**Trying to stay local in Sydney's 'global arc': social housing tenant perspectives**

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**Abstract:** To become a ‘global city’ is nowadays an almost-ubiquitous aspiration among the world’s major metropolises. Generally, municipalities approach the ‘global city’ ambition by opening up real estate markets for global investment and large-scale development, and shifting towards a tourism and service-focused economy. But what does living in a ‘global’ city entail for those who are not connected in to global financial markets?

The low-income and vulnerable residents of inner cities around the world have been disproportionately affected by global city transformations—key examples are Delhi and Rio's efforts to transform for major international events and China’s rapid modernisation and urbanisation. In Sydney, inner-city public housing residents are aware that they, too, are seen as being in the way of the city’s transformation—an anachronism that must be cleared to make way for ‘globally oriented’ development. Situated within Sydney’s ‘global arc’—a corridor of the city targeted for economic and real estate development—the residents of the Waterloo public housing estate have found themselves to be in the sights of politicians and developers intent on ‘renewal’ of the area into a mixed-use, high-density apartment development. Drawing on ethnographic research conducted with community members as they confront the redevelopment plans, this paper explores the impacts of ‘global Sydney’ upon Waterloo residents, looking at resistance to renewal, meanings of and attachment to place, displacement and how it feels to be seen merely as a nuisance to a vast city-building agenda.

**Introduction**

The global city has become the aspiration of city planners worldwide. Cities strive to be considered cosmopolitan and contemporary places ripe for transnational real estate investment and a growing financial services sector.

Yet the global city is not a city for everyone. As articulated by David Harvey, the global city is one in which the rich displace the poor through a process of ‘accumulation through dispossession’ (Harvey, 2008, p. 34). In the discourse of the global city, investment, finance and growth are key, while notions of home, attachment to place and the local are absent. In cities around the world, slums have been cleared, public housing demolished and tenants evicted to make way for higher-income residents and transnational finance. For the low-income inhabitants of the city, the global city mantra is not an ideal but a threat—a threat to their right to the city.

The residents of the Waterloo public housing estate in inner-city Sydney are facing down the state-led gentrification of their neighbourhood. Surrounded by gentrified areas, Waterloo’s public housing now comprises one of very few pockets of low-income housing remaining in the inner city. The estate sits on prime land, close to jobs, transport and services, and—thanks to its redevelopment potential—has been in the sights of governments and developers for almost two decades. In 2015, the state government announced that the estate would be subject to a redevelopment process that would drastically change the built and social fabric of the estate.

For the inhabitants of Waterloo, their home, community and right to inhabit the city is being challenged by the redevelopment. They refute the government’s rhetoric of the global city and urban redevelopment as an unquestioned good, pushing back against neoliberal rationalities. They emphasise the local, rather than the global, in their construction of Waterloo, challenging the government’s conceptions of the place. In this article I outline the ways in which residents of Waterloo are resisting the global city rhetoric and asserting the importance of the local.

Drawing on ethnographic research conducted with residents actively resisting the redevelopment, I demonstrate the ways in which residents are pushing back against the global city, resisting the rationalities that make the global city and its associated gentrification seem logical, justified and inevitable.

**The global city**

The literature on the global city, the neoliberal city, globalisation and the outcomes that these processes have spurred—gentrification, displacement, dispossession—are the subject of a great deal of scholarly work. Due to restrictions on space and the sheer impossibility of covering this literature comprehensively, I make no attempt to do so here. Rather, I will briefly summarise some key contributions to the literature regarding the global city that are relevant to the empirical discussion that follows.

Smith (2012), drawing on Sassen, says that global cities began to emerge in the 1970s when the ‘global financial system expanded dramatically’ and when foreign direct investment was aimed not directly at productive functions but between capital markets (Smith, 2012, p. 430).

The global city is seen by many as a function of increasingly transnational capital flows coupled with factors such as ‘spatial transaction costs’ that encourage firms to cluster in urbanised regions that functions as nodes in the global economy (Purcell, 2003). Scott describes how the transnationalising forces of global capital have allowed regions to assume the important role that nations once assumed under international capital trade. He describes how these regional ‘superclusters of economic activity’ have become the ‘motors of the whole system’. Referring to concepts developed by Lefebvre, Purcell describes how in the global city the primary value of urban land is its exchange value, rather than its use value, arguing that citizens’ rights in the global city are therefore subordinate to the property rights of owners (Purcell, 2003).

My interest in this paper relates to the consequences for inequality that arise from the global city. The global city is associated with a new dominant political-economic order that has increased the power of corporations and diminished the power of ordinary citizens (Purcell, 2003, p. 564). Purcell describes how the production of space in the global city is made ‘in the boardrooms of large corporations concerned with maximising profit margins’, rather than by the citizens who inhabit the city (2003, p. 580).

This concern with profit margins, especially through urban real estate investment strategies, has led to the spread of gentrification across inner city neighbourhoods in the world’s global cities. Smith argues that gentrification as a ‘global urban strategy’ has been a key dimension of neoliberal urbanism in the 21st century (Smith, 2012, p. 437). He describes how gentrification went from a ‘marginal oddity’ in 1960s London that was haphazard and unplanned to a central goal of British urban policy that is now systematised and ‘scrupulously planned’ (2012, p. 439). Smith stresses that in all of its forms throughout its evolution and in geographically dispersed locations, gentrification is characterised by a displacement of the working class from city centres (2012, p. 440).

Similarly, Harvey argues that this urban restructuring nearly ‘always has a class dimension, since it is the poor, the underprivileged and those marginalised from political power that suffer first and foremost’ from this new urban renewal (Harvey, 2008, p. 33). He argues that two processes—displacement and ‘accumulation by dispossession’—lie at the core of capitalist urbanisation (Harvey, 2008, p. 34).

As gentrification has transformed from the haphazard phenomena to a systematic urban strategy, the state’s role in the process has transformed—becoming central now, often acting as the driver for redevelopment of particular areas—and the presence of transnational finance has transformed the pace and scale of redevelopment. The state uses questions around ‘social mix’ and ’social balance’ to justify calls for urban regeneration—implicating such strategies in the gentrification of the inner city (Smith, 2012, p. 445).

Under the gentrifying, displacing and dispossessing processes that prevail in the global city, urban identity, citizenship and belonging are much harder to sustain (Harvey, 2008, p. 32). Sassen argues that the global city ‘bring[s] to the fore the growing inequalities between highly provisioned and profoundly disadvantaged sectors and spaces of the city’ (2005, p. 40) and notes that the global city has contributed to ‘a sense of powerlessness among local actors’ (2005, p. 38).

Both Harvey and Purcell argue that citizens—especially those marginalised through the processes inherent in the globalising city—should reject this powerlessness and assert their rights to the city in an effort to resist displacement and accumulation by dispossession. Smith argues there is an incumbent need to mount critical challenges to the ‘powerful, often camouflaged’ processes of gentrification (Smith, 2012, p. 446). Similarly, Sassen argues that cracks that have emerged in ‘the national as container of social processes and power’ (2005, p. 39) opening up possibilities for new political, economic, cultural and subjective operations and notes that there are opportunities for ‘recovering place’ (2005, p. 40). What this might look like exactly appears to remain unclear, and we are yet to see a coherent movement against the global city (Harvey, 2008, p. 38). Harvey argues that this needs to be a global struggle (2008, p. 39). However, a global struggle cannot simply burst into existence as such and must surely start with a local, place-based resistance to the dominance of exchange value, to dispossession and to inequality in our cities. Even if it will become global, it must start somewhere. A good place to look for this is in communities that are fighting back against dispossession and displacement. Such communities are often challenging the logic of the rationalities that give rise to the global city, reasserting the local, reaffirming use value and attempting to reclaim their rights to the city.

Throughout the remainder of this article I focus on one such community—the residents of Waterloo, Australia, who are slated to be the next victims of accumulation of dispossession. These residents are resisting their displacement and a view of their neighbourhood as part of the global city, placing emphasis instead on belonging and attachments to place.

**Waterloo case study: Background**

Waterloo, an inner city neighbourhood just to the south of Sydney’s CBD, is home to one of the largest remaining inner city public housing estates in New South Wales. The Redfern-Waterloo area is home to Aboriginal people of the Gadigal Clan of the Eora Nation. The Gadi people suffered devastation due to a small pox outbreak in 1789, however many of their clan remained in and around their country. Many people of the Gadigal clan continue to have a connection to Redfern-Waterloo. Many remain residents of the area, or visit relatives and clan members in the area. The area has become symbolic as the home of a large proportion of Sydney’s indigenous population. The Aboriginal population has continuously lived and worked in the area, and Redfern is a centre of major significance to the Aboriginal community both locally and nationally.

Waterloo is comprised of a mix of both private housing and public housing. In the Waterloo public housing estate, over 4,000 residents live in a mix of three-storey walk-ups and high-rise towers. The towering high rises—four 16 storey buildings and two 30 storey buildings—colloquially known as the ‘suicide towers’, dominate the south Sydney skyline and have remained icons of the area for decades.

The population of Waterloo is comprised of two distinct demographic groups: one which lives in public housing, is more likely to be unemployed and/or on a very low income (due to this being a condition of entry into public housing in NSW). The other is more likely to rent from a private landlord or to own their own home, to earn higher than the Australian average and to pay higher-than-average housing costs.

The presence of the large public housing estate means that there is a higher rate of disadvantage in Waterloo than in surrounding areas. The unemployment rate in Waterloo in 2011 was 9.4%—considerably higher than the national average of 5.6%. 3,273 individuals in Waterloo identified that they were ‘not in the labour force’ in 2011, indicating that they were likely receiving employment benefits due to them being unemployable due to age, disability or mental illness. Waterloo has a significantly higher percentage of people with incomes of less than $AU600 per week (40%) than the national average (23.7%).

Waterloo has an ethnically diverse population, with a high proportion of immigrants (48%) or children of immigrants. 37.4% of residents speak a language other than English as the primary language in their home.

As the inner city has gentrified in recent years, with former slums such as Surry Hills, Darlinghurst and Chippendale now home to professionals living in multi-million dollar homes, suburbs with public housing such as Glebe, Redfern and Waterloo have seen similar changes take place around their housing estates. Waterloo has seen exponential rise in house prices in recent years. In the 12 months to January 2016, the median house price in Waterloo rose by 37% (around nine times the national average) to $AU1.2 million. For renters, the rise has been less severe, with around 13% rise in weekly median (privately-owned) rents in Waterloo, however, this, too, is many times the national average, which is around 2% for the same period.

Waterloo public housing estate is now subject to a renewal process that will further intensify gentrification in the neighbourhood.

**Developing Waterloo**

The current redevelopment proposal could be considered the second round of slum clearance that Waterloo has undergone in the past century. The first wave of clearances occurred in the decades before and after WWII, largely in response to concerns about dilapidated buildings and poor sanitation.

In the 1930s, governments were lobbied by 'town planning activists and social reformers’ to implement slum clearance measures (Allport, 1988). The overcrowded, poorly maintained and inadequate housing of the inner city—mostly comprised of Victorian-era terrace housing, often divided into multiple family units—was thought to be a threat to both moral and sanitary hygiene, and thus required demolition and rebuilding.

The NSW Housing Commission resumed thousands of parcels of land throughout Surry Hills, Redfern, Waterloo, Erskineville and Glebe, but in many cases took over a decade to construct the new housing. Construction commenced in Waterloo in 1951. The modernist buildings—particularly the 30-storey towers purpose-built for seniors—were considered architectural triumphs and were opened by the Queen of England. In the decades since their construction, however, many of the buildings were left unmaintained,

Local opposition to redevelopment and the Green Bans[[1]](#footnote-1) prevented the demolition of the entirety of Waterloo’s Victorian housing. Although much of it was demolished, homes east of Pitt St were saved, and remain today as the Waterloo Conservation Area.

Since 2000, there has been renewed interest in redeveloping Waterloo—this time around, this interest has been in relation to removing the public housing blocks built in the 1960s and 1970s.

The Redfern-Waterloo Authority emerged as part of the NSW Government's response to the 2004 Redfern Riots and the associated interest on the area, including it being the subject of a government inquiry. The inquiry focused on the effectiveness of government, non-government and policing programs and strategies in place in the Redfern-Waterloo area, as well as proposals for the future of the Block.

The RWA began planning for the redevelopment of Redfern Waterloo, however the plans developed by the Authority were never implemented. Over the next decade, the RWA was renamed the Sydney Metropolitan Development Authority, which was then renamed the Urban Growth Development Corporation (UGDC) at the beginning of January 2013. Urban Growth NSW (separate to UGDC) is a state-owned corporation intended to focus on large-scale urban renewal projects.

In December 2015, the NSW Government announced plans to redevelop the Waterloo public housing estate. Using a yet-to-be-built station for a new Metro rail line as a catalyst, the government plans to redevelop the estate with a majority of private housing and around 30% social housing. The completed development will house around 10,000 people—6,000 additional residents. Initial announcements indicated that all residents would be moved for the duration of the redevelopment, which was to be between 15 and 20 years. It was not clear whether housing would be provided for all of these residents to realise their promised right to return. However, more recent communications have indicated that residents will be able to remain on the estate throughout the redevelopment, which will be phased so as to minimise disruption.

**Waterloo as part of the global city**

Sydney is framed in key planning documents, such as the *Plan for Growing Sydney (NSW Planning and Environment, 2014)*, the NSW Government’s strategic plan for the city, as a ‘global city’. Sydney being seen as a global city is a key priority for the state government, with the plan referring to the city as the ‘economic capital of the country’ and making repeated references to global city aspirations, aiming for the city to be considered ‘a competitive economy with world-class services’ (NSW Planning and Environment, 2014, p. 4). The *Plan for Growing Sydney* identifies strategic places as part of a ‘global economic corridor’ in which the government aims to ‘remove barriers to growth and promote more efficient land-use outcomes’ (NSW Planning and Environment, 2014, p. 44), signalling intentions to promote gentrification through urban renewal in these areas.

Waterloo sits within this global economic corridor. It is also part of an ‘urban renewal corridor’ and sits alongside the Central-to-Eveleigh ‘global city precinct’ and the Green Square ‘strategic centre’.

It is clear from these documents that planning for areas such as Waterloo is taking place based on its alignment with this idea of Sydney as a global city. Rather than looking at each neighbourhood of the city as being a distinctive area with cultural, built and social nuances that might contribute to a unique feel or sense of place, the plans focus on the area’s contribution (and potential contribution) to the economic outcomes of the broader city. ‘Improvement’ and ‘development’ of places in this context involves the transformation of places to align with these global city visions, which include office towers and apartments for the middle classes.

**Methodology**

This paper draws on an ethnography of Waterloo conducted throughout the redevelopment process. The ethnography commenced in 2016 and is continuing throughout 2017. The data drawn upon here were collected from ethnographic (participant) observation of community groups (especially the Waterloo Public Housing Action Group), engagement processes led by the government and by the community, and public meetings. I took extensive field notes throughout these meetings, with notes ranging from general mood, key conversation topics, and direct quotes. I have drawn extensively on direct quotes here in this paper, as they provide a vivid insight into the perspective of the residents of Waterloo. Most of the quotes included in this paper are from residents who are active members of the Waterloo Public Housing Action Group, however some others are also included. Names have been changed to preserve the privacy of participants.

**Findings**

**Resident perceptions of the global city**

Michel Foucault argued that a key role for resistance is in rejecting the taken-for-granted (2002, p. 236). Residents of Waterloo regularly practice resistance through rejecting the taken-for-granted construction of urban renewal and through challenging the government’s rationalities about the global city. The residents take this resistance seriously, as they see gentrification as a major threat to their community and home—I have heard them describe the battle against gentrification as a ‘war of attrition’ and ‘the fight for our lives’. In this section, I describe the ways in which residents are engaged in refuting the dominant narratives regarding the global city, through their alternative narratives of renewal gentrification, privatisation and ethnic cleansing.

***Renewal as gentrification***

For residents of Waterloo, the global city is synonymous with gentrification. Although ‘renewal’ has connotations suggestive of something positive—revitalisation, rebirth—for residents the term has darker implications. Residents see the renewal projects that are taking place as part of the state government’s plan to transform areas of the Sydney’s ‘global economic corridor’ are merely strategies to eradicate the poor from the city:

‘They [government planning agencies] just want to attack the poor in the inner city’ (Janet).

Residents feel that they are treated poorly because they are low-income and welfare-dependent residents, and that they are being evicted from their homes because of their socio-economic status:

‘They [the government] treat you as a germ, a second class citizen’ (Gillian).

In the view of many residents, renewal projects are intended in part to shift poorer citizens—especially public housing tenants—from inner city areas into less desirable areas to the city’s west and south-west. Recent evictions of tenants from public housing in Millers Point—a public housing estate on Sydney Harbour located next to the Barangaroo development (a major redevelopment project focused in large part on attracting investment and tourism from China—provides further evidence of this for residents. Residents feel that the government is using the renewal as a strategy to relocate residents further from the city centre:

‘All these relocations are just an escalator: we keep getting moved out further’ (Janet).

The government has repeatedly used the notion of social mix—that is, of using the renewal to introduce a greater degree of social (income) mix into the neighbourhood—to justify the redevelopment. Residents question this as merely being a smokescreen for gentrification, arguing that they don’t need any more social mix:

'What's wrong with our community? We've got strong ties, people know each other, grown up together, a good community. It's really just that we're poor' (Gillian).

Rather than seeing the redevelopment as a positive opportunity for improving social mix, the Waterloo community sees the redevelopment as jeopardising the existing social mix, which they see as valuable, rather than as problematic, as it is in the government’s construction:

'My fear is the loss of that social mix and diversity [that could be caused by the redevelopment]. Loss of hope is also a concern, the despondency and disconnection that might result' (Arthur).

There is a keen awareness among residents that the type of community that the government wishes to attract through the redevelopment project is very different to the community that exists there now. Rather than viewing the redevelopment as a productive opportunity to ‘create’ a new community, the residents see it as a destructive process that will destroy a valued social network:

‘The moment the first building is knocked down, the community will be non-existent anymore’ (Robert).

In large part, this concern stems from the fact that, in the renewed neighbourhood, public housing residents will find themselves in the minority, surrounded by a huge influx of new private residents that will be middle income professionals—‘yuppies’ to the residents:

‘[We are] to be cleansed by living next to yuppies’ (David).

The residents reject the notion that these new residents will become part of the ‘vibrant community’ that the government hopes to create, arguing that what will result is a fractured, incoherent neighbourhood that has no common ties:

'They'll all be rich international students. The students will never be part of the community, they're temporary' (Janet).

These comments stand in contrast to the government’s rhetoric around the global city, the very aim of which is to attract international students, business and investment (see the NSW Government’s *Plan for Growing Sydney*). Whereas the government sees the influx of transnational real estate and middle-income professionals to the city as a positive thing, the residents of Waterloo see this process as gentrification—a violent and egregious displacement process that is shifting low-income residents from the inner city towards the fringes. By constructing renewal as gentrification, the residents are highlighting the unequal impacts of the global city upon its residents.

***Renewal as privatisation***

The global city is part of a rhetoric in which private investment and enterprise are valorised and government functions are seen as anachronistic and inefficient. Whereas government departments talk about the redevelopment of Waterloo as a project which will provide benefits to the residents of Waterloo’s public housing, the residents themselves see privatisation as intended only to benefit outsiders—government officials, real estate investment and middle-income newcomers to the area.

When asked about why they thought the government was interested in change the social mix of the area, Valerie responded 'they're changing it for money’. Emma, sitting beside Valerie, agreed: 'we don't even need to talk about this question’.

Residents see the privatisation of the estate not as being an opportunity to improve the lot of public housing tenants but rather as part of a state-wide sell-off of public assets:

‘Privatisation of public assets is what this government is all about, we can’t let it continue. They just want to sell, sell, sell’ (Philip).

That the government was even remotely interested in improving the estate for the benefit of the residents is seen by residents to be a laughable notion. The Metro Rail Station that was the catalyst for the redevelopment is described by the government almost as an offering to the public housing residents to alleviate their situation, however these residents see the situation very differently:

‘The Metro station is not [being put] there to give people good public transport. It’s there to make the land more valuable' (Corinne).

The residents refute the notion that the government is interested in improving the estate for the benefit of public housing residents, emphasising that the government only wants to engage in value uplift to privatise the land and housing in Waterloo.

***Renewal as ethnic cleansing***

Residents of Waterloo see the global city strategy in Sydney as linked to the ongoing dispossession of lands from Aboriginal communities. Redfern-Waterloo, home to the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, has been an important area for the Aboriginal community, not only in pre-colonial times but throughout the centuries that followed. Through a series of events including the handing of control of ‘The Block’ (a cluster of public housing dwellings) to the Aboriginal community, Prime Minister Paul Keating’s famous speech, the death of aboriginal teenager TJ Hickey and the riots that followed his death, Redfern-Waterloo became a site of great political importance for Aboriginal Australians.

However, dispossession has been a key theme in the narrative of Waterloo, with the colonial invasion, the demolition of the Block and now the renewal of Waterloo forming key conflicts in this centuries-long ‘war of attrition’—as one resident of Waterloo has framed the continuing dispossession of her community.

'There's been three purges of our community, we're now reduced to just 300 people’.

‘When I moved to Redfern in the 1970s there were 40,000 [aboriginal] community members here. Now there are 200 of us left. All this gentrification is just code for ethnic cleansing.’

Members of the local Aboriginal community see the ‘global city’ and the related renewal of Waterloo as part of a sinister strategy to remove the Aboriginal community from Waterloo altogether:

'They're subsuming our community, this is ethnic cleansing. And now they're bringing the ethnic cleansing down here [to Waterloo]’.

In particular, the use of land owned by the Aboriginal community at The Block for student housing is a key concern. Universities in Sydney are undergoing massive growth of their campuses and accommodation to provide for a growing international student market that brings huge incomes from the Asian market. Redfern-Waterloo, and nearby Green Square, close to several major universities in Sydney, have become sites where student housing investment has boomed, with both designated student housing and apartments aimed at the Asian student market built at rapid rates. Members of the local Aboriginal community are outraged that renewal projects such as that being undertaken at The Block are providing more housing for international students than for the local Aboriginal population:

‘There is plenty of student housing around Redfern. We do not need to impinge on the needs of the local aboriginal community to provide housing for students. This is just another example of institutional racism’.

Aboriginal community members argue that seeing the Aboriginal community as just one among many stakeholders—instead of viewing them as the custodians of the land on which the estate stands—means that the government risks continuing to displace and dispossess the aboriginal community:

‘until we centre indigenous people in this, we're going to still be involved in the same dispossession that has been going on forever’ (Lauren).

**The local city: residents’ perspectives on Waterloo**

Residents of Waterloo attempt to assert a claim to their neighbourhood. By reaffirming the local, not global, aspects of their city, they are attempting to discursively reclaim their city. They are resisting the global city through a discourse of localism, home and attachment to place that flies in the face of narratives about renewal being the only solution to the city’s problems.

***Ideas of land ownership***

Whereas the state government views land as a commodity which can be bought and sold—and a commodity that is particularly useful in the global city for attracting transnational investment—the residents have a very different view of land ownership.

For starters, there is a strong emphasis on recognising that the land belongs to the Aboriginal custodians first and foremost:

'this is their [the Aboriginal community’s] land after all' (Robert).

In the Waterloo Future Planning Centre, a community-led facility aiming to articulate the residents’ vision for the future of the estate, a large sign saying ‘always has been always will be Aboriginal land’ is painted prominently on the wall of the space, declaring firmly an idea of land ownership that is firmly at odds with the state government’s. The group sees that negotiating with Aboriginal elders about the future of the land should be a key part of the decision making around this site.

Further, residents firmly support public ownership of the land. As Boris, noted, a key issue for residents is ‘will the government sell the land?’. Ownership of the land arises repeatedly as a concern in all sorts of meetings around Waterloo. Further, 99-year leases of the land are not seen as an attractive alternative to selling, as residents see this as sale by other means.

The residents, who firmly value public assets, the welfare state and public housing, see the sell-off of these public assets and public lands as unforgivable:

‘privatisation should not be allowed to happen, it’s just really wrong. It shits me to tears’ (Ellen).

The residents’ views of the land in Waterloo are much more locally-oriented, focused on the specific benefits that public ownership provides for local residents and on the historical relationship that the Aboriginal community has with the land. This stands in contrast to the global perspective of the government, who sees the estate as having potentially for international real estate investment.

***Home and a sense of place***

Residents of Waterloo feel strongly that the public housing estate is home, in contrast to government and mainstream media rhetoric which tends to portray the area as a slum in need of clearance. As Robert noted:

‘I have no objections to [the government] redeveloping a slum. This is not a slum’.

Residents are made to feel that they should not view the estate as home, despite many having lived there for decades.

‘They tell you this is not a lifetime house’ (Gillian).

Gillian notes that there are clearly different perceptions held by middle-income and low-income people about what home might look like:

‘One person's castle not the same as another’s’ (Gillian).

Emma, who has lived on the estate for several decades, says firmly:

'This is my home. Home for 45 years. I don't want to leave. I won't go anywhere else. I moved so much before I came here, every few months. When I came here, I loved it. I said, “I will stay here until I die”’.

Residents are also eager to point out that Waterloo is a special and unique place for them, contrary to government narratives about the estate:

‘This is a unique place. There's nowhere else like this, it's unique. That's being totally ignored. We live together quite harmoniously compared to other places' (Janet).

'I love the Waterloo estate, there is a thriving community, supportive networks through which to develop talents and support other people’ (Catriona).

These perspectives attend to the focus that residents have on the local. Residents appreciate the local community and character of Waterloo, and view the area as their home place.

***The built environment***

The built environment of Waterloo is a further point of contention. While the government sees the estate’s baton brut modernist towers as signifying anachronistic welfare state and city planning ideals, the residents view the estate as an excellent place to live. In part, this is because they find their quality of life within the towers to be a high quality.

'I know they're not the most attractive buildings, but they're good to live in. These buildings were built for eternity’ (Robert).

The kinds of development that have resulted from ‘global city’ renewal projects around the city, such as at Green Square, are viewed by residents as unattractive places to live,

‘I fear that we'll have something soulless like what's around Danks St’ (Catriona).

Residents also value the existing built environment because they see the towers as representative of a legacy of modernism and welfarism that accords strongly with their rationalities.

‘Even if I don't live in them I want to see them retained as an example of the time when being a pensioner was treated with respect, that was the purpose of these towers when they were built. Matavai and Turanga are models of their kind, they embody a vision for society, we might lose their legacy [if they are demolished]’ (Catriona).

The Waterloo Public Housing Action Group is focused on trying to get the government to retain the towers, and in particular the towers Matavai and Turanga which were purpose-built for elderly residents and are architecturally interesting. Residents want built environment preserved to serve as a reminder of egalitarian ideals of welfare states, and of a city that was built with people—rather than capital—in mind. Their focus on retaining the existing built environment stems from their lived experiences in place.

**Discussion and conclusion**

For the residents of Waterloo, importance lies in the local. As their home place, the estate is an important site of security, connections, stability and support. They value the buildings, the people and the services they have access to, and firmly reject the government’s construction of their home as being in need of renewal and social mix.

Waterloo residents are keenly aware that the global city is not one conceived with citizens like them in mind. They fear that the global city ambitions of the state government will see them cast aside, shoved to the fringes of the city to make way for injections of transnational real estate investment. They see the ‘global city’ and associated urban renewal as euphemisms for gentrification, privatisation and ethnic cleansing.

In this paper I have identified the ways in which public housing residents refute taken-for-granted ideas around the global city as well as the ways in which these residents place emphasis on the local as opposed to the global. The residents are worried—rightly so—that the global city threatens their right to the city and their continued inhabitance of their home place. Planners, academics and others have a responsibility to question the rhetoric of the global city. We cannot ignore the equity implications of the global city, and must recognise that global city ideas tend to be embroiled in a process of ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (Harvey, p. 34). There is a need to question who the global city is designed for—and who is excluded.

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1. The Green Bans were union-led bans on the demolition of heritage buildings, workers housing and environmental assets that led to the preservation of housing and green space in Sydney in the 1970s. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)