Check for updates

ones I know well enough to comment on. He has visited a number of the cities, and sometimes interjects personal observations. Most importantly, he has the right style. Take Paris. He features it in the period 1830–1914, speaking of city-planning, tourism, *flânerie* and city walks, and uses it as a springboard to speak about the urban experience of women, making his case through perceptive interpretations of several Impressionist paintings, including Manet's *Corner of a Café-Concert*. Here, and in many other contexts, it is Wilson's ability to distil, juxtapose and communicate the elements of a general, as well as of a particular, urban culture that justifies his strategy: he can keep several balls in the air.

Yes, there are limitations. There is a western bias, although less marked than in Mumford's or Hall's works. Wilson is also stronger on the cultural and social aspects of cities than the economic. Trade and ports, certainly, get their due, but he has little to say about agglomeration economies or the role of cities as places of technical, as opposed to cultural, innovation. In this regard, *Metropolis* reflects the current state of our subfield, in which economic history plays little part. Too bad. But this is a fine piece of work. Wilson is clearly addressing a general, not a specialist audience. To that end, *Metropolis* entertains as well as informs. In the process, it could also inspire readers, including students looking for a field of study, to pay more attention to urban history, or indeed current urban issues. It could even profitably be read by jaundiced senior scholars such as myself. After all, I was intrigued to learn that, around 2100 BC, it was a week-long fling with Shamat that persuaded Enkidu to abandon his wilderness utopia for the uncertain pleasures of Uruk. It is an old story, well told.

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Nabaparna Ghosh, *A Hygienic City-Nation: Space, Community and Everyday Life in Colonial Calcutta*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. 236pp. 13 figures. 4 tables. Bibliography. $100.00 hbk.
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The story of colonial urbanism has traditionally been understood through the prism of spectacular built forms and highly racialized and segregated spaces. Influenced by the spatial turn, which sought to unpack the social processes behind the production of colonial-built environments, a recent strand of historiography has questioned the coherence of colonial impulses and shifted focus away from viewing cities solely as vehicles for economic and political domination. While building on this rich scholarship, the book under review has presented a substantial methodological departure from existing accounts that focused primarily on those spaces that had a direct political and commercial bearing on the expansion of colonialism in Calcutta. By paying attention to the less monumental spaces, Nabaparna Ghosh has ferreted out fascinating historical materials on Calcutta's neighbourhoods, or *paras*, to enhance our understanding of the indigenous perspectives on

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the colonial-built environment. In addition, her work foregrounds the resilience of vernacular settlements, a point that is often ignored within a field saturated with accounts of colonial bureaucratic procedures that rationalized and disciplined space.

In thinking about the *para* as a historical, spatial and symbolic category constituted of kinship ties, Ghosh demonstrates how these neighbourhoods have been shaped and reshaped, built and rebuilt and experienced in response to highly racialized and exclusionary discourses on sanitation and public health, colonial legal and propertied regimes, emergent discourses on urban governance drawn from mythology and scriptures that recast the natives into rights bearing Hindu citizens, and an anti-colonial cultural nationalism fostered by the *bhadralok* or the urban professional elites. By doing so, Ghosh resists essentializing the *para* into an atavistic and unchanging category waiting to be reformulated by colonial modernity, and instead unearths the governmental, discursive, legal, cultural and political processes that constantly regulated and produced these neighbourhoods.

The first chapter follows a familiar line of argument on hygiene in talking about how the enforcement of civic improvements and the articulation of British ethnomedical discourses on sanitation, such as in official colonial reports and photographs, served to inferiorize native bodies and neighbourhoods as receptacles of filth. Unlike many of the existing studies that have stressed the steady acculturation and appropriation of the liberal language of improvement by the native propertied elites, Ghosh has unearthed archival sources on contestations about colonial building policies and urban improvements that were not necessarily linked to the secular terrain of the municipalities. Instead, she shows how the upper-caste propertied men, in their routine negotiations with the state, fashioned themselves as *nagarpotis* entrusted with the moral authority to uphold the Hindu spatial order.

In the second chapter, she provides yet another instance of reification of social identities, when upper-caste propertied men threatened with evictions by the Calcutta Improvement Trusts invoked religious vocabularies to transform the *paras* into exclusive Hindu spaces. A scrutiny of the legal correspondence, petitions, municipal and property records reveals the creative use of Hindu religious texts by the Marwari and Bengali elites to claim ownership rights over properties that were deemed *debutter* or inalienable. We can observe a further consolidation of Hindu religious identities in the 1920s, when the Swarajists (a group that had branched out of the Indian National Congress) together with the *bhadraloks* assumed control of the municipal administration to launch a brand of cultural nationalism that fused health campaigns, fitness training and festivals in the *paras* with anti-colonial agitations. Here, instead of solely focusing on the native negotiations with the colonial state in the municipalities, she shifts attention to the merchant-led village settlements of the thirteenth century, which had segued into the colonial urban configuration as autonomous spaces. Known for being distinctive Hindu built environments, these settlements, now spearheaded by a new class of urban professionals, had by the last decades of the nineteenth century emerged as an equally important site for articulating a language of resistance against colonial rule.

In contrast to the conventional received wisdom about English education and the rise of nationalism, Ghosh argues that the everyday *bhadralok*-led organization of cultural and civic activities in the *paras* was later appropriated by the dominant

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nationalist political currents to craft a Hindu language of public health and cultural nationalism. However, as shown in her final chapter, these urban upper-caste mediations on hygiene were primarily intended to graft the same set of racialized practices, which had hardened and codified native bodies and spaces as being inherently insanitary and threatening, on to the *bustees* or migrant workers' tenements populated with non-Bengali non-Hindu and low-caste dwellers. By locating filth in low casteness, this mimetic project ensured the continued dominance of the caste elites as reformers and vanguards of the anti-untouchability, as well as the anti-colonial movements as well informed of much of the later day caste and class spatial polarization and marginalization of informal settlements in post-colonial Calcutta.

While the author has offered a highly textured and fine grained analysis of how the *para* elites led hygienic restructuring of space through mediations with the colonial state, more information on how these discourses circulated among different sections of the urban populace within the *para* would have revealed the multiple tensions that went into the making of these spaces. Except for highlighting a few instances of dissonance within the hegemonic conceptions of Hindu hygiene from the Dalits and Muslim city dwellers, the *paras* come across as texts that could be 'read' to understand either the colonial impulses or the upper-caste attempts to create new forms of Hindu modernities. Despite these minor gaps, this book, which is also beautifully illustrated with vernacular cartoons, photographs and maps, has set the stage for incorporating the histories of marginal spaces within the extant scholarship on colonial-built environments.

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Annalise J.K. DeVries, *Maadi: The Making and Unmaking of a Suburb*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2021. 264pp. £39.95 hbk.
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The rise of suburbs was a key dynamic of the twentieth century and speaks to a number of fields of research that have recently flourished, from histories of real estate to social segregation. Not least for these reasons, Annalise J.K. DeVries' study is a very welcome contribution that zooms in on a prominent case in the Middle East during the first half of the twentieth century: the suburb of Maadi, south of Cairo. DeVries' book adds to scholarship about other suburbs of the Egyptian capital in the same period, such as Heliopolis and Helwan.[1] The author opens the book with the historical context from which Maadi emerged. She describes the Capitulations and Mixed Courts that endowed European and North American nationals in Egypt with economic and legal privileges. After 1882, the British occupation further fuelled migration and the flow of capital from Europe

[1]R. Ilbert, *Héliopolis, Le Caire, 1905–1922: Genèse d'une ville* (Paris, 1981); 'Abd al-Munsif Salim Najm, *Hulwan Madinat al-Qusur wa-l-Sarayat: Dirasa Athariyya Watha'iqiyya li-'Umran al-Madina* (Cairo, 2006).

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