CHAPTER 1

Ways of Knowing the Global Urban

The vast extension of some urban settlements and a growing awareness of the impacts of urbanisation across the planet, including in remote places, alongside persistent growth in the urbanised population pose new challenges for urban studies. Divergent urban forms are fragmented and extended across often vast areas rather than spreading outwards from a putative central part of a 'city'. What kind of urban theorising might be relevant to this urban world? Research strategies more adequate to the complex spatiality of urban forms are needed. Theorisation of the urban has not only to respond to the changing geographies of global urbanisation but also to feminist, post- and decolonial critiques of urban studies, and to the substantial challenges of climate and development crises. At stake here are both the 'subjects' and geographies of theorising. Whose ideas count in shaping theorisation and how do different voices contribute to wider conversations about the urban? How might both the shared and the divergent concerns across wealthier and poorer cities inform theorisation? What difference does it make to think the urban in the midst of the interconnectedness of a globalised urban world? It is widely agreed that urban studies needs to embrace a much wider repertoire of urban contexts in building understandings of the rapidly changing forms of contemporary urbanisation. Parochial interpretations of the urban need to be revisited: but how exactly is this to be done?

Different scholars have set out on the project for global urban studies in a variety of directions. Pulling (some of) them together here, I invite readers to join me in being inspired by the creativity and range of work which supports global urban studies, and to take time to explore these different paths on their own terms. I review three sets of debates which have recently shaped urban studies, and which speak to the core concerns of theorising the urban. Each brings into the open, aspects of the emerging and persistent challenges

Comparative Urbanism: Tactics for Global Urban Studies, First Edition. Jennifer Robinson.

of thinking the urban across the diversity of urban experiences. Together they help to ground practices of revisable theory building in urban studies. The chapter explores, first, different ways in which urban scholars propose to work with and across spatial difference. Here, regionally based scholarship, and the idea of the 'global South' have been prominent. Debates around these propositions signpost also the prolific interconnections which puncture such territorial containers. They alert urbanists to the diverse, (dis)connected communities of scholarship which make up urban studies. Globalised processes of capitalism and colonialism, and prolific circulations of money, ideas and people, establish that different forms of the urban across the globe – and ways of understanding these – are necessarily constituted in relationship to one another. A 'planetary' perspective prioritises such spatially extended processes of urbanisation, and seeks to dissolve the territorial container of the 'city' as a privileged starting point for urban studies. The second section considers how both proponents of Planetary Urbanisation and their feminist and postcolonial critics insist that theorisation of urbanisation processes must contend with spatial difference and specificity. Critics point to the need to rebuild urban studies through the diverse and divergent experiences that contribute to making urban life. Different positionalities of theorists matter, too, and the third section of the chapter explores how feminist critiques link with contributions from post- and de-colonial urban studies, black studies and critical race studies. Together with approaches inspired by materialities and 'assemblage' thinking, what comes to the fore here is the need to attend to the emergent distinctiveness of each urban context, as well as the opacity and unknowability of urban life. A range of wider epistemological issues are evident: whose voice counts in theorising the urban (and from where)? How is the process of coming to know urban worlds to be understood? The racialised and masculinist histories which scar the very terms on which the urban can be thought call for methodological renewal.

Across these different approaches, urban scholars face shared challenges of thinking the urban: an (im)possible object which is characterised by interconnections (differentiation), diversity (both spatial and social) and distinctiveness (specificity). The urban comes to be known from many different contexts and perspectives; but it is necessarily thought from somewhere. At the core of this book is the sensibility that such located knowledge of the urban is, however, inevitably shadowed by other urban experiences, by elsewhere(s). Given the nature and form of the 'urban question' in the twenty-first century, it is my proposition that to take forward all these different approaches, some kind of comparative imagination seems crucial – to think across diverse and interconnected urban experiences, and to build insights through engaging with the distinctive forms and inexhaustible complexity of

urban life. What kind of comparative urbanism can provide methodological propositions for rebuilding urban theory in the midst of the empirical and conceptual revolutions shaping urban studies today? The final section provides an outline response to this question.

This chapter establishes how comparative urbanism emerges from and can align with, support and extend efforts to respond to the dual conceptual challenges presented, on the one hand, by the changing nature of urbanisation and, on the other hand, by calls to decentre and transform the practices of urban studies. The rest of the book then proposes how comparative urbanism might support a theorisation of the urban which works with and across the interconnections, divergences and distinctive outcomes which make up the global urban.

Uncertain Territories, 'Strategic Essentialisms': Regions, the Global South and beyond

In globalising urban studies, the challenges of difference arise in many different guises. Questions about how to distribute differences analytically within the global urban have been front and centre of debates about post-colonialising the field. Is the urban to be understood as varied by region, by the wealth of countries, or by common geopolitical categories? As scholars have searched for new ways of framing the urban, all these possibilities have been explored, with some suggestive implications for thinking comparatively about the global urban. But as we will explore here, the spatialities of the urban strongly undercut the spatial forms of 'regions' and the 'global South', even as these formulations have accumulated significant critical weight in reshaping the concerns of global urban studies.

Regions

To articulate the potential for new practices of theorising the urban from beyond the traditional Anglo-American heartlands of urban studies, post-colonial critics have sought to instigate new geographies of authority and voice. Surveying the key ideas about cities emerging from different regional contexts (Asia, Africa, South America), Roy (2009b) proposes a form of strategic essentialism as a grounding for this work. Certainly, it is an important starting point for post-colonial critique to insist on the space to speak back to arguably 'western' theory based on the best insights of scholars in different parts of the world. Formulating this as a 'strategic essentialism' acknowledges that territorialisations of knowledge production are only temporarily feasible.

The circulating and connected geographies of both knowledge production and the processes of urbanisation quickly puncture any straightforward area-based approach.

The 'strategic' epithet therefore indicates some of the limitations of this approach, but also its potentiality. For, certainly, new subjects of urban theory have emerged from embedded regional scholarship and regional circuits of theorisation which are productive and important in their own right (Bhan 2019; Pieterse 2013; Wu 2020). Cities, countries and regions support and produce communities of scholars (including their diaspora) whose concerns are distinctive, if internally sometimes highly differentiated. The 'region' as a ground for theorisation can be a substantively important and generative context for thinking, fostering scholarly networks, traditions and practices. Regions have shared histories and closer economic or political interactions which can frame careful and effective comparisons (Abu-Lughod 1976, 1999). However, both urban scholars and the processes they are interested in are open to influences from a wide array of different contexts and urbanisation processes which stretch across the globe (Bunnell 2013; Sidaway et al. 2014). Urban scholars are often both intimately driven by the situated histories and politics of a context, and connected to wider debate. Insofar as specific urban contexts are more than regionally determined, shaped by globalising processes, circulating policies and the re-iterations of urban forms which result from these prolific interconnections, the 'region' as a basis for theoretical voice is perforated. It might be claimed, momentarily, as grounds for distinctive conceptualisation but is quickly called into question through both internal differentiation and the disruptions of wider processes of globalisation. Cities are, as Mbembe and Nuttall have it, 'embedded in multiple elsewheres' (2004, p. 348), and the scholars of particular contexts are equally part of wider circuits of knowledge and concepts which trace multiple trajectories and histories.

This has animated scholars from former socialist contexts who have criticised the analytical 'territorial container' which the post-socialist epithet indexes (Stenning and and Hörschelmann 2008). Moves to de-territorialise post-socialism rather focus attention on how social processes are shaped by both historical continuities and reactive anti-continuities with socialist era formations, as well as extensive re-engagement with globalising processes (Sjöberg 2014). Thus, rather than a blanket categorisation of territories as post-socialist (Tuvikene 2016), 'post-socialism' becomes an analytic, or concept, to interrogate complex historical formations. This brings an awareness that the transitions with their epi-centre in the former Eastern Bloc have had massive implications for many other places too. With the demise of the Cold War the demilitarisation that followed had major impacts on cities like Los Angeles and opened new geopolitical frontiers implicating different urban

contexts and regions (Tuvikene 2016). Post-socialism 'as process not container' is therefore suggestive of many opportunities for conversations with scholars in and of other contexts (Rogers 2010). These might be on the basis of being implicated in the same circuits and global connections. But opportunities for comparative insight across quite different historical processes also open up, for example, with places having undergone political and economic transitions in the same time frame, for example, from authoritarianism to democracy (Brazil, South Africa) or liberalising economies, such as India (Harrison and Todes 2014). A number of scholars have also been concerned to explore the parallels between initiatives to post-colonialise urban studies, and the need to foreground the voices of scholars of cities 'after transition' from socialism (Bernt 2016b; Chari and Verdery 2009; Müller 2020; Müller and Trabina 2020). Experiences of socialism and post-socialism can inform analyses of urban processes elsewhere. For example the intense culture of privatism driving distinctive forms of globally resonant micro-gating and hyper-postmodernism in the built environment of Sofia, Bulgaria (Hirt 2012); the rapid and extensive forms of suburbanisation with all its environmental implications, consequent upon rapid deregulation of land use management which have shaped urban experiences across former socialist countries (Sykora and Stanilov 2014); the marked informalisation of economy and society which ensued with economic liberalisation (Smith 2009); or the global flows of primary commodities which frame post-socialist economies and urbanisation (Gentile 2018).

Ferenčuhová (2016) is right, however, to counter such deterritorialising initiatives with the insistence that the historical divisions and resource-challenged institutional conditions of scholarly work in post-socialist contexts have shaped and limited the range of openings and wider theoretical conversations in urban studies from post-socialist contexts, both historically and today. Her concerns are shared by scholars writing in and about cities in Africa, where institutional resources are meagre and policy demands pressing. The call for a more methodologically diverse urban studies acknowledging the exigencies of different regional contexts is presented by Parnell and Pieterse (2016). They argue that in the African context more transversal practices are needed, embedded in practical terrains of often politicised forms of knowledge production. Stronger valorisation of research that involves the empirical documentation of less well known urban realities is also important. They insist that building insights from different regional contexts should have broader implications for urban studies: 'Either Africa must be ignored or the theory, method and data of urban studies must change' (p. 241). Importantly for our concerns here, they note that in a moment when the centres of urbanisation and urban studies are shifting globally, both African

and post-socialist contexts face the possibility of being doubly marginalised, as Asian urbanisation and the growth of mega-urban regions overshadows interest in other contexts. But bringing China urban studies into wider conversations about the urban must also address the challenges of generating insights concerned with the specificities of that region, while insisting these also contribute to broader theorisations (Wu 2020). These shared concerns of scholars from very different regions perhaps signals the potential for cross-fertilisation, to support and inform one another and bypass the often obligatory 'northern' reference points of urban studies.

The scope for wider theoretical conversations is partly structured by different languages and segmented publishing realms (Slater 1992). Whereas some Asian, Indian and Anglophone African scholars might have closer access to and influence on hegemonic debates (Chatterjee 2004; Huat 2011; Mabogunje 1990; Tang 2021; Wu 2020), those from minor language communities, even in the European context, are often more fundamentally excluded (Sidaway et al. 2014; Vaiou 2004). Translations of key texts and stronger engagements with French and Spanish language literature as well as generational shifts in language learning priorities to favour English (for example in France and Germany) have opened up conversations with dominant Anglo traditions (Gintrac and Giroud 2014; Hasbaert 2013). Some of this is the result of the relocation of scholars from different regions to well-resourced northern institutions. The engagement is often one-directional, though, with English language speakers siloed by their limited language skills, and English language publishing norms dominating what is published as 'international' knowledge. The ongoing fracturing of intellectual endeavour presents a serious limit to wider conversations about 'the urban'. A patchwork of regionally and linguistically diverse theorisations sets the uneven and power laden terrain of 'global' urban studies.

Regionalisations of urban theory are to some extent inevitable, and productive, and provide many generative insights. They highlight the endemic classic challenge of theorising the global urban – seeking to build wider theorisations of the urban while always having to start somewhere. But regions are deeply entwined with a wider world (substantively and conceptually) and so their geographical delimitations are often artefacts of power and cartographic imagination rather than analysis. Building new subjects of urban theory on such essentialisms runs certain risks, potentially isolating new subjects of theorisation and preventing the emergence of new grounds for speaking more generally about the urban condition in ways that resonate with different regional experiences. Given the institutional and publishing landscape, this most likely preserves intact the authoritative analyses of the urban produced in the dominant heartlands of Euro-American scholarship. Strategic essentialism could

re-establish earlier lines of incommensurability which saw urbanists disavow insights from geopolitically, developmentally and regionally different contexts (Robinson 2006). The dynamic strength of regional scholarship lies in its crucial importance to addressing the challenges of urbanisation in diverse contexts in different analytical registers. This needs to be balanced with attending to the range of historical trajectories, globalised relations and prolific interconnections which shape any urban context (Bunnell 2013). These can offer different pathways to launch emergent regionally based understandings into wider conversations. As Myers expresses: 'My goal is … to point to the multifaceted urbanity in African contexts as of great value to global understanding of urbanism' (Myers 2011, p.7).

Global South

Some of the same challenges involved in deploying strategic regional imaginations as grounds from which to propose new accounts of the urban are evident in the idea of a 'southern' urban theory (Lawhon and Truelove 2020; Schindler 2017; Watson 2009). But the imagined geography of the south is even more complicated to work with than that of 'regions', which might have some substantive coherence in economic interconnection or political integration. On the one hand the idea of the 'global South' borrows an initially geopolitical (as 'third world' or non-aligned movement) and latterly developmental metaphor linking poorer nations beyond the capitalist heartland and western core. The concept has moved beyond the dividing line of 'poverty', though, which is the original meaning of the term formulated in the Brandt Commission report (1980), to describe a somewhat uncertain contour separating richer north and poorer south. Critically, its re-orientation as 'global' south makes sense of poor countries north of the equator, but also allows analysts to include experiences of poverty wherever it is found, including in wealthier contexts. The relational connections between poverty in the North and South, through migration, precarious working, deindustrialisation, and the wider restructuring of global capitalism, are important here.

As with thinking from regions, there might be good academic grounds for the imaginative delineation of distinctions between urbanisation in the global North and South to practically take forward postcolonial critiques. Raewyn Connell's (2007) path-breaking book, So*uthern Theory* develops a *sui generis* analysis of the lines of exclusion of many parts of the world from the labour of (sociological) theorisation. She contests the positioning of some places as sources of data rather than theory, and insists on a reinvention of theory for a sociology 'at a world scale'. The appeal of the global south in academic analysis is only partly in the potential it offers for a critique of the uneven territorial

distributions of poverty, wealth and power globally. Also key is its figuring of the ex-centric scholar or location, who/which can disturb or speak back to dominant knowledges in a radical idiom framed by their distinctive experiences (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012). In this vein, the idea of the global South is a highly suggestive tactic for global urbanism, and has inspired the articulation of distinctive approaches in urban studies. For example, the idea of thinking from the South is allied with calls for an engaged, politically committed research practice, informed by the inventive analyses emerging from city dwellers, international policy makers, states and other actors in some of the poorest cities which have been highly marginalised in urban studies to date (Bhan 2019; Pieterse 2013). Similarly, the desire to decentre analyses of the urban encourages new subject positions, with writers eager to recentre interpretations in new locations and sources of authority, based on the geographical metaphor of the South (Lawhon and Truelove 2020; Watson 2014b).

What defines the 'south' for urban scholars? As a baggy geopolitical category, it perhaps inherits the opportunism and potential indicated by the political non-aligned movement which lies behind the term, 'third world', whose mantle it inherited. 'Southern theory' might further be grounded on the global histories of colonisation which affect some contexts embraced by this term (Parnell and Oldfield 2014), or on a critique of the geopolitics of exclusion from knowledge production in the colonial present (Lawhon 2020). It might reflect the value of a theorisation from more peripheral capitalisms which perhaps constitute the leading edge of economic and political change (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012). The term 'global' South, though, permits a widening of attention to exploitation and poverty wherever it is found, across the 'north' and 'south' (Miraftab 2009). These overlapping ambitions for the term make of the 'global South' a highly dispersed spatial referent – and one which some propose to stretch further to encompass a putative global 'Southeast', acknowledging the shared analytical exclusions and political–economic marginality of both 'South' and 'East' (Müller 2020; Yiftachel 2006, 2020).

In their prescient critique of the concept, 'third world' city, Dick and Rimmer (1998) point to the many urban processes which connect cities across the developmental divisions which had fragmented twentieth century urban studies (Robinson 2006). To what extent does the concept of the global South potentially perpetuate such analytical divisions? Developmental differences now not only distinguish wealthier and poorer cities from one another along some important lines, but also tie cities together in new ways. For example, in extensive municipal collaborations to address global urban problems, as well as through the multiplicity of circuits of travel, trade, investment and imagination which shape urban policy and practice across the world (Lauermann 2018). In a globalised and interconnected urban world the

analytical basis for maintaining a consistent conceptual separation between groups of cities is unclear.

In their collection *Handbook on Cities of the Global South* Parnell and Oldfield (2014) offer some nuanced reflections on defining the global south. They suggest that the 'spatial scope' of the term is not literal, and acknowledge the concept as fluid and contested. But this, they indicate, 'should not detract from the widespread concern to (re)view the global urban condition with a southern sensibility'. They motivate for a distinctive perspective in which the challenges of poverty and resourcing influence scholarship in and of the south. Research in such circumstances, they insist, has to be legitimate and to have local traction. They do, though, identify scope for contributions from the global south to understand problems of the global north, 'highlighting that resource limits, poverty, informality and growth are not the preserve of the south'. Indeed, they suggest that these challenges are found 'everywhere', and that 'much extant urban theory has a global application' (p. 3). Other authors agree that the demands, expectations and personal desire to address local problems through relevant research and identifying potential solutions, together with a broad commitment to 'praxis', often characterises the southern urban research experience (Bhan 2019). Helpfully, Lawhon and Truelove (2020) seek to 'disambiguate' what southern urban scholars are trying to achieve (although they don't interrogate the limits of the geopolitical container, the global south). They point out that scholarship from 'the south' emphasises empirical differences; seeks to respond to Euro-American hegemony that displaces the diversity of intellectual traditions which might be brought forward in the name of the South; and that practices and interventions in cities of the south seek to be relevant to those contexts. Seth Schindler (2017) proposes some specific tendencies and characteristics which southern cities might share, and sees these as distinctive kinds of 'cities' from those in the 'North Atlantic and Northeast Asia' (p. 60).

Given the imprecision and broad scope of the term, many theorists who have drawn on the geographical referent of the 'South' to propose a critique of metropolitan theory have hedged the term with numerous caveats. Connell (2007) embraces shifting geographical reference points in which the overlapping and imprecise markers of north–south, first world–third world, core–periphery must suffice to indicate 'the realities of global division' (p. 212), and where the limits of the geographical imagination underpinning the concept of south is clear – 'To use concepts like "periphery" is just the beginning of analysis, not the end' (p. 213). The Comaroffs' (2012) premise their analysis on the virtues of an 'ex-centric' viewpoint, and the assertion that the history of the present reveals itself 'more starkly in the antipodes' and is thus best investigated from that 'distinctive vantage' (p. 7). But their geographical

imagination rests on a 'South' which is not only dialectically entwined with the North, but tied together through the 'labyrinthine capillaries' of transnational capital, with 'much North in the South, much South in the North'. At the end of the day, they suggest that 'the south' cannot be 'defined a priori but must be understood relationally', along a range of different processes: 'It is a historical artefact, a labile signifier in a grammar of signs whose semiotic content is determined, over time, by everyday material, political, and cultural processes, the dialectical products of a global world in motion' (p. 47). Perhaps this array of caveats and complex spatialities of analytical imagination and historical process might themselves be more promising as starting points than the idea of the global South. The question is, then, how to articulate hopes for new cartographies of knowledge production which might 'reshape the circuits through which social-scientific knowledge moves' and refit social science in both metropole and periphery for 'global dialogue' (Connell 2007, p. 227).

Efforts to locate and define urbanisation in and from the global south are drawn to move beyond the temptations of territorialisation given the instability of 'where' the global south might be, and what it might be characterised by. At base there is a significant mismatch between a territorialised imagination of 'south' and the crosscutting relational geographies of global urbanisation. Broader conversations about the nature of the urban also invite a move beyond the segmentations implied by 'southern' and 'northern'. Parnell and Oldfield (2014) motivate for the potential to think with the distinctive experiences of 'southern' urban contexts but they also find shared features across north and south which deserve analytical engagement. Comaroff and Comaroff (2012) track the basis for such engagement across global north and south to the wider circuits and connections of global capitalism. In his consideration of the implications of southern perspectives for 'rethinking urbanism' Myers (2020) traces 'subterranean' and forgotten relations across global south contexts but also between north and south. He follows Edouard Glissant to bring into view, from a de-centric positionality, the interrupted, fragmentary and forgotten relations which characterise the violent disruptions of ocean-borne slavery and island globalisations. Tracing the relations which proliferate from and across different contexts proposes analytical 'relations of equivalence' amongst diverse urban experiences. This links indigenous, settler and slave 'urbanisms' in Hartford, Connecticut, US, for example, through sometimes long-buried connections and flows, across continents, taking in both the Caribbean and the East coast of Africa. The stage is set to consider how the itineraries of global urban studies might proceed in the tracks of the interconnections and circulations which make up urbanisation, rather than on the unsteady territories of regions, the South – or, as the next section considers, the redundant territorial category, the city.

The Disappearing City: Planetary Urbanisation and its Critics

The idea of 'planetary urbanisation' draws on Henri Lefebvre's (2003[1974]) suggestive hypothesis of the 'complete urbanisation of society', and the potential impact of urbanisation (literally) anywhere. The sprawling extent and diverse forms of many cities, or even urban galaxies, as Soja and Kanai (2007) would have it, together with the proliferation of extensive urbanisation processes stretching amongst and beyond urban settlements, presents significant analytical challenges for urbanists (Brenner and Schmid 2014; Merrifield 2013). The globalisation of many urban processes has meant that flows and connections amongst cities are shaping the planet far beyond the physical extent of even these large urban settlements. If the 'urban' as such is in question and its forms and processes of formation are in such flux, building new theorisations, potentially starting anywhere (on the planet), seems imperative.

The core argument of Planetary Urbanisation is founded on an unobjectionable concern which has dogged urban studies almost since its inception – that the territorial referents of the term, 'city', do service for only a small portion of urban processes (Wirth 1938). Urban studies has always struggled to find the terminology which can keep pace with the expansion of territories seen as urban (Fawcett 1932; Gottman 1961). The search is once again on for new vocabularies of the urban to respond to its changing form, but also to replace the territorial shadow contained in the notion of the city. The Lefebvrian-inspired idea of planetary urbanisation has been highly suggestive in focusing attention on the processes of urbanisation, as opposed to 'cities' (Brenner and Schmid 2014, 2015). Theorising urbanisation at a planetary scale, however, must confront the challenge of approaching this across the great diversity of urban outcomes or territories, and the diversity of circulations and processes shaping the urban. What needs to be theorised as urban must therefore start with a multiplicity of forms, trends and interpretations of the urban condition around the world (Brenner and Schmid 2015). Lefebvre himself, as Goonedewarna et al. (eds) (2008, p. 297) observe, was generally sceptical of any 'premature intellectual totalisation', insisting on the necessary incompleteness of theoretical specifications of the urban, as both geographically varied and historically always in process.

Brenner and Schmid (2015) appropriately suggest, then, that urbanisation is variable, polymorphic and historically determinate and that what needs to be theorised as urban takes many different forms. They agree that the project of theorising urbanisation needs to think across a great diversity of urban processes and urban outcomes. In their seven theses on urbanisation Brenner and Schmid propose that:

> urbanization under capitalism is always a historically and geographically variegated process: … (it) must be understood as a polymorphic, multiscalar and emergent dynamic of sociospatial transformation: it hinges upon and continuously produces differentiated, unevenly developed sociospatial configurations at all scales.
>
> (Brenner and Schmid 2015, p. 175)

Some core questions of urban studies no longer admit a reasonable answer in this view: discerning where and what is the city has become an impossibility (Brenner and Schmid 2011; 2014; 2015; Brenner 2013; Merrifield 2013; Murray 2017; Keil 2017). The city, Merrifield (2013) insists, is a 'pseudoconcept'. Along with others taking this approach, we are invited to re-specify the theoretical content of the 'urban' and to develop new vocabularies of urbanisation in the face of the sense that the territorial term 'city' has become an inadequate starting point for theorisation (Brenner and Schmid 2015). These writers consider that **whatever the 'urban' might be, it can only be constituted in theory rather than on any a priori empirical grounds**. The earlier efforts of Wirth, Castells and Lefebvre to formulate such theorisations have become important reference points (Brenner and Schmid 2014; Angelo and Wachsmuth 2015). These three thinkers proposed (in turn) a conceptualisation of the urban within theoretical arguments about ways of urban life; forms of political mobilisation and institutions; and the form of urban space.

Here we might usefully pause to reflect on what these earlier theorists of the urban also have to teach us about the project of theorisation. Wirth's efforts to ground urban theory in ideas of size, heterogeneity and density were profoundly parochial (informed by the experience of particular – US and European – cities) and were widely criticised at the time and since by sociologists and anthropologists around the world for that reason (Robinson 2006). Castells' search for a mapping of theoretical concepts onto the city was motivated by his eagerness to displace the heterodox Marxist analysis which Lefebvre was offering to think the city with. In a strongly Althusserian argument he insisted that the 'ideological' conceptualisation of the city through a theorisation of space rather than class distracted from what he considered to be the proper focus on conjuncturally significant structural processes which had become aligned with the city – namely, collective consumption under advanced welfare state capitalism (Castells 1977; Stanek 2011). A spatially anaemic analysis of the urban ensued, and Lefebvre's contributions are only recently coming to be more fully appreciated after decades of inattention and misinterpretation (Goonewardena et al. 2008; Kipfer et al. 2012; Schmid, 2022). The implications for urban studies of the uneven engagement of Lefebvre and his interpreters with global urban experiences, or the colonialism which shaped European and post-colonial urban experiences, has only recently

drawn some attention (Kipfer and Goonewardena 2013). In the meantime, and insufficiently acknowledged in the search for new vocabularies of 'planetary urbanisation', urban geographers have already attended most carefully to the dual spatialities of territorialisation and interconnection which shape this impossible, unbounded, fuzzy object of analysis (Massey et al. 1999; Ward 2010). It is worth noting, then, on the basis of these earlier theoretical initiatives, that theorisation of the urban has been shaped from particular locations, and from specific political and philosophical perspectives.

Provocations for a theorisation of planetary urbanisation have themselves been subject to critique along these lines. This includes the need to be alert to disclosing the locatedness of the inspirations for these theoretical propositions – the places and particular urbanisation processes which shape or dominate in contemporary theorisation. For Lefebvre, the main inspiration for planetary urbanisation, these were European. Through his life-time he was also influenced by a wide-ranging set of urban contexts and writers on diverse forms of urbanisation which he drew on in his analyses (Stanek 2011). But Lefebvrian theoretical vocabularies certainly rely on a critical engagement with European philosophical categories, if at times opaque and idiosyncratic sources across English, French, German and other languages (Goonewardena 2018; Schmid 2008, 2022). The repertoire of inspiration for thinking urbanisation as 'planetary' has its roots in European philosophy and the wider Euro-American academy and have been closely tied to (certain theorisations of) global capitalism based again on largely Euro-American perspectives (Brenner 2013; Merrifield 2013).

Criticisms of Planetary Urbanisation take off from these observations. Thinking from different urban contexts and experiences can bring into view a much wider range of processes shaping global, or planetary, urbanisation. Gendered inequality (Peake 2016) and diverse, black and indigenous urbanisms (Simone 2016) are important starting points for this critique and for initiatives to build new understandings of the urban. Developmental actors and policy-oriented interventions are crucial determinants of the urban and urbanisation in many poorer city contexts and may rely on a territorial imagination of the urban (Pieterse et al. 2018). Urban scholars across the world have long been concerned with the ways in which 'the city' and the countryside are woven together through an intricate range of (often transnational) 'extended' relationships. Circular migration, as a constituent and long-lasting feature of many Southern African urbanisms, for example, bears attention here (Potts 2010). Planetary urbanists can be criticised, then, for their excessive emphasis on capitalist processes in their opening statements (Brenner and Schmid 2014, 2015), and for occluding other social processes and analytical rubrics through which urbanisation, 'urban territories' or 'extended urbanisation' might be understood (Buckley and Strauss 2016; Ruddick et al. 2018).

This is particularly relevant to thinking 'the urban' as a spatial phenomenon, and suggests some lines of commonality between theorists of planetary urbanisation and some critics. Whatever the urban is, it indexes the rich fullness of spatial formations; conceptualisations of the urban need to build from the multiplicity of social worlds and materialities of urban space, and urban life. Lefebvre (2009) works closely with the idea of 'concrete totality' as a starting point for analysis – the replete fullness of the empirical world. If the urban is a spatial concept, in a rather recursive fashion anything which takes place in (or shapes) the spaces of urbanisation can be understood to be part of the category urban. This is a crucial point for the potential to post-colonialise and diversify theories of the urban. Whatever takes place in the urban, anywhere, defines the content and conceptualisation of the term. Thinking the urban from anywhere, and from any aspect of urban life, is a necessary potentiality of global urban studies, and a crucial expectation of comparative urbanism.

With the urban in view as a spatial phenomenon, the argument that 'ontological struggles around the everyday [are] connected to *but not wholly subsumed by* the processes of urbanization' (Ruddick et al. 2018, p. 5) requires some clarification. The suggestion that subjects are not fully determined by the urban context is of course, valid. But is it appropriate to draw the conclusion that these subjects are not (already fully) urban? This rests on the possibility that certain experiences and histories located in urban areas are not urban, or more strongly, do not belong in/to the urban. Across Southern Africa, and in many other colonial contexts, colonial administrators sought to exclude indigenous populations from urban areas. As a result, enforced circular migration drew towns and villages into 'one social field' (Gluckman 1961; Potts 2010). In this sense, subjects arriving in the urban (who might never have travelled to the city) were already strongly urbanised. And urban life was profoundly constituted through traditional practices, languages, customs and rule – often mediated by colonial interventions. On political grounds (whoever is in the city or connected to it is part of it and counts) as well as on theoretical grounds, the urban is transformed through its *constitutive* and already interconnected outside (Robinson 2006). Both a Lefebvrian account of space as the fullness of experience, and Massey's view of spatiality as the product of a 'simultaneity of trajectories', raise questions about the suggestion that some practices and experiences in urban areas do not belong in/to the urban. This offers an alternative post-colonial reading of the 'urban' question. Whatever urban subjects bring to the city, whatever their trajectories and journeys to urban contexts might be, it is quite important to acknowledge that they are already both of and in the urban. In that sense, the 'subjects' invoked by Ruddick et al. (2018) matter, but not to contain the scope of urbanity or urbanisation processes. Rather, it is to insist on the

changing and varied nature of the urban, and to place all urban subjects as central to its formation and differentiation. The concept of the urban, in this framing, needs to be open to constant extension, and not restricted to only some processes or people.

The debates here resonate with a rather arcane debate which sought to determine what is only in, versus 'of', the urban (Saunders 1986; Scott and Storper 2015). The complaint that planetary urbanists leave no 'outside' to the urban is related to this – that some people and processes might be in the urban but not of it; or be only partly shaped by urbanisation processes. Certainly, "urban" studies does not exhaust analysis of social processes. And neither is the urban everywhere. Some aspects of these concerns rest on a misinterpretation of the Lefebvrian argument. Lefebvre's point was that industrial society was transforming to one where the primary determination was not industrial processes but urbanisation, which could increasingly, and *potentially*, be found anywhere. His point was not that urbanisation is already everywhere. Presumably analytically this is not an impossibility, but as Lefebvre's famously useless diagramming (just one straight line) of the 'complete urbanisation of society' from 1 to 100 indicates, 'society' globally was understood to be somewhere along that continuum. Urbanisation coexists on the planet with many other processes, some of which, like agrarian economies, could be said to be associated with 'rural' places (Krause 2013; see Balakrishnan (2019) on agrarian urbanisation), and Lefebvre explores the dynamic interactions across these processes in detail in his longer texts, such as the *Production of Space*. The advocates of planetary urbanisation might have been clearer about this in the first place, and perhaps were motivated by their aim to sketch an impressive contrast with a 'city' perspective.

Ruddick et al's (2018) concerns are crucial to the formation of any new theories of the urban – all aspects of practice and experience, in 'everyday life' in and across (and beyond) the terrains of urbanisation are relevant to how the urban might be understood. This point is central to the work of both planetary urbanists (and Lefebvre) and their feminist critics. But this needs to go along with the post-colonial insistence that whatever is in the urban is urban. Thus, any urban or urbanising context provides a foundation for theorising the urban.

If the fullness of urban life should be the basis for theorising the urban, the criticism has been levied that planetary urbanisation advocates have resorted to universalising or totalising language, reducing the rich complexity of the urban to a limited analytical focus prioritising only certain processes. This leaves a theorisation which does not attend to the rich diversity of situated and embodied experiences of urban life. Feminist, indigenous and southern perspectives are strongly at odds with such an approach (Buckley and

Strauss 2016; Leitner and Shephard 2016; Peake 2016; Ruddick et al. 2018). Goonewardena (2018) provides a response to this critique noting the closely shared agendas of the planetary urbanisation authors with feminists (both influenced by Lefebvre) eager to think through the 'everyday' and politicised urban practices. He notes that the idea of 'totality' in Lefebvre (and Marxist-feminist theorists) indicates an open analytical formation precisely seeking to think across the rich diversity of social experiences. In this spirit the ongoing project of theorisation of (planetary) urbanisation could more fully embrace the differentiated outcomes of urbanisation, and more directly support building insights from the fullness of everyday life and diverse social processes. The inexhaustible empirical reality, or 'concrete totality', which is urban space is crucial to grounding such an endeavour.

It is this rich fullness and diversity of the urban which led Brenner and Schmid (2015) to propose a broadly nominalist approach to theory building, which accommodates new terms and emergent conceptualisations. On this basis they look to find common ground with post-colonial writers:

> we endorse a nominalist approach that permits an open-ended interplay between critique (of inherited traditions of urban theory and contemporary urban ideologies), epistemological experimentation (leading to the elaboration of new concepts and methods) and concrete research (on specific contexts, struggles and transformations). It is thus in a spirit of comradely dialogue that we offer below our own set of critical reflections on the possible foundations for a new epistemology of the urban under 21st century conditions.
>
> (Brenner and Schmid 2015, p. 161)

However, postcolonial critics insist that coming to know the urban cannot rest on the insights of unspecified, unmarked and unlocated theorists. The labour of knowledge production which would yield revisable analyses of the urban is critically associated with positionality – to write as a white (northern) scholar, for example, is to produce knowledge which is inevitably marked and situated (Ruddick et al. 2018). Opening to different subjects of urban theory (Parnell and Pieterse 2016; Roy 2011b), and the broad insistence on writing the urban differently from different places and subject positions, is crucial to global urban studies. This resonates well with the intentions of Brenner and Schmid's Thesis 7, in which the 'urban as a collective project' is an open determination, shaped by a multiplicity of struggles, across different contexts and political subjects (2015, pp. 176–7). But this political instinct, their critics rightly argue, needs to stretch to the articulation of the production of knowledge too, in which authorial reach and ambition might be curtailed by

acknowledging the veracity of claims, often disjunctive in relation to wider theories, made by theorists and scholars writing on different urban processes and from different contexts and positionalities (Buckley and Strauss 2016; Robinson 2014b). Who is the subject of urban theory matters, as we will explore in Chapter 7.

Those exploring the concept of planetary urbanisation, and their critics, give a strong steer on the terms on which global urban studies might be taken forward through a comparative imagination. Key elements of comparative urban practice are signposted: the urban is a conceptual determination, and revisable in relation to different urban outcomes and changing historical processes; the geographies of urbanisation which might form the starting points for comparative reflection are widely dispersed and fragmented, rather than territorially confined; and the urban is a spatial formation, a site of a rich complexity of social life and (the production of) difference. Critiques of ambitious theorisations and universalising or reductionist analyses indicate that diversifying the subjects of urban theorisation and exploring more modest, even discrepant, conceptualisations across different urban contexts is an important project for urban studies. This should set the tone for a comparative urban imagination. This last set of concerns, with the subjects of theory and the style of theorisation, is at the core of the third debate which we review next, framed through decolonial, developmental and materialities approaches in urban studies. How might the urban be conceptualised in relation to diverse and divergent urban experiences, on the terms of scholars and urban residents who live and work in different contexts? Does a focus on emergent materialities of the urban necessarily foreshorten the active role of researchers in conceptualisation? On what grounds might it be assumed that the urban can be known at all? And, do decolonial critiques entail a refusal of wider conversations about the global urban?

Decolonial, Developmental, Emergent: Different Starting Points, or Incomparability?

Ambitious theorisations of the urban contrast with positions that draw on decolonial, developmental and 'assemblage' thinking to search for different ways of approaching the urban. For some, it is in the materiality of urban life, in the many configurations of things, bodies, movements, practices and imaginations, that the multiplicity of the urban is made evident. Thinking the urban takes place in the midst of the artefacts, infrastructures, material objects and practices which are generative of the multiplicity of potential outcomes of whatever the urban might be. Rather than seeing urbanisation as broad socio-spatial 'processes' which are extended across and shape dispersed urban

territories, inspired by Bruno Latour, Manuel De Landa, and the broader Science and Technology Studies these urban scholars zoom in on the discrepant and varied elements which create emergent 'assemblages' (McFarlane 2011b). These are seen as shifting, perhaps at times precarious, configurations which constitute the fabric and practice of urban life. Importantly for the concerns of comparative urbanism, materialities approaches also highlight and invite us to track the routes and trajectories by which entities and 'black box' assemblages come into being (Jacobs 2006; Latour 2007).

Urbanists working in this vein have been drawn to a perspective on the urban almost diametrically opposed to that of the political economy approaches which inform Planetary Urbanisation. Amin and Thrift pointedly resurrect the term 'city' and stress the small territorial extent of cities ('just two percent of the earth's surface'), even as they subtend so much of the global economy. For them, it is the distinctive density and heterogeneity of the materiality of infrastructure which is central for understanding urban life: '(u)ncovered, the urban infrastructure turns out to be not only as active as any community or institution, but also the medium through which much of the latter is orchestrated.' (Amin 2014, p. 156). It is the agency of 'materials themselves' which Mcfarlane wishes to bring into closer view, and the force of emergent human-non-human alignments. Through the idea of a gathering 'cosmopolitics' he sees that this 'has the potential implication of generating new urban knowledges, collectives and ontologies' (2011b, p. 221). For Amin and Thrift (2016, pp. 26–7), this leads to an 'alternative science of the city', nudging

> actors reliant on panopticon vision to concede to multiple methods, partial insights and hybrids of human and non-human intelligence, to settle for an open 'science' of urban knowing, to question canons of thought that pretend access to the hidden depths of the city. Thus, knowledge is necessarily situational, incomplete, conjectural.
>
> (Amin and Thrift 2016, p. 31)

The insights of these writers have been considerable in reframing approaches to urban life, and we return to them throughout the book. However, a studious absence of attention to the researcher as a subject of knowing in materialities approaches can sometimes seem to imply that the materiality of a city can be understood transparently – if only ever partially – by an observer. The city makes itself known, somehow, to observers and participants. Ignacio Farías (2010) suggests that the use of Actor Network Theory in urban studies has been somewhat empiricist and post-hoc. The question as to how new kinds of concepts of the urban emerge, from where, on whose terms, in whose voice – including, for example, the suggestion to 'see like a city' – has been less clearly articulated by advocates of this approach. This is partly a result of the

efforts to approach more closely the agency of the materiality of urban life, and its emergent formations, and to put into question the value of overarching theoretical propositions (McFarlane 2011b). Within this perspective, McFarlane (2019) proposes the 'fragment' as one starting point for a more active process of recomposing understandings of the urban, in which researchers are drawn to follow certain phenomena, but with a view to a more modest scope for understanding. On this basis, he is looking for:

> An urban studies … without a consensus on what urbanism is, or on what urban politics is, or on what urban space is – an urban studies, in short, inherently open, experimental and generative around the very question of '*what is*'.
>
> (McFarlane 2019, p. 225)

The 'lure' of the fragment proposes then one way for thinking about how new knowledge of the city might be articulated by researchers in the midst of 'assemblages'. But these commentators are more discreet on the wider questions of the subjectivity of the researcher and their agency in composing and articulating concepts. On what grounds might existing concepts be mobilised, new concepts invented? Who might be proposing them, and are they only ever relevant to the specific, emergent formations in which they might be generated? If concepts are formulated in these initiatives, what might be their 'reach' (Lancione and McFarlane 2016)? More generally, the prolific circulations in which the elements of urban assemblages are entailed, suggests that understandings of the urban cannot be assumed to take the shape of a tight territoriality, as foregrounded by Amin and Thrift. Tracing the flows of policy and matter which make up urban life potentially distend the grounds and reach of conceptualisation too (Cairns and Jacobs 2014; McCann 2011).

At stake in materialities approaches and criticisms of them are two key questions for comparative urbanism. Firstly, do concepts of the urban which might be proposed have reach beyond the specific situation? And secondly, how might the subject-researcher be understood as part of the creative practices of 'learning the city' (McFarlane 2010)? Both of these issues are also raised in decolonial critiques of urban studies. Seeking to actively refuse, decentre or displace rather than simply nuance or transform inherited understandings, decolonial critiques hope to go further than post-colonial analyses in searching for active grounds for new intellectual practice. And whereas in materialities approaches the subject as researcher seems to be displaced by emergent and dissonant urban materialities, in decolonial critiques the question of who is coming to know the (global) urban is firmly in view. The subject of decolonial theorising is profoundly in question, looking beyond the critiques of researcher subjectivity implied by 'intersectionality' or postcolonial ambivalence (Hill

Collins 2019). Coming to know the urban is the undertaking of subjects whose locatedness in place and positionality within historically unjust social relations matters. Drawing on experiences of subjectivity forged in the brutalising histories of colonial, slave and violent urban histories, the call is for a thorough reversioning of the grounds of knowledge. Here black studies and indigenous studies scholars have made powerful contributions. Fred Moten (2018) looks to draw towards an 'out' of the 'outside' – grounds for thinking subjects, their ways of engaging with and coming to know the world, as well as the imagined nature and forms of worldliness which look to step aside from, to operate outside of, to refuse, inherited formulations (McKittrick 2021). All these aspects of producing knowledge need to be re-imagined, drawing on resources beyond the traditions of western philosophy. Thus, from an African perspective experiences of fracturing or doubled interiorities and openings to connected but non-integrating conceptualisations potentially inform new practices and discourses of method and philosophy (Mbembe 2017) – and ways of coming to know the urban.

The trajectories of urban scholarship, as well as its grounds and territories, after decolonial critiques, open onto dissonant and potentially divergent analyses. On what basis might discrepant urban experiences be seen as incomparable? In a considered return to the first/third world division which haunted the field of urban studies for so long (Robinson 2006), some writers suggest that developmental challenges, poverty, resource limitations and the implications for daily life significantly limit the value of extant scholarly concepts and insights (Pieterse et al. 2018). The landscape of global urban studies which developmentalism opens up, driven by the exigencies of intervention and engagement, is perhaps understandably restricted, focussing on cities with similar challenges and configurations. But seeking solutions to the challenges of poorer cities can also involve the prolific circulations entailed in 'best practice', or require the accumulation of data at a vast scale to grasp the 'global urban' in terms of its impacts at an aggregate level (Parnell and Robinson 2017). On the other hand, much engaged development practice and research takes a 'slow' form of place-based learning (Bhan 2019). Focussing on developmental agendas on a case by case basis or trying to synchronise with international development institutions' hegemonic policy agendas runs the risk of limiting learning from academic urban scholarship. For example, focussing on strengthening hierarchical forms of government as opposed to thinking across the promiscuous circulations of investment flows, design ideas, professional practice, and economic informality which compose many urban areas. Tracing these connections might bring quite different comparators into view, and open unexpected or experimental comparisons across divergent urban realities

to yield surprising insights (Myers 2014; Simone 2010). Part Two of this book considers this in some detail.

Writers drawing across developmental, decolonial and materialities approaches are also at times ambitious for conceptualisations which might travel. Simone and Pieterse, in their volume, subtitled, 'Inhabiting Dissonant Times' seek to work across both developmental concerns, and the distinctive emergences of material and human capacities:

> we have attempted again to tell other stories – stories that provoke the capacity to keep on going, but knowing that providing viable homes and platforms of operation are still critical. The intricacies of everyday life can be part of the story of structural change and urban governance, just as the details of administration and finance are part of the fabric of everyday life. In this sense the book is a polemical call to abandon the disciplinary and thematic stories that weigh urban studies down, leaving it unable to contemplate the imbricated nature of emergent urbanisms.
>
> (Simone and Pieterse 2017, pp. 196–7)

Here, the telling of many different stories which are produced in and through urban worlds becomes method, theory and diagnosis. The urban, then, is the site where, for example, 'Lives are constantly reassociated and redistributed in shifting networks of affiliations and experiences', where 'the capacity resiliently to become many different things has become standard operating procedure' (p. 69). In concluding their book, Wirth's theorisation of the urban as density, heterogeneity and size is recast in a new register of conceptualisation:

> Divergences will have to be part of the same story, a density of stories, and, even though urbanization may no longer rely on density as its defining trope, density – of the relationships among all things – is the only urban future.
>
> (Simone and Pieterse 2017, p. 198)

If urban studies requires multiple, dissonant, divergent and emergent forms of conceptualisation, is a wider conversation about the urban doomed? It is worth noting that even as Simone and Pieterse's 'dissonant' narratives draw attention to the multiplicity of stories and divergent forms of the urban, this turns (in a kind of topological transformation) into a *re-conceptualisation of the urban as multiplicity, as density of stories and relationships*. The question as to on what basis such wider accounts can be proposed from particular observations remains. Particular urban contexts could be seen as the sites and stakes of political subjectification and claims without necessary reference to any overarching processes of urbanisation (Davidson and Iveson 2015b). And the analyses and insights of marginalised urban populations, hard-won in the face

of dominant knowledges, might not be intended for wider dissemination (Jazeel 2019). Does this mean that understandings of located, specific urban experiences are incommensurable? If it is possible to consider distinctive, emergent and multiple urban experiences in relation to one another, how might such conversations be composed? In this vein, some writers seek to promote new kinds of ambitious theorisation from different starting points, such as 'worlding' histories of Asia to de-imperialise knowledge (Chen 2010), or recasting global connections as relations of equivalence (Glissant 1997). For some, building new insights on the urban from the specific histories of previously exceptionalised contexts is an important response (Wu 2020). For others, even though ideas may originate in one context, in the wake of their internationalisation and circulation they might subsequently be seen as already present, belonging to, and operative in, a different context (Robinson 2006). Thus, writers might be determined to name theoretical resources, whatever their 'origins', as already localised and generative of ambitious decolonial projects, such as in dependency theory or Latin American Marxisms (Vainer 2014).

Glissant insists that tracing relations between places proposes 'a form of comparison reliant on equality with and respect for the Other as different from oneself' (Myers 2020, p. 26), operating in the service of 'degeneralisation'. The theorist who looks across the related world with curiosity (perhaps in the tracks of Franz Fanon) might also be drawn by the anti-colonial comparison (the shared predicaments of the colonised), the post-colonial ambition (the connected struggles of the anti-colonial modernising nationalists), or the insistence on decolonising urban studies, where scholars from many different ex-centric contexts find shared themes and collective voice (Kipfer 2022). As openings to forge analytical connections from distinctive contexts proliferate –Worlding Africa (Simone 2001a; Mbembe 2017), Asia as method (Chen 2010), new subjects of theory (Roy 2011b; Simone and Pieterse 2017), learning networks across marginal communities (McFarlane 2011a; Patel et al. 2012), internationalist politics (Kipfer 2022) – they both puncture hegemonic universals (Lowe 2015) and generate emergent concepts. Even as the pressing challenges of urban life demand action in specific contexts, urban scholars and practitioners might often be drawn to find inspiration from experiences, struggles and responses forged elsewhere.

Decolonial, developmental and dissonant approaches to urban studies articulate and call for different grounds, practices and forms of knowing. But the place of wider conceptualisations in these initiatives remains unclear. Key questions for urban studies are posed here, and in them the potential for comparative urbanism finds both inspiration and some (dis)orientation. It is (only) on the terrain of emergent materialities and through the agency of

fractured subjects that the urban can be known. And the terms on which (differently located) subjects might come to know the urban, as well as inherited Eurocentric assumptions about the nature of the knowing subject, are also very much in question. The approaches reviewed in this section also identify crucial aspects of the spatiality of the urban, notably its emergent and material form, with implications for how comparisons might be framed. Together with the other two debates reviewed above, these approaches present key contours of the nature of the urban that will inform our search for new co-ordinates of comparative urbanism, as both theory and method.

Dimensions of a Comparative Urban Imagination

Reviewing key issues involved in coming to know the urban from different theoretical perspectives has identified a number of challenges which face urban studies. How might global urban studies proceed, methodologically and conceptually, to think across a great diversity of urban contexts, and from a multiplicity of positionalities? How might a conversation about the urban be sustained when the starting points for thinking the urban, or tracing urbanisation processes might potentially be anywhere on the planet, including the expanding peripheries, edges and extended urbanisation processes? What kind of theoretical and methodological approaches would not foreclose on a deep awareness of the incapacity of theory or concepts to exhaust the fullness of the urban world, or to find their limits in dissonant urbanisms (Simone and Pieterse 2017)? How might urbanists anywhere proceed in engagement with different, often overlooked, intellectual resources from other urban contexts which might have something to contribute to understanding the urbanisation processes and urban territories they are concerned with? Might scholars work productively with existing theories while keeping conceptualisation open to inspiration from any city? What kind of theoretical practice might be commensurate with the revisability of concepts, divergent realities and different positionalities which any account of the urban entails?

With the range of approaches to global urban studies we have explored in this chapter, why consider cultivating a comparative imagination as a way forward? What can comparativism contribute to ways of knowing the global urban? This book takes inspiration from comparativism's openness to conceptual revision, and its willingness, in principle, to seek to understand and reflect on diverse experiences in different contexts – to think with elsewhere. But inspired by the spatialities of urbanisation, some of which we have explored in this chapter, it develops methodological and philosophical grounds for a new repertoire of comparative methods open to the distinctive

potential which the urban presents for 'thinking with elsewhere'. Inspired by post-colonial critiques, comparative urbanism mobilises the possibility to draw insights from a wide array of contexts while acknowledging the starting point of all theoretical endeavour as always (somew)here. The inevitable locatedness of the subjects of urban theory can be viewed not so much as a constraint as an opening. New concepts might be initiated from anywhere, and inherited conversations about the nature of the urban refined or refused. In a comparative urban imagination new conceptualisations might be crafted in relation to discrepant, emergent and associational urbanisms imbricated in the materialities and the fullness of urban territories, and in the lived experiences of urban 'everyday life'. These concepts may or may not seek to reach beyond the contexts in which they are embedded, and the subjects enacting and articulating insights may or may not choose to initiate wider conversations. In this sense, positionality matters as much as location, and with feminist, postcolonial and black studies critiques comparative urbanism places the subject of theorising centre-stage.

Each of the debates we have reviewed above establishes some contours for a comparative urban imagination. Together they suggest the dimensions of a new methodological map for urban studies. Drawing on these different debates – and we will need to mobilise aspects of all the perspectives we have encountered here – a comparative imagination for global urban studies can compose new ways of coming to know the urban. And as we proceed through the book it will become evident that comparison not only offers a method for coming to know the urban, it exposes and elaborates the nature of the urban, as an emergent, (im)possible object of analysis.

In reformatting comparison as method, then, the urban also comes into (theoretical) view. Across the different perspectives discussed in this first chapter, a shared framing of the urban world has emerged, which evokes its complexity and multi-dimensionality. With the scholars reviewed here, we can see the urban as produced through the prolific interconnections and inter-relations of a globalised world, while the outcomes of these flows vary and can be strongly territorialised – the form of the urban is, then, **differentiated**, produced by circulating processes across many, even divergent, urban contexts. We are also inspired to consider the urban as **diverse**. If specifically 'urban' processes can be identified, perhaps associated with spatial arrangements, land use, the emergent and associational form of urban life, for example, these are different in different contexts, not least as they are shaped by historical trajectories of urbanisation. And the many social, economic and institutional dynamics which contribute to shaping urban outcomes are diverse and potentially divergent across the globe. Thinking about urban experiences must therefore confront but also find ways to work creatively

with this diversity of both outcome and process. There are many shared features of urbanisation processes and urban outcomes which could bring diverse urban experiences into potential analytical engagement. For a comparative imagination, this opens up many creative tactics for researchers to explore the urban world. Finally, all the urban thinkers we have considered here have highlighted that the fullness and inexhaustibility of urban space forms the grounds on which they seek to craft their insights. As a complex, spatial object, with multiple determinations, emergent formations, and unforeseeable assemblages, the urban is always **distinctive**. Every urban outcome is individual. Here, we will locate the potential for thinking the urban anew, each time, launching insights from anywhere, any urban territory, in the midst of the urban world. A reformatted comparative urban imagination, then, might contribute to provoking new geographies of theorising the urban along the tracks of interconnections, across diversity and shared experiences, and in the midst of urban territories.

Theoretical innovation in understanding the urban can therefore arise through tracing the genesis of emergent urban forms, practices and imaginations in the prolific interconnections that make up whatever the urban might become. Whatever the urban might be is emergent from a multiplicity of interconnected circuits, and from the many territories in and across which distinctive forms of urbanisation unfold. The territorial (urban) outcomes of urbanisation are diverse, if often characterised by repeated elements, formed in the eddies of extensive 'social processes' and dispersed according to historic distributions of land-use, opportunities for value creation and extraction, as well as the lived realities of social and economic practices. To think the urban, then, is to be willing to trace the genesis of distinctive territorial outcomes emergent in and through an interconnected sets of socio-economic flows and relation. But it is also to be immersed in the situated, inexhaustible socio-material configurations of urban life. Forging comparative imaginations and methods adequate to this task is the challenge of this book!

By the time we reach the end of the book, then, we will have considered in detail many different ways in which urban scholars have sought to work with differentiation, diversity and distinctiveness. We will delve in some detail into different formulations for how concepts emerge across difference and in relation to the resistances and generativity of the urban world. Different approaches in urban studies grapple with the form in which the urban must necessarily come to be known. For Lefebvre (2003) the urban is quintessentially a space of assemblage, a concrete totality which realises emergent socio-spatial formations. For Massey, it is the sum of a multiplicity of trajectories which composes the open political possibilities of space. And in a Deleuzian imaginary, the very form and concept of space itself, as depth and different(c)iation, is emergent in

the intertwined genesis of the material world and ideas (Dewsbury and Thrift 2005). As we saw in a 'materialities' register, inflected with the emphasis on emergent assemblages and associations, the multiplicity of possible urban outcomes are composed in the everyday articulations of materialities, things, bodies, the infrastructure of words, the composition of publics, and the arcs of connection which are traced through imagination and through the physical trajectories of the many journeys made, for example, to put together potentialities for livelihoods (Simone 2010). The multiplicity of the urban is an outcome of lived reality, of the many ways in which urban dwellers, or urban scholars, piece together the city (Ferrari 2013). Crafting an analytics of the urban therefore opens to a multiplicity of outcomes, experiences, surfaces and spatialities. Given all this, conceptualisations of the urban will themselves constitute a multiplicity. Building more globally relevant understandings of the urban will require (discrepant) conversations about urbanity amongst many different subjects of theorising across the diversity of twenty-first century cities, a multiplicity of urban experiences, and a wide range of global urban histories.

Conclusion

Sprawling, fragmented, discontinuous and globalised, as well as emergent, precarious and material, the urban requires new and multiple vocabularies; but it also requires new and agile geographies and practices of conceptualisation. Understanding urbanisation means working with the dynamic, globalising circuits which are materialising urban territories in configurations that diverge from centred norms of discrete urban form. Thinking the urban globally therefore cuts across tendencies to segment the field of urban studies on any a priori grounds. While strongly valuing insights from different urban experiences, urban studies also needs to sidestep inherited conceptual divisions and fragmentations in favour of being alert to emergent and unexpected analytical alignments across the urban world.

The central aim of this book is to contribute to a comparative imagination specifically relevant to understanding urban processes, which can be put to work to build new interpretations of the urban, in alliance with urban dwellers, through rigorous analysis and committed engagements. Starting from anywhere, a comparative approach to the problem of understanding the urban world inspires the generation of concepts in conversation with the array of related and distant analytical insights to hand and in engagement with the dynamic and emergent urban world. Generating concepts creates new insights which are in turn available for launching into wider conversations

and shared practices of interrogating the urban elsewhere, where they may (or may not) find purchase.

The rest of this book presents comparativism as one possible response to questions which as we have seen in this chapter are shared across different approaches in urban studies. The book will argue that a comparative imagination is an intrinsic part of coming to know the global urban world, whatever theoretical perspective you might adopt. However, Chapters 2 and 3 explore how the inheritance of comparative method and practice in urban studies is somewhat mixed in relation to its ability to respond to the debates and demands of global urban studies. Formal methodological guidance has tended to truncate the scope for comparison of different cities. But in their vernacular practice comparative urbanists developed some helpful pragmatic ways to work across diverse urban outcomes. After considering these in turn in Chapters 2 and 3, Chapter 4 then establishes how, in the light of these traditions, comparativism might be reformatted to respond to the specific challenges of contemporary global urban studies. In the rest of this first part of the book, then, we trace the lineages of comparative urban research, and explore some resources for reframing the philosophical basis and methodological assumptions of comparative urban practice, to better fit it for global urban studies.