

A professor of sociology at the Open University in Milton Keynes, Sophie Watson has published widely on urban publics, public space and everyday life. Consequently, *City Water Matters* shines in the chapters on publics and the ways that water assembles them. Tracing urban publics through water fountains (chapter 2), swimming pools, lidos and ponds (chapter 6), and the River Thames (chapter 4), this is where the book makes a solid contribution to the debate on water cultures and water practices. Everyday life and public cultures seem key to the author's understanding of the urban. In Watson's words, 'the nature of public life and its particular blends of cultures, as ways of life and forms of an aesthetic expression, are defining elements that differentiate cities and give each one its distinctive atmosphere' (p. 22). The remaining chapters cover practices and materialities of water consumption (chapter 3) and bodily cleanliness (chapter 5), religious rituals (chapter 7), and water-related material artefacts (chapter 8).

It came as a bit of a surprise that the entire book is centred on London, with brief excursions into realms of the former British Empire, from Varanasi and Angkor Wat to Sydney's Bondi beach. Most of the other places visited throughout the book are arranged as vignettes adorning an album. This selection is simultaneously coherent and a little haphazard, as the underlying logic for selecting these 'other' watery places is not always clear. How does the Mission Brewery in San Diego, for instance, speak to London? Consequently, I feel the global perspectives could be both more relational and more specific. The section entitled 'Water tap, Africa' (p. 200) illustrates this point, in that it provides little context, sources or specifics. In a similar vein, generalizations such as 'the impossibilities of keeping clean in many parts of the Global South' (p. 131) sound a bit odd in a 2019 publication. Perhaps unintentionally, the author seems to indicate that such limitations are a thing of the past in the global North—a claim broadly contradicted by the literature on environmental justice and its interconnectedness with structural racism in the US and elsewhere. The 2014 water crisis in Flint, Michigan, where the city's predominantly black residents were exposed to heavily lead-contaminated tap water for an extended period of time is merely one of the more notorious examples.

For readers less familiar with the entangled style of assemblage writing, the meandering nature of the book might slightly hamper a smooth reading. As the author has it, the book is 'fluid—breaking out of traditional categories and exploring, in a serendipitous way, different aspects of water as it settles or is unsettled in cities' (p. 11). At times, however, the elements of urban water around which each chapter is organized were not easily discernible. A wide range of water-related literature is referenced, with an attempt to sketch out the field in its multiplicity in the introduction (chapter 1). Most significantly, some key works and perspectives as discussed in this journal, particularly with respect to the financialization and governance of water as well as water crises and citizenship, are left unmentioned.

To conclude, Sophie Watson's book is a good read on the ways that water assembles urban publics in London, with ponds, public fountains and the Thames at its heart. I would recommend this book to anyone interested in the specifics of British water cultures and the granular quality of London water matters, as well as to a broader academic audience engaged in water assemblages.

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Aidan Mosselson 2019: *Vernacular Regeneration: Low-income Housing, Private Policing, and Urban Transformation in Inner-city Johannesburg*. New York: Routledge

The steady accumulation of scholarly research and writing on Johannesburg after the end of apartheid has contributed to our understanding of cities that fall outside

the conventional rubric of 'global cities'. Aidan Mosselson's *Vernacular Regeneration* is a welcome addition to recent scholarly efforts to situate the study of Johannesburg within wider discussions and debates in global urban studies and the critical geographies literatures. Mosselson's study is grounded in (months-long) ethnographic observation, consisting of a combination of on-site investigations, interviews with key figures in real estate development, and an intimate knowledge of strategic locations.

While much has been written (sometimes superficially) about inner-city Johannesburg as a derelict environment and dangerous 'no-go' area peopled with criminals and foreign newcomers, little is understood about the processes of transformation and regeneration which have taken hold in distinct pockets. While a great deal of the scholarly literature on Johannesburg has focused on such spatial extremes as luxurious gated residential estates (on the one side) and informal squatter settlements (on the other), Mosselson takes as his point of departure the 'in-between, not-so-extreme spaces that also make up the city' (p. 4). It is out of this investigation of the mundane, ordinary spaces that he develops his views on 'vernacular regeneration' in inner-city Johannesburg. The strength of this book is how Mosselson tries to wrestle with and unpack the contradictions and ambiguities of transformation, regeneration and improvement tied to the provision of low-income housing in Johannesburg's inner city.

Mosselson advances an eclectic theoretical argument that arises inductively from an on-the-ground empirical investigation rather than originating from an *a priori* analytic framework. He correctly (in my judgement) points to the uncritical overuse of such concepts as neoliberalism, gentrification and revanchism as overarching, universalizing explanations for urban transformation in cities at the margins of modernity. In his view, depictions of urban governance in Johannesburg as 'neoliberal' 'fail to recognize the array of innovations that are simultaneously driving urban change' (p. 16). Similarly, in his view, the undue stress on revanchist policing in the inner city ignores how private security companies like the *Bad Boyz* (with a singularly 'bad' reputation) actually contribute to positive improvements. In constructing his argument, Mosselson distinguishes neoliberal urban governance (with its top-down stress on market-based entrepreneurialism) from 'developmental and transformative agendas' which focus on the provision of low-income housing in the inner city (p. 56). In recognizing the complexity and indeterminacy of the circumstances, he suggests that, in practice, these seemingly divergent agendas are entangled and imbricated (pp. 26, 56–57).

This much is not in dispute. By the 1990s, if not before, inner-city neighbourhoods of Johannesburg had fallen into an advanced state of disrepair. Taking advantage of opportunities for profitable investment, perhaps a dozen or more enterprising ('pioneering') real estate developers began acquiring abandoned and neglected buildings at low prices, retrofitting these properties with spartan facilities and making them available for rent to low-income inner-city residents. To securitize their buildings against crime, these private developers closed off access by installing floor-to-ceiling steel entry gates (with biometric fingerprint access controls), hired armed guards to monitor the premises, and meticulously screened potential occupants. Rules were strict. Non-payment of rent resulted in summary eviction without legal recourse.

How do we understand this process? Mosselson introduces the term 'vernacular regeneration' as a way of explaining market-driven (profit-seeking) approaches to the provision of low-income housing that were decidedly 'not a part of a relentless march toward global gentrification' (p. 62). He suggests that the narrow commercial interests of private property developers in providing low-income housing cut against the neoliberal agenda of gentrification and, hence, can be harnessed to the 'greater good' of the developmental agenda (p. 56). For Mosselson, even though this process is rooted in profit-making commercial enterprise, creating stable housing for low-income residents of the inner city is a commendable achievement in and of itself (*ibid.*).

Arguing about whether or not making ‘improvements’ by investing in low-income housing constitutes ‘gentrification’ is a rather fruitless exercise that revolves around the definitions of our terms of reference. For Mosselson, gentrification is ‘bad’, yet in lauding the process of ‘vernacular regeneration’ Mosselson too quickly (and sometimes cavalierly) overlooks its seamy side. He argues that, while they offer ‘peace of mind’ to residents, the draconian surveillance features of this commercially-driven property regime do indeed ‘infringe on rights and protections granted to tenants’ (pp. 28, 142, 146). In effect, he folds private profit-driven provision of low-income housing into the regeneration process; by making ‘improvements’, this ‘vernacular regeneration’ contributes to the developmental agenda (p. 83).

I believe that Mosselson has fallen into the trap of confusing outcome (better and improved housing for low-income residents) with motive (profit-making) and means (zero tolerance policing). For private real estate developers keen on fashioning profitable business enterprises, ‘cleaning up’ the inner city, building-by-building and street-by-street, is part of a wider strategy of creating conditions for stable profitable investment. Here and at other key junctures in *Vernacular Regeneration* Mosselson shows a tendency to frame his argument in terms of either/or rather than both/and. It is not a matter of *either* improvements *or* continued dereliction; both regeneration-with-improvements and revanchism-exclusion can operate in tandem (pp. 117, 142). Market-driven regeneration came hot on the heels of mass evictions of squatters who were forcibly driven out of the only shelter available to them close to opportunities for work.

Mosselson criticizes talk in the scholarly literature of ‘fortified enclaves’ and ‘private fiefdoms’ as ‘alarmist and drastic’ (p. 117). Yet in his descriptions of low-income housing accommodation as inner-city living arrangements he provides irrefutable evidence for the existence of conditions—i.e. highly securitized entry-gates (with biometric fingerprint codes); arbitrary rules for occupants of these private dwellings; and draconian eviction policies for non-payment of rent—that resemble nothing less than ‘fortified enclaves’ and ‘private fiefdoms’. These ‘rent factories’—as I have argued elsewhere—have become the mechanism for regeneration of the inner city.

In my view, two residential complexes in Johannesburg’s inner city embody and exemplify the features of fortified enclaves. The 54-storey cylindrical apartment complex called Ponte City is a highly securitized enclosed space. Correlatively, the seven-square-block residential complex known as Legae La Rona (‘our place’; mentioned but mislabelled in the text, p. 191)—the first Residential Improvement District in the inner city followed soon after by the eKhaya neighbourhood—was originally surrounded by a high fence with securitized entry-ways and four elevated guard towers staffed by private security operatives armed with rifles. To add to its security arsenal, the private owners have introduced thirteen CCTV cameras and an on-site armed reaction vehicle.

Mosselson focuses a great deal of attention on the private security company *Bad Boyz*, charged with protecting the eKhaya neighbourhood, a multi-block refurbished zone in Hillbrow. He suggests that much of the scholarly literature stresses the revanchist nature of private security while overlooking the more mundane, everyday forms of policing—like clean-up campaigns and social service work. Similarly, Mosselson acknowledges the voluntary street patrols which operate under the auspices of the Community Policy Forum (CPF) in the inner city, and the conduct of these voluntary patrols. The CPF patrollers regularly engage in random stop-and-frisk tactics, intimidation, and even physical assaults (I know about this from personal experience with CPF night-time patrols), all carried out in the name of the common good of ‘security’.

Mosselson claims that ‘there are more subtle, complex processes at work which combine to make these procedures and forms of policing *legitimate*’ (p. 96, my italics). Certainly, as he correctly points out, ordinary residents who are afraid of crime—women, shopkeepers and the elderly—tolerate and even welcome the extra-legal tactics of the CPF and the *Bad Boyz*. Like his defence of property developers who enrich themselves

through renting to vulnerable poor people in the inner city, Mosselson seems to suggest that the extra-legal, draconian policing results in greater security, physical improvement and eventually the wider regeneration of the inner city, and hence serves a 'higher good'. What is missing here is the acknowledgement of a fundamental truth: that Johannesburg's inner city is largely stitched together through violence, both structural and otherwise, whether inadvertent or deliberate.

Yet at the end of the day, *Vernacular Regeneration* is a welcome addition to the scholarship on Johannesburg. It fills a gap in the literature which typically treats the inner city as a sort of metaphor for all that has gone wrong with Johannesburg after the end of apartheid. Mosselson clearly demonstrates that regeneration of whatever kind is a messy, contradictory and morally ambiguous process.

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Maxim Trudolyubov 2018: *The Tragedy of Property: Private Life, Ownership and the Russian State*. Cambridge: Polity Press

Private property is one of the most painful issues in contemporary Russia. Decades after the formal reintroduction of a market economy following the collapse of the Soviet Union, property relations in the country are still crippled by imperfect legislation, selective law enforcement, and the attitudes of Russian citizens. This English translation of *The Tragedy of Property*, originally published in Russian, presents a wonderfully written in-depth exploration of these imperfections. It is also an ode to private property. Maxim Trudolyubov, a liberal journalist and scholar, wants the reader to believe that the key change Russia needs so it can finally prosper is the protection of private property and the development of a true sense of ownership among its citizens.

Trudolyubov mostly focuses on homeownership, with a few digressions to discuss other forms of property. The book is 'structured as a progress through an imaginary private home' (p. 6). First, the reader enters through a fence; an all-important element dividing the fragile security of a Russian home from the hostile and turbulent outside world. Next we explore 'the land the house is built on, and the issues of its security, price and the design to which it was built' (*ibid.*). The author then proceeds to talk about the history of private property, the specificity of property acquisition in the Russian imperial era, the socialist experiment and, finally, the transition to a market economy and its implications for the social and political life of the country.

Throughout the political upheavals and systemic changes, one element of the Russian landscape has remained constant: the fence. Chapter 2, 'The Fence: Russian Title', is one of the best chapters in the whole book. In Russian cities and towns, the omnipresence of fences is palpable, and security guards scrutinize everyone entering public offices, universities or residential buildings. Fences, Trudolyubov convincingly argues, 'are our constant, and clearly an outward manifestation of some internal need that none of the forms of government has been able to satisfy' (p. 27)—that is, the longing for privacy. Russian citizens were deprived of privacy for decades, if not centuries, made vulnerable and insecure, cramped in communal apartments with strangers, and exposed to the all-pervading eye of the state. After the collapse of socialism, Russians embraced private life and expelled from their worldviews anything remotely resembling collectivity or public interest.

Property in Russia was never truly private, Trudolyubov contends. It was always conditional on service to the regime, whether the monarchy or the Communist Party. The housing policies of Soviet leaders Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev—involving extensive housing construction and the provision of separate apartments for families—marked the first steps towards more citizen autonomy and property-like relations. These steps led Soviet citizens to believe that housing was a right: