

https://dspace.org/

City regeneration and the making of an urban experience : The Nelson Mandela bridge as sculpture

Stevens, Cheryl

2008-10-20T11:51:04Z
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/5768

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

ABSTRACT

"Nation building without city building is a senseless exercise"
- Tomlinson *et al* (eds.) 2003: x.

What is the nation in the 21st century and how is it represented in the urban built environment? This question underlies an anthropological investigation into the meanings of the Nelson Mandela Bridge project - a simulacrum for the making of a particular Johannesburg experience. The multi-million Rand fantasy of the urban imagineers showcases a post-apartheid inner city revival through the personification of a mayoral dream for a world-class city. The city's textured socio-cultural and political-economic urbanity, its haphazard mining town origins and the aggressive apartheid urban politics, filter into its post-apartheid urban reconfiguration. The artful juggling of socio-cultural, political and economic elements launches the project as physical and symbolic entry-point into a new urban and historical era – a new urban frontier.

The project's technological innovation and slick excesses mirrors 21st century capitalist thinking – a packaging of local experiences into a marketable landscape commodified for moneyed consumption and participation. The privatisation of public space through modes of urban gentrification elicits elitist urban engagement in a partitioned and generic urban space. The latter conflicts with the project's official branding as: "[being]'for the good of all'. This research interrogates the adaptation of international best practices, the machinations of trans-nationalism in setting up urban experiences that contest individual constitutional and democratic rights. Contrasted here are the un-narrated voices of the city's dark underbelly, the uncertainties of a marginalized majority struggling for a meagre existence in the inner-city in the face of the grand-scale urban regeneration project.