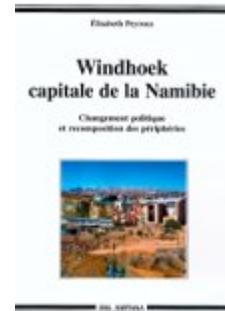


Elisabeth Peyroux. *Windhoek, capitale de la Namibie, changement politique et recomposition des périphéries*. Paris: Ifas-Karthala, 2004. 373 pp. EUR 26.60 (cloth), ISBN 978-2-84586-486-3.

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## Post-apartheid Urban Dynamics in Namibia

This book is the result of five years of doctoral research that led to a Ph.D. in geography (defended at the University Paris 10-Nanterre in December 2000). It was published in Paris in 2004. It is entirely written in French but English-speaking readers might be interested to know that the author has also published in English on different or related topics.[1] It is a highly valuable book from three points of view. First, although it is not an isolated work in the field of Namibian urban studies, it is the first book written in French that deals specifically with urban and housing dynamics in post-apartheid Namibia.[2] It thus constitutes a major contribution to the knowledge of a part of Africa that French researchers have only recently started to investigate, thanks to post-apartheid changes.

The author provides the reader with a basic understanding of Namibian urban dynamics in the capital city Windhoek, with a specific focus on the rapid residential and socioeconomic changes occurring in its peripheries (townships and informal settlements). The first section of the book provides a historical bird's eye view of the colonial and postcolonial/post-apartheid situations. The second section focuses on post-apartheid institutional changes, differentiating the points of view and respective roles of three stakeholders in the peripheries: the national state, the municipality and a semi-public institution (NHE, National Housing Enterprise). The third section of the book (and the most original contribution) consists in a detailed analysis of two housing programs and of a household survey. Entitled "Compétences territori-

ales et différenciations sociales et spatiales," it describes the conditions of access to urban land especially for migrants, their abilities to benefit from the recent promotion of home-ownership in the post-apartheid context (do they manage to extend their houses and how? ), as well as the processes of community-building at stake in these housing programs.

This book therefore clearly fits into a tradition of research into land regularization and self-construction in a context of rapid urban growth, a shortage of housing, and massive poverty that confronts institutional, legal, and town-planning rules and constraints on urban dwellers' practices in developing cities. It is also quite rich in detailed maps (p. 18), although more analytical maps (as opposed to descriptive location maps) would have been welcome, and it contains a short glossary, a list of acronyms (useful for newcomers to Southern African urban issues), and a detailed list of references.

Secondly, the book strongly echoes the South African context (although this link is not emphasized by the author herself), not only because it directly reminds us of the impact of the South African colonization in Namibia (in the 1940s and 1950s), but also because it indirectly raises issues that the two countries share: the legacy of apartheid legacy in the cities, the hope and promises of the post-apartheid era (this research was done in the 1990s), the recourse to a systematic promotion of home-ownership for the poor in the peripheries, the development of squatting, and the difficulty of addressing ur-

ban sprawl and the growth of the “illegal city,” etc. The book therefore nourishes the essential scientific debates on post-apartheid urban dynamics in Southern Africa: the political versus technical dimension of the housing debate, the political discourses on the legacy of colonization and apartheid, and the call for drastic and spectacular change. However, the comparison is not developed explicitly: it is not the goal of this book, which has a much broader aim.

Thirdly, beyond this monographic interest, the book has a strong theoretical purpose. It uses Windhoek as a case study to address the issue of urban changes at large. It focuses on the conditions of the production of new norms of urban governance. The author thus questions the mechanisms of change and of permanencies at the local scale (“le changement et l’invariant,” as she puts it). The book therefore seeks to “establish the basis for a systematic analysis of social and spatial change”: “the thesis is in line with the issue of post-apartheid social and spatial transformation. It focuses on the local scale and on the residential peripheries of the capital city, Windhoek” (p. 7).[3]

The peripheries of Windhoek and the rapid transformations induced by the decolonization process and the post-apartheid “transition” in Namibia (to refer to the lexis used in South Africa) constitute a very exciting case study from this point of view: the shift to a democratic society challenges the ability of public authorities to conceive a new way of managing the city while its relationship with the civic society is quickly changing.

The author explicitly resorts to a theoretical framework of analysis that she applies to interpret the changes she witnessed: the theory of regulation.[4] The systematic, and sometimes too mechanical nature of her approach, may be regretted (she refers, for instance, to “political determining processes,” which might be questioned—“des déterminants politiques,” p. 118); the same applies to her interest in global and systematic dynamics which are somehow inspired by a structuralist approach. Those who are interested in individual portraits, vivid and suggestive illustrative examples of residential or professional individual trajectories will not find them here, since the author has almost banished this approach although she conducted many interviews with residents that are presented as having mainly illustrative value (p. 233). This dimension may be lacking to some extent; nevertheless her ambitious theoretical project is quite innovative (especially for a French Ph.D. in geography).

This theoretical approach proves very valuable from

two points of view. First, it emphasizes the necessity of looking at the “periodization” of urban change (“une périodisation du changement,” p. 13) and of addressing the issue of the contrasted and sometimes conflicting or interlocking temporalities at stake in town-planning practice: the book juxtaposes the quick changes of citizens’ practices against the inertia of public action that has undertaken an in-depth and long reform process. It forces us to put urban dynamics into historical perspective, a necessity which is often neglected in geography, although it is hardly new.[5] Of course, in Southern Africa, it is hard to ignore this necessity: quick urban growth, the development of informal housing, as opposed to the formal townships of the apartheid era (dealt with in the introduction and in chapter 3, pp. 77-93) as well as drastic political changes force us to consider the temporalities at stake in the city. The book searches for historical “breaks” and shows that they did not always occur at the same time as political changes and at the same pace. For instance, the “institutionalization of the constraints”[6] and the roots of apartheid date back to 1912 and were initiated by the German colonial power before Namibia was colonized by South Africa (in 1915); likewise, resistance to segregation and relocation was strong up to 1959, etc. The book also shows that what remains untouched is at least as important as what has changed and that changes are often the condition of permanencies (as G. Tomasi di Lampedusa stated).[7]

Secondly, the resort to regulation theory forces us to consider urban change from the stakeholders’ point of view, whether public (the political and institutional dimension of urban change) or private (the NGOs and the urban city dwellers’ practices). It forces the investigation of the meaning of those categories of analysis, which is particularly well done as far as communities are concerned (chapter 9). However the private sector is rarely mentioned and the stress is put on the relationship between public stakeholders and civil society (this may be due to the nature of local governance in the mid-1990s).

However, one may regret that the interaction between those stakeholders and the way they inform each other in a dialectical manner are not always considered. For instance, the author refers to the households’ housing needs (“les besoins”), while this notion is highly questionable: both public and private offers have a strong impact on demand (this term would be more accurate); also, the author states that the administrative discourses are neutral (“neutres,” p. 152) while their so-called neutrality is ideologically constructed and meant to erase the political dimension of the housing issue. This is all the more

frustrating given that the book shows perfectly well how public action tries to catch up with urban dynamics that it cannot entirely control.

Moreover, it would have been interesting to investigate the origins and educational background of the administrative staff as well as its changes or inertia (the book gives us some clues but does not investigate this systematically). This might have led to interesting conclusions regarding the position of officials (at the national and local levels) in the political game and the connection between public, private, and civic spheres that are investigated separately here.

Finally, the book only accidentally refers to the international institutions (namely the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) although they played a key role in the definition of the new national housing policy in a country recently independent and opened to these influences. They contributed to the focus on homeownership and on the site-and-services formula (the author makes an allusion to Turner's influence on p. 168, but without connecting it to those international major stakeholders).

Yet, these are minor reservations. Two other aspects of the theoretical approach are more controversial and therefore foster a two-folded critique of the book. Firstly, the book lacks systematic critical analysis of regulation theory as far as its central concepts, its main conclusions, and its contribution, as opposed to that of the theory of governance, are concerned; secondly, it reactivates the epistemological debate about the relationship between field work and the theoretical dimension of research in geography.

This theoretical framework resorts to concepts or notions inspired by liberal discourse (at least from a lexical point of view) and which are never discussed in the book. They revolve around two axes: the idea of compromise, consensus, and negotiation; and that of "efficiency," which tends to "dim" the importance of political struggle and conflict behind the scenes. At the core of the theory is the notion of compromise ("compromis"), or social compromise ("compromise social") resulting from a negotiation process ("négociations"), ("un principe de négociation," p. 15), based on arrangements and on a "social contract." As Peyroux defines it, "the social compromise notion refers to political, economic, social and financial constraints social stakeholders have to consider and to the way they cope with them, adapting, adjusting themselves so as to 'reproduce themselves'—ensure their existence is not threatened, while addressing the needs and

the demand of the citizens" (p. 16). Similarly, the author talks of "the new and increasing contractual nature of the relationship between citizens and public powers" (p. 318).[8] Both formulas imply a satisfactory balance of all sides (public authorities and citizens), based on the idea that it is necessary to come to a compromise to "make things work." However, the "negotiation" involves stakeholders whose power and forces are unbalanced; the "negotiation" may be verbal or not, use different media, be peaceful or resort to more violent means, and finally, it may not be a negotiation at all between equally powerful pacific stakeholders; moreover the "compromise" is not fair by nature, as the author demonstrates perfectly well in the third section (which deals with increasing social differentiation and segregation in the peripheries of Windhoek): it seems to be a selective compromise (not inclusive of all); only the privileged are in a position to exert community influence ("la pression sociale," p. 317), and not to remain mere "groups" or a "mish-mash" of residents, as shown in chapter 9. The "arrangements" ("les arrangements" in French) is a formula directly taken from English, but in French, the word does not have the same technical and neutral dimension; it has a totally different meaning, implying a peaceful settlement or an agreement. The words "cohabitation" and "entente" are also debatable.

Finally, is it possible to talk of a real "contract"? It does not refer to the Rousseauian vision of the contract since the political dimensions are never stressed while the regulation is defined as a purely social process ("processus social," p. 321): "the regulation is conceived here not as an unavoidable, automatic or structurally necessary process, but as the consequences of intentional social practices." [9] This is all the stranger as the subtitle of the book emphasizes the political dimension (referred to explicitly as "les logiques politiques des acteurs institutionnels," p. 317). It does not refer either to the legal meaning of the word "contract": what would be the contracting parties' resorts in the case of disagreement?

This compromise is supposed to foster "social efficiency" ("efficacité sociale," pp. 118 and 187), a notion that is questionable since the criteria of this "efficiency" are not defined while the contradictory and provocative content of the association of words is not explained and justified: it just seems to imply that a "compromise" that "works" is socially efficient.

In other words, one wonders why the lexis used by the regulation theorists and the relevance and meaning of the choice of words are not criticized by the author,

given what the Windhoek case teaches us. These expressions tend to imply a technical dimension of the changes (as opposed to a political one) and thus unfortunately weaken the main idea defended here: the emergence of new “norms” of governance (“des normes,” p. 12) as well as the conditions of the “reproduction” of the system, a Marxist terminology curiously used in an apolitical context here that diminishes the role of political forces and conflicts at stake.[10]

This perspective leads the author to examine the solutions adopted in Namibia to accommodate the poor, in quite a constructive perspective, without questioning a number of received ideas: Does the promotion of home ownership really lead to “an increased freedom and autonomy and to a wider choice for citizens at a more affordable cost” (p. 317), in “better conditions” (p. 319)? [11] If one refers to the apartheid era, the answer is certainly yes. However, this does not mean that home ownership is a real choice. This does not mean either that home ownership is a cheap and valuable option for the poor. The indirect cost of services is not really taken into consideration here, but the author shows “the deepening social inequalities and the emergence of new forms of socio-economic segregation” (p. 321).[12] Moreover, was the pragmatic choice made by public authorities (the adoption of the international and cheap formula of sites and services) the only solution and should it not be questioned from a political point of view?

This problem may also be linked to the direct “transplantation” of concepts forged and used by and for economists, and this at the macro-economic scale. Indeed, when the author applies them to local and urban dynamics, she is forced to consider political forces present in a specific territory and the balance of power between them: this draws us back to the concept of urban governance—why is the “old” “urban governance” approach invalid and why does the author need to resort to regulation theory to analyze changes in the city? What does the concept of regulation bring to the debate? To what extent does it explain these changes better than the concept of changing urban governance? What, if any, is the relation between the “regulation framework” and the “governance” approach?

Regulation theory might indeed prove essential and complementary to the governance framework of analysis, but this is never discussed here. The concept of governance is not at the core of the debate (and never defined) and it is used in a very restrictive way: the author states that she wants to study the “articulation entre un

type de gouvernance, un contexte institutionnel et des compromis sociaux” (p. 15). She thus rejects a large and inclusive definition of governance (including its connection with urban temporalities) that would cover all these fields (see Patrick Le Galès’ definition).[13]

Indeed, the main contribution of regulation theory seems to be its capacity to address public action and citizens’ practices in their temporal dimension: their fluidity and their fragility in time (that the author did not have time to investigate the recent period (see *infra*), the fact that consensus may be only apparent and in fact quickly rejected, or the rapid adaptation of public authorities to the post-apartheid situation and their capacity to integrate new “norms” so rapidly, maybe because these norms had been in preparation for a long time. It would be fascinating to explore the concept of “principe de routine” that is largely used in this book along these lines.

This approach has a major epistemological consequence: instead of looking at Windhoek through the prism of regulation theory, the author could have proceeded all the way round (and the result would have been of course a totally different book); she could have used this case study to test the value of an abstract theory and its relevance in a specific context. This would have implied questioning this theoretical framework in the first place, which is not the case here, and may have forestalled the lexical problems mentioned above. However, the fact that the book raises such a methodological and quasi-epistemological issue (that of the link between the theory and the field work, the nature and the status of reality versus a theoretical construction) is, in itself, of great value: it questions the methodological approach of the French school of geography that favors in-depth field work applied to theoretical issues, rather than theoretical work disconnected from specific case studies and from the contextual dimension of the geographical approach. The very interesting typology that shows the complexity of the socioeconomic dynamics at work behind the “paysage” (a concept cherished by the French school of geography) (p. 277), reflects this tension and the fact that the author has hesitated between the two approaches.

Finally, the reader might be surprised to see that the field work was done almost ten years ago (the book itself is two years old and was published four years after the Ph.D. itself was defended), while it seeks to study the emergence of new norms of governance. One may wonder whether 1996-1999 was not too early to observe them and why the author has not updated the data and the analysis.

Indeed, she chose to provide us with a book that strictly reflects the work done in the late 1990s. This is disappointing since she had an opportunity to gather more institutional and political information— if incomplete—using electronic and Internet resources, since the main source of information, a field survey, could not be replicated.

This is all the more frustrating since 2000 was too early to make definitive conclusions about the importance of the changes observed: in South Africa for instance, the major political and economic shift took place in 1997-98 when the RDP strategy (redistribution and more social policy) was replaced by a liberal platform (along the lines of the GEAR), and it was only after Thabo Mbeki was elected in 1999 that this became clear. However, the book leaves a number of fascinating issues open for young researchers, which is a major contribution: for instance, does the social differentiation observed in the mid 1990s eventually lead to increased urban segregation?

For more recent information, one can refer to more recent work of E. Peyroux, but the author seems to have chosen to develop the comparative dimension of her research (she is mainly writing on South Africa at the moment).[14]

#### Notes

[1]. Elisabeth Peyroux, "Political Logic and Territorial Change in Windhoek (Namibia): The Case of the Low Income Peripheries," in *Proceedings of the International Symposium on Government, Governance and Urban Territories in Southern Africa*, held at the University of Zambia, Lusaka, 21-22 November 2001 (Paris: UNZA, University Paris X-Nanterre, 2002): 195-210; Elisabeth Peyroux, "Urban Growth and Housing Policies in Windhoek: The Gradual Change of a Post-Apartheid City," in *Contemporary Namibia: The First Landmarks of a Post-Apartheid Society*, ed. Ingolf Diener and Olivier Graefe (Windhoek: Gamsberg Mc Millan, 2001): 287-306.

[2]. The first Ph.D. on post-apartheid Namibia was defended in France by Olivier Graefe who also used this theoretical framework. Prior to this, pioneer work had been done in Namibia that is extensively referred to here, whether it resorts to the same theoretical framework (see for instance, Olivier Graefe, "Apartheid, municipalisation et régulation en Namibie," in *Petites et moyennes villes d'Afrique noire*, ed. Monique Bertrand and Alain Dubresson [Paris: Karthala, 1997]: 205-218; and Alain Dubresson and Olivier Graefe, "Décentralisation et dynamismes

urbains en Namibie. Vers des inégalités économiques croissantes?" in *La question urbaine en Afrique australe*, ed. Philippe Gervais-Lambony, Sylvie Jaglin and Alan Mabin [Paris: Karthala, 1999]: 101-123) or to others (see Peyroux's references to Ingolf Diener or Claude Meillassoux's work, both inspired by dialectical materialism and analyzing the link between a colonial authoritarian state, capitalism, and the resort to a system based on salaried employment, i.e., low salaries that satisfied capitalist firms, but forced the state to conceive an ambitious public low-cost housing policy). Between 1996-1999, the author took part in the "programme CAMPUS," directed by her Ph.D. supervisor, Alain Dubresson, that brought together French and Namibian researchers.

[3]. "Poser les bases d'une analyse systémique du changement social et spatial" (p. 13); "la thèse s'inscrit dans cette problématique du changement social et spatial post-apartheid. Elle se focalise sur l'échelon local en prenant pour objet d'étude les espaces résidentiels périphériques de la capitale, Windhoek" (p. 7). All translations are by the reviewer.

[4]. Robert Boyer and Yves Saillard Y., eds. *Théorie de la régulation. L'état des savoirs* (Paris: La Découverte, 2002).

[5]. Marcel Roncayolo, *La ville et ses territoires*, (Paris: Folio Gallimard, 1990); Marcel Roncayolo, "Conceptions, structures matérielles, pratiques. Réflexions autour du 'projet urbain,'" *Enquêtes, La ville des sciences sociales* 4 (1997): 59-68. (He also refers to negotiation.)

[6]. "L'institutionnalisation de la contrainte" (p. 32).

[7]. G. Tomasi di Lampedusa, *Il Gattopardo* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2002 [1957]).

[8]. "La notion de compromis social renvoie aux contraintes politiques, économiques, sociales et financières auxquelles les acteurs sociaux sont soumis et à la manière dont ils s'en accommodent pour assurer leur reproduction tout en répondant aux besoins et aux demandes des citoyens. Elle renvoie donc au processus d'adaptation constante des acteurs sociaux à la fois aux impératifs de leur reproduction économique et de leur légitimité politique"; "la contractualisation des relations entre citoyens et entre citoyens et pouvoirs."

[9]. "La régulation est entendue ici non comme un processus inévitable, automatique ou structurellement nécessaire, mais comme la conséquence de pratiques sociales intentionnelles" (p. 14).

[10]. “La fonctionnalité du mode de régulation se définit en fonction de sa capacité à reproduire les rapports sociaux et à piloter le processus d’accumulation, en corrigeant les déséquilibres créés en permanence, par sa dynamique endogène” (p. 14).

[11]. “Plus de liberté, plus d’autonomie, plus de choix aux citoyens et à un coût plus accessible.”

[12]. “L’amorce de nouvelles formes de ségrégation socio-économiques.”

[13]. Patrick Le Galès, *Le retour des villes européennes: sociétés urbaines, mondialisation, gouvernement et gouver-*

*nance* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2003).

[14]. Elisabeth Peyroux, “Espace et régulation: une approche des changements politique et socio-spatiaux à Windhoek (Namibie),” *L’Espace Géographique* 1 (2006): 14-29; “Innovation et régulation territoriale dans les périphéries de Windhoek (Namibie)” in *Re-compositions territoriales, confronter et innover, Actes des Rencontres franco-sud-africaines de l’innovation territoriale*, Avignon, Le Pradel, Grenoble, 22-28 janvier 2002, Paris, IRD, collection “Colloques et séminaires.” Available online at <http://iga.ujf-grenoble.fr/teo/Innovation/introduction.htm>.

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