PREFACE

Global urbanism at the start of the twenty-first century has reached an important watershed: for the first time in human history, the urban population has passed over the symbolic threshold where the majority of people now live in cities. At a time when the unprecedented scale of worldwide urbanization has marked the dawn of what in academic and journalistic discourse has been referred to as the new Urban Age, what it means to project the future shape of cities-yet-to-come—and to talk of sustainable urban development and to provide for human security in fragile urban environments—has assumed enormous significance.[1] As a world-historical process, urbanization has lurched inexorably forward in space and time, "explod[ing] inherited morphologies of urbanism at all spatial scales," creating "new, rescaled formations of urbanized territorial organization," and intensifying "socio-spatial independencies across places, territories and scales." At the start of the twenty-first century, as Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid have persuasively argued, "the resultant, unevenly woven urban fabric" has acquired

> extremely complex, polycentric forms that no longer remotely approximate the concentric rings and linear density gradients associated with the relatively bounded industrial city of the nineteenth century, the metropolitan forms of urban development that were consolidated during the opening decades of the twentieth century or, for that matter, the tendentially decentralizing, nationalized urban systems that crystallized across the global North under Fordist-Keynesian capitalism.[2]

The overwhelming bulk of urban population growth in the foreseeable future is expected to take place not only in the Global South's sprawling megacity

regions but also in its relatively small and medium-sized cities. This shift in the scale and scope of worldwide urbanization has meant that the prominent "leading cities" of North America and Europe have become "increasingly anomalous embodiment[s]" of contemporary urbanism.[3] Scholars have estimated that 93 percent of population growth in cities will occur in the so-called developing nations in the foreseeable future, with 80 percent of that growth taking place in Asia and Africa. By the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, there were more than four hundred cities with a population of at least one million and nineteen cities with a population over ten million. In 1975, just three cities could be classified as "megacities" with populations of ten million or more, only one of them in a "less developed" country. As of 2017, there were thirty-seven megacities. The United Nations estimates that by 2025 there will be close to fifty megacities, with the overwhelming majority located in so-called less developed countries. Other projections suggest even larger numbers, forecasting that Asia alone will have at least thirty megacities by 2025, including Mumbai (2015 population of 20.8 million), Shanghai (35.5 million), Delhi (21.8 million), Tokyo (38.8 million), and Seoul (25.6 million).[4]

As their sheer numbers have proliferated, megacities of hypergrowth have displayed a clear break from prior patterns of urbanization and urban spatial form on a global scale. Scholars, policy makers, and journalists have used a wide variety of analytic constructs to characterize and categorize rapidly growing cities in the world's poorer countries. The most notable terms include "emerging," "developing," "underdeveloped," "less developed," "backward," "modernizing," the "Third World," and the "Global South."[5] Each of these categories has its own history and connotations and, as such, carries (often unacknowledged) ideological biases and normative baggage. Each category offers what amounts to a one-dimensional shorthand that sometimes obscures as much as it illuminates about structural inequalities, persistent poverty, and the division between haves and have-nots on a global scale. Yet there is no question that the process of urbanization is taking place at an accelerated rate in fast-growing cities in relatively poor countries. For the foreseeable future, the great majority of new urban residents on a global scale will be poor, will lack regular wage-paying work, and will have to cobble together livelihoods under impoverished conditions in resource-depleted cities where public assistance and municipal services are nonexistent for the majority of residents.[6]

Yet the actual picture is much more complicated than can be seen simply by pointing to the dominant patterns and general trends that characterize global urbanism at the start of the twenty-first century. Focusing exclusively on the accelerated pace of urban population growth on a world scale can sometimes conceal

as much as it reveals. While the overall trajectory of urban transformation points toward larger and larger cities, contemporary processes of urbanization have resulted in divergent patterns of global urbanism. The distinctiveness of these patterns suggests that it is impossible to account for all contemporary urbanization with a single, universalizing, one-size-fits-all theoretical framework.[7]

These dissimilarities are indeed stark. Well-known cities like London, New York, Chicago, Tokyo, Paris, Barcelona, and other "globalizing" (or already globalized) cities with world-class aspirations remain in the spotlight as exemplars of healthy, sustainable, and competitive urbanism. Yet authoritative estimates suggest that one in six cities worldwide experienced substantial loss of population even before the 2007 American subprime mortgage crisis and the onset of the late-2008 global economic slowdown. In the United States, for instance, the 2006 census estimates revealed that sixteen of the twenty largest cities in the 1950s had contracted in population size, often by huge amounts.[8]

A substantial body of scholarly literature has drawn attention to this growing subset of cities in the United States, Europe, and elsewhere that are confronting sustained socioeconomic decline and the challenges associated with deindustrialization, shrinking populations, property abandonment, and the downsizing of municipal services. What is clear is that this phenomenon of "shrinking cities" transcends national borders. Urban contraction resulting from capital flight and disinvestment, downward shifts in employment opportunities, and population loss is a worldwide dilemma that cuts across continents, regions, and even localities. Cities that have grown slowly or suffered population shrinkage can be found everywhere.[9] Many older industrial cities in core areas of the world economy continue to face population declines that are taking place in some instances on an unprecedented scale. Over the past half-century, 370 cities throughout the world with populations over one hundred thousand have shrunk by at least 10 percent.[10] Metropolitan regions across the United States, Canada, Europe, and Japan have projected double-digit declines in population in the coming decades.[11] Suffering from disinvestment, the hemorrhage of stable employment, and significant population loss, these distressed postindustrial cities in decline are "loser cities" that stand in stark contrast to the massive city-building projects of the Asia Pacific Rim, the "spectacular urbanism" of the Persian Gulf, and the "instant cities" of southern China.[12]

Then there are those struggling cities with burgeoning populations, inadequate and overstretched infrastructure, and virtually nonexistent regulatory mechanisms—unplanned and unmanageable cities like Kinshasa, Lagos, Karachi, Dhaka, Lima, Manila, Cairo, and Caracas, to name a few—which, as Jennifer Robinson has suggested, "do not register on intellectual maps that chart

the rise and fall of world and global cities."[13] Lacking the observable qualities of genuine "city-ness," these bloated metropolitan conurbations do not seem to function in recognizable ways.[14]

What has emerged at the start of the twenty-first century is a kind of asymmetrical urbanism, in which shifting patterns of highly uneven urban development have gone hand in hand with expanding gaps between wealth and poverty not only among cities but also within cities.[15] In the contemporary age of globalization, cities around the world have become enmeshed in an uneven spatial geography where the so-called healthy, vibrant cities with world-class aspirations are emerging as key nodal points in the global economy, while the loser cities that are unable to compete are bypassed and left behind. The megacities of hypergrowth are growing so fast that opportunities for wage-paid employment have failed to keep pace with the expanding numbers of work seekers, existing infrastructure is so overburdened that it has virtually collapsed, and municipal services cannot adequately provide for long-term residents or new arrivals. Adding even more confusion to this diverse mixture of urban typologies is the steady accretion of master-planned, holistically designed cities built entirely from scratch—the instant cities that originated in the Persian Gulf, popped up along the Asia Pacific Rim, and eventually spread to the Indian subcontinent, elsewhere in the Middle East, Africa, and beyond.[16]

Urbanization is a complex, multifaceted, and sometimes contradictory global process that proceeds along multiple pathways without a privileged, common end point. To think in terms of alternative trajectories is to challenge the claims to a singular urbanization process that takes place through recognizable stages along a predetermined linear pathway.[17] It is necessary to engage critically with new thinking about global urbanism and urbanization processes, to deviate from the conventional practice of evaluating "Third World" cities from the fixed (and privileged) perspective of "First World" cities, and to dispense with the rigid demarcation between (exploiting) core zones and (exploited, dependent) peripheral regions of the world economy, as if these distinctions somehow represented a permanent and unchanging geographical fix.[18]

URBAN FUTURES

This wholesale shift in the center of gravity of global urbanization away from the historic Euro-American core of the world capitalist economy has provoked both renewed popular curiosity about cities around the world and scholarly

concern about what the patterns and rhythms of global urbanism portend for the future. As a general rule, cities concentrate poverty and deprivation, but they also represent perhaps the best hope of escaping these circumstances. Beyond the demographic hyperbole and stereotyped imaginings of urban dystopia about rogue "cities gone wild" (chaotic and feral) that has accompanied the explosive expansion of megacities of hypergrowth, it has also been widely acknowledged in both popular culture and scholarly writing that cities are the key strategic sites for global flows of finance, trade, and information, which are the indisputable lifeblood of the contemporary capitalist world economy.[19]

Well-known "global city" theorists like Saskia Sassen have described a spatial ecology of global centrality and marginality that has essentially taken shape as a ranked hierarchy of rival "alpha cities" in fierce competition to become leading command-and-control centers in the world economy.[20] Her analysis can be interpreted in one of two ways—either as a Darwinian claim about intense competitive rivalries and the eventual survival of the fittest, or as a Durkheimian argument about the evolving functional specialization of cities arranged unevenly in what might be called the new international division of labor. Whether or not one cares to subscribe to such formulaic ecological characterizations of globalization, one key theme remains: despite all the scholarly discourse about deterritorialization and the borderless world, cities and their place within a world of cities continue to matter, and to matter a great deal.[21]

If London, Paris, Chicago, and New York at the start of the twentieth century assumed dominant roles as the premier crucibles and living laboratories for world-historic experiments with urban modernity, the hyper-urbanism of the new millennium—characterized by explosive growth in the sheer size and vast geographic scale of cities—has altered the terrain upon which to make sense of the experiences and expectations of contemporary urbanity.[22] In the face of the irreversible trend toward the urbanization of the globe, the fate of humanity has become ever more inextricably tied to the socioeconomic (and political) life of cities, to the variegated sites of urban space and administrative structures, and to the networks and flows of capital, migration, and trade that not only tie global-city regions together but also link them in wider urban fields.[23] As Trevor Hogan and Julian Potter have suggested, the coming of supersized megacities "seems inseparable from the ambivalent and transient experience of modernity—the ideals of liberty, individuality, property, accelerating progress," and, conversely, the grim realities of grinding poverty, immobility, anonymity, and social marginalization for those left out of, and hence excluded from, the mainstream of urban life. The growth of megacities has amplified the dysfunctionalities and social evils associated with late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century

modern industrial cities—the exemplars of urban modernity at the time.[24] The dynamism of the modern metropolis as the engine of capitalist growth and expansion was not without its seamy underside of crime and vice, environmental degradation, and horrific deprivation. The mirror image of the capitalist modernity associated with affluent neighborhoods and upscale housing can be found in such squalid building typologies as overcrowded tenements and insalubrious slums.[25] These urban dysfunctionalities never disappeared. They have mutated, metastasized, and reappeared under different guises (and have assumed different meanings) as shantytowns, ghettoes, informal settlements, and squatter camps in today's sprawling megacities of hypergrowth.[26]

Those ordinary people who lay claim to a "right to the city" continue to struggle with a long litany of challenges, including securing gainful employment, obtaining access to decent and affordable housing, and compensating—through their own initiative and sacrifice—for inadequate infrastructure and the lack of inclusive governance. Confronted with entrenched patterns of social inequality and the absence of meaningful channels for upward mobility, marginalized city dwellers often come face-to-face with a life of absolute impoverishment and immiseration.[27]

While the growing importance of megacities (and global-city regions) in the world economy is widely acknowledged, there remains considerable disagreement over how to interpret the explosive growth of urbanism on a global scale.[28] Urban scholars and policy makers together oscillate between starkly opposing points of view. These prognostications range from unblinking optimism to skeptical pessimism. Does the unprecedented growth of the world's cities offer limitless opportunities for a better life, or does it portend a looming disaster of monumental proportionsjust waiting to happen. ? On the one side, a great deal of scholarly writing and popular journalism has coalesced around a confident, optimistic discourse that envisions cities as inviting arenas of livability, opportunity, and transformative potential.[29] The well-entrenched fantasy projection of a global evolutionary trajectory toward urban growth and trickle-down prosperity has remained an astonishingly tenacious belief in mainstream developmentalist circles. Edward Glaeser, in particular, is an enthusiastic advocate of the inherent value of urban living, arguing that cities are durable engines of innovation and wellsprings of material wealth that offer unprecedented opportunities for sustained upward mobility. In short, these scholars and journalists argue that cities are humanity's greatest creation and the best hope for the future.[30]

In contrast, an opposing dystopian discourse has crystalized around the view that unregulated population growth and uncontrolled spatial expansion

forfeit whatever advantages cities seem to offer those urban residents who cannot compete for scarce resources. There is no shortage of disturbing images of rapidly growing cities around the world as vast dumping grounds or repositories for the jobless poor.[31] Many urban scholars have warned that the inability of large numbers of struggling cities to absorb work seekers into the mainstream of urban life creates the conditions for a coming catastrophe.[32] In the megacities of hypergrowth, unplanned and chaotic urbanization has continued to take a huge toll on the quality of the material environment and on human health, contributing to ecological, socioeconomic, and political instability. As Mike Davis has provocatively asked, "does ruthless Darwinian competition, as increasing numbers of poor people compete for the same informal scraps, ensure self-consuming communal violence as yet the highest form of urban involution?"[33] An estimated one-third of nearly three billion urban dwellers today live in what are typically called "slums," defined as informal settlements where people cannot secure necessities like clean water, adequate housing, and proper services. As a result, an estimated 1.6 million urban residents die each year for lack of such basic amenities as clean water and proper sanitation.[34] Without a doubt, growing urban inequalities and diminishing opportunities for upward mobility have greatly reinforced patterns of social polarization, exclusion, and marginalization in cities around the world.[35]

One enduring image has portrayed the contemporary city as a social space for the circulation of civic freedoms and the practices of political autonomy—that is, an evolving terrain that provides the public setting for the monopolization, contestation, and negotiation of power, politics, and economic exchange.[36] Whether large or small, cities are contested sites where the politics and practices of citizenship are played out, often in dramatic fashion. The entanglements of rights, entitlements, and claims to belonging careen back and forth between what Egin Isin has called the fault line between *urbs* and *civitas*—that is, the gap between the experience of the city on the one side, and its enormous productive capacities for human progress and its promise of inclusive participation in civil and democratic polity on the other.[37] Economic interdependence goes hand in hand with legal rights of private ownership and formal political-legal autonomy. Instrumental market rationality and the impersonal cash nexus intricately bind buyers and sellers together in ever-expanding circles of exchange and circulation. Yet engagement in "increasingly abstract forms of association of which money is the paradigmatic form" subjects urban dwellers to a market logic that both offers opportunities for enrichment and operates as a powerful force for entrapment.[38]

THE NARROW FOCUS OF CONVENTIONAL URBAN STUDIES

Despite their claims to universal applicability, the dominant theories and methodical approaches used to study cities—constituting what Ananya Roy has called the "universalizing knowledge-space" of mainstream urban theory—have remained largely tied to the experience of a handful of leading world-class cities of Europe and North America. These cities serve as the wellsprings for ideas about urban modernity and the privileged source for theorizing about urbanism and urbanization.[39] All too often, these vibrant, healthy, "developed" cities located in the historic core areas of the capitalist world economy form the paradigmatic reference point and the discriminating lens through which to view diverse global urban experiences.[40] These leading world-class cities function as the standard-bearers for what a "good city" should be and the benchmark for defining what less successful cities should emulate.[41] As a general rule, scholarly inquiry has remained largely fixated on ranking cities in relation to ordered hierarchies and categorizing cities according to levels of development. Grounded in the principles of classical modernization theory, these mainstream approaches to urban studies favor teleological narratives of evolutionary progress in which cities develop incrementally through distinct stages toward a shared goal of sustainable, healthy urbanism.[42]

The excessive focus on identifying the precise defining characteristics of what constitutes a "globalizing city" with world-class aspirations—and the attendant fixation on the rank-ordering of cities in accordance with their position in an arranged hierarchy of relative achievements—has tended to flatten out and homogenize our understanding of the contemporary experience of urban modernity.[43] The conventional urban studies literature has been largely unable to break away from the long-standing regulative fiction that the process of urbanization is a more or less singular pathway that unfolds in fairly distinct stages, with cities distributed along a continuum that stretches from the "fully developed" (mature) metropolis at one pole to "less developed" cities that lack all the important features of modern urbanity at the other pole, with a lot of "developing" cities somewhere in between, striving to catch up by ascending through the hierarchy of achievement.[44]

Rethinking conventional urban theory requires shifting our focus away from the strong fixation on hierarchies, rank orders, and "success stories" and adopting instead a vantage point that starts with the diversity, heterogeneity, and unevenness of urban experiences on a global scale. Examining diverse urban experiences in a world of cities enables us to draw upon new approaches to

theorizing that are not already tied to such paradigmatic constructions as global cities, world-class cities, creative cities, smart cities, and competitive cities—to name just a few.[45]

Properly understood, the point of departure for understanding contemporary global urbanism—the emergent cities of the twenty-first century—is recognizing the diverse trajectories of urban transformation, the heterogeneity of spatial forms, and the asymmetrical patterns of agglomeration and density in contrast with dissolution and dispersal. Dispensing with conventional approaches to studying cities rooted in the "modernization" myth—that is, a priori conceptions of normal and expected routes to a perceived end point called "development"—enables us to explore growth and decline without becoming trapped in a framework that looks for deviations from an a priori norm. This teleological approach relies upon such well-worn binary oppositions as "developed" versus "developing," and "First World" versus "Third World," which indelibly mark cities as "ahead" or "behind" in the (fast or slow, accelerated or stalled) drive toward modernity. Breaking away from conventional approaches to thinking about global urbanism requires an analytic sensitivity to gaps and lags, to bypassing and leapfrogging, and to accelerating and slowing down.[46] Grasping these multiple trajectories of urban transformation at the start of the twenty-first century—what Patsy Healey has called the "recognition of contingency and complexity"—requires that we abandon the preconceived notions that govern our understanding of cities and urbanization.[47]

Processes of growth and development (sometimes fast-paced and sometimes agonizingly slow) are inextricably intertwined with stagnation and decline. As a general rule, conventional urban studies literature has continued to rely on abstract concepts, analytic categories, and descriptive markers that were first developed and gradually refined over time to account for the meteoric rise in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of the great modern industrial metropolises that constituted the core of the capitalist world economy. Yet with the emergence of diverse patterns of urbanization, conventional models used to explain the evolving dynamics of growth and development of the modern metropolis that characterized the Fordist era of industrial capitalism have become outmoded.[48]

Framed in bold strokes, what characterizes global urbanism at the start of the twenty-first century is the remaking of cities in ways that sidestep and skip over the patterns of urban growth and development that characterized the late-nineteenth-century era when the great modern industrial metropolises of North America and Europe assumed dominant positions in top-down management of the capitalist world economy. At present, the patterns of global urbanism do not conform to orthodox one-size-fits-all models or rigid paradigms that rank cities

by what they have and what they lack. The production of a multiplicity of different cities that respond to different pressures and logics makes the call for a more thorough, cosmopolitan reimagining of urban theorizing on a global scale even more urgent.[49]

Rigid adherence to the universalizing claims of an all-encompassing urban theory—with its roots in the experience of globalizing cities in North America and Europe—neglects the heterogeneity, the diversity, and the shifting geographies of global urbanization. As Helga Leitner and Eric Sheppard have persuasively argued, it is necessary to reject the pretension that a single, omnibus theory can sufficiently account "for the variegated nature of urbanization and cities across the world."[50] In a similar vein, Jamie Peck has contended that reconfiguring urban theory must "occur across scales, positioning the urban scale itself, and working to locate cities not just within lateral grids of difference, in the 'planar' dimension, but in relational and conjunctural terms as well."[51] Focusing attention on difference, not as a deviation from an expected pattern of development but as the fundamental constituent feature of global urbanism, provides an alternative point of departure for understanding urbanization on a world scale.[52]

Efforts to (re)theorize urban studies from the perspective of the Global South have called for a paradigm shift in our understanding of urbanization and urbanism.[53] "Seeing from the South," as Vanessa Watson has suggested, provides an alternative vantage point from which to unsettle and dislodge "taken-for-granted assumptions" about what it means to talk about urban modernity and the supposed destination of urban development.[54] Challenging the core regulative principles of those mainstream urban theories that treat Northern urbanization as the normative benchmark from which to evaluate progress toward urban modernity allows us to contest "the dogma of a universal and teleological model of urbanization."[55]

In contrast to mainstream approaches to urban studies, the alternative conceptualization of "ordinary cities" has steered urban thinking away from the inordinate fixation on globalizing cities with world-class aspirations as the wellspring of ideas about "good urbanism," proposing instead the idea that cities everywhere should be drawn into a wider theoretical engagement in the production of new geographies of theory making.[56] This proposed movement toward a postcolonial comparative urbanism opens up new room for thinking across sites and across diverse historical circumstances in order to understand the nature of the interrelations and connections between and among cities located outside the core areas of the world economy.[57]

OPEN-ENDED EXPLORATIONS IN SEARCH OF ADEQUATE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

My interests in exploring the divergent trajectories of global urbanism at the start of the twenty-first century are as much speculative and conjectural as they are analytical and diagnostic.[58] This book is about "imagining cities in advance of their arrival" as much as deciphering cities as they exist at present.[59] At the risk of oversimplification, cities are complex assemblages of material objects arranged in various patterns of density, serving multiple functions and purposes, and held loosely together via infrastructural networks. City building is always unfinished and incomplete. The balance between material form and density, as well as between proximity and distance, constantly evolves. As Saskia Sassen has suggested, "in this incompleteness lies the possibility of making."[60] City building is not a random, haphazard process without purpose and deliberation, but neither is it a uniform process converging around a common spatial-temporal destination or end point.[61]

This book is animated by three questions. First, how do we grasp the rapidly evolving realities of global urbanism at the start of the twenty-first century—and the multiple urban worlds that take tangible shape in different places—as city-building practices follow multiple trajectories across geographical space and historical time? At root, teasing out and identifying these patterns involves an exercise in classification. Second, how is it possible to theorize about global urbanism in ways that recognize the diversity, distinctiveness, and historical specificity of cities, while at the same time acknowledging that the contemporary world of cities is interconnected and subject to "widely circulating practices of urbanism" that often produce similar patterns and outcomes?[62] In other words, urbanism does not conform to inviolable "laws of motion," yet it is not the outcome of purely random happenstance. Third, how do we distance ourselves from universalizing theoretical approaches that rely upon a priori (and ex cathedra) conceptual frameworks to understand the putatively singular, overarching logic of urbanization, while at the same time avoiding the radical relativism (what Robert Beauregard has called "radical uniqueness") that treats each city as an irreducible special case with a peculiarity and uniqueness all its own?[63] Addressing these questions requires that we excavate the main underlying assumptions and core regulative principles that have for quite some time framed and guided mainstream urban studies as a distinct field of inquiry.[64]

By the end of the twentieth century, the unfolding of new, haphazard patterns of urban growth and development that gave rise to vast, spatially fragmented, and distended polycentric conurbations without obvious or fixed boundaries suddenly unsettled and destabilized the taken-for-granted conventional distinction between the city (with its high-density downtown core) and the suburb (with its low-density building typologies at the urban edge).[65] The appearance of these amorphous, horizontally expansive, post-urban spatial configurations on a boundless scale—what urban theorists have variously called the extended metropolis, the 100-mile city, the limitless city, sprawl city, exopolis, postmetropolis, metrourbia, or the city turned inside out—has thrown into doubt the concept of the city as a coherent category of analysis.[66]

New spatial patterns of urbanization have effectively undermined the conventional understanding of cities as discrete, spatially bounded places that have an integrity all their own. What might be called extended urbanization—an idea that falls into line with Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid's notion of "planetary urbanization"—reflects multifaceted urbanizing impulses that have pushed their tentacles outward into exurban territories (hinterlands) in haphazard ways that defy simple classification.[67] As a dynamic process of spatial production, urbanization has broken down barriers and leapfrogged over obstacles, dissolving and absorbing whatever stands in the way. The shape-shifting nature of urbanizing processes that produce new spatial forms and novel kinds of territorial urbanization "proceeds through the appropriation and deployment of multiple logics of spatial production and articulation."[68] Dispersed settlement patterns, ribbons of densifying growth, and elongated corridors of circulation and transportation have produced "intensely operationalized landscapes" that in no way resemble what conventional urban studies has long understood as the city.[69]

As a universally recognized and identifiable object of inquiry, the notion of the city is, upon close inspection, ephemeral and unstable. Looking at cities in the limited sense of administrative (political) units with arbitrarily imposed boundaries yields very little by way of understanding the underlying dynamics and processes of urban transformation. Cities consist of multiple, contested territories that are embedded in complex local histories.[70] The disruptive force of unregulated outward sprawl, the development of regional patterns of haphazard growth, the proliferation of edge cities that undermine the idea of monocentric urbanism (defined by density, proximity, and agglomeration), and emergent configurations of extensive urbanization, or what might be called "continuous settlement," imply that it is time to rethink what we mean

by the city, and by urbanism more generally.[71] Cities have no a priori or fixed ontological status but are socially produced and continuously transformed by a multiplicity of forces and imperatives operating at every geographic scale. In short, epistemologically speaking, cities as objects of inquiry are as much arbitrary social constructions as actual places with an ontological status of their own.[72]

The aim of this book is to recast our thinking about trajectories of global urbanism at the start of the twenty-first century. By adopting a broad spatial and temporal framework that unsettles conventional approaches to urban theorizing, I hope to identify patterns of regular recurrence, historical evolution, and genuine novelty in contemporary processes of globalizing urbanization. The driving force behind these efforts to rethink mainstream urban studies is to challenge those theoretical approaches that aspire to universal validity and general explanations without respect for time and place. All such universalizing theories, albeit in different ways, fail to acknowledge the temporal and spatial specificity of place and context as the substructure and building blocks for knowing.[73] The persistence of such epistemological categories as First World and Third World, developed and developing, are unhelpful binary distinctions that paralyze our imagination, obscuring our ability to see beyond the developmental paradigm of linear pathways leading to the end goal of the "modern metropolis." Similarly, vague terms like "failed," "distorted," or "stalled" urbanism suggest that some cities lag behind and need to catch up with some idealized image of what a "good city" ought to be.[74]

Rethinking urban theory enables us to conceive of cities beyond the West not as derivative copies, imitations, or counterfeits of the real urbanism of the Global North but as hydra-headed, polymorphous, and mutating ensembles of physical objects and social practices.[75] Mainstream urban studies typically frame overburdened cities of the (so-called) Global South as an assortment of empirically interesting yet anomalous cases, that amount to not much more than reservoirs of stylized facts or storehouses of anecdotal information that yield poignant stories of desperation and victimization or heroic manifestations of sheer grit, but little else.[76] They are "objects to be theorized," but "they are never able to theorize back"; that is, they are not able to produce ideas that contribute to building new theoretical understandings of global urbanism.[77] In such an analytic division of the urban world, cities beyond the West—those "off the map" of structural relevance—are looked upon as "the intractable, the mute, the abject, or the other-worldly," that is, pale replicas of an imagined genuine urbanism, and exemplars of a stalled, truncated, or even counterfeit modernity.[78]

GRAND NARRATIVES OF PROGRESS THROUGH EMULATION

The dominant current in the applied, policy-focused literature still follows the conventional narrative of development as the singular goal of policy implementation. The assumption is that if policy recommendations are implemented correctly and effectively, then poor cities will, over time, experience progress toward sustainable development. This viewpoint lends itself to the notion that current inequalities and hardships are in some ways an acceptable state of temporary limbo, constituting a kind of unfortunate but necessary rite of passage that will eventually resolve itself. All newcomers to cities have at some time experienced periods of suffering and socioeconomic hardship, but they were eventually able to work their way out of poverty and ascend the ladder of upward mobility.[79]

It is my contention that urban transformation is neither linear (following a recognized and predetermined direction) nor cumulative (additive and not reversible). There are no singular, fixed end points or directional beacons to guide urban transformation. This nonteleological approach rejects the assumption of requisite sequences, or identifiable stages or phases, of urban growth and development that define the trajectories of urban transformation.[80] Yet while urban transformation is multidirectional and rhizomatic, it is not directionless and inexplicably chaotic. There are identifiable patterns and shared features. Connections, networks, and flows inextricably bind cities to one another in ways that make it impossible to treat them as singular, bounded, and isolated units of analysis. This connective tissue operates in asymmetric ways that privilege certain places while punishing others. The "unruly materiality of the urban" has inspired the proliferation of imaginative theoretical projects. Urban theorizing "takes place in the midst of fields of politics, power and practice" that arise and erupt from the diversity of urban experiences.[81]

The collapse of the grand narrative of urbanization (and the march toward progress), which tried to subject disparate urban realities and experiences worldwide to the reductive model of the modern metropolis in all its pristine glory, has opened creative theoretical space that has enabled us to embrace urbanism as a multitude of conditions that do not conform to a single universal model of transformation.[82] In searching for new ways of understanding global urbanism, I contend that it is necessary to maintain a largely inductive, open-ended approach to analytic revision and conceptual experimentation. The deductive, universalizing ambitions of grand theorizing run the risk of not only foreclosing conceptual innovation but also subsuming difference and variation under a single analytic framework. In contrast, a call for theoretical openness requires,

as Jennifer Robinson has argued, "thinking with variation and repetition, rather than trying to 'control for difference.'"[83] The shift in the geographic center of global urbanization, coupled with the diversity in the existing patterns of urban transformation, has revealed gaps and fissures in mainstream urban scholarship. Universalizing theorizations of urbanization focus on establishing the core features that characterize the presumed essential nature of cities. Yet the elastic, flexible, and malleable boundaries of cities and urbanization more generally have undermined theoretical and methodological efforts to identify a coherent object of inquiry. Making sense of the diverse trajectories of global urbanism requires abandoning the quest for a privileged starting point and a single analytic framework to account for the range of different urban outcomes.[84]

Precisely what the process of urbanization means in regard to ideas about urbanism and cities has become increasingly blurred because of complex and hybrid patterns of land use and human settlement. "The vast urban agglomerations taking shape across the world," as Saskia Sassen has suggested, "are often seen as lacking the features, quality, and sense of what we think of as urbanity [and city-ness]."[85] Depending on specific geographic, climatic, economic, and cultural conditions, numerous and often radically conflicting outcomes accompany urban transformation and development: the hyperdense megalopolis of high-rise vertical urbanism inexplicably coexists with extensive horizontal growth and seemingly endless sprawl; traditional street life of small-scale "walkable" urbanism exists side by side with high-speed traffic corridors and freeways; the material durability of architecture and the built environment is overlaid by the immaterial ephemerality of lived daily experience ("soft urbanism"); a feverish proliferation of enclave spectacles is incongruously juxtaposed against sites of dereliction and ruin; the fast-track urbanism of the Asia Pacific Rim and the Persian Gulf coexists with deindustrializing cities faced with shrinking populations along with the slow strangulation and gradual disappearance of smaller cities and towns in relatively rich countries with high levels of industrial development.[86]

As the crowning achievement of the industrial age, the planned urbanism of high modernism has lost its special place as the agreed-upon model for the future of cities in the face of the massive expansion of informal housing settlements and self-built shelter as the dominant modes of city building on a global scale.[87] As opposed to thinkers from the nineteenth century onward who looked upon the emergence of the modern metropolis as an up-to-date cosmopolitan outpost standing against the traditionalism and parochialism of rural backwardness, the idea of urbanism today "no longer indexes a normative cultural concept"—expressed in lively debates over the civil realm of social life, public space and the

public sphere, architectural spectacle, the emblematic figure of the flaneur, along with the blasé attitudes, and anonymity—but "represents a cosmos of extremely varied notions determined by geographic, cultural, and individual preferences." If we want to grasp the complexity of urbanism at the start of the twenty-first century, "we have to capture it in all its disguises, gradations, and transformations occurring simultaneously on a global scale."[88]

As a means of understanding the everyday experience of ordinary people outside the mainstream of urban life, the once reigning paradigm of modernity has proved to be an inadequate analytic tool. To accept and even embrace the merits of indecipherability, ambiguity, and illegibility requires a rethinking of the basic concepts and analytic constructs that are embedded in the modernist paradigm of rational order and spatial stability.[89] Following Bonaventura de Sousa Santos, making sense of ordinary urbanism in struggling cities requires extensive epistemological shifts in the kind of knowledge production that can build the field of critical urban studies.[90]

This book challenges long-entrenched ideas about how we conceive of the meaning and significance of the informal settlements that provide housing and livelihoods for growing numbers of otherwise shelterless urban poor who inhabit struggling cities of hypergrowth around the world. For the most part, the mainstream scholarly literature has viewed these irregular settlements through the prisms of modernization and development theories, the breakdown of sociospatial order, the rise of endemic crime and violence, or debates about the cultures of poverty. Yet these shantytowns have proved to be both more durable and more multifaceted than any of these perspectives anticipated.[91] Far from being accidental outcomes (or unfortunate outliers) that emerged in the shadows of more dynamic formal economies and public regulatory regimes, unplanned, unregulated, and irregular housing arrangements have become permanent and integral features of urban life on a global scale.[92]

MANY URBANISMS