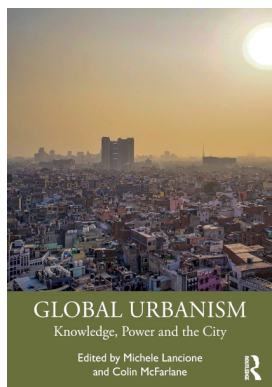

Book Reviews

Michele Lancione and Colin McFarlane (eds.) 2021: *Global Urbanism: Knowledge, Power and the City*. London: Routledge.



Global Urbanism, edited by Michele Lancione and Colin McFarlane, is a wide-ranging collection. Beyond the editors' persuasive introduction we are taken on a whirlwind tour of 38 chapters narrated by 56 voices and spread across four rich strands of discussion. But *Global Urbanism* is also a sizeable work in other senses, in that it displays a wide variety of styles and stances of contemporary urban studies, including four individual interviews, a conversation, and even a collective interview.

Needless to say, no short book review could possibly do justice to what is one of the most exciting mixes of writing in urban studies I have come across in quite some time. The volume spans far and wide across the globe true

to its incipit, ranging from deep dives into youth community spaces in Accra, office blocks in Phnom Penh and Turin's working-class neighbourhoods, to name just a few. Leaving aside the Introduction in Part I, the four key themes that Michele Lancione and Colin McFarlane use to organize this vast landscape of places and opinions are centred on questions of how to rethink global urbanism (Part II), how to read the global through the everyday (Part III), how global urbanism is governed or is itself a governing rationale (Part IV), and the contestations that emerge therein (Part V).

Global Urbanism was spurred, the editors tell us, by a demand from urbanists—grassroots, community and critical academic—to rethink the epistemologies and politics of the 'urban age' beyond Western normative stances. In that regard, the book takes its cue from a 2013 *Urban Geography* manifesto by Sheppard, Leitner and Mariganti aimed at 'provincializing' global urbanism beyond Anglo-North American stances. Lancione and McFarlane thus set their multiple authors the task of tackling what it might mean 'to say we live in a global-urban moment, and what are its implications?' (p. 3). Helpfully, the book takes care to step back from defining 'global urbanism' from the get-go, espousing instead the plurality of the concept's possible understandings beyond dominant forms of 'urban age' rhetoric. Hence most of the authors—as in Tang and Benjamin's chapter, for example—reject and question the totalizing role played by global urbanism as a category.

Knowledge and its various manifestations in urban politics—as per the collection’s subtitle—play a starring role here, lying at the crux of many (if not the majority) of the chapters. Fittingly, however, the issue is not simply one of generating more knowledge. As Castan-Broto’s chapter poignantly puts it, much of it concerns the need to challenge and decolonize hegemonic practices of knowledge-making, not just urban knowledge itself. For most of the book this involves a form of situated as much as circulating knowledge, and one that comes from conversation and solidarity steeped in listening and seeing ‘through’ different urbanist eyes—as exemplified by the engagements with activists like Ferulano in Naples or Jhabvala in Delhi.

From this perspective, one of the most interesting things that *Global Urbanism* offers, in my view—albeit quietly, but nonetheless effectively—is an accessible and effective vocabulary of global urbanism development with its feet firmly on the ground and finely attuned to Southern sensibilities. Consequently, the volume is peppered with semantic gems, ranging from the ‘feverish’ use of sand and bricks chronicled in Southeast Asia by Jamieson *et al.* to Pieterse’s beautifully phrased ‘cracks’ as openings through which investigation can step into propositional action and De Boeck’s emphasis on the ‘nervous’ condition of global urbanism, as seen in Kinshasa. In the same vein, *Global Urbanism* is very much a smorgasbord of methods and empirical stances, from the functional geographies painted through Silver’s corridors to Adeniyi-Ogunyankin and Peake’s prose in Ibadan via Müller’s creative ‘rummaging through footnotes’, to name just a few.

Elucidating the volume’s limitations is not easy. It is perhaps notable that, while Lancione and McFarlane sought not to impose or ask for consensus over what ‘global urbanism’ might mean for the authors, we are also confronted with relatively limited disagreement or debate throughout the book. Solidarity dominates the tone of most chapters, with no doubt much plurality on show here but perhaps less of that direct contradiction and confrontation that the editors thought important for our capacity to understand global urbanism.

Equally—and justifiably, I should say, perhaps forcefully taking on the role of ‘reviewer 2’ here—we do not come across any of the voices of global urbanism from the multilateral, scholarly or private sector fronts that still play a key role in setting the dominant debates; the likes of those depicted in McNeill’s chapter on the global health industry or those with whom Bulkeley *et al.* engage in their chapter on climate politics. It could have been interesting to position conversations with the likes of Amin and Roy alongside a few of those voices going in the opposite, non-solidarity-based, direction to this book—but that is perhaps asking for a two-volume exercise. Notwithstanding, that is possibly the very audience that needs to dive deep into the nooks and crannies of this book to find inspiration for a far more ‘global’ (in the sense of Robinson’s chapter) or ‘cosmopolitan’ (as understood by Thieme, in direct opposition to Chattopadhyay’s neoliberal capture of the term) sense of urbanism.

Despite these quibbles, this is a book worthy of considerable praise, not least because it delivers on its aim of engaging with global urbanist matters in a way that makes the urban ‘political’. Even more importantly, it does so in a grounded manner that speaks through and with (but never over) the lived experiences of the many sites examined in *Global Urbanism*, and beyond. Hence it can be said that *Global Urbanism* refreshes and updates the long-standing ‘urban question’ (as well as the more recent ‘new urban question’) in relation to the twenty-first-century urban condition, and it

does so with a collectivist, situated and innovative flare one might hope more and more 'urbanists' would embrace.

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