line in the liberalisation project which enveloped the continent in the 90s.

### **1.) The Invention and Re-Invention of Citizens**

Why have Africans been excessively concerned with not how to vote but who should vote? At the heart of this question is the debate about who should belong and who should be excluded in the nation-state. Such debates, muted in the first three decades of independence, have suddenly gained salience in an era of structural adjustment and liberalisation. To be sure there were anti non-national demonstrations and even expulsions prior to the 90s—the Moors in Senegal, the 1968 Aliens Compliance Order in Ghana and the 'Ghana must go' exodus in Nigeria—but not the kind of gate-keeping that now seem to characterise almost every other state in Africa. But the explanation for this phenomenon is not hard to find: resources are scarce, so bourgeois economics teaches, so people struggle over the limited resources available. Of especial relevance to the argument is the economic context in which such act of deciding who is in and who is out becomes quotidian. I argue that dwindling fortunes of most African states constitute the material basis on which such ideas take root. And unlike Europe where conversations about citizenship are invoked to exclude poor immigrants, in Africa such conversations affect rich and poor alike<sup>6</sup>. The class character of the conversation is seemingly therefore blurred: it is about protecting constricting economic space against competition from the 'other'.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Part of the reason could also be related to the fact that citizenship is conceptualised and experienced as a group phenomenon! See Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizens and Subjects*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

<sup>7</sup> For an alternative position see Jeffrey Herbst, 'The Role of Citizenship Laws in Multiethnic Societies: Evidence from Africa' in Richard Joseph (ed.) *State, Conflict, and Democracy in Africa*.

What does it mean to exclude an individual or a group of individuals from participating in activities that affect their everyday existence? What are the implications of multiple exclusions in the political, social, economic and cultural spheres? Such exclusions clearly erodes an individual's quest to realise his or her being; for it definitely touches on their individual and collective identity not only as a political or social being but more importantly their humanity. This kind of political practice, totally out of sync with democratic practices everywhere, not only limits and even stifles political participation but also lends itself to charges of marginalisation; and provides a fertile ground for potential insurgents. Yet they occur and are being reproduced on a daily basis in contemporary Africa. These kind of conversations feeds into 'exclusionary nation-building strategies' that have been used in Zambia and Cote d'Ivoire to destabilise the opposition, stifle dissent, and maintain power at all cost.<sup>8</sup>

Even so, some might argue that the invention and possible reinvention of citizen is part and parcel of the nation-building project. After all the state in Africa is a colonial creation that has remained intact after independence; that the invention/reinvention of citizens should be read as a work-in-progress; a sequel to the dismantling or rearranging of the neo-colonial state and by implication the colonial state. Now what such arguments fail to consider is the monumental implications of trying to rewrite history with any kind of regime change. In the context of a multi-national polity it is difficult to determine how such a project might be undertaken without the privileging of particular nationalities or interest groups. In other words whose interest would it serve: the popular classes or their oppressors? African borders are notoriously porous; citizens criss-cross these borders in a continent that has continue to register the highest number of refugees per square metre; people acquire residency and before you know it they are 'indigenes' who are only fingered as settlers when they express their desire to occupy political positions. The granting of citizenship to Burundian refugees in Tanzania might appear magnanimous; ditto for the granting of citizenships to non-nationals who fought in the Guine-Bissau war of independence. Yet we know from experience that such gestures are hardly translated to real citizenship with political rights. There are numerous cases of groups and nationalities—from the Asians in East Africa to the

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<sup>8</sup> See Beth Elise Whittaker, 'Citizens and Foreigners: Democratization and the Politics of Exclusion in Africa,' *African Studies Review*, 48, 1, 2005: 109-126.

Mbuti/Batwa in Cameroon and the Great Lakes, from the Tutsis in Eastern Congo to the Lebanese/Syrians in West Africa—whose citizenship have been questioned and contested over several generations.

The experiences of the Banyamulenge (South Kivu) and Banyamasisi (North Kivu)—historically Tutsis and Hutus— in the Democratic Republic of Congo are instructive<sup>9</sup>. The recurrent crisis in the Eastern Congo—the quintessential site for losers in Rwanda to retire and regroup according to conventional wisdom—cannot be understood outside the perennial struggle for national citizenship and rights to land and local governance in post-colonial Congo. The inhabitants in this contested area have been classified and reclassified as insiders/outsideers as far as they could remember. In between classification and reclassification they have suffered in the hands of their tormentors without a single finger been raised to defend them. It is alleged that between 1998 and 2001 nearly two million people lost their lives in Kivu out of a total population of nearly eight million. How many more would have to die before their individual/ collective rights as citizens are accepted *de jure* and *de facto*? What is the problem?

The problem dates back to the colonial era when the Belgian colonialists began to move migrants from Rwanda to settle in the Bukavu area of present day Congo. And the *raison d'être* of the whole immigration scheme was to ease the human pressure on the Rwandan highlands by exporting surplus labour to the Kivu area where migrants would either work on European farms or eke out an existence as independent farmers. A 1937 agreement signed between colonial officials in Rwanda and the authorities in Kivu gave legal teeth to a special project—*Mission d'Immigration des Banyarwanda* (MIB) — that would facilitate the smooth rolling out of the whole operation detailing settlement plan, salaries for workers and officials, and the *modus operandi* in the new settlements. This colonial model of exporting labour to resource rich Congo served the immediate purpose for which it was designed. But like all labour exporting strategies hatched under colonial rule it sowed the seeds of future tensions between the indigenous inhabitants on the one hand and those who migrated and came as refugees. By 1960 when the Congo achieved its independence three distinct but overlapping groups of Kirundi speakers

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<sup>9</sup> See Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001. The Banyamulenge were/are mainly Tutsis while the Banyamassisi are mixed: both Tutsi and Hutu.

called Banyarwanda could be identified. There were the nationals considered to be the original Banyarwanda in the area prior to the coming of the migrants; the migrants who streamed in or were recruited under the immigration scheme; and lastly the waves of successive refugees from Rwanda and Burundi who were a creation of the post-colony.<sup>10</sup>

All three categories were denied citizenship rights in the roundtable conference in Brussels preceding independence. And even though the conference participants included representation of the Banyarwanda from Masisi the issue could not be resolved. Like other contentious issue in the Congo on the eve of independence, the Belgians left the issue to be resolved by the 'Congolese themselves.' From 1960 to the 1991 when the sovereign national conference took place the Banyarwanda went through a political see-saw that left them collectively uncertain about their future in the Congolese state. A 1964 constitution limited citizenship to those who had descended from an ancestor living in the Congo before 18 October, 1908—the official date of the founding of the Colony by King Leopold. But this did not go far enough; it excluded most of the migrants and the post-colonial refugees. A 1972 Citizenship Decree passed in wake of the massacre of 200,000 Hutu in Burundi gave citizenship to all those who had settled in the Kivu area before January 1, 1950. This generous offer allegedly the work of Mobutu's chef de cabinet Barthelemy Bisengima himself a Tutsi was revoked by another citizenship law in 1981 which stipulated that only those who could demonstrated an ancestral connection to the population residing in 1885 in the then demarcated Congo would qualify as citizens. Thousands lost their citizenships a result of the new parliamentary ruling. And this loss would be the immediate context for the Sovereign National Conference of 1991—the era of democratisation.

With this stormy background of denial and exclusion one would have expected that a Sovereign National Conference(SNC) would have attempted to clarify the substantive issues involved in acquiring national citizenship—the rights and obligations of individuals and groups within a prescribed political space. Before the SNC was convoked on 7 August 1991 Mobutu had been pushed to promise reform; wide-ranging changes were expected on the issue of representation; he had

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<sup>10</sup> These three categories are yanked from Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

also relinquished his position as President of the MPR thereby ensuring the separation of state and party. The CNS, the voice of the internal opposition and civil society, attempted to speak for a nation that had been silenced by a stifling dictatorship in the name of democracy. But that democracy was defined narrowly by those who saw themselves as the real Congolese – the indigenous majority – who were struggling against the non indigenous minority that was align to a polity: Rwanda. As Mamdani explains:

The very democracy that tended to create a majority across ethnic lines tended to pit a self-consciously 'indigenous' majority against what many increasingly came to think of as a 'non-indigenous' minority, one they saw as not only Kinyarwanda-speaking but also owing political allegiance to Rwanda.

The obvious irony here is that the very democracy that was supposed to empower the Banyarwanda minority turned out to be the very weapon that will be used to crush their aspirations for citizenship.

Denied citizenship by the Mobutist state—the state ruled that only indigenous Congolese could participate on behalf of their province—the Banyarwanda were subsequently hounded by a discriminatory exercise (operation d'identification des nationaux) designed to separate them from those who allegedly had the right to vote. Instead of installing a democratic dispensation that would allow residents to exercise their democratic right to vote and be voted for, the exercise triggered 'fierce conflicts over who belongs and who can be excluded from the right to vote.'<sup>11</sup>

### **11.) The Presidential Candidate as a Foreigner/Banyamulenge**

The Presidential candidate as foreigner/Banyamulenge feeds into the overarching question of the invention and reinvention of citizens. The transition period—from subjects within an autocratic space to citizens within a democratic dispensation—that has heralded the so-called third wave has raised troubling constitutional issues bordering on the independence of the judiciary: a supposedly sacred tenet of liberal democracy. Incumbent presidents have either sought to

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<sup>11</sup> Peter Geschiere, *The Perils of Belonging: Autochthony, Citizenship, and Exclusion in Africa and Europe*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009: p.122.

invented their opponents and potential challenger as foreigner/non-indigene and therefore to be disqualified or raised serious doubts about their paternity so as to achieve same. The presidential candidate as a foreigner assumed grotesque if not comical proportion in Zambia were it was effectively used against the founding father of Zambia by the then incumbent President Frederick Chiluba, and later with tragic consequences against the one time prime minister of Cote d'Ivoire Alhassan Ouattara. In both cases the judiciary and the national constitution were manipulated to serve the interests of the incumbent presidents.

To understand how and why two countries that had served as hospitable environments for non-nationals were transformed as hotbeds for hounding alleged non-nationals we need to come to grips with the context within which both dramas unfolded. Both countries are mono-cultural economies dependent on a single crop/mineral: Cote d'Ivoire on cocoa and Zambia on copper. The former was touted as the second largest economy in West Africa and the miracle of its success squarely anchored on the cocoa boom that was heavily dependent on the importation of labour from the West African sub-region, notably from Burkina Faso, Mali and Guinea-Conakry. The latter with its copper mines attracted labour in Southern African region but specifically from Malawi and Congo. The prosperity of both polities was dependent on the international price of cocoa and copper and the surplus labour that streamed in to exploit both resources. A bottom out in prices of both cocoa and copper might create serious economic difficulties with repercussions far beyond the economic realm. And this was exactly what happened in the 1990s<sup>12</sup>.

The argument here is that the economic crisis of the 1990s unfolded against the backdrop of a liberalisation exercise that threatened the hegemony and control of the nations' founding fathers: Felix Houphout-Boigny and Kenneth Kaunda. Both had enjoyed power unopposed under the aegis of one-party dictatorship. Disabled by the fall in the price of cocoa and copper—the material base of the one-party dictatorship and the key to le miracle ivoirien —and compelled by the Breton Woods sisters to embrace externally designed one-size fit all structural adjustment policies, the founding fathers had to alternative to the surging trend of democratisation but to

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<sup>12</sup> The linkage between the economic crisis and the political crisis and how they unfolded and reinforced each other is more complex than what is presented here. For Cote d'Ivoire see Jean-Bernard Ouedraogo and Ebrima Sall (eds.) *Frontieres de la citoyennete et violence politique en Cote d'Ivoire*. Dakar: CODESRIA, 2008 and Geschiere cited above for more detail.

dismantle the one party state and conduct seemingly free and fair elections. But this reductionist argument hardly explains why xenophobia became salient in an era of democratisation or how it was deployed to bar potential opponents from contesting elections. Moreover it leaves unanswered a crucial question: why did it assume more virulence in Cote d'Ivoire and not in Zambia?

A simple answer might be in Cote d'Ivoire the founding father survived the first democratic elections whereas in Zambia the founding father was voted out of power. What is important for our present purpose is the extent to which those who succeeded both founding fathers would subvert the democratic process by manipulating the constitution and interfering with the due process. Immediately he took office in 1991 President Chiluba began investigating the nationalities of all the leading opposition members. This investigation led to the deportation of two leading members of the United National Independence Party (UNIP): William Banda and John Chinula were both sent to Malawi<sup>13</sup>. Then in May 1996 the Zambian parliament completed work on a new constitution that would bar Kenneth Kaunda from contesting any election because he his parents allegedly came from Malawi. This ruling lead to a bizarre twist; a group of opposition members filed a class action suit challenging Chiluba's paternity: that he was in fact a Congolese having been born in the Belgian Congo. Two years later in 1998 the very court that had denied Kaunda's citizenship confirmed Chiluba's citizenship by affirming that he was born in Zambia by Zambia parents. The fact that the ruling was based on the simple assumption that anyone who was formally resident in the then Northern Rhodesia at independence automatically became a citizen of Zambia did force a rethink of the earlier judgement on Kaunda. For all practical purposes Kaunda was declared a persona non grata through deliberate manipulation of the constitution and the due process.

In the case of Cote d'Ivoire the situation was much more complex. Houphouet-Boigny passed away in 1993 and was replaced by leader of the National Assembly Henri Konan Bedie, as provided by the constitution. But partly because Houphouet-Boigny's re-election allegedly benefitted from the support of migrants from the North and partly because Bedie feared the growing popularity of the then prime minister Alhassan Ouattara, he quickly moved to limit the election to the highest office to those whose parents were born in Cote d'Ivoire. In the midst of the xenophobic frenzy fuelled by the autochone ideology of ivorite, Ouattara was

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<sup>13</sup> Beth Elise Whitaker, 'Citizens and Foreigners', p. 114.

deemed ineligible to contest the 1995 elections boycotted by several opposition groups thus making it possible for Bedie to be elected as President. Bedie's four years in power was practically devoted to consolidating his position by propagating the retrograde idea of ivorite which became the hallmark of his regime.

By the time he was overthrown in a coup d'état ivorite had become the sing-song of the political class in the mainly southern part of the country so much so that the new military leader Robert Guei found it difficult to chart a new path. Under mounting pressure from civil society, the international community, and the numerous opposition groups to conduct elections and hand over power, Guei hesitated, and then decided to hold a referendum on a new constitution which included a requirement that both parents of a presidential candidate be Ivorian citizens. The referendum—supported by Ouattara's Rassemblement des Republicains (RDR)—went through with an overwhelming majority of 87% of the vote. Ouattara who had hoped to challenge the dubious parent citizenship clause in the court was ruled ineligible to contest the elections when his party, the RDR fielded him as their presidential candidate. The manipulation of the constitution and the due process was deliberately used as an exclusionary strategy to deny a candidate, invented as a foreigner, his constitutional right to vote and be voted for. It would inaugurate the road to an armed insurgency that would destabilize the country for a decade under Laurent Gbagbo and his Operation Nationale d'Identification.

The experiences of political exclusion in Zambia and Cote d'Ivoire should warrant a re-examination of the constitutional arrangements dealing with specific/general provisions which seeks to exclude potential candidates from participating in multi-party elections. Seven of the fifty-two countries in Africa require one or both parents of presidential candidates to be citizens. These include Burkina Faso, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Mozambique, Rwanda, and Zambia. There are similar provisions in the 1997 Democratic Republic of Congo constitution and the Somali transitional charter of 2000. Most of the constitutional provisions are silent on the citizenship of candidates' parents. The main emphasis is on citizenship by birth or descent.

#### **111.) Cities without Citizens**

In this section I argue that the exclusivist paradigm that informed the construction of the colonial city continued to reproduce itself in the post-colonial era.

Exclusion, in my view, denies citizenship rights to those so excluded; for it creates squatter citizens, those living on the edge, whose collective actions/voices are always criminalized: their honest and innovative strategies dubbed informalisation, that is to say, outside the law, and by implication, illegal. Even so their everyday collective actions continue to shape official policy on major urban issues: from land ownership to livelihoods to service delivery—water, energy, urban infrastructure, health facilities/sanitation and schools. In Sierra Leone this group is predominantly youth: those without jobs; the unemployed; without any visible (legal?) means of sustenance. They are not easily defined in part because their youthfulness is not biologically-specific. Elsewhere they are considered migrants, foreigners/Makwerekwere as in South Africa, or in some instances as settlers who are always pitted against indigenes who see them as usurping their right to exclude ‘others’ from their rightful space. The historic and violent attempt to remake Harare from above by the ZANU-PF—Operation Murambitshina—and the travails of the Abahlali movement in South Africa underline the proliferation of cities without citizens.

The irony here is that the very city where subalterns are being hounded and denied a legal space constitutes the veritable site of democracy: the home of the citizen allowed to exercise his/her right to vote and be voted for. What then is the relationship between the city and democracy? To be sure, the city, particularly in one-city nation like Sierra Leone, remains the centre of power, the seat of government with its awesome architecture symbolising colonial modernity. Yet the structural violence and exclusion that marks the city leaves the majority of its inhabitants outside the realm of governance except of course as statistics or in periods of social unrest when they unusually enter the official mind. The decentralisation fever that gripped the continent in the wake of liberalisation has not succeeded in really bringing government to the people. Service delivery remains abysmally poor or even non-existent while local elections continue to register low-voter turnout as a mark of disinterest on the part of city inhabitants.

A recent study by UN-Habitat underlines the need for a comprehensive and integrated approach to tackling the issue of urbanization as a national priority<sup>14</sup>. The study concludes that ‘populations are growing much faster than local economies,

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<sup>14</sup> UN-HABITAT/UNEP, 2010. *The State of African Cities: Governance, Inequality and Urban Land Markets*, Nairobi.

leading to major social and economic challenges like high unemployment rates, slum proliferation, social polarization and crime'.<sup>15</sup> It therefore urges West African states to 'build governance and management capacities in cities of all sizes and plan for significant spending on services provision'.<sup>16</sup> The need to combat our 'planet of slums' through structuration from above has been on the front burner of academic and official discourse since the turn of the century; so too is the realisation that we are now in an urban age where majority of the worlds population would live in 'non-functional' cities in the global south.<sup>17</sup> Putting structures and systems in place to manage cities and make them functional is one thing; getting those structures to work for youth and other marginalized subaltern categories quite another. The major political challenge is not how to make African cities functional. Rather, it is how to make African cities work for marginalized groups. Put differently, it is how to create citizens out of non-citizens/marginal groups.

Devising inclusivist strategies—from health to education, from housing to transportation, from energy to sanitation—that would speak to the individual and collective needs of the growing army of young, unemployed, houseless squatter citizens would lay the foundation for a solid partnership between these marginal groups and city officials. This would give them a stake and a participatory voice in the evolving dispensation that would privilege their collective interests as a group. The very stuff of democracy! The rest of this section discusses marginal youth in an urban context by exploring some aspects of the changing urban landscape in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Freetownians like to imagine that the current urban malaise is largely war induced. Overcrowded dwellings, the proliferation of sex workers, endless traffic jams, incessant power outages, and erratic water supply are some of the markers of everyday life in contemporary Freetown. But the ugly truth is that these developments predated the war. What the war did was to accelerate the rate and pace of decadence in a city with no visible and functional governing structure, a city whose inhabitants do not pay taxes or elect those who run the affairs of its so-called management committee - an ad hoc body periodically appointed by the central government to guide the affairs of the city. Between 1991, when war broke out, to

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p.100.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p.98.

<sup>17</sup> See Mike Davis, Planet of Slums, London and New York: Verso, 2006.

1999, when Freetown was attacked and occupied by rebels, the city population trebled and living conditions deteriorated to an extent that people are to be found occupying any and every abandoned building. By 2000, the city could easily be described as congested, dilapidated, and abandoned. Its inhabitants living on top of each other: the rich at the top, the poor at the bottom. At the apex of this set-up, ironically, were those who had come to Sierra Leone because of the war: the UN personnel, both civilian and military.

Freetown is what it is today not because of the war but because Sierra Leone is a one-city nation. To unmake Freetown, or even remake the city, like its besieged inhabitants are currently doing, is to question received ideas and practices about who should be in the city and what rights they should have. The cessation of hostilities and the formal ending of the war in 2002 followed by elections opened a new chapter in the city's history. A new local government act was promulgated in 2004 followed by elections later in the year. This gave life to a city administration with elected officials seemingly accountable to the people. Gradually city officials began to assert firm control over municipal schools; market dues were paid; and attempts were made to do something about garbage collection by instituting a waste management unit funded by the World Bank. Even so, the lines between the city's functions and that of the central government remained blurred. The first Mayor elected under the new dispensation spent the better part of his four year tenure fighting the central government over who should control what in the city<sup>18</sup>. A new Mayor elected into office in 2008 quickly went on the offensive: he created a metropolitan police force and levied a flat tax on every adult citizen in the city – \$1.25. This move, though unpopular when it was announced, was nevertheless embraced by Freetownians who now reasoned that they may as well pay up if they are to receive any service from their elected representatives.

When officials of the newly created metropolitan force began to harass citizens to pay their taxes by erecting road blocks during early morning rush hour the public was incensed. This was subsequently followed by mass demolition of stalls/kiosks and makeshift markets on the side walk. Tax payers threatened to withhold their taxes even as the metropolitan force continued to harass and arrest citizens. Hardest hit were hawkers, petty traders on Freetown's main streets who got

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<sup>18</sup> The situation was complicated by the fact that the then Mayor belonged to the opposition All Peoples Congress (APC).

their stalls demolished, the unemployed who were constantly harassed to pay their taxes, and the huge army of the physically challenged polio victims who had colonized a choice area in the city centre next to the Mayors office. The new Mayor's assault on urban congestion and informal (illegal?) structures/settlements did not go down well with the dispossessed urban poor. The physically challenged and petty traders cried foul: they were deliberately singled out because they are powerless and without political connections. Those with political connections, they charged in reference to the Mayors actions, were the greatest offenders. Some of them even claimed that they had legal papers from the respective authorities before erecting their road side stalls.

This selective attempt to remake Freetown from above is revealing: the Mayor did not attempt to demolish the numerous enclaves of shanties peopled by the urban poor that now dot the Freetown landscape. These ghettos of the young and the unemployed are as bizarre as their names suggest – they range from Afghanistan in the city centre to Kohlbot in the East End to Obama Area on the periphery of the sparsely populated suburb of IMATT,<sup>19</sup> about three hundred meters away from the new US Embassy fortress on the hill top between Regent and Leicester Peak. These shanties predominantly peopled by the young are to be found almost everywhere in Freetown: there is Madina and Bongo town on the coastline behind the military headquarters; kamayama, a rocky patch of land on the periphery of the densely populated suburb of Lumley; and the numerous colonies on the hill tops overlooking the city from central Freetown to the far east. The collective misery of Freetown's favelados only registers on the national radar during the rains when disaster struck<sup>20</sup>. But between the occasional disaster and everyday happenings they remain, as they always have, off the national radar as unofficial statistics for rent seeking officials out to make an extra buck!

As is often the case with officialdoms' dealing with subalterns, the disaster that led to the death of twelve people early in August 2010 elicited a series of pronouncements from city officials trying to absolve themselves. A disaster waiting

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<sup>19</sup> The International Military Assistant Training Team (IMATT) was constituted at the end of the war to train/retrain senior officers of the Sierra Leone army. They are predominantly British and some Canadians. They occupied a sparsely population suburb on a hill top overlooking the city.

<sup>20</sup> Twelve people perished on 9 August when an unfinished building they had occupied on one of Freetown's hill tops collapsed during heavy downpour. The President was there to console the victims!

to happen was the general refrain from the public as word went round that twelve people had perished in a badly constructed building on the hill top. Freetown's numerous tabloids had a field day: the papers were full of stories about living conditions in the favelas and what favelados and officials could do avert another accident. The lively conversations in the tabloid elicited prompt response from city officials: a quit order was issued to residents of Afghanistan—a coastal eyesore of shanties peopled by unemployed youths in the city centre—to prevent another disaster. And the order came not from the mayor but from councillor Bode Gibson who informed the public that 'we should not turn a blind eye to things that would cause disaster'. Denying the charge that city officials were collecting dues from the squatter citizens of Afghanistan, the councillor squarely put the blame on officials at the Ministry of lands: 'let us not hesitate to condemn the lands Ministry as they were the ones charged with the responsibility of issuing building permit'<sup>21</sup>. City officials, it would appear, could issue quit orders and demolish illegal structures but the right to issue building permits solely rests with the ministry of lands. Between city officials and the ministry of lands a no-go area exists that makes it impossible for both institutions to function properly. Who then is responsible for the proliferation of favelas in Freetown?

Answer to this question certainly takes us back to the question of rights and entitlements. Who should live in the city and what rights should they have? After two hundred years of its existence Freetown is now faced with a teeming population of youngsters who are homeless and living in slum-like conditions. Is it any wonder that food and housing—the two most basic of basic needs—constitute the most challenging aspects of everyday life for majority of its inhabitants? The grim reality is that inhabitants of Freetown's shanties do not have to apply for building permits; they erect their makeshift structures wherever and whenever they see the possibility of establishing a place they could call home. Subalterns know too well that city officials and bureaucrats from the ministry would turn a blind eye to any infringement of official regulation if their rent seeking appetites are whetted by those who seek to occupy and convert public or private space for their personal use. The irony here is that Freetown, originally settled and peopled by subalterns from

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<sup>21</sup>Quit Order for 'Afghanistan' Falcon Bridge Squatters' Awoko Newspaper, p.2, 13 August, 2010.

London, the so-called new world, the West Indies, and the West African sub-region, is now being reclaimed by another group of subalterns, as of right. This reclaiming from below poses enormous problems for city officials as they collectively strive to remake the city from above.

Contemporary Freetown is a city bursting at the seams with close to two million people (some say 2.5) bunched into a land space that has not seen any new network of roads for more than half a century. The current attempt to widen some of the major roads in the western half of the city is coming in too late at a time when the city council is on the verge of bankruptcy. How do we begin to make sense of land grabbing (“encroachment” in local parlance), the proliferation of informal settlements, and the ghetoization of the city whose nominal administrators know nothing or care less about how its inhabitants live or even die? What tentative conclusions can we draw from the independent and single-minded action of its inhabitants to make life more comfortable for themselves by converting public space to private use? Do we dismiss these developments as a by-product of the war and therefore assume that they will vanish now that the war is over? Or do we fashion policies that will engage these multiple voices/actions from below and thereby arrive at a solution to some of these challenges?

The above questions raise fundamental questions about governance, citizenship and democracy. The quotidian actions of subalterns in the city of Freetown and elsewhere on the continent compels us to rethink the city as the birth place of democracy and the role of its citizens in new ways that challenge our conception of urbanisation, citizenship, and the role of the nation-state in the contemporary era.

### **Africa’s Multiple Challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Democracy, Citizenship and Urbanisation**

Discussions about citizenship are animated when broached along side discussions about marginality. If citizenship is about insiders or those who supposedly belong, legal or/and imagined; marginality is about outsiders, those who are excluded from enjoying their basic rights and entitlements. If citizenship is about inclusion; marginality is about exclusion. Taken together, they constitute the binary that needs to be problematised: the one is the flip side of the other. Like marginality, citizenship is anchored on a notion of insider versus outsider wherein

the insider is privileged: a veritable we versus them phenomenon predicated on an 'othering' that is historically hierarchical and exclusionary. In part because of its inherent exclusivity which confers rights and obligations on peoples/social groups within a specific geo-political space, citizenship has historically being a subject of violent and/but not so violent contestations for individual/collective inclusion.

Citizenship is therefore gate-keeping writ large; a process always in-the-making precisely because of the multiple contestations involve in its realization/evolution. There is therefore no such thing as a finished citizenship project; citizenship is always a work-in-progress; contested and subject to continual negotiations/compromises.

To doubly understand its contested nature in all its ramifications I present marginality as the flip side of citizenship. I define marginality as an imagined state of being (false consciousness?); a product of the structural violence inherent in concrete social relations/formations constantly influx. Those who invoke marginality-- it can be powerful ideological and mobilizing tool--or better still the marginalized, struggle not to be marginal, or treated as an excluded category, on the fringe, far away from the centre of power and the distribution of resources. And marginals, like all subalterns—women, slaves, workers, the colonized, youth—struggle to shed of their marginality (marginal status), to become part of the centre by refusing to be the 'other'! Resisting their individual and collective 'othering'/alterity is therefore central to understanding marginality. And since it is an arena of constant struggle—individuals/groups moving in and out of their marginal status—they succeed now and then to break their chains, so to speak, to become somebody: to have rights as citizens not margizens.

Thus yesterday marginals become today's citizens; today's citizens were yesterday's marginals; today's citizens are in turn haunted by the spectre of marginality and so on and so forth. This historical shuffling—the making and remaking of marginality and by implication citizenship—is embedded in the dialectic that gives rise to its very existence and constitution as historical subject.

Defining who should be a citizen, that is to say, who should be included or accorded rights of belonging to an entity, a geographical space or an institution, is a political question. But such conversations about politics have to be framed within a democratic discourse anchored on an inclusionary paradigm that transcends ethnicity, regionalism, gender and generational divide. After fifty years of

independence African politicians and intellectuals should now turn their attention to the thorny issue of reconstituting the post-colonial state which is at the centre of the overlapping and multi-layered questions of citizenship, democracy and urbanisation. From inventing and reinventing citizens to excluding so-called non-citizens from participating in elections to depriving citizens in cities from enjoying basic amenities, the African state has arguably arrived at the point where it can no longer postpone a meaningful discussion if not resolution of this monumental challenge.

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