Structural transformation and democratic public spaces: Reflections on Habermas and the 2014 Tshwane State of the Capital City Address

Author:
Wessel Bentley[1]

Affiliation:
[1]Research Institute for Theology and Religion, University of South Africa, South Africa

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Correspondence to:
Wessel Bentley

Email:
bentlw1@unisa.ac.za

Postal address:
PO Box 905-1304, Garsfontein 0042, South Africa

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Judging by the immense global academic interaction with his work, Jürgen Habermas's social theory, with particular reference to structural transformation of the public sphere and democracy, is one of the most constructive models for understanding the role and function of citizens in forming healthy societies. This article investigates the recent 2014 Tshwane State of the City Address in light of Habermas's theory. Is Habermas's theory relevant to the South African urban context? Do African cities like Tshwane subscribe to the Habermasean social formula or does it understand the public sphere in ways that require an amended interpretation of what Habermas conveys? This article provides a theological-ethical perspective on this Habermasean investigation of the 2014 Tshwane 'State of the Capital City Address'.

Introduction

On 03 April 2014 the mayor of Tshwane, Councillor Kgosientso Ramokgopa made the following statement in his State of the Capital City Address: 'An engaged citizenry is incontrovertibly indispensable in the success and growth of a democratic way of life' (Ramokgopa 2014:20). A careful reading of the State of the Capital City Address indicates that it does not explicitly describe or evaluate how citizens are encouraged to practically 'engage' for the well-being of the greater Tshwane metropolitan area. It rather draws attention to the current developmental projects facilitated by the local municipal authorities. Ramokgopa's statement nevertheless resonates with the social theory of Jürgen Habermas, a German sociologist and philosopher, who advocates for the full participation of citizens in society (Habermas 1989; Habermas & Ratzinger 2010:30). As the City of Tshwane (and the rest of South Africa) is still in a phase of structural transformation (also a phrase coined by Habermas and which he uses extensively in his work)[1], the question is whether Habermas's social theory on participatory citizenship is of any value to the South African context, specifically that of the country's capital, the City of Tshwane. This article investigates the State of the Capital City Address in the light of Habermas's social theory from a Christian ethics perspective.

State of the Capital City Address

This year, 2014, the State of the Capital City Address is of particular importance. Not only is the address aimed at outlining the achievements, challenges and vision of the capital city, but being the 20th anniversary of the dawn of democracy in South Africa, it is a valuable document in assessing the progress made during this time and to gauge the political trajectory for this pivotal space in South Africa. Twenty years is more than a chronological benchmark; it offers the opportunity to see how democracy has unfolded. It is also of particular significance to locate this research in the context of the City of Tshwane, which serves as the state capital and which therefore, should set the example for the structural transformation of civil society as set out by the dreams and aspirations of those who helped shape the foundations of a fully democratic South Africa.

In the opening paragraphs of the State of the Capital City Address (from here on abbreviated as SCCA), Counsellor Ramokgopa stresses the importance of reflecting on the City of Tshwane's progress and vision. He states that the City of Tshwane is historically significant, not only as the capital of both the apartheid and democratic South Africa, but is also the political and ideological

1.'Structural transformation' in Habermas's work (see Habermas 1989), refers specifically to the way in which society has changed with relation to centres of power and decision making. It is more than social change, as it describes an active social transformation where decision-making power shifted away from a monarch towards the rise of the public voice, economy and the media. This point is described in greater detail under the next section of this article.

capital of both (Ramokgopa 2014:1). On the one hand, Pretoria[2] was the embodiment of all that apartheid stood for. On the other hand, the City of Tshwane is seen as the locus for transformative ideology as iconised by the giant statue of Nelson Mandela on the lawns of the Union Buildings. The fall of apartheid was thus also the fall of Pretoria. The rise of democracy is seen in the development and integration of the City of Tshwane (Ramokgopa 2014:3). The address is clear; if we are to speak about social transformation in South Africa, then it needs to start here, in the City of Tshwane (Ramokgopa 2014:2). The people, the citizens of Tshwane, are part of a people who have won over power by destroying apartheid through their democratic vote and who have committed themselves to the formation of an inclusive democracy as outlined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. The SCCA celebrates the City of Tshwane as a symbol of democracy. The image of the City of Tshwane as described in the SCCA is from oppression to liberation, from separation to inclusivity.

The SCCA then poses a question. It asks: 'What makes a city liveable?' (Ramokgopa 2014:10). This is a question which drives the philosophical exploration of Jürgen Habermas as well. What does a healthy community look like? What are the building blocks for mutual well-being and sustainability? The SCCA (Ramokgopa 2014) proposes the following formula:

> … our view is that a liveable city is one in which it is convenient, safe, attractive and cost-effective to work, play and stay; a place that is adequately equipped with a range of amenities, ranging from adequate health care to green spaces and parks as well as exciting cultural precincts; and one in which conducive work spaces and places exist, supported by a range of transport options. (p. 10)

This is perhaps a pragmatic response, the focus placed on materialising an idealistic notion of what a liveable city should look like. It incorporates elements perceived to have been accessible to a portion of the citizens of Pretoria in the past, but which should become the normative experience of all who live in the boundaries of the capital city at present. Habermas's approach to integrated communities does not place the focus on the pragmatic elements of physical space and infrastructure, but rather locates the value of true integration within the domain of the public sphere. Before I continue to discuss the SCCA, I will provide a brief summary of Habermas's approach to structural transformation.

A summary of Habermas's theory of structural transformation in the public sphere

In 1962, Jürgen Habermas published his monumental work, 'Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft' [The structural transformation of the public sphere: an inquiry into a category of bourgeois society] (Habermas 1989). In this publication he argues that the public sphere is a concept which developed,

2.In 2006, the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality was established. This area includes the city of Pretoria. Since 1994 several towns, cities, streets and buildings have been renamed to more accurately reflect the historical and cultural diversity that exists in South Africa.

rather it existed as a concrete and absolute entity in human history. Referring exclusively to the European context, Habermas traces the progression of the increased power of the public voice from the pure monarchic periods up until the establishment of constitutional states. To Habermas, the Middle Ages represent a period where public well-being was represented by the nobility of a specific area (Habermas 1989:5–14). In this representative position, nobility became the standard against which the well-being of the public could be gauged. Subjects were 'managed' by nobility in accordance with their wisdom to ensure their own, as well the community's well-being. Nobility had a responsibility to their subjects too. The healthier their subjects and the less public turmoil, the greater the benefit to nobility. Public disruption would inevitably impact on the well-being of the nobility and this was avoided at all cost. For this reason, the relationship between those in authority and their subjects had a personalised attribute. The balance of well-being was vested squarely in the relationship between authority (nobility and state) and their subjects (the public). It is however with the emergence of early finance and trade capitalism that the representative position of public well-being shifted downwards to those who were involved in trade and who owned land (Habermas 1989:14). This economic development influenced the relationship between those in power (nobility) and their citizens (those in trade and those who contributed towards trade), giving an increased amount of authority to those in trade and by default lessening the voice of the nobility. Discussions regarding public well-being subsequently moved from the courts of the nobility to the salons and coffeehouses whereby those in trade, landowners and representatives of nobility decided on policies which would impact on the well-being not only on those in power, but also on the public. Habermas calls this transition the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere. This is not to say that the nobility (or state) became redundant. In fact, the relationship between authorities and their subjects 'took on a peculiar character as a result of mercantilist policies, policies formally orientated to the maintenance of an active balanced trade', which in turn led to the exploration and growth of markets for more geographically expansive trade (Habermas 1989:18).

The accelerating growth of capitalist ventures placed more and more representative power in the sphere of economics, leaving the state in a highly depersonalised position. No longer were subjects dependent on the generosity of the nobility, but the growing independence of household economies lifted the public to a new position whereby they themselves could contribute towards the formation of policies and in turn have their productivity become the impetus from which the state would take its cue (Habermas 1989:21).

Furthermore, access to information moved local independence to new spaces. With the establishment of the printed press, the discourse on public and economic policy was no longer only localised to include those in trade, but was accessible to at least the educated classes. Needless to say, state authorities saw the value of the press and could use it to the benefit of state administration (Habermas 1989:21–23). Conversely on a positive side, the state could use the

same media to directly speak to specific constituencies (Habermas 1989:249). This enabled better communication between the state and its citizens.

As literacy and capitalism grew, more people were included in the bourgeois public sphere. Power had shifted from the few in privileged positions (often afforded to them by virtue of family rights) to the public sphere. It is with the rise of public opinion, where the public itself determined to decide what was good for itself, that we witness a political progression right up to the establishment of constitutional states (Habermas 1989:79, 222). In this context, the relationship between state and citizens changed once again. Besides having the responsibility to govern from the premise of representing society and managing the greater benefit of public well-being, the state also had to take on the role of being a welfare state (Stanley 2008:479); it had to see to the well-being of its citizens, who not only held the power of state representation in their hands (meaning that a poor performing state could be ousted by the public), but the very public whom the state served was also the human capital that contributed towards the sustainability of the entire system. As an example of this dual-faceted function of the state, Hardy describes how the state of 19th-century England made inoculations against the smallpox virus mandatory for infants under the age of one year. Besides being a humanitarian decision, the state was also aware that the virus had a significant impact on the feasibility of the future marketplace (Hardy 2013:87–95). With an ageing and decreased workforce, it was imperative that the state took action by ensuring the future viability of its public, which in turn would contribute towards the sustainability of the social system. Admittedly, Hardy's perspective can be labelled as being rather cynical or conspiracy-orientated, but in the example one becomes aware of the twofold tension which still exists in the duties of even the present state authorities: Firstly, the state becomes the public representative and subsequently needs to ensure the well-being of its public. Secondly, the state is accountable for the sustainability of the system it inherits, without which its power would be nullified.

Habermas's description of the structural transformation of the public sphere therefore takes cognisance of the following questions:

• Who are the decision-makers in society?
• What is the role of the state in society?
• What is the role of the public in society?
• Which spaces influence the relationship between state and public?
• How does access to information shape the dynamics between state and public?

These are open-ended questions, seeing that no society or constitutional democracy can exist as a closed system. Habermas makes this point by declaring that when one participates in the discourse on democratic states and the public sphere, one has to accept that these remain a project, 'within the framework of the nation-state, it is oriented to the ever more thorough exhaustion of the normative substance of constitutional principles under changing historic conditions' (Habermas 2011:28).

However, some critique has been levied against Habermas's view of society. Goode, who has a deep appreciation for Habermas's social theory, notes that it has been described as 'idealistic, Eurocentric and unwittingly patriarchal' (Goode 2005:1). The response to this critique is that Habermas did not intend to formulate a universal social theory, but based his description of the dynamics of the social sphere specifically on the European context by means of exploring European history. That said, it is well known that European history *is* predominantly patriarchal. And as with any theory, it is always idealistic, as it remains open to the influence of nuances which cannot be captured comprehensively by any such theory, no matter how detailed it may be. Habermas provides us with *a* theory which gives us the space to notice trends and attempts to predict trajectories of power, freedom and public participation in democratic systems. Although the South African context historically depends on a more communal model of decision-making than Europe, I draw on Habermas's model for the reason that both South Africa and the current Habermasean public sphere have one structure in common, namely a constitutional democracy. To draw too stark a distinction between the philosophical approaches of the City of Tshwane and Habermas's Europe would be unjust, as much of the City of Tshwane's developmental proposals can be classified as being Eurocentric itself and not uniquely African.[3] I will now turn to the SCCA to identify where and whether Habermas's social theory is applicable.

Who are the decision-makers in the City of Tshwane? Considering political and public space

The SCCA describes the seat of political power as resting with the public, but it is simultaneously vested in those who have been elected to local government positions. Power belongs to the people, for it is the people who brought about change in 1994 (Ramokgopa 2014:2). It is also noted that a level of authority is required within this new dispensation which will ensure that the public freedom is protected. On a national level, it is the people of South Africa who decided for change and who became the architects of the South African Constitution which governs not only the national vision, but also shapes the local implementation of it (Ramokgopa 2014:2–3). The local authorities are then described as the gatekeepers of this vision, the authority which will guide the transformation process, reminding society of where it came from, where it is going and how it is going to get there (Ramokgopa 2014:3).

Regarding constitutions, Habermas agrees that a just and encompassing constitution needs to be the product of public participation, whereby all voices need to be heard and considered (Habermas & Ratzinger 2010:29). The basic premise of a constitution is that it is a compromise document, whereby each participant in the democratic project has to

3.For example, much of the City of Tshwane's vision for the short to medium term is based on developmental projects relating to infrastructure, city planning which places the city on par with those in the West, and economic principles such as the free-market philosophy and capitalism.

surrender something in order to produce a framework that will serve the common good. The SCCA's appreciation for public involvement in the South African constitutional project is so far in agreement with Habermas's social theory. Although there is recognition of public power, it is in the administration and implementation of this power that one finds a slight drifting away from the Habermasean view.

Local authorities will remind, local authorities will set the destination and local authorities will decide on the method for achieving this aim – it seems as if decision-making power is vested solely in the authorities, removed from the public sphere, leading to a Habermasean question: 'Where are the people, the citizens, in this decision-making process?' Is the SCCA suggesting that since the people achieved democracy, it is now no longer their responsibility to set the agenda for structural transformation? Are the citizens of Tshwane expected to become spectators of the democratic project unfolding before their eyes? The argument can be made that the public engage in the democratic project by virtue of their vote, electing representatives to local government office. Local government is therefore an extension of the local public voice. But Habermas does not agree with this notion. Local authorities may interpret the democratic process in this way, but the establishment of a bourgeois public sphere has historically not elevated the voice of the grass roots person, but rather initially diminished it (Habermas 1989:23). What does the SCCA then mean by 'an engaged citizenry'?

If there is a perspective that a new bourgeoisie is located in local government, then it would follow that there exists the potential of discordant voices coming from the public and those in authority. Why is it that the ruling party used as its 2014 election slogan: 'We have a good story to tell', while there are numerous public protests against, among other issues, poor service delivery? The ruling party is correct in advocating for a positive view of transformation, for indeed great strides have been made in many areas of social development. Habermas would in my opinion note the frequent occurrence of public protests and argue that the people are saying that their story is not as good as what is thought. The City of Tshwane has not been immune to public protests. In 2014 alone, areas such as Mamelodi and Atteridgeville were inundated with civil action, frequently requiring the intervention of the police to restore calm and order. The citizens' main objections were against poor service delivery, lack of infrastructure and the need for state intervention in the education sector.

Although the SCCA states that power belongs to the people, it needs to be pointed out that this is a romantic notion of power and governance. Yes, power belongs to the people, but how is this power demarcated? An 'engaged citizenry' is not simply a public that is asked to vote officials into power and then, without questioning show appreciation for projects which are deemed by local government to benefit society as a whole. This pushes us back to the relationship between nobility and their subjects; a relationship where those in

authority exercise true power while subjects are reduced to being asked to be grateful for generosity shown. The power of an engaged citizenry is more than just the public voice through a ballot. I suggest that in this context an engaged citizenry is one that elects public representatives to office, participates in the developmental projects offered by the city and that holds public representatives accountable for their roles in exercising their responsibility both to the local citizens, but that also ensures that the city is sustainable in the greater socio-political and economic playing field.

Local government's recognition that the public hold power must move beyond rhetoric for although such expressions may flatter the public, local government needs to admit that it itself carries unmentioned executive and administrative power. Not every citizen can be consulted in or be part of every the decision-making process. Furthermore, not all decisions place the citizens at the focal point of development. The power of governance is not limited only to serving the people of the city, but the City of Tshwane is also influenced by external forces which impact on local developmental implementation. Besides being a reflection of the will of the people, public policy in democratic systems is also informed by greater economic and political trends (Emden & Midgley 2013:1–5). Power exercised by local government encompasses more than the City of Tshwane's self-determination. For all means and purposes, the democratic project itself is leading to the notion that: 'Democratic self-determination has become as impossible as it is superfluous' (Habermas 2011:15), meaning that the exercise of political power for the purpose of social structural transformation no longer originates completely and ultimately from the public voice, but is shaped by the tremendous influence of macro-political and economic tides.

Who are the decision-makers then? This is a complex question, but it can be safely stated that power does not only belong to the people. Yet, the public voice through elections, participation in the democratic project, and in the demand for justice and accountability can immeasurably shape the production of public policy by local government which informs the City of Tshwane's relationship with external role players.

The state's role in public space: Considering economic and infrastructure development

In the SCCA, the City of Tshwane's economic position is of great importance. In 2013, Gauteng generated 35.6% of the national gross domestic product (GDP) of which the City of Tshwane generated 27% of Gauteng's GDP and therefore 9.4% of the national GDP (Ramokgopa 2014:5). In this statistic alone one finds that the public representation of local government is not only concerned with the well-being of the citizens of the City of Tshwane, but it needs to consider the city's place and contribution to the national economic picture as well.

In order to meet the demand of both its citizens and the pressure from the national fiscus, the City of Tshwane has committed itself to investing substantially in the Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) sector (Ramokgopa 2014:16). How the City of Tshwane will do this, is not spelt out. However, the SCCA traces the unfolding of the democratic project in the City of Tshwane by describing the development of public spaces and infrastructure. It is the SCCA's view that the development of public spaces is the primary method through which the materialising of equal spaces for all will be accomplished. 'As part of remaking the special form of the capital city, we are guided by the principles of justice, sustainability, resilience, special equality and special efficiency' (Ramokgopa 2014:10).

The good story that can be told is that currently 90% of households in the City of Tshwane have access to electricity (Ramokgopa 2014:7), 90% of households have access to running water (Ramokgopa 2014:7) and there are health care facilities scattered throughout the city, ensuring that each person has access to health care within a five kilometre radius of their residence (Ramokgopa 2014:18). Through the *'Re aga Tshwane'* programme, 252 184 people have received access to government housing and 9291 title deeds have been registered within the first 10 months since the programme's inception (Ramokgopa 2014:8). Furthermore, public transport systems are being upgraded to ensure efficient means of transport from residential areas to areas designated for industrial and commercial use (Ramokgopa 2014:13).

New precincts are also being developed in the eastern outskirts of the city, which will house centres of governance, a convention centre, and centres promoting entertainment and economic development (Ramokgopa 2014:13). Innovative projects such as the generation of energy by using landfills as a source of power will not only aid job creation, but will also fuel the development of the City of Tshwane for the benefit of all its people (Ramokgopa 2014:14). Another development to take note of is the City of Tshwane's decision to roll out free Internet connectivity throughout the city for all of its citizens (Ramokgopa 2014:17). It is the council's view that Internet connectivity will promote economic growth while enabling the enhancement of basic knowledge. The SCCA goes as far as viewing Internet connectivity in the same light as other basic human rights (Ramokgopa 2014:17).

No one can dispute the value of these projects. From a Habermasean view, one explores the motives behind these developments within the framework of certain questions. What informs the City of Tshwane that the development of public spaces and infrastructure will necessarily make for the benefit of a democratic society? Construction may be impressive and state of the art facilities may leave one awe-inspired, but in light of all this development, what is the response of those who continue to live in abject poverty? Are these developmental projects truly in the interest of the public, or are we witnessing the empowerment and enrichment of a select few (new bourgeoisie), who managed

to successfully negotiate the apparent importance of these projects? I propose that the answers to these questions are not straightforward. Perhaps one is faced with a both/and situation and not necessarily an either/or. Of course there will be opportunistic individuals who seek self-enrichment under the guise of social development. A Special Investigations Unit inquiry into allegations of mismanagement and maladministration in the City of Tshwane from 2010 to 2012 found that, at the time, 65 municipal officials with interests in 66 companies were doing business to the value of over R185 million with the municipality (De Lange 2012). Such conflicts of interest indicate that for those officials at least, the development of the city had more to do with personal benefit than honestly serving the interests of the community. It must also be noted that the City of Tshwane has subsequently embarked on an anti-corruption drive and received a clean bill of financial health from the office of the auditor-general for the 2013 financial year (Ramokgopa 2014:20; Thakali 2014). This is highly commendable and in turn points to a true commitment to serving society.

Regarding the point of connectivity, it must be noted that it provides a very important shift in the Tshwane public sphere. Can it be that Internet connectivity will serve society in the same way as the printed press did in the Middle Ages? Access to information is a pivotal part in the transformation of the public sphere. With Internet connectivity, information is instantaneous. Furthermore, the information that is accessed is not necessarily information which can be controlled or manipulated by local authorities. Citizens can become more informed, communicate more freely and engage more liberally through this resource. One only has to cite the examples of the role of social media in the Arab spring to suggest that connectivity dramatically enhances the place of the public voice within the public sphere.

One aspect of social development which is glaringly absent from the SCCA, is the building of institutions of learning. Despite the rapid growth in population in the eastern suburbs of the city for example, no new public schools have been built in the past three decades. Local schools are overflowing and educational infrastructure cannot cope with the numbers of learners who need to be accommodated. Why is it the case? The moral and ethical consideration of this imbalance questions the exorbitant spending on creating venues for entertainment, governance and commercial ventures but not on public education! To remedy the situation, it were mainly been religious groups that have established schools in these areas to meet the rising demand for primary and secondary level education. The negative consequence has been that because these institutions need to raise their own capital for their viability, they are mostly inaccessible to lower and middle income groups – the groups that need educational upliftment the most.

Considering religious space

Despite the fact that religious communities have historically contributed significantly to the building of society, none more

so than the city of Pretoria, the SCCA makes surprisingly little mention of the interaction between local government, religious communities and the public. The only reference which is made to religious communities is in the mentioning of the City of Tshwane handing 140 parcels of land to churches in previously disadvantaged areas (Ramokgopa 2014:9). One could give the council the benefit of the doubt, as admittedly not every relationship and project can be mentioned in the SCCA. Nonetheless, some form of recognition should have been given to faith communities and their social contribution through establishing and maintaining schools, clinics, feeding projects, counselling centres, projects in prisons, projects on sustainable horticulture, and the list goes on, most of which is done without the support of the City of Tshwane.

Perhaps the SCCA reflects the early Habermasean understanding of the role of religion in the public sphere. In Habermas's early work, he viewed religion as a minor role player in the modern building of the public sphere.[4] In his more recent works it is evident that Habermas has come to form a more moderate perspective of religion, viewing it as one of the voices that is essential in contributing towards the discourse on moral insight in the public sphere (Habermas & Ratzinger 2010:48–50; see also Gordon 2013:196; Habermas 2005). Admittedly, on the one hand, at times religion acts as a disturbing influence; Habermas views the rise of religious fundamentalism as a knee-jerk reaction to overhasty secularisation and immoral capitalisation (Fritsch 2013:282–287; Habermas 2003:101, 106). On the other hand, religion plays a vital role in people's sense of belonging and so Stanley is correct in his assessment that: 'Religion becomes a helpful test case for Habermas' notion of solidarity on the interpersonal level' (Stanley 2008:484).

Habermas is not particularly interested in the transcendental nature of religion, but more in the way in which religion becomes a gravitational point which encourages the cohesion of those who adhere to a belief system. It is the normative values that stem from belief systems which inadvertently contribute towards the social input of structuring constitutional frameworks. Religion's often subconscious and unintentional influence on the formation of moral frameworks cannot be underestimated. This does not mean that Habermas argued for the existence of a covert religious state. A religious state is as dangerous as its extremist opposite, a secular state. A religious state 'is problematic in that it must compromise, and even deny the rights of citizens to freedom of religion' (Forster 2012:75), while a purely secular state overtly or covertly denies the value of its citizens' religious values (Forster 2012:76).[5] Habermas's post-secular state, even at local level, argues that religion is a role player among role players in the formation of a healthy public sphere. At this point Habermas's perspective is very

important, that: 'The secularization of the state is not the same as the secularization of society' (Habermas 2011:22).

How does religion then participate in the public sphere? Drawing from Habermas's later work, Bohman describes religion as a participant in social discourse (Bohman 2013:179). In order to do so effectively, religion cannot engage in social discourse from a condescending, 'preaching' methodology, but solely with a cognitive openness to engage and learn from others (Bohman 2013:180). Morgan-Olsen puts it slightly differently. Religion is to translate its religious reasons into public reasons 'in order to enter political discussions in the public sphere' (Morgan-Olsen 2012:230). To Habermas it is important for religion to participate in the public sphere, for society belongs to religion and religion to society in an interconnectedness which cannot be separated by purely secularist agendas. Democratic societies emerge, and they only emerge as a result of those who participate in it. Drawing from Hegel, Habermas's image of the dance between sacred and secular is to be encouraged (Habermas 2010:21), resulting in a form of society which would not have existed were religion ignored or sidelined in the process.

Habermas warns that 'secular reason may not set itself up as the judge concerning truths of faith' (Habermas 2010:16), but encourages state and religion to engage at eye level, using a common language in public discourse which is to the benefit of society as a whole (Habermas 2011:25). The SCCA's tone regarding religion implies tolerance, but does not openly afford religion recognition as a partner in effectively contributing towards social development. The City of Tshwane may have given land to churches (and here one also queries whether religious groups other than Christianity benefited from this generosity), but what the city must remember is that centres of worship are places where people meet. Where people meet, people enter into discussion. Where people talk, problems are highlighted and opportunities explored. It does not take long before religious communities mobilise and fill the gaps left by government when it fails to effectively look after its people. It would be wise if the SCCA explored more elaborately how the City of Tshwane could engage faith communities to further its interest by being a form of welfare state as well as meeting its macro-scale responsibilities.

The City of Tshwane and accountability space

Accountability is of tantamount importance in constitutional democracies. The SCCA raises interesting points of how the City of Tshwane is to be held accountable for its governance. According to the SCCA, there are three measures of accountability.

The first is the city's accountability to its historic legacy. Ramokgopa is explicit: The city stands on the shoulders of those who have gone before, and thus it is not only important for the City of Tshwane to meet the approval of its citizens, but it has to make our ancestors proud by what has been achieved (Ramokgopa 2014:23). This strong African

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4.Habermas's initial argument was that the more society becomes increasingly secularised and is led by secular powers, the less authority religion carries in the shaping of public policy. See Habermas's discussion on politics and morality in Habermas (1989:102–117).

5.Forster uses the term 'anti-religious state' for what Habermas terms as a purely secular state, and uses the term 'secular state' where Habermas prefers 'post-secular state'. In my view Habermas's differentiation is a more accurate description as not all purely secular states can be classified as strongly as being anti-religious.

anthropological description sets the City of Tshwane apart from pure capitalist, secular metropolitan cities. Once again, the sentiment is reinforced that the City of Tshwane is tasked with remembering the past and should assess whether the aspirations of those who have gone before us have been achieved in any way. It is against the background of the founders of our democracy's vision that the City of Tshwane is held accountable for its implementation of structural transformation. But how is this measured? The SCCA then depends on the public voice to assert whether it is being true to its mandate.

Secondly, the City of Tshwane is accountable to its citizens. It is to this end that the SCCA states that as the leaders of the City of Tshwane they are accountable to all its citizens and not only to those who elected the public representatives to local government office. 'We aim to harness the diverse backgrounds of people from all walks of life whose history, aspirations and dreams shape their expectations of the City of Tshwane' (Ramokgopa 2014:21). Habermas views such inclusive gestures as the operation of a truly democratic system. To this end the ward system in the City of Tshwane ensures that the public voice, however diverse it may be, is represented on local government level. Ward leaders are elected by the citizens and are directly accountable to their constituents. In theory, this structure seems very appealing, but the question is asked whether the minority voice truly and effectively carries weight in the context in which the city council is predominantly made up of representatives from one political party. The balance of power is subsequently in the hands of the electorate. Furthermore, in order to be transparent, the process of public accountability is spelt out by the signing of performance agreement contracts by the mayor and the mayoral committee – who are assessed on a quarterly basis and the performance agreements are available to the public (Ramokgopa 2014:19). If there is any objection to the performance appraisals of either the mayor or mayoral committee members, procedures are in place for the public to voice their dissatisfaction and for these leaders to be held accountable. This is an important measure as it facilitates communication between leadership and citizens in terms of the mandate given to leaders through the votes of their constituencies.

Thirdly, the City of Tshwane is accountable to the national leadership as well as to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. On one level, as stated earlier, the City of Tshwane accounts for a significant portion of national revenue, hence it has a responsibility to both provincial and national government to account for its decisions and actions. Secondly, the decisions and implementation of the national vision at local level are always subject to the rights afforded to the citizens by the Constitution. For instance, in 2012 the Constitutional Court ruled against the City of Tshwane in a case where the city evicted residents of Schubart Park, which left numerous families destitute (South Africa Constitutional Court 2012). The City of Tshwane, in being accountable to the Constitution was ordered to reinstate the residents'

occupation of the Schubart Park complexes and to engage with the residents more proactively in resolving disputes. The City of Tshwane thus cannot afford to only pay lip service to its accountability to the Constitution, but needs to see to it that the rights afforded to citizens are in fact implemented and protected. Habermas (2005) agrees with this point, adding that:

> Only regimes that, by means of appropriate policies, clearly aim at reducing the gap between purported constitutional norms and a constitutional reality that falls short of these norms can demand loyalty from their citizens. (p. 49)

This transparency in accountability goes a long way to facilitate open communicative channels and a strong public voice in the public sphere.

Conclusion

The SCCA provides us with an important statement on the health of our 20-year-old democracy. It is evident that certain notions in Habermas's social theory are applicable even to the context of the City of Tshwane. Questions of the locus of power and decision-making point to a classic example of a Habermasean political and economic bourgeois public sphere. This is not a criticism of the current state at all, but shows that there is a vibrant public sphere which is concerned with the well-being of its citizens while making calculated decisions regarding the political and socio-economic contributions and the viability of the City of Tshwane in the greater context. The SCCA describes the elaborate developmental projects that the City of Tshwane is engaged in. These projects hinge once again on the local government's responsibility towards its citizens (development of infrastructure and accessibility to amenities in accordance with human rights agreements) as well as towards macro-political and economic agendas (facilities for governance, commerce and industry).

In Habermasean terms, these are all signs of a healthy society. Questions are raised however whether the City's commitment to development sufficiently deals with the needs of its citizens. Two areas were identified which do not feature highly in the SCCA, namely the City of Tshwane's commitment to develop schools and institutions of learning and secondly, the City of Tshwane's active engagement with religious communities in partnering for the purpose of social development. In Habermas's eyes, these are shortcomings that the City of Tshwane will need to address.

Lastly, the City of Tshwane's understanding of accountability, and accountability measures as reflected in the SCCA, were outlined. Here too, it was found that in Habermasean terms, the City of Tshwane is committed to transparent communication with its citizens. In addition to the City of Tshwane's resonance with Habermasean theory on various levels, it also contributes something unique: it brings a rich African flavour to the way in which democracy and accountability is expressed. The focus on community, past, present and future, makes this democratic city distinct from other metropolitan centres around the world.

From a Christian-ethical perspective, the City of Tshwane can be commended for its commitment to social development, practical leadership and transparent accountability. It needs to caution those in authority though that the possession of power so easily corrupts which not only separates the bourgeoisie from the common citizen, but may very well become the driving force for hedonistic behaviour and new forms of oppression. According to Habermasean theory, such expressions of power will be challenged by the masses, while responsible leadership will ensure the support of a vibrant and diverse public sphere.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

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