

Delivery as Dispossession: Land Occupation and Eviction in the Postapartheid City. By Zachary Levenson. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022. Pp. xxxii+197. \$99.00 (cloth); \$27.95 (paper).

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Delivery as Dispossession: Land Occupation and Eviction in the Postapartheid City is a good book. It combines a strong theoretical argument with a deeply researched empirical foundation. Zachary Levenson takes the promise of the ANC-led political regime in the *postapartheid* period to deliver housing to those most in need as his historical point of departure. After 1994, the postapartheid political regime has provided millions of new houses to those without homes and has registered countless others on waiting lists. But the sheer scale of the demand for housing has far outstripped the capacity of housing officials to deliver, with the result that the housing backlog—those households in need of housing—has either remained constant or actually increased (p. xii). In the postapartheid imagination of the new ruling elite, those without housing are entitled to acquire a place to live, and summary evictions are not supposed to happen. Even though housing delivery has taken place at a steady pace, municipal governments have continued to routinely target “illegal” land occupations and to evict unwanted squatters. While postapartheid housing officials no longer articulate eviction and dispossession in racial terms as was the case under white minority rule, urban dwellers without legal rights to occupy land are regularly subjected to forced removals. Levenson seeks to explain why “a government that stakes its very legitimacy on reversing the damage wrought by centuries of *apartheid*, segregation, and colonialism evicts new land occupations and dispossesses residents on a regular basis” (p. xi).

Inspired by the work of Neil Smith (*The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* [Routledge, 1996]) on real estate capitalism and gentrification frontiers, Levenson began his research project with the assumption that “postapartheid evictions were part of a strategy of invisibilizing poverty so as to entice capital to invest in urban redevelopment” (p. 20). Yet in his empirical investigations, he arrived at results that seemed at odds with these conventional theoretical expectations. Levenson focused on two unauthorized land occupations (one at Kapteinsklip and the other at Sigalo) at the edge of Mitchell’s Plain—a “township” located on the southern periphery of Cape Town. *Delivery as Dispossession* is animated by a paradox: given the peculiar set of circumstances that accompanied these land seizures, the land occupiers at Kapteinsklip were not likely candidates for eviction (p. 9). Yet the judge ordered their removal. In contrast, the circumstances surrounding the land occupation at nearby Sigalo seem to suggest that the land occupiers certainly faced eviction. Yet the land occupation at Sigalo was tolerated. Why these contrasting cases? Answering this question forms the heart of *Delivery as Dispossession*.

In order to make sense of this differential pattern of evictions, Levenson undertook two theoretical moves. First, he breaks away from a conventional conception of the state “as a coherent institutional entity that simply enacts policies upon passive populations at will” (p. 164) and instead adopts a view of the state apparatuses as an arena of struggle in their own right. One can detect echoes of the thinking of Nico Poulantzas in Levenson’s analysis. Despite a few scant references, I think that Levenson misses the opportunity to critically engage with Poulantzas and his theory of the relative autonomy of the state.

Second, Levenson’s critical reading of Antonio Gramsci yields not an ossified, analytic distinction between “political society” and “civil society” as mutually exclusive terrains (as in Partha Chatterjee’s view), but a more fluid methodological distinction (p. 27). Whereas land occupiers in both Kapteinsklip and Sigalo articulated their political projects in civil society, they inevitably spilled over into the legal-institutional domain of political society. Impatient people routinely jump over existing housing waiting lists to engage in unauthorized land occupations. Yet state housing officials and the judiciary “see” these land occupations differently, gravitating between regarding some as legally tolerable actions by deserving populations in need of housing, and others as unruly threats to the orderly delivery of housing.

In challenging prevailing explanations in the scholarly literature, Levenson demonstrates how the different approaches to self-organization of the occupiers differentially effects the eviction outcomes. He borrows the distinction between a series (atomized individuals) and fused groups (united groups engaged in collective action) from Jean-Paul Sartre. He observes in his empirical research how land occupiers at Sigalo organized themselves into a coherent social movement with collective interest (pp. 74–75). When they joined forces to challenge the efforts of state officials to remove them, they paradoxically achieved a degree of legitimacy that advanced their cause. In the eyes of that state machinery intent on evicting them, they appeared as a coherent body (a *fused group* in Sartre’s formulation), a legible population. In contrast, land occupiers at Kapteinsklip adopted an individualizing approach, seeing themselves as atomized homeowners-in-the-making (p. 17), seeking to acquire land through private ownership. They failed to form a united body, fragmenting into distrustful, contending factions. Housing officials and the judicial apparatus reacted to this apparent disunity, regarding these land occupiers as undeserving opportunists, targets ripe for eviction. Enconced in the legal-institutional domain of the state administration, housing officials, the police, and the judiciary “see” unauthorized land occupations through the lens of moral judgement. In Levenson’s words, “occupiers are seen as constituting an underserving poor whose refusal to wait their turn impedes compliant citizens from receiving housing. Eviction, then, is understood as a means of preserving the impartiality of the waiting lists” (p. 66).

Levenson uses theory not as an abstract set of principles separate from the messiness of empirical realities but as a kind of useful toolbox from

which he takes ideas to frame his analysis. His theoretical approach is eclectic. There is an inherent danger with theoretical eclecticism: it can lead to the use of theory as window dressing or decoration that sounds nice but does not advance an argument. For sure, Levenson does not fall into this trap. He draws on the work of such well-known theoreticians as Jean-Paul Sartre, Antonio Gramsci, Stuart Hall, Pierre Bourdieu, and Michel Foucault, as well as Asef Bayat and Javier Auyero. In my judgment, Levenson unfortunately dismisses Mike Davis (*Planet of Slums* [Verso, 2006]) too quickly. While his treatment of specific conditions might be faulted for occasional unwarranted generalizations, Davis produced a magisterial analysis of the proliferation of slums on a global scale, including a scathing critique of the self-help, “bootstraps capitalism” fantasy of upliftment.

One cannot do justice to the intricate details of Levenson’s complex argument in a few short pages. Suffice it to say that Levenson uses his theoretical toolbox to construct a comparison of divergent outcomes. Levenson uses this comparative methodological approach to challenge deductive theorizing and its tendency to select on the dependent variable. Scholars like Howard Kimeldorf (*Reds or Rackets: The Making of Radical and Conservative Unions on the Waterfront* [University of California Press, 1992]), Mark Traugott (*Armies of the Poor: Determinants of Working-Class Participation in the Parisian Insurrection of June 1848* [Routledge, 2001]), and Jay MacLeod (*Ain’t No Makin’ It: Aspirations and Attainment in a Low-Income Neighborhood* [Routledge, 2009]) produced really good comparative analysis. I would add Levenson to this rarefied list.

Parks for Profit: Selling Nature in the City. By Kevin Loughran. New York: Columbia University Press, 2022. Pp. xiv + 271. \$120.00 (cloth); \$30.00 (paper).

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Rooted in debates around the privatization of public goods, green gentrification, and persistent urban inequality, Kevin Loughran’s *Parks for Profit* provides a nuanced and richly detailed historical account of the rise of post-industrial park spaces, including the High Line in New York City, the Bloomingdale Trail/606 in Chicago, and the Buffalo Bayou Park in Houston. The book includes extensive background information on each city and the development trajectory of each park site; Loughran pays particular attention to the broader economic, political, and racial tensions inherent in each of these cities.

Beginning in the 1990s, in an effort to both clean up disinvested post-industrial areas and attract a wealthier, creative class, elected officials focused on parks as new sites of neoliberal expansion. Throughout the book, Loughran focuses on the development of these parks into beautiful, pristine, and sterile places that sit on once “working landscapes” such as railways,