

Published by the University of KwaZulu-Natal
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Journal of Inclusive cities and Built environment. Vol. 2 Issue 4

How to cite: L.S. Jali. 2022. Decoloniality, Inclusivity and Autonomy in Reimagining Cities of The Future. *Journal of Inclusive cities and Built environment*. Vol. 2 Issue 4, Pg 67-76.

DECOLONIALITY, INCLUSIVITY AND AUTONOMY IN REIMAGINING CITIES OF THE FUTURE

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Published 30 November 2022

ABSTRACT

African Union has hope for a vision of an Africa that is thriving by 2063 (UNDP Africa, 2017). Historically Africa was under the gaze and submissive to the imaginings of western vision. Africans as drivers of development prove to be difficult as global coloniality continues to shape inclusivity, autonomy, and spatial activities. Reimagining the future of cities is aligned with the way global coloniality unpacks how modernisation takes place. Decoloniality becomes important in that it gives Africans the space to think about autonomy to plan how can issues of inclusivity be addressed in the context of providing sustainable cities in line with spatial justice. The main drivers of reimagining the cities of the future are environmental sustainability and disruptive technology. Environmental sustainability and technological vision/disruptive technology are very problematic in the African context. In the African context, environmental issues are secondary as social inequalities and political issues are at the forefront of African lived experiences. Technology although present continues to exacerbate the gap between the “haves and the have nots”. This paper critically explores the future of cities concerning decoloniality, inclusivity and autonomy. It highlights key discussions about decoloniality and helps to unpack an African perspective towards reimagining future cities. The purpose of this paper is to bring to the forefront what sustainability means for smart cities in Africa, and if they are ready to take on an autonomous role in defining the future of cities.

KEY WORDS Decoloniality, Coloniality, Inclusivity, Spatial planning, Autonomy

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1. INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM

Reimagining cities of the future is an important discourse for Africa, especially in a context of coloniality. According to Maldonado-Torres (2007:243) Coloniality 'is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects, we breathe coloniality all the time and every day'. Coloniality has disabled Africa from being able to reimagine its future and have autonomy (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2014). Smart cities aim to promote sustainability and ensure that citizens get the best out of urban areas (Cassandras, 2016). Smart cities are relevant to develop countries, but are they relevant to the developing world? (Smedley, 2013). Chris Vein (World Bank) states that 'Cities in the developing world are all striving for economic growth and improved living conditions, but their capacity to do so varies widely' (Smedley, 2013). Therefore, it is important to unpack African perspectives to reclaim autonomy and pave the way for alternative ways of looking at contemporary Africa. Inclusivity and autonomy in post-independence are terms that are often used when referring to decoloniality. The term decoloniality has helped to provide critical discourse in disrupting and challenging western authority. The colonial period lasted five centuries, the colonizer had sole control over the economy and authority (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). Only sixty-two years have passed since African independence, and this knowledge illustrates that Africa still has a long way to go. Through Pan-Africanism, African nationalism means solidarity and resistance to neo-colonialism. An important characteristic of neo-colonialism is the reduction of state control so that external forces can influence the country (Nkrumah, 1965).

Decolonization makes us aware that African people's lived experiences matter. Through colonialism, African realities were disempowered and denied

autonomy. The process of reimagining cities of the future is complex because of external forces that continue to influence the way we perceive and interact with societal structures. The spatial planning of society has a significant impact on an individual's socioeconomic status. Due to globalization, advocating for autonomy within cities is a difficult process. Currently, African leaders are working to redress exclusion in cities, and to introduce policies that promote inclusion. Inclusivity is significant to help those who are vulnerable in society to have a voice. In South Africa, for example, the eThekweni municipality has adopted environmental sustainability as a key to city development (eThekweni Municipality 2011). This has given rise to renewal programmes which aim to revamp the city (Stephanus, 2013). In the process of doing so, the municipalities vision, in the end, is to ensure that all citizens benefit from these new changes. According to the World Bank Group (2022) by 2050, the city will account for more than half of the population (70%). If urbanization is managed well, it can improve people's quality of life by facilitating economic growth. The paper seeks to analyse future prospects for reimagining future cities by unpacking the discourse of inclusivity, coloniality, and decolonization. Second, the paper will examine the relevance of smart cities in the African context and the role of autonomy in reimagining cities in the future. This paper critically reviews literature on what it means to reimagine cities of the future, and secondly, it discusses decoloniality and autonomy. Thirdly, the article discusses the impact of disruptive technologies, fourthly, it discusses the importance of social justice and inclusivity. The article will conclude with findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

2. REIMAGINING CITIES OF THE FUTURE

Tracing back historically, capitalism plays a major role in the building of cities (Mrozowski, 1999). Historically, the future of cities has been built upon the foundation of the industrial revolution, and neoliberalism has ensured that a western vision dominates all city development. With neoliberalism, economic growth is facilitated by the free markets and government intervention is limited. (Smith, 2022). The concept of smart cities is not novel as in the 1990s there were interests in cities going green (Moate, 2022). The development of cities that are inclusive of climate change issues have been endorsed by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Moate, 2022). Goal eleven maintains that citizens should have resilient, safe, sustainable, and inclusive cities. The welcoming cities of the future have received a positive response. In South Africa for example many politicians have cited that smart cities have the potential to improve urban conditions. In 2019, Mmusi Maimane and President Ramaphosa endorsed smart cities and the president stated that in certain parts of the country, new cities will be built (Harrison and Toad, 2022). Future cities will be designed to meet society's needs while still providing economic growth. A smart city involves technology, people, and smart governance (Nam and Pardo 2011). It involves envisioning a city where people are very aware of the environment and how to maintain its sustainability by adopting eco-friendly habits (Norman and Newman, 2021). The International Monetary Fund and the World Development Bank state that the current urbanization contributes seventy per cent to gas emissions (World Bank, 2016). Smart cities contribute to sustainable development by enhancing both human and environmental quality of life. In terms of adopting and embracing smart cities, Singapore is at the top, followed by Spain (Barcelona), the United States of America, Japan, and many others (Su, Li, Fu, 2011). In these countries, ICTs (Information

Communication Technology) have been key to their development. Smart cities ensure that the concept of a '15 minute' city is also created, reducing the amount of carbon that humans emit because of decentralisation. Each neighbourhood must have easy access to schools, work, and shops which should encourage walking and cycling (Antunes, Barroca and Guerreiro de Oliveira, 2021).

Since industrialization, the modernisation of cities has since been visualized to be controlled by international institutions (Escobar, 2004). This creates a false narrative that African countries/leaders will never do well because of coloniality (Mkandawire, 2001). This is because coloniality of which Maldonado-Torres (2007) defines as the continuation of colonial power patterns. Societal structures continue to be shaped by long-standing power patterns. The world order has historically been shaped by global coloniality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2014). Christopher Columbus "discovered" the rest of the world in 1492, which led to the expansion of global colonialism (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2014). As a result, slavery and racism shaped the relationship between the global north and the global south. Africa's reimagining of their futures differs as when African leaders gained independence, their role was to facilitate decoloniality. Decoloniality according to Maldonado-Torres (2017):

'Consists of the shift from the acceptance of inferiority and the conditions of slavery to the assumption of the position of a questioner. It is a position that entails not only scepticism of the a priori superiority of Europe, but also radical doubt about the lack of the full humanity of the colonized. As a result of this turn, the colonized subject emerges not only as a questioner but also as an embodied being who seeks to become an agent' (Maldonado-Torres, 2017:118).

Apart from reimagining the future of cities, Africa also needs to work on ensuring a better quality of life for its citizens. Internal challenges cannot be neglected for a vision that might not currently be beneficial to all parties. Smart cities also promote equity,

which is another key issue. Although smart cities are governed by equality principles, they have not yet reached a consensus on how to achieve a utopian society. (Kingson,2022). A report on the 11th session of the World Urban Forum was recently released by UN-Habitat. Poland hosted the forum from 27th to the 30th of June 2022 (Harrouk, 2022). The main goal of the forum was to envision the future of cities. The forum unpacked how cities should be prepared for current and future challenges. Considering how Covid-19 disrupted social life, valuable lessons are believed to have been learnt. Forum participants suggest introducing innovative measures and adopting more comprehensive technologies in order to better understand and address city issues (Harrouk,2022). The important aspect of the discussion was acknowledging that poverty and inequality continue to be problems that need to be resolved. The forum states that urban futures will be impossible to achieve without governments actively finding solutions to address poverty and inequality. As a decade of action window, the years 2020-2030 can be used to address social issues by focusing on informal employment, gender transformation, and infrastructure investment in deprived neighbourhoods (Harrouk, 2022). Bringing smart cities to life, co-housing is the concept of urban living in the future. Co-housing is grouping citizens into shared spaces to promote social relationships (Globality Health,2020). Co-housing promotes sharing rather than individual ownership. Families/individuals in co-housing share kitchens, gardens, and parking while still enjoying their own privacy (Globality Health,2020).

3. DECOLONIALITY AND AUTONOMY

Although we are in the post-colonial era, it does not mean that coloniality is completely eradicated (Ndlovu, 2018). The key element that provides a critical discourse to African perspectives, is to define the coloniality of power, knowledge and being. These three elements support the argument that

autonomy is needed and should be a driving force for understanding the state of Africa. Autonomy is about self-governance and more especially the freedom to have independent reasoning, values, and desires (Taylor, 2017). The coloniality of power helps us assess how external forces disempower and put into place their authority and ways of thinking (Mignolo,2007). The key to regaining autonomy also lies in the identification of Africa's way of doing things. Pan-Africanism was the first movement that African leaders developed to challenge western authority. Organisations such as the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), and the All-African People's Conference (AAPC) to mention a few constantly worked together to achieve independence (Everett, Hardick and Johnson, 2020). Autonomy in African states has been a concept that has critically challenged African leaders all over. Coloniality of knowledge helps identify the structural effects of coloniality on institutions in society (all knowledge of what is known is from a Eurocentric perspective). Hence Mignolo (2007) suggests that there needs to be more inclusivity of different voices to disrupt western hegemony. The coloniality of being ensured to disengage Africans from their reality. The inferiority created denied the very existence of races who did not form part of "the chosen race" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2014). The combination of coloniality of power and knowledge created a very complex society that revolves around the imaginings of the West (Pardo, 2020). Colonialism ensured that there was no autonomy as the rights of the "other" were disabled (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986). This further demonstrates the power of colonialism in the African context is forced to adopt the smart city model. The purpose of decoloniality was to usher in revolutionary thinking. African leaders led Pan-Africanism movements to delink relations with the colonizer (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). We use technology that is controlled by the knowledge production of the first world. The very technologies that were created for the World Wars have always not favoured those from the

Global South. Africa is more dependent on buying than being a supplier (Mishra, 1992). The challenge arises also in that cities in African spaces are continuously represented as a spatial and racial image of the western imaginings of what a city should be (Góes, 2022). Therefore, there also needs to be a discussion of the decolonization of cities. This proves to be difficult as globalization plays a central role in ensuring that the autonomy of local governments is limited. Góes (2022) argues that racism is incredibly powerful to the point that African spaces are seen primarily as resources for exploitation. So, this shows that decolonial projects for cities are a necessity. African leaders need to think of innovative ways to develop African perspectives in development that will set Africa apart. When decolonisation occurred, there were high expectations (Keller, 1995). The majority of African states had borrowed development money and were planning to use their political authority to change the state of Africa (Keller, 1995). African leadership on its own requires intervention. Poor leadership is currently causing internal and local issues. Africa had the potential with all its resources to become a powerhouse but is superseded by cities such as Dubai which has smaller minerals (Badjie, 2021; Mkandawire, 2001). Friedman (2019) notes that simply saying Africa has poor leadership is insufficient, but that what democracy means to individuals and how often citizens fail to hold the government accountable for its actions are equally relevant. It is imperative that African leaders address internal issues like corruption and facilitate crucial discussions and ways to assert autonomy in the discussion of inclusivity and decolonization. As Maldonado-Torres (2011: 4) puts forward: 'For that one must build original concepts and be willing to revise critically all received theories and ideas.' Currently, even the Sustainable Development Goals are overseen by the United Nations. There also needs to be a multidisciplinary approach to decoloniality. Fernández, Sonn, Carolissen, and Stevens (2021) unpack how psychology for example can

enable us to explore the human mind and how people come to understand their identity. It further helps explore how to analyse the effects of society on the individual. This is significant since it can create key strategies in helping the government to understand the mindset of its citizens.

There have been efforts to decolonize transport. Transport is a major component of cities and is critical. Transport infrastructure was initially built to serve the needs of colonialism (Schwanen, 2018). Post-colonial cities are booming and must serve the needs of large populations. Much of the population in urban cities use public transport as their means of entering and exiting the city. Across the African continent, governments are implementing integrated transport systems. Integrated transport system is a better way of making the city accessible to citizens. In the city of Johannesburg and Cape town, there have been initiatives in encouraging people to use public transport (Vadi, 2015). The Smarter Mobility Africa Summit (SMA) intends to educate and help start-ups set up their businesses that will contribute to advancing technology in modernising public transport systems (Engineering news, 2022). This shows how modernisation is a powerful force that even within decolonization era, the tendency to develop smart cities is the trend. This raises again the reality of how Africans have not yet reached a consensus regarding forming autonomy and originality in their approaches to development. Decolonization and autonomy reveal that smart cities have long been developed by developed nations but establishing autonomy within an African context remains difficult. Currently, African countries have subscribed to sustainable initiatives to reduce gas emissions (Kaitwade, 2022). African Green Stimulus Programme is African led and aims to unify the African continent by responding to sustainable goals and Covid-19 recovery. An initiative by Africans to reduce their gas emissions is not a bad idea, considering how global climate

change and sustainable development should include development initiatives. A sure way of regaining autonomy is through understanding that the means of production are essential for those who have been historically disadvantaged. Owning the means of production for Africa can ensure a better reimagining and bottom-up approach to development (Ndlovu and Makoni, 2014). Not only that but being able to protect the economy from exploitation is crucial (Hickel, 2021). The constant state of the Global South being a captive market for globalisation prevents governments from meeting human needs (Hickel, 2021). Therefore, the discourse of autonomy challenges the way in which Africans need to think of ways of having trade tariffs to benefit them. Africa owning resources should be able to have top-down approaches toward foreign entities. In practice, however, not owning the means of production skews negotiating power. The International Monetary Fund and World Bank disarm the very components such as trade tariffs that should be beneficial to the Global South (Hickel, 2021). These are difficult conversations for African governments to raise, as when thinking about developmental states Thandika Mkandawire states that:

'The ultimate result of the misreading of experiences in Africa and elsewhere throw the proverbial baby out with the bath water, but also to nourish justice that makes understanding Africa's strengths and weaknesses particularly possible lessons and capacities have simply been ignored' (Mkandawire, 2001:290).

4. SPATIAL JUSTICE AND INCLUSIVITY

Although spatial justice is critical, it proves difficult as it is intertwined with environmental justice and economic justice to mention a few. Within the context of decoloniality, spatial justice seeks to ensure fair and equitable distribution of space within a city (Soja, 2009). This sparks debate about the way urban planning has been unfairly distributed throughout colonial history. The main objective of colonialism and

unjust racial laws/government was to ensure that not all people could benefit from urbanization. Therefore, Soja (2009) brings attention to the three key points that need to be kept in mind when discussing spatial justice. Spatial justice is a product of human creation and can be altered (Soja, 2009). Secondly, the way the space is shaped also shapes social interactions and that spaces are created to satisfy the needs of humans and condition them (Soja, 2009). Therefore, African countries should embrace and challenge themselves to do better regarding the redistribution of spatial justice. Economic liberalization continues to clash with local planning (Véron, 2010). In order to maintain the exchange of goods and services, countries in the Global South have continued to integrate within the global economy. Spatial justice is imperative, as coloniality historically has shown how the control of land can disable autonomy. The main aim is to detail how the integration of Africa into the Eurocentric system has serious consequences for Africa's development. According to Gatsheni-Ndlovu (2015: 16), 'Genealogically speaking, coloniality is founded on the theft of history. The theft of history for Africa translated into the theft of its future' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015:16). As a result, in a post-colonial society, many African leaders have the challenge of recreating urban spaces to integrate the previously disadvantaged within society.

The 2030 Millennium Development Goals promote inclusion and equal opportunities. Those who are considered previously disadvantaged have not been able to benefit from developmental plans that benefit their livelihoods. The structural adjustments taken during the 1970s caused further internal divisions (Gupta, Cornelissen, and Ros-Tonen, 2015). Inclusive development aims to protect the most vulnerable within society. To enjoy the convenience of smart cities, all citizens must be included. The way that African spaces are structured still has a long way to go. For example, according to Maina (2015) 'Most black South Africans continue to live on the most damaged land, in the

most polluted neighbourhoods near coal-fired power stations, steel mills, incinerators and waste sites. Many are without access to clean air, water and services.' This poses a challenge and questions who will benefit from smart cities when not all people have the means to access cities South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 emphasizes the importance of spatial justice (Adefemi and Coetze, 2019), specifically act 'Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act of 2013' that promotes principles of sustainability, spatial resilience efficiency, effective administration, and spatial justice (Adefemi and Coetze, 2019). It is pertinent to note that spatial justice helps unpack how development was built through racism and excluded the human rights of people who did not fit into the "chosen race". This unfortunately has created African urban cities that were used to maintain power and control (Njoh, 2009). The sustainability that is promoted by smart cities needs to balance environmental, social, and economic factors. Smart cities in Africa would only benefit those who are already well off. In Africa, the main issue of justice is the redistribution of land and resources. The creation of smart urban living spaces can be enhanced through as co-housing that can potentially ensure spaces are rebuilt to integrate diverse people into one space (Harrouk, 2022; Globality Health, 2020). The main challenge of spatial justice is not merely just placing people in the correct spaces but empowering them to benefit from living in the city. Fainstein (2009) raises the imperative issue of understanding how inclusivity at times does not equate to automatic justice. The fact that inequality already forms the basis of inclusivity and spatial design leaves many still fighting for social mobility. This is significant, as it means that spatial planning alone cannot immediately solve the problem, but it is a start. Factors such as education and job training continue to play a major role in social mobility. Meaning people can access previously restricted areas but still not benefit.

Another element Fainstein (2009) mentions is that spatial planning and inclusivity increase participation from citizens. At times though this can be a disadvantage in that when it comes to voting and approving upcoming developments it does not prevent people from being removed. Often multinational companies can take up valuable land from local communities to set up businesses that can supposedly benefit the community. Another factor to consider in spatial planning is the way in which globalization opens borders and allows immigrants to locate themselves within a different country for better opportunities (Jouve, 2015). These further increases economic competitiveness in the city.

5. THE ROLE OF DISRUPTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Technology is the main driver of the economy, the workplace, and social interaction in society. In Africa technology has played a key role in providing a diverse range of income opportunities. Disruptive technology is defined as innovation that changes how businesses and industries operate (Tarud, 2022). Technology is always evolving and tends to replace existing technologies with more advanced upgrades. According to Jha (2018), the top disruptive technologies are the 5G Network, blockchain, artificial intelligence, autonomous vehicles, biometrics/digital payments, and drones. There was controversy surrounding the 5G network at the start of Covid-19. Many citizens felt that it was the cause of the Covid-19 outbreaks (Heilweil, 2020). This has played mind games because it has portrayed the development of technology as impending doom for society. It was believed that the 5G towers that were built in Wuhan, China had dangerous effects on humans when they were active (Heilweil, 2020). For smart cities, the role of disruptive technology is to provide efficiency and convenience. A major goal of Artificial Intelligence Technology is to allow computers to control most items that humans use (Gupta, 2022). This means that internet access within smart cars

for example will ensure that your car is able to self-diagnose any issues (Gupta, 2022). This is without having to travel to a mechanic to do so. Gupta (2022) mentions that health departments using technology can be managed remotely and wireless devices can send alerts in the event of an emergency. These are some of the few changes that will be introduced to India. With the click of a button, smart cities will be the next level of convenience. According to research done by Portal Disrupt Africa, Africa raised funding above \$195m in 2017, up 51% from 2016 (New African, 2018). This shows how in Africa technology has assisted many start-up companies to become innovative in providing services to the local people. Services such as MPESA, Bitcoin, Forex trading etc had penetrated Africa (New African, 2018). As exciting as this may seem, the digital divide cannot be ignored. The covid-19 pandemic exposed sixty per cent of the population to struggling to cope with transitioning to online work (Henderson, 2021). Online work requires technical skills and access to technology (Henderson, 2021). In lower-income countries, men are more likely to have cell phones than women (Steele, 2019). Steele (2019) also mentions the different factors that contribute to the digital divide. These are relevant to the African context as most citizens struggle with access to education, low income, geographical restrictions and more importantly seeing most technologies as luxury. This then raises the issue of smart cities being heavily reliant on innovative and disruptive technologies that can exacerbate existing inequalities. Disruptive technologies ensure that products, services, and information can be accessed efficiently and easily (Radu, 2020). Within cities, the application of fibre optic cables is now the way. In Africa, Ghana has inserted fibre-optic cables to ensure that their university students have a reliable internet connection (Maylie, 2019). The University of Ghana also reduced connectivity costs because of this option (Maylie, 2019). This clearly shows that there is a slow integration and preparation for ICTs within African cities.

There are three cities in South Africa that plan to integrate smart cities within the country (BusinessTech, 2021). These are Lanseria, Durban Aerotropolis and Mooi Kloof Mega-City (BusinessTech, 2021). These chosen centres are major hub areas for the economy. The transition of allowing technology to fully takeover would require citizens to be highly skilled to be able to integrate into the Fourth industrial revolution (4IR). The 4IR seeks to progress with disruptive technologies and settle for a future that includes artificial intelligence, robotics, 3-D printing and the "internet-of-things" (IoT) (Brown, 2020). Brown (2020) believes that Africa is not ready to progress into the 4IR so rapidly. The challenges include that Africa has a large percentage of the population who is uneducated, a high rate of informal economy and agricultural economies (Brown 2020). African economies are struggling to catch up to first-world standards. This clearly shows that global inequalities exist, and disruptive technology could further worsen the digital divide.

6. CONCLUSION AND DIRECTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The literature clearly indicates that there are many proposals to promote smart cities. This is no surprise as society has experienced consistent social change over time. The challenge that arises in reimagining future cities, centres around the very powerful influence of external factors. The literature shows the concept of autonomy and decoloniality is not fully constructed in favour of the developing world. Authors such as Mandakwire (2001), and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2014) to mention a few bring our attention to how the Western world has no intention of nurturing the Global South. A reimagined future city is also about reviving the imagination of Africans to create a society that they can relate to. This proves very difficult as authors such as Kingson (2022) and Hickel (2021) remind or bring attention to the fact that autonomy is still hindered by the upper hand of rich nations in their control of development policies. Developing smart cities is

very efficient, allowing for sustainability and convenience for the human race. However, the literature highlights challenges that still stand in the way of nations implementing smart cities. Smart cities promote multiculturalism by ensuring that all citizens stay within the same housing arrangements through co-housing. This still raises issues in that it is not always guaranteed that people will get along. History has complicated the way in which we perceive each other. More often than not ethnocentrism is a strong denominator within society's social order. This brings up the question of whether societal structures (schools, government, religion etc) reflect the co-housing proposal which aims to foster diversity. Also, governments cannot predict the mindsets of citizens and how they will perceive these changes. Interestingly though literature shows how smart cities are being integrated into phases. Smart cities, for instance, have integrated transportation systems. South Africa and India are slowly implementing policies to make transport efficient and accessible as mentioned in the discussion of decolonization and autonomy. Japan, the United States, and many more have become pioneers of smart cities, especially in recent years. Decoloniality and inclusivity are intertwined in that they help give context to why spatial planning should be taken seriously. However, autonomy is the key to facilitating how developing countries can use decoloniality as a driving force to promote inclusivity whilst finding their originality. Through the continued imaginings of the World Bank and IMF, global coloniality, the coloniality of knowledge and being, continues to flourish. The sad reality is that whether the third world likes it or not they will follow the principles of cities of the future. The reason for this is that they do not have an alternative to what they have presented now. Smart cities can only continue to be relevant to third-world countries on the basis of the continued exploitative relations between the Global North and South. Harrouk (2022) made an insightful point about smart cities not offering a utopia. This

raises the question of how a smart city can still be materialistic but still practice sustainability/equal society. If the global world already struggles with inequality, will it not worsen things further? The literature also raises concerns about the economic system and the way capitalism has become the blueprint for all decisions in African society. As a result, there is continued imperialism, which manifests itself in the colonization of knowledge, society is progressing at a fast pace to accommodate modernity. This has occurred because literature indicates that when Africa became independent, African leaders' first resort to the economic meltdown was to rely on external institutions for bank loans (Badjie, 2021; Keller, 1995). Mkandawire (2001) attributes this to external institutions promoting ideology over understanding developing countries for their true potential.

There are many ways in which disruptive technologies may change the way citizens relate to their surroundings. Literature indicates that as much as there is a digital divide, a large number of people are able to have access to technology (Maylie, 2019; New African, 2018). Covid-19 increased the dependence on technology as isolation prevented people from accessing social institutions. This shows that the constant need to think of ways to better cities with concepts such as smart cities does have a place.

Harrouk (2022) argues that discussions at the World Urban Forum prove the world is rapidly changing and humans must adapt effective strategies. Smart cities are not to be looked at negatively, but the realities and challenges that face developing countries indicate that they still have a long way to go in asserting autonomy within discussions of reimagining cities of the future, and decoloniality must be addressed as well. Asserting a distinct voice is necessary to prevent the movement from fizzling out. This is done by creating original decolonial initiatives that move away from modernisation as the only worldview for society. Only then can Africa say

that they have autonomy. Decoloniality, inclusivity and autonomy are crucial concepts in the discussion of autonomy in reimagining cities of the future. History starts by showing how autonomy was socially constructed to only benefit the Eurocentric world. In achieving decolonization more was expected in critically defining African ways of doing things. African perspectives are yet to be fulfilled due to the many problems that plague African societies. Smart cities seem to promise significant sustainability, but the concept of sustainability remains far away. Smart cities do not appear to solve the issues of sustainability at this moment and fail to answer the numerous challenges that Africans face. Disruptive technology seems to be the future of society. However, African perspectives lack due to the many ills in African societies that prevent Africans from fully participating and benefitting from technology. Decolonial initiatives that address the core needs of the Global South pose a long task for governments. There should be more studies to analyse decolonial projects and if they lack more emphasis should push to explore why. African leaders need to have more summits that critically discuss their role in decoloniality. The assumption that being postcolonial represents autonomy is false. There needs to be a constant effort to keep redefining and reimagining African perspectives with intention. Multidisciplinary approaches should be endorsed whereby academics, governments and civil societies sit together to critically unpack strategies around disrupting hegemonic powers which continue to interrupt African stability and growth. Decolonial perspectives cannot be enforced by governments alone, but there must, more importantly, be a thorough assessment of the socioeconomic issues that persist in African cities. In a free society, why do Africans continue to follow Eurocentric models? There should be more policies directed toward accountability to keep leaders accountable who deviate from the path of decoloniality and autonomy.

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