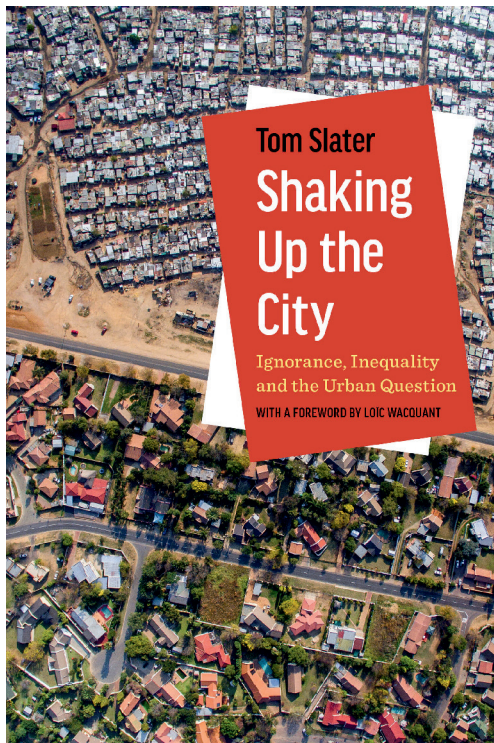# BOOK REVIEW SECTION

Slater, T.: Shaking Up the City: Ignorance, Inequality and the Urban Question. Oakland, University of California Press, 2021. 258 p.

In recent decades, social inequality and marginality have become one of the most important concerns in social urban studies. A deeply polarised social (class) structure has become a challenge for central and local governments, bringing new policy dilemmas about gentrification and homelessness; degradation of districts and the return migration of bourgeois families looking for public amenities and infrastructural rebuilding; rent control and skyrocketing real estate prices; and bureaucratic changes produced by fiscal cost-cutting and neoliberal restoring of the state. Consequently, new discourses have emerged about the city and urban injustice. A welcome contribution to this ongoing debate can be found in *Shaking Up the City*. The book addresses the causal mechanisms behind urban inequality, material deprivation, marginality, and social suffering in cities across several

international contexts, and while doing so, it scrutinises how knowledge (and all too often ignorance) on these issues is produced by a range of urban actors. The 8 chapters and 257 pages of the book offer the reader new interpretations of socio-spatial processes and present a strong call for a more critically reflexive approach to urban social science. It is rooted in an institutional political economy approach to urban geography and, therefore, focuses primarily on the political and economic structures shaping inequalities in cities.

In each chapter, Tom SLATER takes us back and forth, clarifying well-known theories and showing in which way they can be used to produce either fallacies or good knowledge about the city. He expresses well the tension between the idea of epistemology (that is, the production of knowledge) and the idea of agnotology (that is, the production of ignorance). Drawing on Robert PROCTOR's notion of agnotology and Pierre BOURDIEU's concept of symbolic power, Tom SLATER defines his 'agnotological approach' and argues that "it allows us to understand the institutional arrangements and symbolic systems that fuse and feed off each other to structure the deeply unequal social relations behind the profound differences we see in life chances in cities in so many geographical contexts today" (p. 23). The author operationalises this by bringing together the co-production of knowledge and ignorance as a field of inquiry, and this is a powerful and most important input, in my opinion, into critical urban studies.

SLATER presents a critique of misunderstanding or ignorance in the use of well-known notions like urban resilience, gentrification and neighbourhood effect, sink estates and ghetto, rent control and housing justice. The considerations are supported by empirical examples from various cities such as Edinburgh, Glasgow, Cape Town, Vancouver, and many more. Moreover, the author deconstructs the views that influence the modern way of thinking about the city. Jane JACOBS and William WHYTE (p. 2) and Gehl Architects (p. 3) are criticised for their utopian thinking. Tom SLATER discusses the views of Andres DUANY on gentrification, pointing to "a false choice between gentrification (a form of reinvestment) and a concentration of poverty (disinvestment)" (p. 53) or Matthew DESMOND (p. 86) about an important study on eviction, paying attention to a lack of conclusions that would frontally tackle the structural and institu-

tional arrangements behind the extremely high cost of rental housing. On the other hand, we can hear a strong voice of Loïc Wacquant, along with Neil Smith, as key interlocutors in this book and to a lesser extent Pierre Bourdieu and David Harvey.

In Chapter 1 (*Challenging the Heteronomy of Urban Research*), the author introduces and operationalises the book. He starts with an explanation of 'the heteronomy of urban research.' He refers to the condition of scholars being constrained in asking their questions about urbanisation, instead of asking questions and using categories invented and imposed by various institutions that have vested interests in influencing what is off and on the urban agenda. As a result, there is a rise of "policy-driven research at the expense of research-driven policy" and, with it, "decision-based evidence-making at the expense of evidence-based decision making" (p. 4). Slater states that this book is a critical response to 'the steady erosion of intellectual autonomy' and a call for more critical urban studies. Moreover, he shows the mechanisms governing urban research, pointing to the high dependence of researchers on funds obtained from different (also politically involved) institutions. The final part of the chapter brings us to the aforementioned conceptual articulation of agnotology and symbolic power.

Chapter 2 (*The Resilience of Neoliberal Urbanism*) starts with an analysis of the Chicago School of Human Ecology and presents the history of concepts being brought from biological science to social sciences. In particular, he criticises the production and circulation of 'urban resilience' as one of the most recent examples of such a term. According to Slater, urban resilience has a large institutional apparatus. The author gives an example of the Rockefeller Foundation's 100 Resilient Cities competition (2013–2019), which offered cash prizes to city administrations that show the most initiatives to return their cities to market-driven planning as quickly as possible after economic shocks and a significant number of urban managers participated in the program. Based on Glasgow and Cape Town examples, Tom Slater argues that the positive narration of building resilience makes acceptable claims to "unlock economic potential and de-risk development to create opportunities associated with sites in order to attract developers" (p. 33). In that sense, resilience appears as a political concept that moves the responsibility for economic and environmental crises and stresses to people, rather than addressing the underlying causes of these crises and precluding questions or practices of resistance. Through this approach, we avoid asking questions about who the resilient city is for and who is evicted to make way for it.

Chapter 3 (*Gentrification beyond the False Choice Urbanism*) shows how the production of ignorance about gentrification has emerged. He explains that most of the research deals with the pros and cons of gentrification, worrying about threats to social diversity, housing affordability, but finally concludes that gentrification is good on balance because it represents the reinvestment that stops the neighbourhood from decaying. What I find interesting in this chapter is that the author demonstrates that gentrification and urban decay are not "opposites, alternatives or choices, but rather tensions and contradictions in a global system of capital circulation, amplified and aggravated by the global crisis of affordable housing, a system that relies on propitious conditions for accumulation laid down by the neoliberal states" (p. 25). In this chapter the author discusses rent theory in general as the most useful concept that explains the political economy of gentrification and responds to the agnotology that circulates about the supposed benefits of gentrification. Referring to Neil Smith, Slater indicates that the rent theory is "a theory of the state's role in creating economic conditions for gentrification" (p. 65), which helps understand the speculative interests of land developers or the activation of territorial stigma. Moreover, what I find very interesting is that the author discusses how the rent gap theory explains gentrification accompanied by displacement beyond the Global North.

In the next section, titled *Displacement, Rent Control, and Housing Justice* (Chapter 4), Slater considers the displacement of the working class from urban space as the most harmful effect of gentrification and presents the role of rent control in mitigating against it. The author discusses different studies that refer to and critique rent control and emphasises that it is one of the misunderstood policies across a variety of disciplines and professions concentrating on urban issues. Slater exposes and dissects three of the prevalent myths about rent control: "1. that it negatively affects the quality of rented properties; 2. that it negatively affects the supply of housing and 3. that it leads to 'inefficiencies' in housing markets" (p. 25). This brings us to an urgent question of housing justice, and according to the author, rent control is just one among many instruments that can be used to reframe the debate around housing away from assets and profit and investments to community, family or home. The chapter ends with the positive conclusion that the history of rent strikes teaches us that when landlords, the housing industry or profit-driven state legislation refuse to "concede any ground, tenants also fight back and often win" (p. 108).

Chapter 5 (*Neighborhood Effects as Tautological Urbanism*) presents a discussion on the meaning of neighbourhood effect and on different studies about it. Slater points out that research on neighbourhood effects came from an understanding of society that is based on the assumption that where you live affects your life chances. This brings us to the belief that neighbourhoods matter and shape the fate of residents, and therefore urban policies must be con-

centrated on poor neighbourhoods, seen not "as expressions of social dysfunction but its incubators" (p. 117). Acceptance of the neighbourhood effects thesis misses the key structural question of why people live where they do in cities. SLATER uses a very interesting case study of Cape Town and inverts the neighbour effects thesis. He points to the problem of how differential life chances in cities are produced. He highlights the injustices inherent in letting the market be the force that determines the cost of housing and where people live. This goes in line with the remarks of Roger ANDERSSON and Sako MUSTERD (2005) that "problems in the neighbourhood are seldom problems of the neighbourhood" (p. 132) or Loïc WACQUANT (2008) that "in reality, they track the extent to which the state works or fails to equalise basic life conditions and strategies across places" (p. 132).

Chapter 6 (*The Production and Activation of Territorial Stigma*) highlights the need to pay more attention to how territorial stigmatisation emerges and how people are discredited, devalued, and poorly treated due to the place with which they are associated. Tom SLATER discusses how the concept of symbolic power matters in the analysis of urban inequality. He quotes Loïc WACQUANT (2008) who claimed that territorial stigmatisation is "arguably the single most protrusive feature of the lived experience of those trapped in the sulphurous zones" (p. 142) and focuses on two aspects. First, that some areas of disrepute in many societies have become nationally infamous and denigrated, so now not only policy elites or upper class have negative opinions about these districts, but also their inhabitants themselves. Second, that spatial disgrace has become so powerful that it is partially autonomised from other forms of stigmatisation, like poverty, ethnoracial origin or working-class position, or unemployment, even if it may be closely tied to them in certain contexts. Later in the chapter, the author explores the genealogy of the term 'sink estate.' He traces that it was invented by journalists and adapted by politicians in the United Kingdom and now is used to criticise social housing, distracting attention away from the discussion that social housing is connected with an urgent necessity during a serious crisis of affordability, but also an incubator of community, solidarity, shelter, and home.

In Chapter 7 (*Ghetto Blasting*), SLATER explores territorial stigmatisation by analysing the meaning of the term ghetto. He criticises the excessive ease in calling workers or immigrant places a ghetto and goes back to the definition of WACQUANT (2012) that ghetto is an instrument of ethnoracial closure that employs space to fulfil two conflicting functions: to maximise the material profits extracted from a category deemed defiled and defiling, and to minimise intimate contact with its members to avert the threat of symbolic corrosion and contagion they are believed to carry (p. 172). Based on different examples of ghetto forma-

tion, SLATER concludes the chapter with a strong statement taken from Morgan ADAMSON: "understanding contemporary spaces of racial oppression as internal colonies seem necessary in the face of ongoing white ignorance, visible in stigmatising labels such as ghetto and in the violent processes of predatory capitalism" (p. 182), which expresses that territorial stigmatisation can be treated as a new way of 'internal colonialism.'

In the final chapter (*Some Possibilities for Critical Urban Studies*), the author emphasises that the conceptual frames of agnotology and symbolic power can offer some potential pathways for the field of critical urban studies. He proposes reframing the discussion on urban inequality and more focusing on the relationships between urban knowledge, urban ignorance, and urban struggles.

An undoubted strength of the book is the fact that it presents varied concepts that are not amenable to simple and universal explanations regarding their formative processes, their patterns, and their impact. SLATER demonstrated a critical approach to urban studies positioned against vested interest urbanism and against "the prevailing political wind of the steady erosion of intellectual autonomy" (p. 185). The book is dominated by theoretical considerations. There is some lack of practical solutions that would be an alternative to the practices criticised by the author so far. Nevertheless, the book reveals the crucial importance of confronting different approaches and contexts in understanding urban dynamics. Such economic, social, cultural, and institutional contexts differ not only in the way cities developed over time but also in what kind of narration and why it is used to transform them. The examples presented by the author show that social inequality and marginality still are visible despite many years of efforts to promote urban justice.

The book is deeply rooted in Anglophone urban geography. Therefore, not all nuances can be interpreted similarly by researchers from other regions. SLATER tries to show that even if concepts like the rent gap theory or gentrification have been constructed in a particular cultural, economic, and historical context, it is not a valid reason to dismiss them or unlearn them in different contexts today. The challenge is to take geographically diverse localisations seriously and learn about processes in contexts beyond the Global North. I agree with this, as the local conditions, circumstances, for example, in the Global North and the Global South are radically different. Additionally, in the case of Central and Eastern Europe, some of the concepts like, for example, rent control, are seen differently because of different former experiences.

The book certainly encourages critical thinking, which seems particularly important in the context of changes taking place in Central and Eastern Europe.

The transformation that has been taking place for many years has made us adopt Western European solutions as the best for our cities without questioning them. This is particularly evident in the discussion on revitalisation and gentrification, reinvestments in degraded districts, and current studies on urban resilience. Recent urban research projects on Central and Eastern Europe (e.g. Tammaru, T. *et al.* 2015) show an increase in social disparities, also as a result of over-trust in neoliberalism. Our study on residential segregation at the local level in Warsaw, Poland, indicates that even if segregation indices are still quite low, urban inequality is growing (Jaczewska, B. *et al.* 2017). Therefore, this seems to be a good time to consider more critically the future of cities and the needs of our city residents.

This book is an essential reading for anyone concerned with the main ideologies of urban renewal and developing modes of analysis to facilitate the pursuit of more democratic and equitable urban futures. It can be recommended to a wide audience, especially scholars and students (in second-cycle studies) as well as urban activists. It will be of particular assistance to academic lectures if they are seeking inspiration on how to start critical discussion on urban studies.

Barbara Jaczewska[1]

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[1] University of Warsaw, Faculty of Geography and Regional Studies, Warsaw, Poland. E-mail: bgibki@uw.edu.pl