

BOOK REVIEW

Simon Curtis. 2017. *Global Cities and Global Order*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-874401-6. 264 pp. \$90.00

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<https://doi.org/10.47785/urbana.6.2020>

The steady increase in international activity by subnational actors, especially global cities, suggests increasing theoretical challenges to the primacy of the state in the study of international relations. *Global Cities and Global Order* is an important contribution to the debate regarding the inexorable rise of global cities and an urgent call for greater prominence of subnational entities in the mainstream study of international relations traditionally centered around nation-states as the primary actors in the international system. In addition, this book also highlights the growing tension between the evolution of urban centers and the dynamics of modern capitalism. Global cities, according to Curtis, have become not only major drivers of globalization but also serve as fundamental “nodal points” in an expanding network of cities. This network of cities is expected to play an increasingly important role in the international system going forward. Simply put, the changing nature of cities reflects the changing nature of the international system.

The book begins with a critical review of the evolution of the concept of cities and states throughout history. Curtis begins with an examination of the existing literature and main theoretical foundations to introduce global cities and their impact on the future of the international system. Curtis draws on a wide range of relevant theorists of cities across disciplines and provides critical reviews of their contributions to the ongoing debate on urban spaces (including Taylor, Krugman, Acuto, Lefebvre, Harvey, Brenner, Buzan and especially Castells and Sassen) while tracing the evolution of the definition of the global city. The author opts to use the term *global city* (rather than *world city*) given its association with globalization theory and its related mode of capitalist development. Furthermore, Curtis offers sharp insights about the future of capitalism by drawing our attention to the relationship between space and time and the “deterritorializing tendencies of a capitalist economic system” (p. 2) due to the everchanging impact of communication and information technology.

The book is centered around three main themes: the relationship between the city and technology; the largely underappreciated importance of *space* in the understanding of the modern international system and thirdly, the relationship between global cities and contemporary global order. This last theme underscores the book’s strongest argument -- global cities have effectively emerged as irreplaceable players driving the contemporary global governance agenda. There is indeed growing evidence that the solutions to many global issues, or at least the agenda of such global priorities, will not be settled by the existing state-centered system but rather by a global functional network led by sub-state actors in the form of several global cities. The majority of the world’s population lives in cities and current demographic trends suggest this development will continue unabated.

This book is largely written from a theoretical perspective and does not offer extensive prescriptive recommendations, describe specific cases of city para-diplomacy or provide examples of how city networks actually function other than brief references to a “parliament of mayors” or “confederal municipalism” (p. 29). Curtis does not provide many details regarding the mechanisms through which global cities or city networks actually impact the international system. In the absence of specific examples, readers are left to contemplate the degree and type of agency as well as the future agenda of global cities. What will city-led

global governance look like in a system of networked cities? Ultimately, Curtis asks whether cities can “unite across borders to tackle issues of common global governance effectively” (p. 185).

The study of international relations is a field which has traditionally paid scant attention to sub-state actors. By placing the global city at the heart of the study of modern international relations, Curtis not only challenges the current state of theory in the international relations field by not addressing the growing relevance of global cities, he also criticizes the economics field for not “understanding the logics of big cities” (p. 149). For Curtis, the global city is intrinsically tied to the concept of market society. While states have become more estranged from its citizens risking a “democratic deficit”, cities have gradually assumed a greater role in providing alternative solutions to local and global issues. Cities, however, do not “replace or challenge the agency of states” (p.118). As the international system evolves, cities are emerging as increasingly more relevant actors on the international chessboard. Cities have grown in power and in legitimacy over time and have begun advancing solutions to social and political demands of an increasingly urban population around the world. Cities appear to have come full circle in the sense that they pre-date states and have made a comeback as more efficient providers of public goods.

The author outlines how to integrate the city into the traditional state-centric analysis of the international system. Curtis describes cities as critical nodes of a system centered around the flow and transfer of capital, people, goods and ideas and he supports the argument that cities, rather than states, drive macro-development across different geographies and spatial spheres. Another important feature of this book is its focus on the historical discrepancy between the transnational economic system (capitalism) and the state-based political system.

An additional advantage of this book is that it lends itself to several different academic courses across several disciplines as well as to general reading by the interested public. It promotes global city scholarship to the wide IR audience, and, simultaneously, draws attention to international system theory to those in the field of urban studies and other related disciplines. This book makes a significant contribution to the field of international relations and should quickly become required reading for anyone interested in the issues of global governance, cities, globalization and the future of capitalism. Given its rich theoretical content, it is an ideal text for graduate students, advanced undergraduates or anyone looking for a concise, well-written and finely argued introduction to the examination of global cities and their increasingly instrumental role in the quickly evolving international system.