Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall, eds. *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2009. Afterword by Arjun Appadurai and Carol A. Breckinridge. viii + 398 pp. Photographs. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Contributors List. $99.95. Cloth. $27.95 Paper.

Johannesburg has attracted a great deal of scholarly interest in the decade and a half since the end of apartheid. No longer constrained by the moral imperative to direct their creative energies toward exposing the evils of white minority rule, researchers and writers have given free rein to pursuing all sorts of topics that before the 1994 transition to parliamentary democracy would have been regarded as not sufficiently engaged with the politics of the day. This "normalization" of intellectual life has led to a great deal of experimentation with new ideas, perspectives, and paradigms, especially those derived from cultural studies, post-Marxism, and postmodernist perspectives.

This outpouring of new research and writing has produced a critical mass of scholarship that has enabled us to rethink Johannesburg as something other than the quintessential "apartheid city." By addressing such topics as culture, consumption, and spectacle that were often ignored not very long ago, *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis* reflects this turn toward scholarly "normalization." Taken together, the contributors to this edited volume (first published as a special issue of the journal *Public Culture*) give Johannesburg a new visibility as a complex and vibrant city with a distinctive cosmopolitan culture all its own.

Elusive Johannesburg is a loosely organized book. Its method of presentation resembles a collage of discrete elements stitched together in a single volume. The book itself is divided into two sections. The first consists of conventional scholarly essays written in an academic mode. In contrast, the second consists of an assemblage of short essays, interviews, and other nonconventional commentaries: a collection of vignettes that explore different aspects of the city largely from the perspective of personal experience. The advantage of this approach is that it allows for a great deal of freedom to include very diverse commentaries on the city, its people, and its places. The disadvantage is that it does not sufficiently demonstrate how and why the city fits together as a coherent whole.

Many of the essays encourage us to think about Johannesburg as a modern, cosmopolitan metropolis in ways overlooked and ignored in the conventional urban studies literature. For example, in "Aesthetics of Superfluity," Achille Mbembe shows not only how apartheid rule was never able to completely realize its dream of racial exclusivity, but also how two middle-class sites of conspicuous consumption—Melrose Arch and Montecasino—have taken the place of the gold mine as the new "spectacle of capital" (61). In "People as Infrastructure," AbdouMaliq Simone helps us reimagine the Johannesburg inner city not as a monochromatic site of impoverishment distributed evenly across a given locale, but as a highly uneven space of

inventiveness and opportunities. Jonathan Hyslop argues convincingly that the unique cosmopolitan setting of twentieth-century Johannesburg nurtured the "inclusive nationalisms founded on universalist values" (124) of "the two most globally significant and famous individuals" (123), namely, Mohandas Gandhi and Nelson Mandela. In looking at the architectural competition for the design of Freedom Square at Kliptown (a site made famous for the 1955 ratification of the Freedom Charter, the "liberation manifesto" of the Congress Alliance), Lindsay Bremner unpacks often overlooked questions about the role of professional architects in building South Africa's new democracy. In "Instant City," John Matshikiza recounts his years as an exile in order to stake his claim to Johannesburg as "home."

The introduction, written by Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall, is perhaps the most controversial part of the book, not only for what it says but also for what it does not say. The authors seek to locate Johannesburg as a historically specific place in a global world of cities. Their primary goal is to assert the "worldliness" of Johannesburg, that is, the capacity of its residents to generate—in the words of the authors—"their own cultural forms, institutions, and lifeways, but also with the ability to foreground, translate, fragment, and disrupt realities and imaginaries originating elsewhere" (ix). This act of "writing an African metropolis into the world" (ix) requires a rethinking of the categories and concepts that have guided conventional urban studies. In following the lead of urban scholars such as Jennifer Robinson and others, Mbembe and Nuttall warn against twin traps that exert a strong influence over contemporary urban theories. On the one hand, they caution against looking at Johannesburg through the functionalist lens of the "global cities" paradigm. In their view, the "global cities" approach fails to take into account the specific cultural economies of particular cities (3). On the other hand, they strongly object to those established urban theories that depend uncritically upon metanarratives of modernization. In their view, these mainstream approaches to urbanization place undue stress on slums and other sites of material impoverishment in African cities.

In focusing on culture, consumption, and experience, Mbembe and Nuttall (both in the introduction and their individual essays) distance themselves from earlier scholarly traditions—particularly the social history approach (epitomized by the work of Charles Van Onselen) and structuralist Marxism. These rival paradigms dominated research and writing on Johannesburg from the 1970s to the mid-1990s. In their view, writing about Johannesburg has unduly "privileged a reading of the urban as a theatre of capitalist accumulation and exploitation" (12). Going further, they assert that the existing scholarly literature on Johannesburg lacks comparative depth, has a limited theoretical reach, and is too dependent on political economy (15).

To make this argument, Mbembe and Nuttall rely on a selective reading of existing scholarly literature, thereby ignoring a great deal of recent research that is both theoretically sophisticated, comparative in orientation,

and empirically rich. Klaus Seghers and Marie Huchzermeyer, for example, are two such comparativists overlooked here. In seeking to establish an original identity for the book, Mbembe and Nuttall seem unable to resist the temptation to dismiss the work of others by simplistically caricaturing it under the generic rubric of "political economy." The authors claim to advance a new theoretical understanding of Johannesburg as an "Afropolitan city." In response, critics will undoubtedly counter with the argument that they do not develop "theory" in any sustained or disciplined manner, and, correspondingly, that they sometimes allow their theorizing to slip into a kind of moralizing about how "bad" political economy is and how "good" culture is.

In their concluding essay, Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge refer to the "stale debate" between political economy and culture. This characterization produces a false dichotomy. Insights drawn from political economy and culture are not necessarily and inherently stale, sterile, or unproductive. Instead, they can produce a dialogue that advances our collective understanding of cities. Johannesburg is a cultural space that is elusive, and hence difficult to grasp—a city that defies simplifications. In my view, there is no privileged vantage-point from which to unravel its making and its meaning. Hence, it goes without saying that perspectives drawn from political economy, cultural studies, poststructuralism, and class analytic frameworks all provide useful angles of vision from which to develop an understanding of the processes of urbanization that have shaped this unfinished city both during and after apartheid. The perspectives we adopt have a great deal to do with what it is we want to know. We should not have to choose between political economy or culture, but rather appreciate what each lens brings to the scholarly investigation.

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Richard Grant, *Globalizing City: The Urban and Economic Transformation of Accra, Ghana.* Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2009. xviii + 187 pp. Maps. Figures. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. $26.95. Cloth.

In this important book Richard Grant offers an approach for examining "globalizing cities"—that is, cities of developing countries that are undergoing urban and economic transformation—and situates cities such as Accra firmly within contemporary globalization processes. This book redresses the existing imbalance in scholarship on urban centers, which tends to privilege "global" (often Western) cities over "globalizing" cities (or ordinary cities in the developing world). In this way Grant incorporates Africa into global understandings of urban transformation. Highlighting the importance of primary research and fieldwork at the local level, he notes that globalizing