

BOOK REVIEWS

Review Essay—Gated Communities: Perspectives on Privatized Spaces

Georg Glasze, Chris Webster and Klaus Frantz 2006: *Private Cities: Global and Local Perspectives*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Rowland Atkinson and Sarah Blandy 2006: *Gated Communities*. New York and London: Routledge.

Private Cities: Global and Local Perspectives (2006) and *Gated Communities* (2006) continue a trend in urban studies that focus on recent manifestations of these developments in a variety of global locales. As the editors of *Private Cities* note, 'there is hardly another form of urban development that has received so much public attention since the late 1990s as privately organized and secured housing developments' (Glasze *et al.*, 2006: 1). The two volumes are a fantastic resource for researchers interested in these contemporary topics and they provide robust survey material for courses focusing on this type of housing. They also evidence a number of trends that typify this area of scholarship, both positive and negative. The two books share many of the same authors, and many of the chapters are products of a series of conferences on private residence and gated communities first convened in Hamburg in 1999 and of meetings held since then in Mainz, Glasgow, Johannesburg and, most recently, in Santiago. Questions that researchers have posed explore the rationale of individuals who decide to live in these environments, the historical precedents of privatization, the structural conditions that enable the construction of gated communities and the socio-economic consequences of these privatized residential spaces. Whether private neighborhoods are good or bad is left to the speculation of both the authors and the readership.

The beginning of an interest in gated communities and private residence in academia is debated, but most look upon the publication of Blakely and Snyder's *Fortress America* (1997) as the first comprehensive analysis of gated communities. This publication also marks an agreed position of most that the phenomenon of localized private residence is a uniquely American invention that has diffused rapidly throughout the world, with global capital as the main vehicle. While the landmark survey study by Blakely and Snyder is a touchstone for most analyses of private residence, Teresa Caldeira's pioneering work in São Paulo, Brazil, on crime, fear and segregation (1996) is similarly noted as a principal study in the field. Besides serving as the first works of their kind on this particular urban phenomenon, both publications have also plotted trajectories for research that has followed in their wake. While Blakely and Snyder provide an omniscient viewpoint that surveys private residence from outside of the gates, Caldeira attempts to locate the rationale and culture of those that reside within them. This bifurcated perspective has marked studies of private residence ever since, and *Private Cities* and *Gated Communities* continue that trend.

Of the two volumes, *Private Cities* is the most comprehensive collection, as it deals with gated communities specifically but also with a number of related topics. The introduction to the book is an excellent guide through foundational questions surrounding privatized housing, including their rise as a result of the perception of growing criminality, the notion that they are class markers of prestige, the threat that

privatization places on conceptions of public space, and whether or not private neighborhoods are indeed an American invention. With this as a basis, the reader then looks to the chapters that follow to provide positions on whether privatized residences either emulate the rationalization of a 'culture of fear' or a 'culture of prestige'.

Evan McKenzie, one of several authors who contributed to both collections, wrote the first chapter of both books. McKenzie is well known as one of the central figures in the field and as one of the first academics to focus on homeowner associations as a research site. McKenzie does not solely focus on the gates that surround these enclosures, but on the economic and political context that enables their construction and viability. The rise in gated communities in the United States and throughout the world rests on an ideology of privatization that provides the impetus for any economic or political decision to construct them. As McKenzie notes, any perceived benefit of gated-community construction must be weighed against the concomitant increase in spatial segregation that results from their existence. The question is whether developers or residents ever take this into consideration when deciding to build or live within gated communities. He painstakingly details the means by which gated communities and their private governments are constructed, revealing that the very idea behind community associations is intrinsically antithetical to the supposed American belief in the sanctity of private property.

Next, Foldvary takes a rare holistically positive orientation towards private-residence development by addressing the simple reality that their mere existence demonstrates their economic viability. This is despite the fact that the majority of researchers hesitate to comment on the long-term effects of private-residence development, particularly the potentiality of residential and societal segregation that occurs from their construction. For Foldvary, resultant segregation is not the by-product of gated communities per se, but the failure of public government to provide adequate services. What he fails to address is the possibility of displacement that occurs from the development of private residence that happens in many nation-states where they are built. This is particularly true in the context of South Africa.

While many of the contributions discuss local rationalizations of either security or affluence that spur the creation of and residence within gated communities, perhaps no other nation-state has the socio-economic and political context of contemporary South Africa as a historical precedent. Jurgens and Landman attempt to discern whether or not fear and security are driving factors for gated-community residence, but they stretch further into theoretical positions of the spatial consequences of a new pluralistic post-apartheid society that private residences emulate or create. They build on the idea that gated communities are a response to post-apartheid social conditions, but they also assert that these new private neighborhoods may not only be ineffectual at countering a culture of fear, but that the new class fragmentation, as opposed to the precedent of racial segregation under apartheid, may have its own set of negative consequences altogether. These three contributions form a powerful triad within the collection to discuss the political, socio-economic and racial aspects of private residence.

Other contributions in *Private Cities* fulfill the promise of exploring the spread of the gated-community model in a variety of global locales, including Russia, China, New Zealand, Portugal, Spain and Lebanon. The reader should be conscious of not simply falling into the trap of reading the collected works as a globetrotting jaunt through its manifestations in different parts of the world. Many strains of research within the contributions are similar, principally emanating from the fascination of uniformity among residences no matter where they exist in the world and the various local histories of architecture and varying forms of security concerns. From these positions the authors attempt to explain the local structural conditions that create gated communities historically (Glasze), the specific architecture that potentially provides an allusion to European aristocracy for residents (Frantz), their position as 'predators' of public resources (Le Goix), as bastions for foreigners (Lentz), or as symbolic and literal barriers between classes within a given society (Janoschka and Borsdorf).

Problematically, what the majority of the studies also demonstrate is a continuing trend of focusing on these places from outside the gates, essentially, an 'outside-looking-in' perspective. Other than Setha Low's ethnography *Behind the Gates* (2003), rare is the study that emanates from fieldwork within gated communities, essentially, from the 'inside looking out' and possesses the capacity to gauge the cultural nuances of the actual inhabitants of these spaces. In her contribution to this collection, Setha Low goes beyond the dual rationales of either fear or prestige as a driving force for gated-community residence and begins to unearth the contradictions that exist within these places. Residents of gated communities are often looked upon as models of conformity owing to the fact that they have chosen a place to live that is not only uniform in appearance but is also governed by a set of by-laws that determine actual behavior. This assumption is often unquestioned and reflected in studies of private residence and naturally assumed to exist. Low's informants within a number of gated communities question the actual sustainability of their habitats. What Low also begins to detail, which has always been a suspicion amongst researchers, is that residents of gated communities are not 'automatons', but are actually resisting conformity by disregarding or outwardly disobeying restrictions and covenants placed upon them. With this contradiction in place evidenced by ethnographic research, Low ends by stating that no one theory can explain the emergence of gated communities and private government. Their existence and the various cultures that are products of them is more about local context, politics and the history of various communities. This grounded approach and focus on the local population within private-residence communities is sorely needed in the field.

Gated Communities focuses solely on gated forms of private residence. Like the other volume, this collection begins with the analysis of homeowner associations. McKenzie discusses the growing political dilemmas in 'Bonanza Village' from within the gated community as a focal point of research, as it was forcefully becoming a gated community in Las Vegas in order to fit into larger urban planning in America's fastest growing city. The interplay between newly formed gated-community homeowner associations as they are being created and local governments evidences the dilemmas and tensions that are rarely addressed in gated-community analysis, as most analysis occurs after the fact of their construction. This is picked up by Chen and Webster's contribution, as they reflect on the lack of homeowner association creation or involvement as the population of private residences increases. They identify key problems with homeowner associations in Taiwan specifically and provide some interesting suggestions on how to possibly make them more popular and efficient.

Other authors in the collection observe the role of gated communities in the polarization of space, as markers of social distinction, as a means of creating socially homogenous spaces and as a movement of urban resources into the control of already elite groups. As the editors note, this type of development has the potential to create a loss of social diversity, further social segregation, displace crime to 'softer targets' outside of the gates and exacerbate an already existent lack of services for the poor via the withdrawal of elite groups into enclosed spaces. Indeed, work published by Charlotte Lemanski on the effects of gated communities on those immediately outside their gates in Cape Town (2006) and Richard Ballard's conception of the 'semigration' of South African residents speak to these conclusions (2004).

Glasse highlights a number of economic approaches to the formation and persistence of gated-community development through club goods theory and the interplay between economic and political changes, usually seen as effects of globalization on the one hand and nationally or regionally differentiated governance patterns on the other hand. He raises the profound question of whether or not private neighborhoods create shareholder democracies that violate basic democratic principles. While he laments the trend of utilizing club goods theory to the neglect of a focus on the social construction of institutions within gated communities, the reader is left to ponder this latter research trajectory. To answer this, the reader can look to contributions by Thuillier and Roitman, who both focus on the development of gated communities in South America. Thuillier moves beyond a discourse of the fear and club goods theory models to explain how the new spatial layout of Buenos Aires, with the elite living on the outskirts of the city, represents a profound change in urban culture and residential mentality. He discusses the effects of gated communities on those immediately outside of their confines and presses the need for local governments to use legislation to maintain some semblance of control on this novel form of urbanization.

Roitman provides perhaps the most comprehensive approach to gated-community residence in her analysis of one enclave in Mendoza, Argentina. The causes for the gated-community phenomenon are divided between structural and social rationales and the continued interplay between them. Roitman attempts to understand the desires of the social actors involved in gated-community living by focusing both on those inside and outside the gates and the various perceptions each group has about themselves and the constructed other. The competing perceptions provide a robust understanding beyond the assumption that gated communities feed social segregation. Interview excerpts from her empirically grounded research with gated-community residents and their immediate neighbors speak directly to the framing devices the majority of gated-community researchers use, and provide the welcome voice of actual residents and their sentiments. The fact that Roitman also focuses on an 'intermediate city' rather than a large metropolitan area demonstrates how the phenomenon is present in many urban locales of different sizes.

Manzi and Smith-Bowers also pursue a qualitative approach in their comparative analysis of two case studies in the United Kingdom. They use the oft-quoted 'culture of fear' paradigm established by Glassner (1999) to establish the most relied-upon rationale for choosing gated-community residence. They then take this one step further by attempting to uncover the tensions among gated-community residents and therefore contradict the commonly held assumption that residents are a homogenous social group. In tandem with Roitman and Low's piece, one can establish a course of study that forwards the importance of ascertaining the viewpoints of residents as primary in gated-community research.

Although both collections assert the importance of local perspectives, readers may find themselves yearning for more of the local voice rather than the consistent survey analysis of private residences. Thus, the reader may continually ask why individuals choose to live in these spaces, whereas the majority of researchers themselves are more focused on where they occur and what structural conditions allow their construction. One of the persistent questions constantly discussed in this field is about the reasons why individuals actually want to live in these places. This question essentially goes unanswered in the majority of work on private residence. This may reflect a personal bias towards ethnography, but as a researcher in

this field one has a pretty thorough knowledge of the various means by which private residence is constructed. As the editors of *Gated Communities* note, 'the significance of gated communities lies less in their number and more in what they say about a wider bundle of social pressures now directing where and how people live' (Atkinson and Blandy, 2006: xiv). It is now time to move beyond the fascination of their mere existence and delve further into the cultures of gated communities and how they are changing over time. I look forward to further work by this prolific group of scholars and hope that they continue to focus on the locales that they have already addressed so comprehensively in terms of social justice and the perspectives of the residents who have chosen to live in these privatized spaces.

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