contributed to the creation of a different Jerusalem, one defined by bypass roads and a gigantic separation wall. These developments had profoundly negative effects on people’s daily lives.

The history of Jerusalem is certainly unique, but the dynamics traced in this book also resonate with the politics of architecture in other parts of the world. Current discussions around President Donald Trump’s plans to build a wall on the U.S.—Mexico border, for instance, testify to the broader relevance of Nitzan-Shiftan’s historical research. How can we shape ethnically diverse communities that are unified but not unilaterally so? How can we build cities that are safe but also more just and humane?

Nitzan-Shiftan addresses these queries in enlightening ways, although she admits to being unable to provide answers for all of them. She concludes the book by characterizing Jerusalem as an agonistic democracy. Relying on Chantal Mouffe’s theories, she identifies Jerusalem as a place that continues to contain and manage conflict rather than resolve it. This conclusion is insightful, but regrettably brief.

Through meticulous analysis of varied projects, plans, and buildings, and the brilliant use of critical theory, Nitzan-Shiftan masterfully demonstrates how the profession of architecture can actively shape political discourse rather than simply reflect or respond to it. Such an approach is important for architectural history. However, in placing emphasis on buildings’ materiality and on accounts of professional builders, Nitzan-Shiftan leaves out the voices of ordinary people who lived in these spaces or were barred from using them. There are a few exceptions, such as her discussion of popular demonstrations against new settlements in the early 1970s (87–89), but she relies primarily on knowledge and information produced by elites and experts. Even when nonarchitects are brought in, they are politicians, journalists, and major religious figures, such as the archbishop of Jerusalem. Additional images of resident displacements and building demolitions—such as the ones shown of New Ramot (97) and the Mughrabee Quarter (234–35), or those analyzed by scholars like Ariella Azoulay—would have been helpful. Similarly absent are the stories of those ordinary Jews who have been ghettoized in suburban neighborhoods because of security concerns. What is more, the book contributes, inadvertently perhaps, to the idea that Palestinians have not attempted to engage as professionals. What contributions have Palestinians made, apart from their militant defiance and their engagement in preservation activities? (This topic is briefly addressed at the book’s end [29]). To what extent have their lack of participation been a means of protesting Israel’s legitimacy (207), and to what degree has it been a result of their systematic expulsion by powerful agents? Answering these questions may go beyond the scope of this already lengthy book, but an attempt to do so could have generated a more nuanced narrative.

However, for highlighting the role of architecture with sophistication—and for her erudite writing and years of meticulous archival research—Nitzan-Shiftan should be given much credit. Her book shows how Zionist ideologies, intensified during the 1960s and 1970s through Jerusalem’s rising built environment, reverberate into the current moment. They do this amid renewed conflicts prompted by the current U.S. president’s recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and his plans to build a new embassy there.

Portions of the research presented have appeared in previous publications, but this beautifully illustrated book also offers copious new material, including extensive interviews with experts and previously unpublished archival documents. A comprehensive bibliography is sorely missing, but the index and notes are nothing short of outstanding. It is worth noting that the book’s publication coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of Israel’s appropriation of East Jerusalem, and that its cover is animated by the colors of the Israeli flag, an allusion to the nationalist projects discussed within. For a less knowledgeable audience, the publication date and choice of cover might project the very nationalist paradoxes that Nitzan-Shiftan criticizes. These issues do not, however, detract from the overall quality of the project. Along with the author, the University of Minnesota Press must be commended for producing yet another outstanding work of architectural history.

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Notes

Jennifer Mack
The Construction of Equality: Syriac Immigration and the Swedish City
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017, 344 pp., 7 maps, 78 b/w illus. $30 (paper), ISBN 9780816698714

At a moment when divisive and xenophobic rhetoric about immigrants is on the rise, “place histories” can illuminate migrants’ critical place-making practices and contextualize their complex relationships with their new homes as well as the ones they left behind. In The Construction of Equality: Syriac Immigration and the Swedish City, Jennifer Mack presents a social, spatial, and urban history of Södertälje, a city on the periphery of Stockholm, over the past fifty years. Drawing on a range of methodologies, Mack guides the reader through empirically rich case studies while also demonstrating how ethnographic research can inform historical analysis and contribute to the telling of vital architectural and urban stories.

In large part, this book explores how Syriac spatial and building practices have disrupted Swedish architectural and planning philosophies based on the notion that formal homogeneity and uniformity promote social and economic equality. Mack also examines the assumption—made by many urban planners, politicians,
and citizens—that segregated immigrant neighborhoods in Sweden are a social problem. In response to this prevalent narrative, she explores the spatial richness of so-called segregated neighborhoods as well as the stories of individual Syriac migrants, who are often perceived as being part of a monolithic immigrant bloc. These histories illustrate how those on the margins produce “urban design from below” through repeated tactical and material interventions into local planning processes and uses of public and private spaces (17). According to Mack, “rather than urban anthropology,” hers is “an anthropologist of the urban,” one that creates a road map for studying a shifting material world so as to better understand migrants’ social and architectural histories (11).

Sweden’s unique political history makes it a particularly interesting place in which to study migrant-initiated urban change. In twentieth-century Sweden, where spatial solutions to social problems were the norm, planners and architects exerted great influence over social policy. As planning processes were increasingly centralized and linked to governance, the idea of a classless society, or at least a society where class distinctions were not readily visible, drove design decisions. In 1965, the government launched the Million Program, the goal of which was to realize one million housing units for a population of eight million persons by 1974; the program was initiated as part of Sweden’s efforts to transform from a struggling Nordic country to a modern welfare state. The resulting, highly standardized mid- and high-rise towers were meant to foster social equity and cement best practices of citizenship. Ideologies of social equity dovetailed with Sweden’s humanitarian stance toward the world’s refugees.

Syriac Orthodox Christians fleeing religious persecution arrived in Sweden on what became known as the “First Plane” in 1967; by the mid-1970s, a steady stream of Syriac immigrants were entering Sweden from places like Iraq and Turkey. Unlike many refugees, the Syriacs claimed no single nation-state as their homeland or presumed place of future return. Unlike migrants who travel between home and host nations, the Syriacs had left homes to which they could not return. Upon arrival in Sweden, they were dispersed throughout the country as part of a policy intended to ensure their assimilation. They reconvened quickly, however, many of them in Million Program towers in Södertälje, a city whose current population is approximately 26 percent Syriac. For Syriac refugees, who came from a range of places, Södertälje became their global capital. Mack’s book tells the story of how and why that happened.

At first, Syriacs’ material intervention into Swedish urbanism, which Mack connects to the modernist Million Program housing initiative, was limited to modest renovations and the occupation of existing buildings. In the 1970s, industry and the local economy in Södertälje declined, resulting in the departure of many Finnish and Norwegian laborers. This created vacancies in Million Program homes that were filled by incoming Syriacs. Extended Syriac families often secured units near one another, and many began using shared interior stairwells as social spaces. These practices, along with the Syriacs’ use of public lawns for family picnics, alarmed local Swedes. Syriacs also formed social associations that gathered in public community centers and held religious services in Swedish Lutheran churches. As Syriac visibility increased, so did vocal anti-immigrant sentiment and action. 

Raggare—anti-immigrant youth gangs—clashed with Syriac youth, exposing Södertälje’s hardening spatial and social divisions. In order to continue holding events and providing services, Syriacs began buying and renovating existing buildings.

It was not until 1983 that Syriacs constructed their first large-scale, purpose-built church in Södertälje. While they could use Swedish churches, their liturgical needs and social practices were not readily adaptable to these, nor were existing structures able to accommodate the hundreds of Syriac congregants who wanted to attend services. The first Syriac-commissioned church, St. Afrem’s, designed by a Swedish architect, was given a discreet exterior that concealed a decorative interior—primarily the product of donated Syriac labor and craftsmanship.

After some fifty years of settlement in Sweden, Syriacs began to enact neighborhood-scale changes in Södertälje, erecting new houses in the Lina district, which came to be nicknamed Hollywood. Unlike the communal sites Syriacs had created, such as churches and soccer fields, the homes they built in Lina were intended to display “evidence of their hard-earned class journey over five decades” (173). Their stucco-clad, Mediterranean-style houses, with ornamentation and imported materials (e.g., limestone from Turkey), stood in sharp contrast to the standard wooden, gable-roofed cottages characteristic of most other domestic architecture in Sweden.

Mack ends her account of the Syriacs’ trajectory (from the occupation of existing high-rises to the construction of entirely new ethnic enclaves) with a discussion of the Swedish Standard—a building code developed by the Swedish Standards Institute that embodies an almost cultlike dedication to standardized building practices. As Syriac architects and designers began to receive commissions to build for their own community, and as Syriac families aspired to redo their homes’ interiors, they developed inventive ways to break from the Swedish model while still abiding by the rules. For example, the standard two-story maximum building height regulation fails to articulate a specific ceiling height; as a result, many Syriac homes have very high ceilings, something that Swedish planners find surprising and frustrating. Mack argues, however, that a “Syriac Standard” has also developed, in which the cultural and social mores of the Syriac community put “limits on material forms of expression within the group” (234).

Thus far, I have presented the book’s narrative as one aligning with the idea of a Syriac “urban design from below,” but Mack complicates and deepens our understanding of the risks and results of the Syriacs’ interventions with ethnographic evidence, integrating stories of material change with explanations of the spatial practices and politics thatenliven it. For example, her observation of and participation in a Syriac wedding allows her to describe how such an event became part of a “ritual infrastructure,” or a set of spatial practices that, “over time and with repetition,” has shaped Syriac urban life (136). Brides-to-be and their entourages perform highly choreographed rituals that engage the city’s barbershops, beauty salons, banquet halls, and streets, even as Syriacs enact and cement ideas about chastity, marriage, patriarchy, and intrafamilial hierarchy in urban space.
Using sources including online forums, interviews with professionals, newspapers, historic ordinances and close ethnographic observation, Mack illustrates the drama that material changes have inspired. For example, she outlines how Swedish planning ordinances sought to create a tightly regulated and homogeneous built environment. Planners and politicians working within these norms have claimed that Lina “is not Sweden” (219). From their point of view, standards produce “neighborhood harmony.” From the Syriac point of view, however, these standards are a “disciplinary imposition on creative freedom” (176). If Lina “is not Sweden,” then what is it?

This ambitious book tackles the rich complexity of Swedish urban planning and Syriac spatial practices, showing the impacts they have had on each other and tracing diasporic, minority-led, urban change. Were a follow-up volume to be written, some exploration of Swedes’ reactions to Syriac transformations and uses of the built environment (beyond those opinions expressed in online forums and newspapers, or those of planners or politicians) would be in order. Beyond anti-immigrant sentiment or critiques of Syriac’s “maximalist” ways, are some of the Swedes who make up the other 74 percent of Södertälje’s population rethinking their own practices and traditions in light of the Syriac approach to life? How does Syriac urban design from below compare with, for example, Arijit Sen’s ethnographic–architectural–historic analysis of Indians and Pakistanis in Chicago?1

As a reader, I am particularly curious about Syriac definitions of equality. Mack shows how the idea that Sweden is building a just and economically equitable society has become “reified,” and she notes that there are “rifts between the idealized models that majority Swedish architects and planners often still pursue and the new social realities that such professionals must increasingly contend with and accept” (212). Syriacs, thus, design their own “spaces and definitions of equality” (262). Throughout their fifty-some years of settlement in one of the world’s most distinctive sociospatial environments, how have Syriacs’ ideas of equality changed, and what is their conception of spatial equality? How do the views of equality among Syriacs currently living in Sweden differ from those of their counterparts thirty or forty years ago?

Mack brings Södertälje to life, showing it as the Syriac capital of the world. Difference is tolerated there so long as it remains marginal. However, increased visibility often leads to public and professional antagonism. The Construction of Equality lays the groundwork not only for a rethinking of planning practices that are no longer linked to social realities but also for a new focus on migrant populations’ own ideas of how, and for whom, the built environment should function. For those interested in how diasporic spaces are made, especially from the perspective of immigrants, Mack’s book is a must-read.

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Note


Florian Urban

The New Tenement: Residences in the Inner City since 1970

Abingdon, England: Routledge, 2018, 310 pp., 329 color illus. $59.95 (paper), ISBN 9781138224469

During the mid-twentieth century, a strong tendency toward state intervention in the urban built environment prevailed across northwestern Europe. This was channeled chiefly through the two linked mechanisms of city planning and social housing production. During the first three decades following World War II, dubbed les Trente Glorieuses in France, a modernist consensus favoring the opening out of congested cities, and the separating out of their different functions, was established. The most ubiquitous of these functions was mass housing, which in those decades was generally built according to modernist principles and mass-produced along “Fordist” lines. Individual nation-states and large cities drove these programs forward. Thus, far from being crushingly homogeneous, as later claimed by critics, postwar mass housing was bewilderingly diverse, both in its organization and in its built form. In Britain, for example, urban planning often took a radical, surgical approach, and mass housing was overwhelmingly built by municipalities; in Denmark, meanwhile, there was virtually no slum-clearance demolition, and social housing was decentralized by housing associations and cooperatives and built mainly on cities’ outskirts.

Beginning in the late 1960s and 1970s, any general consensus regarding social housing began to dissolve, as citizens and professionals became increasingly discontented with what they viewed as mass housing’s paternalism and disrespect of the once-despised nineteenth-century urban fabric, and architectural revulsion against its alienating sameness became widespread. New formulas of urban development now arose, claiming to be more variegated and place sensitive, more evocative of tradition. Architecturally, such developments usually appeared under the banner of postmodernism. Across northwestern Europe, this modern–traditional approach in planning and housing was encapsulated in a particular motif—the “new tenement,” an update of the traditional nineteenth-century apartment block for contemporary neoliberal purposes. For nearly half a century, this new tenement movement has proceeded apace, with the expansion of neoliberalism gradually sharpening through successive building cycles and the prevalent architectural styles evolving from decorative postmodernism to image-led neomodernism. The movement’s claims of place specificity and integral links to effective economic regeneration, however, have gone largely unchallenged, and extensive areas of redevelopment are assumed simply to have happened, ad hoc and, without connection to broader programs.

Florian Urban’s The New Tenement is the first book to challenge this complacent consensus, subjecting both the built forms and organizational frameworks of this middecade movement to critical and historical analysis. Urban demonstrates that the new tenements manifested unexpected patterns of local and regional diversity, not so much in their architectural styles or traditional planning concepts, but in their cultural and organizational frameworks—much as had earlier phases of the modernist movement. The book reflects the complexity of its subject matter with an appropriately complex layout, combining thematic chapters