

is just how contingent and relatively new the concept of the mortgage is. There is nothing “natural” or “inevitable” about the mortgage in an economy, and importing such an institution into a society where alienability is already an alien concept is bound to produce friction. *Mortgaging the Ancestors*, however, gives the reader much more than a history of property friction in Western Kenya. In lithe and lucid prose, Shipton provides a lens through which scholars and students of changing societies may better see and understand the contexts in which they themselves work. Not all books do that.

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Martin J. Murray. *Taming the Disorderly City: The Spatial Landscape of Johannesburg after Apartheid*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2008. xvi + 261 pp. Photographs. Notes. References. Index. \$65.00. Cloth. \$22.95. Paper.

The changing face of Johannesburg, sub-Saharan Africa’s third largest city—dynamic, fascinating, and often quite ugly—has attracted considerable international interest. Several authors since the fall of apartheid have already offered books on the subject. Martin Murray, the author of a number of books on South Africa, now joins in. This volume, however, is as much (or more) about postmodern planning as about Johannesburg. Somewhat paradoxically, it bemoans the abandonment of the inclusive city by postmodernists while fully incorporating their language and critique of modernism.

Johannesburg is a city that exhibits many faces, some of them fairly homely. Murray emphasizes the extremes: on the one hand, the status-conscious gated world of the successful, conjoined with planning aimed at filling corporate needs; and on the other, the world of the homeless, the migrant, and the destitute. In the economic context of contemporary South Africa, of course, the first literally attracts the second as older social and economic forms disintegrate; as elsewhere, the rich and the poor are becoming more polarized, and the center is holding less well. Much of the specific description of this book concerns the fate of central Johannesburg, which is certainly an extreme if not unusual case in Africa. Here there are miles of decayed industrial landscapes and densely packed high-rise housing now fallen on very hard times. The city form is reminiscent of the downtowns of many large American provincial cities built up in the same time period; but in South Africa, a much poorer country, the prospects for gentrification are far more limited. As Murray notes, more than 1 percent of the city’s population lives in “bad buildings.” Indeed, he provides us with some horrific descriptions of their circumstances as well as those of a shifting homeless population difficult to quantify in numerical terms; many are immigrants from elsewhere in Africa.

Deindustrialization can be blamed on the policies of “high apartheid” (aimed at decentralization in the form of the “Bantustans”), on the flight of capital out of South Africa, and on the indifference of the ANC government to the need for a positive industrial policy. While Murray signals several times that these urbanized core flatlands were once “elegant,” in fact they consisted largely of small, nondescript housing units suitable for immigrants and others without any capital to purchase (let alone the capacity to maintain) detached housing. There were a few luxury penthouses; the squalid accommodations for cleaning workers, housed at the top of such buildings, led to the sobriquet of “Soweto in the sky” once in common use. With the decline of white immigration and high vacancy rates, they were logical entry points for rapid deracialization and deterioration in the built environment after 1990, as demonstrated in Alan Morris’s well-known study of this transitional era, *Bleakness and Light* (Witwatersrand University Press, 1999).

Murray’s analysis, again consistent with international literature on planning, stresses the intentions (or lack thereof) of the private sector. Behind the verb “to tame,” it is not always clear who is the tamer. The trajectory of business tends to meld, perhaps too easily, with those of the state and the slogans of “boosters,” which Murray delights in dissecting. In fact, the national government, as well as the provincial government now situated in Johannesburg, has been consistent in its concern for the city center, and the result has been many (and increasingly successful) initiatives that have gradually had an impact. Whatever its vision, the private sector has moved in only very slowly and hesitantly. Greenfields development and shopping malls remain its dominant footprint in South Africa. The two need to be made more distinct.

It is less clear than Murray assumes as to what his repeated call for “public space” should mean. A drive through central Johannesburg shows a vivacity and street life incomparably richer than was once true in a town that typically died after 5:00 p.m. One would also like to hear more of the voices not only from “below” but also from many other steps on the ladder. The average Soweto resident—and Soweto is far more populous than Hillbrow—has gained very substantially from the end of the old racial system. Moreover, Johannesburg remains a city of opportunity, even at times for poor migrants, just as it displays tragic and garish footprints indicating the rise and fall of the rich. This might have been clearer if the extensive comparative insights did not refer only to Western but also to Third World and especially African models. However, Murray’s analysis certainly holds insofar as there is little or no planning aimed at helping the poorest access nodes of affluence or feel less marginal. In the city of gold with uncertain prospects, the poor are largely on their own.

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