



Review of *Cities of the Global South Reader*

Faranak Miraftab and Neema Kudva, eds. 2015. *Cities of the Global South Reader*. London: Routledge. 350 pages, ISBN 978-0-4156-8227-5 Paper (\$91.00).

Despite the recent growth of critical and empirically rich scholarship on social and spatial processes in the dense, diverse, and politically complex cities of the global South, the field of “Southern urban studies” has continued to feel rather poorly defined. Most exciting precisely because of the diversity of places, peoples, themes, and conceptual frameworks on which they focus, studies in this area have been held together more by their locations outside of the wealthy industrialized core (by where and what they *are not*), than by an agreed upon set of topics, frameworks, or even historical experiences that they share. In one of the first attempts to define this field of study, Faranak Miraftab’s and Neema Kudva’s *Cities of the Global South Reader* successfully manages the difficult task of defining the field’s boundaries and describing its contours, without imposing frameworks that flatten its essential diversity.

In their sharp and incisive introduction, Miraftab and Kudva explain that their motivation to create the volume lies in part in their challenge as educators at U.S.-based institutions to help engage their students in places and experiences so far removed from their daily lives. Acknowledging this challenge as well as their own scholarly commitments, Miraftab and Kudva ask how they, as scholars who have sought in their earlier work to “challenge widely prevalent categories of cities and models of development, dominant paradigms of planning, and taken-for-granted notions of political democracy, inclusion, and citizenship” (2), can help distill for readers and students the complexity of cities in the global South. How can they simultaneously transcend place-based specificities and reject oversimplifying models, paradigms, and concepts? This



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awareness and reflexivity – of their acknowledged need for frameworks and their sensitivities to their pitfalls – is what makes this volume so effective.

The reader is made up of 46 essays: 27 excerpts from previously published works, six new chapters written specifically for this volume, and 13 editorial essays. The geographies covered are wide reaching with essays drawn from case studies in South Asia, Southern and Central Africa, Latin America, East Asia, and the Middle East and North Africa, as well as thematic essays that cut across geographies. The 46 essays are organized into 12 sections, which are further broken down into the five broad themes of: 1) the city experienced; 2) the making of the “third world” city; 3) the city lived; 4) the city environment; and 5) planned interventions and contestations. The editorial essays at the start of each section do the work of introducing the topic and identifying the themes and tensions interwoven through the 2-4 essays within each section. With 12 editorial essays spread over the volume, more than is typical for a volume like this, Miraftab’s and Kudva’s knowledgeable and reflective voices are present throughout, guiding the reader to see the essays as part of a larger conversation and set of debates underway between scholars included and outside of the volume. In doing so, they provide the intellectual history and conceptual explanations required to knit the diverse contributions together into a single, even if still loosely defined, field of study.

Part 1: *The City Experienced*, is the only section without an editorial introduction, which allows for an unmediated presentation of its single essay, Ali Madanipour’s “Urban Lives: Stories from Tehran.” Drawn from Madanipour’s 1998 book *Tehran: The Making of a Metropolis*, this essay is comprised of nine monologues (that he calls “portraits from a labyrinth”), first person accounts of single individuals – male and female, young and old, middle class and poor, migrant and Tehrani native – whose diverse experiences define the city and shape its economy, politics, and social life. This is an effective way to begin the volume, with subjective experience being allowed to frame the discussions of migration, housing, governance, infrastructure, and urban citizenship that follow.

Part 2: *The Making of the “Third World” City* follows next, with sections on “Historical Underpinnings” and “Development and Urbanization. This section allows the authors to historicize the study of cities in the global South. Acknowledging that the study of cities and urbanization processes in poorer countries has a long, important history in the social sciences, this section identifies the fields of urban history and development studies as two disciplines that have long contributed to understanding the forces and structures that shape demographic, spatial, and socioeconomic profiles of Southern cities. The section on historical underpinnings includes a piece each from Anthony King and Doreen Massey, while the editorial essay situates these pieces in debates on subaltern history, historical sociology, and historically oriented Marxist geographies,

to reveal “the spatial and material basis of social relations that shape the urban experience through time” (23). The section on development and urbanization, anchored by pieces from Jennifer Robinson and Michael Goldman, examines the ways that development studies and discourses of development have worked to construct Southern cities as lacking and in need of certain policy, technology, or market-based interventions.

In Part 3: *The City Lived*, the editors tackle the ever present topics of migration, housing, and urban economies, including the deep inequalities that structure opportunities for mobility, livelihoods, and access to stable and secure shelter. The three editorial essays and eight selected pieces, drawn from case studies in China, Colombia, South Africa, and Indonesia, reveal the “improvisational urbanism” required to navigate the ambiguous and often opaque lines between the formal and informal, the legal and illicit, even in authoritarian and highly regulated contexts like China. These themes are carried through in *Part 4: The City Environment*, in which the editors and authors examine access to basic services, urban infrastructure, and ecological risk and vulnerability. While considerations of inequalities and disparities are woven throughout the volume, it is in this section – and particularly in the chapters by Ragui Assaad, Diane E. Davis, Stephen Graham, and Amita Baviskar – that the stakes of urban inequalities and the vulnerabilities they produce are presented with an acute sense of urgency as matters of life and death.

The fifth part, *Planned Interventions and Contestations*, examines questions of governance, participation, urban citizenship, and the transfer of knowledge and policy. The pieces span historically and geographically from Manuel Castell’s classic 1983 case studies of squatter movements in Lima, Mexico City, and Santiago de Chile to Sahar Khamis and Katherine Vaughn’s insightful new essay on cyberactivism in Cairo, which was written for this volume. The ten chapters and four editorial essays demonstrate that fields of policy and politics are vibrant and contested. Urban residents are agentic and engaged, but institutions are exclusionary and exclusive. Local and global elites leverage their advantages for financial and political gain, wielding “good governance,” participation, and other tools of neoliberal governmentality, even as collective actions, “quiet encroachments,” and other examples of “urban citizenship from below” work to level terrains of power.

Cities of the Global South Reader is an exceedingly successful work of curation and field shaping. The selection of essays was careful and attentive to geographical balance, both with respect to case section and the location of authorship, as the editors were deliberate to “give voice to scholars and activists from, or with roots in the global South” (2). Authorship is effectively balanced between established figures in the field and more junior and less well known scholars and writers, while the quality of the essays is consistent and evenly strong. As an effort to define the field of “Southern urban studies,” the volume also succeeds in identifying the topics, themes,

debates, and conceptual frameworks that shape the study of cities in the global South, without overstating the degree of coherence and consensus within the field. But given the helpful presence of Miraftab's and Kudva's consistent editorial voice throughout the volume, the absence of a concluding editorial essay was conspicuous and unfortunate. The reader is left wondering what these five parts and twelve sections add up to and where the future of "Southern urban studies" may lay. Given the attention the editors pay to the historical development of the field, with its grounding in urban history and development studies, I was disappointed by their silence on the implications of the recent proliferation of research on cities of the global South and their thoughts on productive future directions for the field. Yet while this missing essay would have further strengthened the work, my enthusiasm for this effective volume remains strong, as does my recommendation that both new students to this field and those deeply embroiled in these debates will benefit from reading and actively engaging with it.

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