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Suzanne Hall

Book review: cities of whiteness by Wendy Shaw

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Book Reviews

Wendy S. Shaw

Cities of Whiteness

London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007, 232 pp., £19.99 (pbk), £50.00 (hbk)

In *Cities of Whiteness* Shaw conceptualises ethnicity through an exploration of the re-colonisation of an inner city neighbourhood in Sydney during the 1990s. Her portrayal of power and whiteness is framed by how entitlement to urban space is organised; how resources are mobilised to respect or denigrate different ways of living in the city. In the Introduction Shaw connects her study of the expressions of power to the context of urban transformation, 'I hope to portray that whiteness is so much more than ethnicity, to which it is so often reduced. Rather, whiteness can work as a strategy or strategies of (urban) empowerment' (p. 13). Shaw's empirical account of gentrification, developed within interwoven processes of 'renewal' and 'dispossession', is located in Redfern, an area to the south of Sydney's Central Business District.

In spite of an increasing middle-class shift from suburb to inner city that had commenced in the 1960s, Shaw reports that gentrifiers had avoided Redfern, and she attributes this primarily to the presence of an Aboriginal area within Redfern known as 'The Block'. During the 1990s the demand for a particular mode of inner city living, as exemplified by the renewal of areas like SoHo in New York, placed increasing pressure for the redevelopment of Redfern, and with it emerged new images of the area's desirability, and reconsiderations of the future of 'The Block'. Describing it as 'The black capital of Australia' (p. 17), Shaw positions 'The Block' as an enduring symbol of struggle and resistance. She provides an historic basis to her account, by outlining the exile of the Aboriginal people from the original settlement in Sydney in 1788, and the legal constitution of 'The Block' in 1973 as a contained area for Aboriginal settlement in the city.

From the position of her own role as resident of Redfern, Shaw assembles a diverse collection of local experiences of urban change, providing a range

of voices that discuss what segregates and what discriminates, as well as what unifies and what activates. These narratives of local politics are related to the larger mechanisms that construct difference in the city, and Shaw analyses the spatial consequences of developing urban ways of living shaped by images of space and lifestyle. The primary concepts of 'indigeneity', 'mobilisation', and 'escapisms' are developed to reveal how differential entitlement to urban space is constructed. 'Indigeneity' is used to explore the gap between the meanings attributed to indigenous people under particular regimes of power, and the lived realities of indigenous people that transcend these ascriptions. The particular pertinence of Aboriginal indigeneity in the context of the city is explored through the colonial categorisation of the Aboriginal people as rural, and hence belonging in the outback, as contrasted with their presence in the city symbolised by 'The Block'. Shaw traces the persistent lack of recognition of 'The Block', through its destabilisation and decline and attempts to force its closure.

Through the concept of 'mobilisation', Shaw highlights different modes of local resident activism, and compares the distinctions between 'diversionary' issues, primarily oriented around 'turf' and explicitly localised and racialised in the case of Redfern, as contrasted with 'critically empowering' issues that relate to the attainment of rights for disempowered groups (Costello and Dunn 1994). And, lastly, 'escapisms' captures the different ways that taste and culture are selectively consumed in the city, where difficult social realities are marginalised by a focus on the projected aspirations of built form and lifestyle. Shaw analyses the pursuit of 'heritage' as 'protectionism' focused on the preservation of selective histories exemplified by the regard for architecture from the imperial and colonial pasts. She also introduces the idea of 'Manhattanism' where a selective view of cosmopolitan life is demonstrated by the form and imagery of exclusive real estate development in post-industrial spaces around the city.

The distinctive achievement of Shaw's work is the analysis of 'The Block' in explicit relation to its surrounds, and the parallel processes of how areas are made with respect to one another is convincingly revealed. Through this Shaw is able to reveal the mechanisms behind the containment of 'The Block', perpetuated by the racialised representation of 'The Block', concurrent with the processes of selective (white) empowerment around it. One minor concern is that in this relational analysis, the reader's access to forming a picture of 'The Block' is primarily vetted by the views of those who are opposed to it, and more information from within 'The Block'

would be useful. *Cities of Whiteness* develops important theoretical and methodological views of ethnicity, by emphasising the processes by which groups organise power, and the spaces and areas that become the target of preferential focus.

Suzanne Hall

PhD Candidate at the City Programme

London School of Economics and Political Science

J. Macgregor Wise

Cultural Globalization: A User's Guide

Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 2008, 192 pp., £15.99 (pbk)

In his book *Cultural Globalization: A User's Guide*, J. Macgregor Wise gives a colourful account of global flows of culture and their effect on local identity formation processes. Wise, who is associate professor of Communication Studies at Arizona State University, addresses culture in various settings and expressions, drawing on examples of youth culture from Asia, where he has lived, as well as from Europe and North America.

The book is structured into five chapters and a short conclusion. 'Culture at Home' (Chapter 1) presents concepts that serve as perspectives on globalisation and as landmarks within this vast and vague phenomenon: culture, territory, identity, home, ideology and hegemony. They reappear throughout the book when addressing the manifold examples. 'Culture and the Global' (Chapter 2) speaks of cultural flows and power relations, deconstructing a Marxist view of cultural imperialism. Wise hereby does recognise power imbalances in cultural flows, such as the global consumption of US American cultural products while other cultures rarely flow back to the States. But he points to the differences in local receptions, to the multiple flows in other directions (e.g. within Asia) and to the fact that there can also be a pull of culture instead of a push, e.g. in pirate copies. With Arjun Appadurai he concludes that cultural flows are multidimensional and often contradictory.

The in-depth studies of 'Global Youth' (Chapter 3) and 'Global Music' (Chapter 4) are well chosen. By the former Wise chooses to focus on important actors who move globally, use global resources under local conditions or are the target of cultural flows. The latter, of which Wise has a great knowledge, is an example of a particular cultural flow, media and