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2011

Review of *Taming the Disorderly City: The Spatial Landscape of Johannesburg after Apartheid*, by Martin J. Murray

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## Book Review

*Taming the Disorderly City: The Spatial Landscape of Johannesburg after Apartheid* by Martin J. Murray. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2008. **[AUTHOR: Please provide number of pages, cost in USD, paperback/hardback]**

Murray has produced a mesmerizing account of Johannesburg as an iconic neoliberal city of despicable inequality and polarization. According to his portrayal, the blatantly racist spatial regime of apartheid Johannesburg has given way, in the post-apartheid era, to a classist spatial war against the poor. The book presents Johannesburg as an “untamed city of fragments,” a “city at war with itself” **[AUTHOR: Please provide page numbers for quotes]** where there are blurring and intertwined lines between ruin and regeneration, fixed and flexible spaces, entitled and disposable people, profiteering and survivalist strategies, and urban and peri-urban politics. Different aspects of this multifaceted struggle between the advancing forces of capitalist real estate practices and the evermore futile resistances of the poor are discussed in an introduction and following eight chapters. In them, Murray discusses housing crises, slum formation, homelessness, policing, fortified urban enclaves, real estate dealings, surveillance, displacement, revitalization plans, immigration, gentrification, and other city making and unmaking practices. In their discussion, Murray convincingly weaves critical urban theory with a nuanced account of local dynamics drawn from reflections, personal interviews, field visits, and local media.

Murray employs skillful and vividly descriptive language that makes the book a fascinating, poignant

read. Murray skillfully presents an analysis of Johannesburg *as is*: “a city of spectacle and a city of ruin” (p. xi). When he addresses the specifics of Johannesburg’s current development in the second half of the book, Murray displays the archival documenting skills of a meticulous urban historian, and the preceding conceptual analysis falls into place. He also mentions some progressive planning initiatives, such as the ones by unconventional housing entrepreneurs (expatriates and middle-aged black women, p. 198), the nonprofit Johannesburg Housing Company (p. 143), and the Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council (p. 231), as alternative practices that may elicit more just results. Greater scrutiny of those practices could have provided decision makers in Johannesburg (and other cities facing similar challenges) with examples worth emulating. Similarly, the book presents a strong, valid criticism of urban planning and planners, but portrays planners as fully invested in the developmentalist project of city transformation. This overgeneralization obscures the ways in which planners have attempted to resist and reform neoliberal interventions in the city.

Scholars have produced abundant literature on post-apartheid Johannesburg. So, then, what is new about Murray’s book? To a certain extent, a weaving of the general critique of the neoliberal city (based on Boyer, Dear, Fainstein, Flusty, Harvey, Smith, Zukin and others) **[LNB: Do these authors need citations?]** with the specific critique of post-apartheid development. Yet, the phenomena that Murray discusses for Johannesburg have been noted in other cities around the world, the difference among them perhaps a matter of degree. Thus,

an explicit account of the extent by which the physical, cultural, and legalistic legacy of apartheid has affected the spatial practices in post-apartheid Johannesburg would have better elucidated what is unique about Johannesburg in the age of neoliberal globalization.

Although Murray's book stops short of making specific recommendations of city policy, it forcefully asks urban planners, designers, architects, developers, and city officials to consider the unsustainability and injustice of current trends of development and the urgent need to redress them. This makes it a relevant book not only for critical urban studies courses but also for training planners, public policymakers, public administrators, and real estate developers to confront the socio-spatial dilemmas and paradoxes enmeshed in planning, leading to both efficient and equitable city development.

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