Book Reviews

London: Routledge.
338 pp. £85.00 hardback; £27.55 paperback
ISBN 978 0 415 36593 hardback;
978 0 415 36555 paperback

The South African artist Rodney Place has argued that the stringent discipline of Calvinism was probably born of having to deal, on a daily basis, with threatening natural phenomena—initially erecting dykes against the North Sea and then taming the ‘vast and alien African interior’ into which the Voortrekkers trekked from the 1830s. The task of maintaining this cohesion as Volk against potentially erasing forces has, he argues, required new adversaries, even where these have been more contrived than real. In this vein, the ‘Native’—not in the sense of having autochthonic claims to the land, but instead in the sense of being a part of raw nature—was constructed as the illegitimate adversary and one that would require the construction of “a landscape of dykes, social containments in which there was little space to move and everything had its place” (Place, 2006[AQ1]). This locates the subject matter of The Frightened Land, both in respect of the focus on the Afrikaner production of rural landscape following the Great Trek and on the production of the urban landscape following ‘Die Tweede Trek’ (the Second Trek) into the cities from the early 20th century.

Jennifer Beningfield, I suspect, would prefer the metaphor of the laager instead of the dyke, or perhaps even ‘laager mentality’; a term that was used some time back to articulate what those of a Foucaultian–Deleuzian persuasion would nowadays term a thoroughly disciplinary diagram of power (Davis, 1977; Vatcher, 1965). Indeed, the diagram of the laager—the closed circular formation of ox-wagons used by Voortrekkers when drawing-up battle formation—does, when extrapolated to multiple scales, seem to have been the pre-eminent (spatial) diagram for dealing with threatening forces throughout White South African history—the company garden and fort established in 1652; Andries Pretorious’ laager at the battle of Blood River in 1838; the enclosed townships, bachelor compounds and Bantustans under apartheid rule; the gated fortress communities of today; and, as David Bunn has argued, the monuments built during National Party rule which “almost demand gatherings and enclosure rather than simple access from a passing gaze” (Bunn, 1999[AQ2]). Beningfield adeptly captures central aspects of continuity across this historical span, not only in terms of the laager as diagram—although with the spatial inversion from the enclosed (company) garden to the enclosed or ‘corralled’ (African) wilderness—but also more explicitly in the sense that both the rural (as ‘Veld’) and the urban (as an extension of ‘Veld’) represented landscapes offering potential redemption for the Volk, but also possible erasure.

Beningfield thankfully approaches this era not so much by way of yet another political economy analysis of the laws promulgated to draw lines around and keep everyone in their place, but more so in terms of the discursive and representational imagery that drew from mythologised events and which strengthened a normalising Afrikaner narrative that politically naturalised exactly whose place was to be exactly where. Indeed, in relation to Rodney

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Place’s further claim that “Calvinist heaven was wrestled down to earth for nearly fifty years” for the duration of National Party rule, Beningfield’s study can be said essentially to constitute an analysis of the political and representational repertoires that were mobilised in wrestling down and territorialising this dream (Place, 2006[AQ3]. Here, it seems not coincidental that Ndebele (1986) has earlier cast the Boer in the image of ‘the massive wrestler’).

Beningfield’s chief contribution, but also a source of weakness in the study (see later), is her use of a wide spectrum of material (Afrikaner and Black South African poetry and prose, maps, aerial photos, magazines, memorabilia, etc.). She examines, on the one hand, the production, manifestations, political agency and strong-points of this Afrikaner narrative (with the Great Trek as the primogenitor and the Voortrekker monument as paramount iconography); and, on the other hand, the imagery of the Black South African counter-narrative that sought to undermine, critique or simply ignore the foundational claims of this narrative and its associated landscape imagery.

The focus in parts 1 and 2 concerns the cultivation of the two thematic landscapes—or ‘dreamscapes’—of ‘Veld’ and ‘Farm’. These two concepts in a sense came to anchor this ‘heaven’ to the earth through claims of origin-signs and civilised productivity in a wilderness that had erstwhile rejected or erased sedentarising inscription. As Coetzee (2002) had argued elsewhere, early Afrikaans poetry (in the German Romantic tradition) sought to establish evidence of a natural bond between Volk and land in order to naturalise possession. Beningfield draws from this poetry, especially founding fathers such as Jan Celliers and du Toit, not only to excavate the lodestars of this narrative but also to analyse what she sees as the critical importance of the politically motivated institutionalisation of Afrikaans as the autochthonous language that could authentically speak the land. Raising the status of Afrikaans from kitchen language (‘kombuistaal’) to one with autochthonic muscle, it was thought, would resolve the age-old problem of the disjuncture between a European aesthetic and an African subject. Here, Beningfield argues for the importance both of the representational transformation of a barren wilderness into a clear image of the knowable ‘Veld’ (part 1) and, in the context of the ‘Farm’ (part 2), of the mythological significance of the Boer (farmer) for having indelibly penetrated and fertilised Mother Earth where ‘native’ efforts had been unproductive and easily erased. Thus, Afrikaans poetry as penetrative pen, and Boer farmer as fertilising naturmens, came to represent the conduit and the champion of a normalising narrative (even for urban dwellers) that politically motivated the erasure of counter-claims to the land by the ‘native’.

In part 3 (‘Native Lands’) Beningfield endeavours to show how Afrikaner nationalism sought to resolve the central contradiction in the normalising narrative—i.e. the undeniable pre-existence of Other speaking and acting bodies. This contradiction, she argues, was essentially approached by the discursive, representational and spatial production of the native tribal subject (elsewhere termed ‘the invention of tradition’; see Vail, 1989). Here was a political strategy of making all Africans tribal in order to invoke a mythical charter for segregationist policy in both rural and urban areas. Beningfield examines various tactics designed to achieve this end including the mythologisation of the iconography of the rounded hut, the naturalisation of the process of labour migrancy and the projection of tribal lands as safe homelands. While she adeptly and intriguingly teases out the intricacies involved in this audacious political balancing act of making all Africans traditional but not autochthonic, there are weaknesses here. First, she misses the role of anthropology, particularly that influenced by German academia, as a more or less unwitting aide-de-camp in facilitating segregationist policy (see Pugach, 2004). Secondly, reference could have been made to...
the ‘native problem’ and the detrivalisation debate on the wider colonial stage, about which this part of *The Frightened Land* is so undoubtedly concerned. Further, her correct critique of essentialist notions of the ‘tribe’ is weakened by her often rather loose use of the term.

This study insightfully makes evident how the Afrikaner narrative was unable indelibly to inscribe itself into the land in either the rural or urban context; even when wagon-wheels were rolled through wet cement in order to inscribe them and the Great Trek into the ‘national’ conscience or, in the context of the urban sphere (the focus of part 4), when a bulldozed Sophiatown continued to ‘speak back’ and inhibit the new White neighbourhood of Triomf from taking root. Indeed, as Beningfield tellingly relates, the narrative was inevitably unable to betray, not only because ‘Other’ practice refused to be ‘Other’, but also as a result of self-betrayal. Just as the claims of cohesive ‘tribal lands’ were betrayed by the impossibility of being able to represent cartographically the Bantustans as territorially discrete entities, so did the dense and sophisticated urbanity of areas such as District Six betray the state-projected imagery of a frozen tribalism. Concerning self-betrayal, Beningfield shows how even the Voortrekker Monument—the supreme iconographic statement of Afrikaner power—betrayed the narrative of Afrikaner as autochthon by revealing both Black African and European antecedents (Zulu spears and a European style of siting and design). One could add, however, that having antecedents does not necessarily render something as purely imitative, a point upon which Jennifer Robinson (2005), for example, has recently made compelling arguments.

A central theme or tactic of the counter-narrative that Beningfield makes explicit, both during and after *apartheid*, is the attempted retrieval of that which was erased. She raises interesting examples of how opposition journalism sought to make *apartheid* censure manifest by publishing newsprint ridden with yawning spaces, and of Black poetry such as that penned by Mongane Wally Serote, which sought to convey geographies of disenfranchisement, particularly the erasure of Blacks from the White city. Beningfield herself endeavours to conduct her own analytical recovery by reproducing aerial photos in order to recover the density of information ‘discarded, neglected or uncharted’ in maps from the *apartheid* era, principally from the urban context. However, the lack of any methodical analysis of these photographs means that any retrieval is, at best, superficial. One could also debate the utility of this exercise in the absence of other methods that could, to cite from Albie Sachs’ foreword in this book, tap into the vast treasure-house of popular memory that by its very nature articulates itself in a multitude of diverse idioms. A researcher must of course delimit a study, but one is left with the feeling that not tapping into such material means that the examples raised in the book do tend to reinforce Ndebele’s argument that South African writing has tended to suffer from an overdimensioned penchant for the spectacular.

In part 5, she more convincingly examines the beginnings of a dual process of decolonisation and erasure of the landscape of *apartheid* and the recovery of that which was erased during *apartheid*, not so much in the material sense, but in the recovery of vital and deeper layers of landscape meaning over and above the visual. Here she raises the question of whether “landscape [is] a valid means to conceptualise the cultural and social meaning of the land and its representation in South Africa?” I think her Cosgrove-inspired analysis suggests the affirmative, but my lingering impression from a close reading of Beningfield’s highly recommendable study foregrounds a space-inspired conceptual vocabulary—a would-be Holy space (the Calvinist ‘heaven’) being inevitably undermined by Holey Space (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Indeed, one is left with the impression of the South African urban and rural landscape as a ‘Swiss cheese’ shot through with holes after decades of being dug, bored through, mined, displaced or
built-over in the effort either to win economic gains from, establish autochthonous rights to, or to effect the racial segregation of the land. Now that the formerly restricted Black bodies are not, in the words of Lewis Nkosi (1972), limited to only ‘temporary surfacings’, Beningfield seems correct to ask to what extent the representations of this undermined land(cape) will continue to speak back.

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References

[AQ6]


Development beyond Neoliberalism?
Governance, Poverty Reduction and Political Economy
David Craig and Doug Porter, 2006
London: Routledge
340 pp. £90.00 hardback; £24.99 paperback
ISBN 0 415 31959 5 hardback;
0 415 31960 9 paperback

The nomination and subsequent appointment of Paul Wolfowitz for World Bank CEO represented something of a prophecy for our times. The cronyism of the Bush administration helps to explain how he got the nomination. He also had impeccable ‘neo-con’ credentials, which were politically necessary for him to capture the position. However, these alone were not enough to ready him for the job, nor, perhaps, to secure his appointment. It may have been his former job as chief architect for the Iraq war and its reconstruction that prepared him most for his tenure as the world’s chief development officer. Indeed, one might argue that anointing Wolfowitz as the Bank’s Chief was as much a result of fortuitous historical circumstances as anything else, which is why his appointment could be viewed as prophetic. This is because the ‘development agenda’, whether cast in terms of colonial empires, the Marshall Plan or neo-liberalism, has historically required global powers to act tactically to ensure territorial security, institutional legitimacy and economic growth. Given the ideology and practice of the current ‘development’ agenda, which is to promote decentralised technical assistance to impoverished people so that they can establish markets and empower themselves, Wolfowitz could not have been a better fit. He was a man for the times. Or was he?

In their book Development beyond Neoliberalism? David Craig and Doug Porter carefully craft a thesis that seeks to explain the concomitant social changes that accompany shifts in development policy. The book is both conceptually engaging and empirically rigorous. A strength of the book is the obvious close connection the authors have to international
development policy (among other things Porter is an analyst at the Asian Development Bank). Divided into two parts, part 1 of the book focuses on the conceptual argument, while part 2 focuses on particular case studies that effectively draw out the conceptual themes presented in part 1. The authors chose the cases purposefully. While in some studies this could be a limitation, here it is not. These cases both exemplify the ‘inclusive’ neo-liberal development approach that has emerged in poverty reduction programmes and capture its different geographical manifestations through examples of implementation. For example, the authors show empirically that embedded political economic structures and territorial cultures influence policy outcomes. Yet, according to the authors, regardless of how these practices articulate with embedded cultural politics, the overall success of any ‘reform’ is connected to the success of market–society relations. For Craig and Porter, herein lies the rub: the current approach to poverty reduction is losing legitimacy and political support, and will, at some point, need to evolve and re-embed itself. How do they get here?

Craig and Porter argue in Polyanian terms that development has historically been about the establishment and re-establishment of hegemonic notions of society–market relationships. Drawing from Polyan, they argue that development policy and practice cannot exist for any length of time without destroying a society’s human and natural substance. The problem is that markets and societies do not move along in tandem, but in fits and starts, unevenly. As a result, development officials must constantly work to re-embed markets and market relations in areas that have broken free, intentionally or unintentionally, from the institutions established by previous development policy. As an ensemble of market–society relationships starts to fail, a Polyanian ‘double movement’ occurs; when markets break free of social constraint, elites seek to resecure and sustain them through a reactionary movement. Whether it was Rostow, McNamara, the so-called Washington consensus or the architects’ ‘neo-liberal inclusive governance’, each of these phases of development seeks to account for and resolve contradictions in market-society relationships. Ironically, each successive round of development ‘theory’ resulted in the ability of powerful elite governments to extract increasingly more rent from the countries they were ‘assisting’.

To reach a better understanding of this process for development, the authors provide a historical analysis, using their ‘retrospectroscope’ to examine the history of development policy from the time of British colonialism up to the current iteration of neo-liberalism. The chapter argues that key tenets of liberalism—the benefits of markets, universal law and the moral imperative of the individual—are at the core of all recent Western development policy. The struggle, however, has been to re-embed those values after they have failed under previous policies. Chapter 2 engages topics of institutional design, failure and reformulation. Chapters 3 and 4 describe the challenges to government and the genealogy of governance. More specifically, the authors describe how a new ideology emerged in the 1990s and 2000s that shifted responsibility from the government to ‘get development right’ to the individual. The shift from state responsibility to the responsibility of the individual was a powerful one, “ideology is never so ideological as when it is seen as natural, consensual and merely a technical matter” (p. 63). Here, the privatisation of services and service delivery became the standard. NGOs and other charities became the service providers and the technical support specialists, rather than the state. ‘Universal law’ came from the international scale (through the Bank and its interests) with the establishment of development targets. Most profoundly, failure fell not on the state, but on individuals themselves. Under this approach, local people were given the training to develop local (and territorial) markets and the benevolent cast of national and international actors would set development targets for them to meet. Ironically, failure was defined as market malfunction, rules of exchange and
the like. The Bank, then, once the face of development failure, devolved development and responsibility to local institutions and actors and thus sought to protect itself from liability.

After part 2, which details four excellent case studies, too detailed to introduce here the authors turn to putting this analysis to work. In the final chapter, they ask the question: if the ‘inclusive’ neo-liberal model is undergoing a Polynesian double movement, what’s next and what is possible? With their theoretical frame in place and the evidence from the detailed case studies, Craig and Porter offer several scenarios that could follow from the current failure of ‘inclusive’ neo-liberalism. What will the current coterie élitists do in reaction to the failing institutions, legitimacy and increasing security issues that result from failing development policies? The authors provide several considered scenarios. Most importantly, the authors extend the findings of their research to suggest ways forward. For critical geographers and others interested in development, the conclusions, in the abstract, will not be surprising. They are about heterodox knowledges, territorial capacity and place-based constraints. While underdeveloped in the book, the specifics of what Craig and Porter offer are well-grounded in their argument as well as their cases.

This well-written book would be a useful stand-alone text for advanced undergraduates or a companion volume for graduate students. Students interested in development from disciplines such as geography, anthropology, sociology or international studies would find this volume useful.

Reflecting back on Wolfowitz: was he the ‘right man’ or not? Clearly, for the authors (and this reviewer) he was not. However, when Wolfowitz was seconded to the Bank by the Bush administration, the first movement of Polynesian’s account of social change was arguably underway. Had he managed not to die by the sword, he may have been able to leverage his development experience from Iraq (for example, security, institutional failure and political legitimacy) to frame the next neo-conservative reaction to the global development crisis as the world’s chief development officer. Historically, development has shown that there is little reason to be optimistic. Maybe Wolfowitz’s departure will be prophetic in other ways.

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The Earthscan Reader in Rural–urban Linkages
Celia Tacoli (Ed.), 2006
London: Earthscan
329 pp. £80.00 hardback; £22.95 paperback
ISBN 978 1 84407 315 3 hardback;
978 1 84407 316 5 paperback

Early development theory emphasised the spatial nature of development, creating models of dual economies, cores and peripheries, urban hierarchies, transport networks or mercantile models. As a result, development research and intervention tended to be carried out in separate urban and rural areas. A recent World Development paper set out to bring this work, at least in the case of sub-Saharan Africa, up to the 21st century by focusing on the links between industrial and agricultural labour (Tiffen, 2003). More empirical work has produced a series of findings that have prompted researchers and donors to question this dichotomous conceptualisation (discussed further in Lynch, 2005). Work is beginning to develop new conceptualisations of the blurred edges of cities and the activities that cross the rural–urban divide, for example, rural non-farm employment (Bryceson, 2002), urban agriculture (Mougeot, 2005) and densification of rural areas (see for example, Qadeer (2000) on ‘ruralopolis’).

As a consequence of these developments, international donors and bilateral agencies have begun initiatives that are bringing their urban and rural departments together (for example, DFID Urban Rural Change Team, UNDP Rural Urban Partnership Programme, OECD’s Club du Sahel ECOLOC Programme).
In parallel, researchers are also beginning to concentrate on the frontiers of the urban and the rural. An excellent example is the five-country programme of research led by the International Institute for Environment and Development and summarised by Tacoli (2002). Tacoli’s most recent substantial publication, *The Earthscan Reader in Rural–Urban Linkages*, draws on this body of work, but provides a broader context, including a reprint of Tiffen (2003).

This book is divided into five main parts, the introduction in which the editor sets out the broader context and the rationale for the selection, together with a chapter from David Satterthwaite on the rural–urban divide at the level of the small urban centre and the large rural settlement. Part 2 focuses on transformations in livelihoods, with contributions from Jonathan Baker’s work in Tanzania, Jonathan Rigg’s work in south-east Asia and Cecilia Tacoli and a team of researchers reporting on a collaborative and comparative study in Mali, Nigeria and Tanzania. Part 3 focuses on policies in relation to rural–urban linkage, or as Tacoli entitles it: “Policies that address, ignore or misunderstand rural–urban linkages”. This part includes Mary Tiffen’s comprehensive discussion of rural-to-urban transitions in Africa published in *World Development*, Mike Douglass discussing rural–urban hierarchies in Indonesia, Satterthwaite and Tacoli again on small and intermediate centres and, finally, Kirkby, Bradbury and Shen on the same subject specifically in China. Part 4 focuses on mobility and migration, drawing on work in Mexico City, Botswana and India. The final part focuses on the issues beyond the city, in the peri-urban area and on the environmental issues. The best-known of this work is certainly Rees’ ecological footprints; however, Gordon McGranahan’s discussion of environmental burdens is also a very important and influential set of ideas. In addition, there is work by a group of Mexican researchers working on Mexico City and Philip Kelly’s fascinating study of politics in rural–urban relations.

This approach is interesting and the content provides a good range of higher-order synthesising material that gives a global perspective and case study material that provide a down-to-earth perspective so easy to lose when approaching a subject like this that has a global dimension.

The book provides very useful selection of further reading and sources of information including not only reading material, but websites and useful organisations. The rise of the reader is a modern publishing phenomenon as publishers ask academics to identify key reading material for students of a subject. Earthscan has around 18 readers. My experience as a user of these readers is that they can be very variable. They provide a good basis for students new to the subject, but they can be dogged by the editor’s preoccupations or particular take on the subject. *The Earthscan Reader in Rural–Urban Linkages* is one such item. However, Cecilia Tacoli is well placed to make the selection, as she has headed the rural–urban linkages programme of research at the International Institute for Environment and Development. Around 7 of the 15 chapters are from the journal *Environment and Urbanisation*, another IIED publication. However, the selection is informative and provides an excellent sample of the breadth and complexity of this rapidly developing theme. Although there is considerable breadth, the title of the book does not suggest that there will be a focus on the world’s poorest countries. This is unfortunate as there is also a parallel growing interest among academics and practitioners in the advanced economies.

This is a useful book that will provide a very good introduction to this field of research and development intervention. I believe that this book will prove useful to students, researchers and practitioners with an interest in the interdependence of the rural and the urban in development across the world’s lower-income countries.

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Cities, Nationalism and Democratization

Scott A. Bollens, 2007

London: Routledge

283 pp. £80.00 hardback; no price given, e-book

ISBN 978 0415 41947 5 hardback;
978 0203 96293 0 e-book

In this volume, Scott Bollens sets himself the objective of using the urban arena as a ‘lens’ through which to gauge the effectiveness of urban policy as part of sub-national peace building and the accommodation of inter-group differences. He focuses on cities that are ‘contested’—that is, they are characterised by deep-rooted nationalistic group conflicts that challenge their very political and social foundations. Thus, although at times cities may seem to be mere pawns in larger ethno-national games, Bollens explores the possibility that they can be more than this by contributing significantly to conflict resolution or at least to moves towards some degree of peace building.

A key concept deployed in Bollens’ explorations is that of ‘urbanism’. By this, he means a diverse and broad set of urban policy and governance attributes including both interventions by public authorities into the built and social landscapes of cities (what cities do) and the institutional forms and organizational processes of city governance (how cities are organised) (p. 16f).

Having explored these issues in Belfast, Jerusalem and Johannesburg in the 1990s, he here presents a further set of cities—Barcelona and the Basque Country cities in Spain and Sarajevo and Mostar in Bosnia. Each of the urban contexts is examined by first providing a sketch of the state-wide context of their recent history and then by exploring each city’s detailed experience.

Bollens most positive case is that of Barcelona. Though he sees that there were many aspects of that city that predisposed it to be ‘polarised’—different ethnic groups, different histories and political aspirations—this did not happen. Rather, he records the transformative powers of urbanism, with planning providing a focus for the development of a consensus amongst otherwise competing groups. In many ways, Bollens finds the Barcelona experience to be an uplifting one.

Turning to Sarajevo, he sees a city emerging from all-out war, a war that transformed an ethnically varied urban area into one characterised by ethnic homogenisation, this being a product of the ethnic resorting of populations combined with the well-intentioned but deeply flawed interventions of the international community (the Dayton Accord). He claims that Sarajevo has been ‘misplaced’ in Bosnia’s post-war political geography, thus undermining the city’s possibilities as a multicultural area in an otherwise fragmented state, and as a positive model for Bosnia’s future. Thus ‘urbanism’ in Sarajevo has been greatly constrained by international dictat and by ethnonational population transfers (at times, ‘ethnic cleansing’).

The third case study examines the major urban centres of the Basque Country—Bilbao, San Sebastian and Vitoria. Here, Bollens finds “urban dynamism amidst demographic disability” (p. 152). Thus, much urban revitalisation has been achieved alongside hardened political positions and nationalism.
Nonetheless, Bollens concludes that urbanism, and its required give-and-take between different political interests seeking mutual gains, has the possibility of providing testing-grounds for compromises that may over time move society forward on broader, non-urban issues.

Finally Mostar: here Bollens finds that urbanism has not contributed towards the resolution of wider conflicts. Rather, the urban processes of governance and physical reconstruction have been captured and manipulated by ethno-national interests. Bluntly put by the author “planning and urbanism have disintegrated into absurd conditions of parallelism” (p. 183). The Dayton Accord has had to accommodate war-imposed ethnic territoriality. Bollens is deeply pessimistic about Mostar, only tentatively holding out the hope that the recent (2004) imposition by the international community of a unitary city government structure may create the opportunity for ‘urbanism’ to make a positive contribution towards a multiethnic city which in turn may provide a model for Bosnia as a whole.

Cities, Nationalism and Democratization concludes by summarising the experiences reviewed in the four case study cities (or group of cities in the instance of the Basque Country) and then by offering a number of overarching statements. These provide pointers to the possibilities for ‘urbanism’ to impact positively on situations of national and ethnic conflict. Bollens’ conclusion is that cities can contribute to the effective accommodation of group differences and to societal democratisation processes, but that this is critically dependent on the larger context of societal stability or conflict. He notes that cities are frequently microcosms of larger encompassing conflicts, while also having the capacity to devise urban modes and strategies that can complement and help to formulate and actualise larger political accords.

Focusing specifically on city building, planning and urban design principles, Bollens sets out five key objectives—seek flexibility and porosity of urban form, engage in planning that fairly balances the needs of all the city’s communities (‘equity planning’), be sensitive to existing ethnic neighbourhoods as ‘home-lands’, promote and protect public space and, finally, diffuse grass-roots peace building from the city to other urban areas, to state governments and indeed to international organisations.

Cities, Nationalism and Democratization is a considerable tour de force. Building on his earlier work on Belfast, Jerusalem and Johannesburg, Scott Bollens offers a deeply founded analysis of the role of cities in ethno-nationally fraught environments. His research technique, based primarily on 109 face-to-face interviews with political leaders, planners, architects, community representatives and academics (see Bollens 2007, p. 5), provides a wide range of insights which he skillfully deploys. He draws many useful lessons from his research. He enthuses over Barcelona, is moderately favourable in his view of the Basque Country cities (particularly Bilbao), finds Sarajevo a somewhat frustrating set of ‘what might have been’ circumstances and despairs over Mostar with its disastrous combination of ethno-national and international dynamics.

Clearly, the right kind of urbanism can make a very positive contribution to the amelioration (or even resolution) of state-level ethno-national conflicts. However, in the wrong circumstances, this process can be greatly weakened or even crushed. Urbanism can create and reinforce positive dynamics where the broader state political circumstances are not too fraught, but it seems pretty ineffectual where conflict is deeply engrained and particularly where it has been expressed in all-out warfare.

There is a bit of a chicken-and-egg situation here. Does dynamic urbanism impact positively on encompassing regions and states, or is it only where there is a relatively benign conflict environment in the first place that the city can perform its ameliorative role with any degree of success? At times, Bollens enthuses over the positive role of cities—most evident with Barcelona. To be fair, he is much more circumspect, indeed downbeat, in his analyses of Sarajevo and Mostar. Nonetheless, he tends to see the positive roles (actual or potential) of
urbanism throughout his analysis. At times, one feels that his obvious enthusiasm for the positive urban role somewhat colours his conclusions.

Overall, this book is an important read for all urbanists, but in particular for those working in cities characterised by varying degrees of nationalist and ethnic conflict. It sensitises the reader to the positive contributions that urbanists can make to peace building across society. As Scott Bollens himself concludes “through our shaping of the city, we construct the contours of multinational democracy” (p. 251).

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Reference

Energy Metropolis: An Environmental History of Houston and the Gulf Coast
Martin V. Melosi and Joseph A. Pratt (Eds), 2007
Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press
344 pp. £39.15 hardback; £18.00 paperback
ISBN 978 0 8229 4335 8 hardback; 978 0 8229 5963 2 paperback

The concept of this book is quite an important one: to use Houston as an example of the environmental effects of not only the consumption of fossil fuels, as many previous works on urban growth and suburban sprawl have done, but also of the production of those fuels. As the centre of US petroleum exploration and production, first directly through extraction and later through refining and associated service-sector industries, Houston is an important case study. That said, this book suffers from the common criticism of an edited volume: the chapters are of uneven quality and are not tied together in a meaningful way. Each of the three parts—Energy and environment, Growth of the metropolitan region, and Environmental activism at the grassroots—have their own short introduction, which means that the book’s introduction makes no attempt at summarising the contents. On the other hand, the introduction is perhaps the strongest part of the book, outlining its exploration of “the intersection of energy, environment, and urbanisation” (p. 3). Patterns of resource use as well as air and water pollution are contingent on physical and human geography, making Houston a distinct case from more well-studied cities such as Los Angeles. In particular, the city’s monomaniacal focus on growth has led to the neglect of its physical environment—at least on the part of civic and business leaders, if not on the part of citizens. In more recent years, the initial attempts to clean up the city’s emissions and waste have been motivated by post-Fordist concerns over aesthetics and quality of life more than any environmental motivations, except for the environmental justice movement which appears to have had more of a material impact outside Houston than here in its birthplace.

Part 1, Energy and environment, includes a good history of the oil industry in the Houston region and some of its environmental impacts; a history of the Houston Ship Channel and what could be described as its landscape of sacrifice; a history of ozone and smog production and the relatively weak attempts at regulating it; and a chapter on indoor climate control with the unsurprising conclusion that the well-to-do of Houston have air conditioned homes and cars, while many of the poorer inner-city residents do not. All of these chapters have in common the theme of unequal distribution of costs and benefits throughout the region persisting across time, as well as the short-term and long-term mobility of some populations enabling them to avoid environmental degradation and/or discomfort. In some cases, however, the overall contributions are rather small; when “a central point of this chapter” is that “the Houston metropolitan
area could have made more progress over time” (p. 77), one cannot help but wonder how this can not be said of any metropolitan region, much less Houston.

Part 2 explores the growth of the region through its infrastructure: sewer and water, highways and open space. The first two chapters discuss the relationship between the original city and its pre-WWII infrastructure, how the post-war boom led to suddenly increased demands on that infrastructure and how a regional perspective was needed at least in terms of providing pipelines and freeways, if not in any other form of planning. Some reference to cities outside Houston would have been useful to see how typical this case is of larger national trends. The chapter on deforestation in the regional watershed argues convincingly that forested space should be considered as infrastructure rather than aesthetics (as it is today) because of its functions in flood protection and reducing the urban heat island. Finally, a chapter comparing Houston’s rise to Galveston’s fall makes the case that it was not solely the 1901 hurricane that was the cause, but a series of factors in the natural and built environments. This was the strongest chapter of the book by far, incorporating a broad national context as well as the specific environmental characteristics of Galveston and continuing the analysis up to impacts of present-day economic and social trends.

Part 3 builds on Houston’s heritage as a centre of environmental justice activism, making the important point that, if the history of environmentalism in this city seems to be weak, that is because African American environmental struggles have not been taken into account. The Northwood Manor landfill siting case is taken on in two chapters, one a memoir-style by Robert Bullard, one a demonstration of the role African American women have played throughout the 20th-century urban environmental movement. The third chapter argues, somewhat in contrast, that Houston’s environmental movement has always depended on strongly motivated middle- to upper-class individuals to preserve open space and fight for environmental legislation. A final chapter on the fight over a Superfund site and the eventual demolition and resettlement of the adjacent neighbourhood argues that “It came down to a conflict between those who believe a risk existed and those who did not” (p. 273), an excellent but missed opportunity to tap into the existing literature on the ‘risk society’ and the construction of urban hazards.

As is fairly typical of a volume based on conference papers, there is no concluding chapter, leaving the reader to pull together the threads of these disparate papers. For the most part, they are detailed and well-researched case studies with seemingly little effort put into painting a broader picture. Although the book starts out strong by arguing for Houston as an unusual case in its production and consumption of energy, many of the chapters make arguments that could be made of any major US city—but without a national context provided, it is hard to know for sure. On a more minor note, there is a frustrating shortage of maps for readers not familiar with the region, although the descriptions of where Houston and its physical environment fit into southeast Texas are generally quite complete. Those criticisms aside, the book does make a significant contribution in describing the history of one of the long-neglected American cities within the academic literature, which is particularly relevant because of its role in producing as well as consuming fossil fuels.

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Inclusive Urban Design: Streets for Life
Elizabeth Burton and Lynne Mitchell, 2006
Oxford: Elsevier
176 pp. £24.99 paperback
ISBN 9 78 0 75 066458 5 paperback

In the foreword to Inclusive Urban Design, Mary Marshall describes this book as “a brave and rare attempt” to address the dearth of research on people with dementia’s experiences of and
needs when negotiating their local streets. Brave and rare not only in its engagement with a much-neglected area of study, but also in its utility to a number of audiences and in its commitment to making these audiences understand the daily issues to be faced by our ageing population. The authors provide a book which will not only be of interest to academics in a number of disciplines, but which is accessible to students and offers practitioners in urban design key principles translated into practical proposals underpinned by a thorough explanation as to how the authors came to their conclusions.

The book is divided into three sections, each of which can ‘stand alone’. Part 1 comprises three chapters detailing the research on which the book is based (Wellbeing in sustainable environments (WISE) research); the policy context (the book focuses on England) and the implications of an increasing ageing population throughout the minority world. Chapter 3 provides us with an insight into the experiences of older people, both with and without dementia, as they negotiate external environments. This chapter accentuates the point that older people lead their lives in much the same ways that younger adults do and are required to complete the same mundane tasks which we all must do to live: go to the shops, buy food, post a letter and be part of a community through being out in its streets.

One small criticism is that the first few chapters do not engage with theoretical concerns in as much detail as I would have liked. For example, a more thorough critique of ageing would have enabled the reader to consider dominant constructions of old age and how this in turn shapes expectations about what older people can do in external environments. However, in saying this, for those of us who engage critically with the social model of disability, it provides a lucid account of the very real and challenging aspects of what Thomas (1999) refers to as ‘impairment effects’. The book offers the reader an opportunity to consider the fluidity of impairment effects and disabling barriers in producing an inaccessible environment. For example, in chapter 4, the authors discuss the importance of familiarity in enabling older people to negotiate the environment. They provide a clear account of how the movement through space of individuals with dementia is determined by the external environment, by recognition of, for example, architectural features such as a post box which need to be constantly reinforced due to short-term memory problems (p. 54). Set routes may be utilised which contain such features, resulting in the neighbourhood ‘shrinking’ for these participants.

In the second section of the book, six key design principles, derived from the research with older people are discussed, with a chapter devoted to each. Every chapter begins with a clear definition of each principle—familiarity, legibility, distinctiveness, accessibility, comfort and safety—Its importance for older people and how it can be achieved in an urban environment. In reading through the six key design principles, one is struck by how so many of the principles are of benefit not only to older people but to a diverse range of people: those with mobility impairments, sensory impairments and parents with young children. The main design features and recommendations for each design principle are neatly summarised at the end of each chapter, which will appeal to students and practitioners alike.

Part 3 of the book is comprised of two chapters, each with rather different objectives. Chapter 10 provides a useful overview of the 65 recommendations from the previous six chapters and distils these into 17 recommendations, with a clear explanation for the order of importance. Recognising that urban designers only occasionally have a blank canvas to work on, the writers have produced two separate guidelines, one for new urban areas and one for existing urban areas. The chapter emphasises the way in which complex urban environments are produced by a diverse range of actors from policy-makers to sign-makers. It clearly delineates where and with whom responsibility lies in the application of the ‘streets for life’ recommendations. While
connections between the ‘streets for life’ approach and lifetime design guidance is emphasised, Burton and Mitchell acknowledge the competing demands facing urban designers such as conservation, environmental sustainability, aesthetics and costs (p. 148).

In the final chapter, the authors summarise what they perceive to be the limitations of their work, including the practical and cost implications of ‘streets for life’, the lack of discussion around green space and the possibility of conflict with the needs and requirements of other users of urban space. The authors make clear their commitment and enthusiasm to explore these issues through discussion of on-going research to expand upon the work detailed in the book such as Inclusive Design for Getting Outdoors-(I’DGO). In the final pages of the book, the authors reassert their belief that good urban design is “fundamental to [older people’s] survival, self worth and self esteem” (p. 160) and issue a challenge to urban designers to engage with the needs of all users in the planning and design of urban space. This is an important book which situates older people in the urban environment and opens up debates around multiple and shifting uses of public and private spaces in our towns and cities.

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Reference