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Book review: *Uniting a divided city: governance and social exclusion in Johannesburg*

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Uniting a Divided City. Governance and Social Exclusion in Johannesburg

Jo Beall, Owen Crankshaw and Susan Parnell, 2002

London: Earthscan

xv + 255pp. 14 figures, 27 tables, index. £18,95 (paperback) £48. (hardback).

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Development research is at last beginning to awaken to the implications of urbanisation for development policy and practice and to the importance of cities as sites of social change. Cities and indeed the idea of divided cities have for a long time had a place in the urban studies literature but in the context of development, it is village level studies and agrarian change that has long held sway. However, the indelible incidence of urban poverty, the particular challenges for community participation in urban neighbourhoods and the dilemmas of urban governance posed by decentralisation, have all cohered to ensure that cities now have a firm place within the broad field of development studies. It is in this context that *Uniting a Divided City: Governance and Social Exclusion in Johannesburg* stands to influence the existing development literature, not only as a city study of transitional Johannesburg in the decade following the demise of apartheid, but as an interdisciplinary study with broader appeal that addresses issues of political economy, governance and social development.

Beall, Crankshaw and Parnell point out that Johannesburg throws into stark relief some of the most critical challenges of contemporary urban development anywhere, notably poverty and inequality and social and political exclusion. Its sprawling informal settlements and slums are akin to those found across Asia and Latin America, while the features of spatial polarisation and inner city decline are in evidence in many European and North American cities. As such Beall et al consider Johannesburg 'the litmus test for urban reconstruction in divided cities' (p. 196). The critical question the set themselves is whether given Johannesburg's unique opportunity to 'reinvent itself' (p. 3) following the first democratic elections in 1994,

it can effect reformed governance, fresh policies and new planning practices that will have similar resonance for other divided cities?

The great strength of this volume is that it combines detailed empirical research with a sustained engagement with theoretical debates, many of which currently animate development studies. The introductory section provides a comprehensive engagement with debates on poverty, inequality and governance and through the conceptual lens of social exclusion and a framework that embraces structure, agency and institutions, puts forward the case that political inclusion is a necessary if not a sufficient condition for social inclusion. Part II shows us why it is not sufficient, providing a useful documentation of the socio-economic and spatial legacy of apartheid, as well as the transformation of the city from racial apartheid to a social polarisation associated with post-Fordist deindustrialisation. This longer-term view provides essential contextualisation for the subsequent discussion of the decade of political transition, the focus of Part III. Here the institutional responses to urban change are discussed, highlighting the bureaucratic and planning challenges associated with democratisation and decentralisation in a context of fiscal austerity.

The fourth section of the book offers a group of really excellent case studies on the back of which the argument is clearly constructed. They draw on fine-grained collaborative research conducted over a period of four years, detailing the nature of community-state relations in five different areas of the city. Unlike much development research they do not focus on poor communities alone. Consistent with the author's concern to address inequality as well as poverty, the case studies include the income and infrastructure rich northern suburbs, the infrastructure rich but socially mixed inner city, an infrastructure poor and working class former township of Soweto, as well as a socially and physically peripheral informal settlement. In the informal settlement, despite a high degree of community coherence and a mobilising struggle for housing and services, cleavages within the community are revealed. The potential for elite capture of its organisations and circuits of political influence that are not static make the task of participatory planning difficult. In the area of Soweto studied, the authors show how the interests of house owners and tenants diverge, with local political representatives allying themselves with the better-off owners, to the exclusion of the already marginalised and more mobile tenant population. The case

study of the inner city neighbourhood points up the challenges for urban renewal posed by a rapidly changing social milieu that has seen the exodus of many former residents and the influx of many others, notably African migrants from other parts of the continent who are often victims of xenophobia and who fail to engage with the local community or civic life.

Also removed from civil life are the subjects of the final set of case studies, those who choose to live in gated communities. These are given a fascinating and unusual treatment in this volume. As with most studies of gated communities, the book includes a high-income residential complex. This is home to what Beall et al dub the post-Fordist winners, that increasingly multi-racial group of people who socially and educationally would be at home and employable in any global capital. However, it also includes two other kinds of gated community. The second group comprises the lower-to-middle income occupants of a rather run-down townhouse complex who they regard as the post-Fordist losers. These are people in sunset occupations, in sunset industries and in a sunset location to the south of the city. The third is a very South African gated community, the migrant workers hostels that have been held on to as defensive spaces by Zulu migrants wanting a cheap residential foothold in the city, while maintaining strong livelihood connections with their rural homes in KwaZulu-Natal. The more general point these latter case studies illustrate is how social lock-in operates to the detriment of civic engagement and local democracy.

For a general development readership the book suffers perhaps from too much parochial detail, inevitable perhaps from three authors so steeped in the history and politics of the city. Some international readers might, therefore, find themselves doing some rapid page turning at times. Moreover, a book that purports to speak on inequality as well as poverty should perhaps have paid more attention to wealth and the wealthy. Nevertheless, it is a rich seam to mine for those interested in social development, community participation and local governance, with much of interest for readers approaching the book from a number of different directions. It also draws useful policy implications of wider relevance. For example, Beall et al suggest that Johannesburg's 'pro-poor strategies' have been too closely dependent on a 'basic needs' approach, delivered through low-cost housing and basic services, when many of the expressed needs of Johannesburg's citizens relate to jobs, social services, the

development of community spirit and indeed the need for policy responsiveness towards HIV/AIDS. While spending on construction and infrastructure is laudable and necessary to undo the historical legacy of racially skewed apartheid spending, they argue that policy responses need to be broader and more nuanced in a context where there are high levels of social dysfunction and exclusion.

In terms of governance the authors conclude that 'Johannesburg straddles a potential divide between the opportunities presented by an impressive legacy of popular democracy and the constraints imposed by a political and civic disengagement by an increasingly fragile and disillusioned populace' (p. 204). This is a sober conclusion and one that even holds in abeyance a starting assumption of the book that political inclusion has been more tangible than social cohesion and economic inclusion, which have been more illusive. Hence it is in their historical perspective and the long view, which proves institutions and social relations are not immutable, that the prospects for a united city lie.