

SCHOLARLY REVIEW ESSAY

MIGRANTS AND THE RIGHT TO SOUTH AFRICAN CITIES

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Anne-Maria Makhkulu. *Making Freedom: Apartheid, Squatter Politics, and the Struggle for Home*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015. vii + 228 pp. Photographs. Bibliography. Index. \$19.16. Paper. ISBN: 978-0822359661.

Emily Margaretten. *Street Life Under a Roof: Youth Homelessness in South Africa*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015. xi + 213 pp. Photographs. Bibliography. Index. \$25.00. Paper. ISBN: 978-0252081118.

Jonathan Crush, Abel Chikanda, Caroline Skinner. *Mean Streets: Migration, Xenophobia and Informality in South Africa*. Ontario: The Southern African Migration Programme, 2015. iv + 300 pp. Photographs. Bibliography. Index. \$35.00. Paper. ISBN: 978-1920596118.

Making Freedom: Apartheid, Squatter Politics, and the Struggle for Home, *Street Life Under a Roof: Youth Homelessness in South Africa*, and *Mean Streets: Migration, Xenophobia and Informality in South Africa* all employ oral narratives, photographs, tables, maps, and charts to introduce different approaches that examine the dispossessed in South Africa's urban centers. These works, which all focus on contemporary South African history and the post-liberated state, coalesce around key themes such as exclusion, mobility, homelessness, xenophobia, and informality. Anne-Maria Makhulu, Emily Margaretten, and Jonathan Crush et al. show how the worlds of the formal and informal collide on the city's streets, outside Cape Town's peripheries, and within its fringe settlements. These scholars depict how their subjects have "gain(ed) a right to the city" even while occupying marginalized communities in Nyanga, Crossroads, and other settlement areas that developed around the City Bowl. Legislation, class, ethnicity, race, and geography, among other identity markers, exclude migrants from the promise of Cape Town's resources.

The government began to alter the geographical landscape even further than it had with previous legislative measures when it enacted the Group Areas Act in 1950. Officials embarked on a concerted effort to make the urban centers White and to populate the peripheries with Africans, Coloureds, and Asians. Although the state enacted this promulgation over sixty-nine years ago, the impact of the Group Areas Act still reverberates throughout South Africa's cities and townships today. These interrogators brilliantly connect this dot of the past to the stain of the present. As these authors illustrate, South Africa's contemporary terrain caused the even further debilitation of a social class already imprisoned by economic status, poor housing structures, lack of employment opportunities, geographical constraints, and other examples of disenfranchisement. In her feminist perspective on citizenship, Ruth Lister illustrates how migrant women developed their own agency despite being denied inclusion. These three works also corroborate Lister's main argument: they illustrate how the dominant have used the concept of citizenship as a tool of discipline and ostracization, while the squatters have employed it to gain agency and freedom. When dwellers on the fringe became subordinate dominators in their respective enclaves, they determined who belonged in their societies. Subordinate dominators and marginalized subordinates dwelled in liminal spaces, with power serving as a fluid commodity.

In *Making Freedom*, cultural anthropologist Anne-Maria Makhulu interrogates how squatters created illegal settlements to gain their "right to Cape Town." Locked out of the "Mother City's" permanent habitation, African migrants created a string of communities on its fringes to protest their exclusion. As a protest that began at the height of apartheid in the 1970s and ended during its demise in the 1990s, this ongoing movement showcases how squatters renegotiated the urban space to fit their political and personal agendas (1). Like the apartheid regime, which socially engineered the geographical landscape to entrench racial segregation, African migrants have also viewed the land in political terms. These urban militants commandeered Cape Town's fringes and littered them with makeshift shacks and tents. Informal settlements mushroomed conspicuously along the N2 and N3, the heavily trafficked "keys to the city" that the migrants precariously move up and down (xxiii). These havens serve as alternative and parallel communities that replicate or differ from mainstream society. Settlers have sought to envision a new urban order that comprises the construction of "homes" as a form of passage to a citizenship that they define and order. In these parallel and alternate communities, urban militants have altered Cape Town's spatial arrangement by using geography to their advantage when they replicate or differ from mainstream society to envision a new urban order. Squatters have littered the land with "homes" that popped up on various sites within this predominantly Afrikaans and Xhosa-speaking metropolis. These sites' parameters and perimeters have become part of the geographical warfare that marginalized urbanites launched to attain a "right to the city." While these languages represent the city's chief tongues, shack dwellers present another mode of communication that is linked

to poverty, dispossession, racism, and marginalization. Thus, Makhulu's ethnographic study is an exploration into the squatters and the inner worlds they form and frame.

Divided into four chapters and with an accompanying introduction and conclusion, *Making Freedom* discusses the everyday politics that govern the relationships and the spatial arrangements of Cape Town's impoverished. This book details the psychological and physical migration of its subjects who pursue the democratic ideals that apartheid officials prohibited and that post-liberated South Africa struggles to grant. These shack dwellers rectify this situation by establishing their own system of governance and enforcing their own tenets to guide their daily living. While their "politics of presence" offers a form of indelible visibility, it also renders them invisible within the socio-economic structures that reinforce the parameters of their exclusion. Makhulu shows that this circumstance has led to the landscape being reconfigured, with informal settlers confiscating additional land from the city that has ostracized them. With Cape Town's geographical map highlighted by the dots of "occupied areas," the city emerges as a paradox of liberalism and democracy, and of rights and denials (1). These concepts are not lost on the shacks' inhabitants, whose narratives unearth several discussions regarding personhood, gender, intimacy, family relations, and moral economies. These episodes weave together the past, the present, and the future. They form a kaleidoscope of struggle, resistance, and citizenship, where moral and political economies have merged.

Multiple transactional economies have emerged, with household structures orchestrating different forms of intimacies. Shacking up has become an economic and sexual strategy under an arrangement called *Ukuhlisana*, where women forgo marriage rites to gain financial leverages. Participants mortgage their bodies in a quasi-form of democracy, where despite having limited agency, they are constrained by issues of poverty, class, and gender that dictate their actions. The politics governing "home," in *ezimbhacwasi*, the place that houses those without claims to citizenship because of their displaced status, is another transactional engagement. Makhulu writes, "Cities are necessarily sites of the production of 'surplus' both in the sense of a surplus product or value and the production of redundant populations as capital moves increasingly into a speculative phase (15)." Because displaced persons (*imbhecu*) politically reproduce, they, like women who practice *Ukuhlisana*, use their bodies as transactional tools to gain "rights to the city." Militants illegally form a conglomeration of "territories within territories" to negotiate their "pseudo ownership" of occupied land. When these urban "occupiers" seek to control objects and people within their delimited areas, they create a system of justice, policing, and government. Home guards patrol the settlements to promote safety and to offer security within their makeshift environs (71), while dwellers also incorporate rural governance when they devote sections to adjudicate disputes between families and communities.

Emily Margaretten's *Street Life Under One Roof* also threads the notion of order throughout its text. Her discussion of youth between the ages of

fourteen and thirty-five illustrates how they have transformed Point Place into a sustainable domicile inside Durban's metropolitan area. Point Place is situated beyond Addington Beach and is parallel to South Beach in downtown Durban. ". . . (T)he youthful occupation of Point Place reflects the shifting demographic of South Africa's inner cities. It reveals the uneasy transition of a post-apartheid state, the lifting of repressive influx-control laws . . . and the subsequent flight of white residents and capital from the city (10)." When the Street Children's Forum lowered the age for the intake of youth into its shelter, many of the displaced began to occupy Point Place, which they ultimately took over by claiming eight of the twelve available apartments in the building. When they gained dominance within Point Place, residents turned its intimate space into a realization of their citizenship, their right to Durban, and to the urban opportunities it offered.

In this ethnographic three-part book, Margaretten refutes previous scholarship that has depicted the youth as idle by illustrating how they have participated in constructing narratives on homelessness. These "makers and breakers," "navigators," "generators," and "social shifters" have built structures of domesticity at the edges of society (7). Alleyways, gutters, and parking lots, along with condemned buildings serve as sites of illegal "occupation," where cardboard boxes, plastic tarps, and blankets offer shelter from the elements (7). Like Makhulu's subjects, Margaretten's protagonists have turned Point Place into an exercise in a moral economy structured around compromise and propositions. Negotiations take place to procure sex as well as love. Margaretten, however, goes further in the exploration of the power dynamics within sexual arrangements that adopt *nakana*, an isiZulu act which means "to care about or take notice of one another." Distinctions exist between "outside" and "inside" boyfriends. "Outside lovers" provide women with luxuries not readily obtainable to them, while "inside boyfriends" fulfill subsistence needs rather than consumptive ones (66, 67). These distinctions reveal something else about inclusion and exclusion. Material- and cash-related exchanges offer entrées into the world of street shelters that possibly otherwise would have been closed. Female practitioners of "*phanda*" try to get money or other items through an unspoken social contract (71). Companionship and reciprocity far outweigh the risks involved in condom-less intercourse. Sexual transactions, therefore provide keys to the city that would have been closed if the women did not unlock them with their bodies.

Margaretten introduces another gendered arrangement that allows the inhabitants to obtain "citizenship" in this Durban building. Males who found the Point Place females untrustworthy have their "outside girlfriends" enter the street shelter as companions who then become "inside girlfriends." Boyfriends engage in unprotected sex with these "outside girlfriends" because they view them as honest and dependable and free of disease (68). Statuses such as "HIV free" or "HIV positive" create another form of marginalization within Point Place that places women into two different categorizations in this patriarchal arrangement. Clean bills of health

rest with the women rather than with the men with whom they have a transactional, amorous, and/or sexual relationship. This puts females in precarious situations that mirror what street shelter and informal settlement inhabitants experience daily.

Inside Point Place and around Cape Town's outskirts, a metamorphosis takes place. The marginalized enter into social contracts that undersign an unwritten code of ethics guiding the survival needs of the dispossessed. For instance, sharing is considered optional and a practice carried out with nearby friends, rather than an exchange through a wider communal system. Because of their sparse possessions, they "puff and pass" like drug users to sustain their moral economy (8). Conflicts do, however, turn mundane daily activities into heightened domestic dramas. Margaretten and Makhulu converse with each other on this topic to show how violence is intertwined with the squalor and the redundancy that urban living breeds and regenerates. Makhulu shows how transformations within the domestic space lead to incidences of violence and abuse, while Margaretten enters the spiritual world to discuss this topic. She introduces "Ugogo," a ghostly grandmother who appears in some of the youth's dreams. This apparition convinces its "victims" to jump out of windows and plummet to their deaths (14). Margaretten describes physical death, but like Makhulu and Crush et al., she also treats the metaphoric one created by an unequal distribution of land, and a limited number of economic opportunities that lead to social death. In all three works, physical, human, and social geography also become part of an unresolved equation in which the land suffers from overpopulation, inadequate social services, and a high demand for finite space. High saturation also prevents occupants from communing with the earth. Spirits reside there, but because the state objects to their presence on land that they have had to confiscate, this causes a cosmological conflict that none of the works address.

The edited anthology of Jonathan Crush, Abel Chikanda, and Caroline Skinner, *Mean Streets* treads South Africa's urban terrain to explore migration, xenophobia, and informality. Thirteen chapters unpack the complexities surrounding migrant entrepreneurs and the way that South Africans view them. Like the subjects in Makhulu's and Margaretten's studies, Chinese, Somali, Cameroonian, Ethiopian, Ghanaian, and Senegalese refugees and migrants lie outside the parameters of "citizenship" on South Africa's *Mean Streets*. This liability, however, fails to preclude them from the gaze of the dominant populations. They are both visible and invisible. South Africans recognize foreigners; however, like the state, they ignore the migrants' needs unless they compete with their own. Many South Africans believe that African immigrants attain successes at their expense. Contributors to this volume refute this widely-held notion by showing the various ways that immigrants contribute to the economy. Somalis, Ghanaians, and other African migrants pay landlords rent, offer apprenticeship programs, employ South Africans (many of the same ethnic group), provide clients with less expensive goods, invest in infrastructure projects,

and work to improve the country's educational systems (Chinese) (118). Migrants do all of this without the luxury of bank accounts, formal finance programs, or access to visas and permits. Money, rather than governmental documents, serves as the bargaining tool; however, in these migrants' case, currency is used to build financial rather than the consumptive wealth that Makhulu depicts.

Geography is another component to income generation. Oftentimes, spazas or informal shops are located near residences. This business move is logical on social, economic, and positional fronts, for it benefits the merchants and the buyers simultaneously. Home-based spazas sprung up all over when migrant entrepreneurs purchased or rented properties in key locations or purchased trading rights to existing shops. Such business deals help refugees to dominate the grocery markets that exist in their residential areas (92). Sellers also move around; mobile sites of commerce provide greater flexibility for entrepreneurs and buyers. Somalis, Ghanaians, and other immigrants utilize mobility as a form of resistance to expand their domains through trade and consumerism. In fact, their willingness to go around to different parts of Johannesburg, Durban, and Cape Town builds the migrants' clientele, and offers them the opportunity to dictate the terms of their "illegal" exchange of goods. Business acumen is further noted in their reconnaissance efforts. They find out their competitors' prices before they set their own to undercut their rivals (5).

Street hawkers who work from midday until they deplete their stocks also follow this model. They "bring the market to the people's front door" (93). Fruit and vegetable sellers whistle shrilly, while clothes providers, who commandeer trolleys, signal their arrival by banging on doors. Person-to-person interactions advantageously position these merchants in the cat bird's seat because they cut out the middleperson, allowing them to claim all revenues (93). Through this informal network, the marginalized become the subordinate dominators. Various nexuses of power emerge that redefine and subvert the traditional structure of relations. Like the subjects in the other works, these "new South Africans" gain access ". . . [by bringing] politics right to the city's door."

Despite the resilience of these marginalized residents, the state and indigenous South Africans have tried on numerous occasions to destabilize their communities and to deny them basic citizenship. Sometimes, these foreign dwellers are chased out of the townships and other areas where they have tried to settle. Their mini-markets, which provide a range of goods that offer flexible quantities such as the purchase of one egg over a dozen or one cigarette instead of an entire pack, are similar to small supermarkets (13, 14). Even while these small-business entrepreneurs are offering credit to their customers, they are often victims of outbursts of xenophobic violence, especially when tensions run high and jealousy emerges because South Africans believe that migrants are financially better off, deprive them of job opportunities, appear idle, or infringe on scarce resources. Notions such as these serve to reinforce chauvinistic superiority and heightened

divisions between and among members of the subordinate group. Because South Africans act as pseudo agents of the state, they enforce informal segregation to prevent other Africans from accessing their “rights to the city” and claims to quasi-citizenship.

Makhulu, Margaretten, and Crush et al. introduce different approaches to examining the dispossessed in South Africa’s urban centers by opening a window into further exploration. Migration, xenophobia, mobility, informality, homelessness, and street life feature in conversations that capture the nuances of urban living on the fringes of society. These scholars are proficient in depicting the squatters’ pain, financial difficulties, intimate relationships, business strategies, and the moral and political economies that guide their actions. The worlds of the dominant and the subordinate collide in each of these works to provide readers with a better understanding of liminal spaces and power relationships within South Africa’s major cities. The rural counterpart is also needed to balance studies like these to show how regionalization breeds different articulations of begging, stealing, confiscating, loving, and moving that go beyond metropolitan sites but are inextricably connected to them. *Making Freedom, Street Life, and Mean Streets* chart exciting ground by rendering “invisible” lives visible.

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