Review

Tony Roshan Samara (2011) *Cape Town after Apartheid: crime and governance in the divided city.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

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In this book, Tony Roshan Samara, assistant professor in the Sociology and Anthropology Department of George Mason University, proposes a critical reading of the link between urban development and security policies in Cape Town at the intersection between critical urban studies, global affairs studies and policing studies. The work draws on rich and original fieldwork based on interviews with social workers, local press stories and an extensive grey literature. It was carried out in the early 2000s, at a time when the urban regeneration policies implemented by the Cape Town Partnership were spectacularly transforming the CBD and when the gap between the rich, gentrified centre and the poor outlying townships was widening.

Brought to Cape Town by his interest in the prison issue, Tony Samara quickly moved on to explore the links between social control, police practices and the neo-liberalisation of urban policies. The central thesis of the book is that there is a continuity between police repression under apartheid and the 'post-apartheid hard policing' linked with neo-liberalisation (the security aspect of urban regeneration policies). Neo-liberalisation is defined as a transnational 'rule' that is impose locally in the form of entrepreneurial requirements to pursue urban competitiveness, in a conception very close to that proposed by David Harvey (1989). On this account, the rise in violence in South Africa's cities since the 1990s is due not to a moment of temporary anomie linked with the post-apartheid transition, but is the direct outcome of the neo-liberal trend of public policies. This hypothesis is advanced throughout the book, via an analysis of what the author calls 'neo-

liberal governance' and the 'transnational security networks of neo-liberal urban governance' that underpin it.

The first chapter gives a contextual account of neo-liberalisation and security issues in South Africa, then in Cape Town and the Western Cape Province. It shows that the neo-liberalisation of public policies contributes to the construction of criminality as a problem, by characterising insecurity as a major obstacle to development, which leads to a rise in repression as a corollary of local development policies. Chapter Two focuses on the street children living in the city centre. It shows how these children, although very few in number, have been used by the local government to construct a social scapegoat of 'young people of colour', and to drive a 'racially coded moral panic' which is exploited to banish manifestations of poverty from the city centre.

Chapters Three, Four and Five, which concentrate on the Cape Flats, constitute the most original part of the book. Chapter Three describes the history of gangsterism and the rise of vigilantism with PAGAD, then analyses the links between the Cape Flats Renewal Strategy and the struggle against gangsterism. As in the city centre, insecurity (here linked with the criminal economy) is described as a major obstacle to development, which justifies the escalation in police repression. Chapter Four describes the deterioration in relations between the police and the communities living in these districts, the erosion of trust, and the impossibility of building partnerships between the two; it condemns the limitations of official 'social crime prevention' measures, which it perceives as pure window dressing. Chapter Five develops this final point by returning to the roots of the problem. It contends that gangsterism in the Flats is fed by poverty and inequality. Gangsterism is the only thing that offers young people economic and social opportunities, whereas the state, with its simplistic reaction of repression and security, abandons them to a future of prison which normalises the gang system (a spell in prison becomes a common fate for the young) and destabilises the communities (former prisoners always return to their old neighbourhoods).

It is a bold thesis: it implies that the change in the nature of the political regime (and the national policing reforms it entailed) has made no difference, that the South African state, which claims to be combating inherited inequalities, implements security policies that only accentuates them. Despite

the high degree of local government autonomy, the political rotation between the ANC and the DA at the head of the City and the Province – a major political feature of the period when Tony Samara was making his observations – has purportedly made little difference. His claim is that neo-liberal political choices made at national level have been directly transposed to local level, leading to the reproduction and perpetuation within the framework of liberal democracy of practices inherited from apartheid, and even to an escalation in repression. This situates the proposition within a radical geography that casts the capitalist apartheid state and the post-apartheid neo-liberal bourgeois state as two sides of the same coin. The strength of such an approach is that it raises the question of the perpetuation of social and racial divisions, while going beyond the hypothesis of inertia and the somewhat vague notion of 'transition'. It is also a reminder to politicians of the need for change, a generation after apartheid was abolished. Written in the United States and partly addressed to a North American readership, the book nevertheless takes a direct part (and position) in South African national political debates.

The markedly critical tone and striking formulations ('a new iteration of apartheid' (3); 'the living legacy of the apartheid system' (96)) aligns the work with radical North American geography, which employs the notion of neo-liberalism to describe the upsurge in urban inequalities and injustices. These references are not made explicit, no doubt because of the form of the work: an empirical monograph with no theoretical exegesis. It is nevertheless identifiable as close in its analyses to Martin Murray's work on Johannesburg (2008 and 2011). It shares with the latter a dual vision of the post-apartheid city, of the 'divided' city ('Cape Town's two cities'). It is a dualism that has been described as reductive (Mosselson 2013). Here, for example, the analysis focuses on the coloured neighbourhoods and deals neither with the black townships and squatter camps (eg urban renewal and the fight against criminality in Khayelitsha), nor with the formerly white middle-class suburbs. This choice is understandable for practical reasons, but it prevents the extension to the whole city of Cape Town of a motif (gangsterism) specific to the coloured neighbourhoods and it reduces the whole city to a polarity between city centre and coloured neighbourhoods.

Nonetheless, this dualism has one advantage: it offers a way to tackle security-based governance in both the city centre and the townships, which

are generally seen as two unconnected urban worlds and are therefore handled separately, either through the theme of urban regeneration and city centre securitisation (eg Miraftab 2007, Didier et al 2013), or via the question of gangsterism in the Cape Flats. Tony Samara makes the link between these spaces. His theoretical framework allows him to conceptualise apparently divergent trajectories as constituting two sides of a single picture. Some will criticise him precisely for this point of view and for mechanically attributing all the ills of the post-apartheid city to neo-liberalism, an analytical position whose admissibility is disputed in South Africa (Parnell and Robinson 2012) and in Africa in general (Ferguson 2009). In any case, the thesis is a long way from the debates on the national and local developmental state that have dominated South African academic circles since the 2000s.

The fact remains that even if we accept the neo-liberal theoretical framework, the analysis remains somewhat disembodied. The attacks against the 'forces' of neo-liberalism *would* probably be more cogent if they were based on an analysis of the political and economic networks operating in the shadow of urban regeneration. One would like to know more about the 'elites' that are driving this security programme (their social profiles, their careers, their political intentions) and about the effects of generational differences and political transmission, especially if what is taking place is social and spatial duplication. However, the state is perceived as a homogenous arena, and the author does not open up the black box of public action. From this perspective, the connections between local and national are somewhat mechanistic and little light is cast on any conflicts between the different police forces (national, municipal). Moreover, the book says scarcely anything about internal social differences within the townships, because the accent is on racial homogeneity. It presents the Cape Flats communities as a group with few social differences, largely passive and victim to the state's repressive policies, with little capacity for resistance or partnerships with the police. It therefore fails to take into account the question of the procedures and legitimacy whereby responsibility for neighbourhood security is delegated to the communities (plural), another facet of neo-liberalisation and a major debate in works on security governance in South Africa (as well as a national political controversy).

Finally, the analysis of representations is based on the study of what is said by the victims (something no doubt not done enough) and by their allies

(the social workers), as well as of specific media sources (the liberal English-language press). However, there also exist positive models of young men of colour (for example those involved in the ANC Youth League, new elites emerging from the universities …), and counter-positions with the capacity to disrupt the neo-liberal project, which are not confined to isolated militants alone. One would also like to hear these voices, as well as those of the ordinary police, in order to understand how representations are jointly constructed in the day-to-day interactions between police and inhabitants in the Cape Flats and, in consequence, how one can begin to deconstruct prejudices and tackle discrimination.[1]

A greater openness to social and spatial nuance might have done more to highlight South African specificities. After all, the racial and social ordering of urban spaces under entrepreneurial principles and the rise in police repression are a universal tendency of neo-liberalism. In fact, the interpretation that Tony Samara offers us of the links between social control, the criminalisation of poverty and the reinforcement of penal measures is quite close to that developed by Loïc Wacquant on the subject of North America. A North American author is certainly well placed to help us understand how the Cape Town situation differs in this respect in its postcolonial and developmental characteristics.

Note
1. One thinks of Didier Fassin's 2011 ethnographic work on police racism in France.

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