**Chowdhury, R.** 2023. *City of Men: Masculinities and Everyday Morality on Public Transport*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

In *City of Men*, Romit Chowdhury attempts to unsettle received wisdom on gender and urbanity, by asking two central questions: "in what ways do men inhabit city spaces" and "how do such inhabitations produce the city as gendered"? (p. 2). Most readers of *Urbanities*, like this reviewer, are probably aware of the important interventions made by feminist scholarship to fields like urban ethnography, urban studies, and geography. *City of Men* not only recognises these contributions, but also furthers this scholarship by weaving together insights from both feminist geography and masculinity studies.

This book is primarily an ethnography of urban mobility, particularly the everyday lives of male transport workers in Kolkata — that is, men who drive autorickshaws and taxis — and their relationship with the Traffic Police. As I understand it, Chowdhury's interest in studying these social relations is twofold. First, the interactions between transport workers and Kolkata inhabitants (men and women alike) underscore how morality and gendered logics are essential in holding together the urban social order (p. 28). And second, by foregrounding the notion of copresence, Chowdhury underlines how cities eventually "reproduce themselves as spaces of patriarchal power" (p. 28).

The introduction outlines this book's methodological and conceptual approach in relation to, respectively, urban studies and the ethnography of mobility, and feminist interventions on the urban. Chapter 1 introduces readers to the state of Kolkata's urban public transport infrastructure, adeptly engages with urban ethnography and infrastructure studies, and feminist concerns with the urban (e.g., sexual violence, freedom, etc.), and then provides an overview of the key protagonists in the book: "the men who constitute their gendered personhoods through a set of ethical ideas about their labor, the city of their toil, and family life" (p. 39). The rest of this chapter details the three domains that constitute the main ethnographic illustrations of this book: autorickshaws, taxis, and the traffic police.

In Chapter 2, Chowdhury brings readers up to speed on the uniquely sociable characteristics of autorickshaws in Kolkata. Unlike their counterparts in Mumbai or New Delhi, Kolkata autorickshaws ply on shared routes, with up to five passengers riding on a single vehicle. While this mode of transport certainly produces conflicts, many of which are mediated by class and masculinity, Chowdhury also urges us to "heed mundane cooperation" and "theorize copresence" in how urban infrastructures are shared (p. 65). For instance, autorickshaw drivers establish social relations with inhabitants in particular neighbourhoods and routes, as well as other drivers, what is referred to as "a shared vocabulary of understanding" that can help deal with uncertainty (p. 67). One of Chowdhury's contributions in this chapter is what he calls the "crucible of disappointment" (p. 82), the obverse to narratives of aspiration commonly discussed in urban studies. By using this term, the author demonstrates how

masculinity, and aspiring to male social roles, is important in both city life and family life (p. 83).

Chapter 3, titled "Unaccustomed Streets," focuses on taxi drivers and examines "how modes of migrant masculinity subjectivity are entwined with routines of city life" (p. 89). This chapter clearly demonstrates how masculinity and mobility (as transport and migration) are intertwined. Male taxi drivers justify both migration and labour as vital in providing for one's family back home (p. 97). Unlike the autorickshaw drivers, taxi drivers do not have strong unions or social relations and are therefore vulnerable to violence (though they are paradoxically considered undesirable by the middle-class) (p. 104). This chapter also includes a rich discussion around the nighttime (pp. 104-107) and the interior space of the taxicab. Chowdhury discusses the latter in relation to sexual intimacy, of both drivers and among passengers (pp. 114-115), which creates moral subjectivity among taxi drivers, who critique sexual violence while also legitimising patriarchal ideas of protection. This chapter thus shows how taxi drivers "derive a moral basis of their labor … from seeing themselves as public service providers" (p. 117).

Chapter 4 looks at the Kolkata traffic police and their relationship with transport workers. As with the second chapter, this chapter also showcases how transport labour and masculinity exemplify a model of cooperation and conflict. Chowdhury uses the concept of "homosocial trust" to understand the relationship between gender, policing, and urban mobility (p. 122). The ethnographic cases in this chapter include instances of transport workers' efforts to either confront or placate cops — negotiations that characterise transport workers' moral claims to both labour and the urban (p. 128). The rest of the chapter examines traffic cops' efforts at promoting safe driving, through workshops and other social events — interactions that are "structured by ideologies of heteronormative masculinity and desire", referring to both sexual pleasure and commitment to providing for one's family (p. 140). Here, the concept of "homosocial trust" helps track "the cooperative gestures and moral inflections of the everyday state through which the patriarchal city is reproduced" (pp. 144-145).

The next two chapters synthesise the book's main thematic and theoretical contributions. Chapter 5 is especially interesting, as it sketches out certain archetypes to underline this book's main contribution toward a morality of men and the urban. By zooming out from the ethnography, Chowdhury shows how everyday moralities and gendered logics are ever present in not only his ethnographic descriptions, but also in how most urban residents navigate cities, thus in effect producing what we know and feel as the urban. Readers will especially find Chowdhury's discussion of the "good city" (in relation to the "safe city") to be an insightful contribution to discourses on sexuality, gender and the urban (pp. 155-156). The concluding chapter highlights this book's contribution to urban studies and masculinity studies, particularly emphasising its contributions to the latter

field, which has so far neglected dimensions of space and spatial relations (p. 172). In particular, the conclusion reiterates an observation that I found particularly relevant, that is, how gendered notions of public-private are visible in male transport workers' everyday labour, an activity that otherwise happens in "public" (p. 169).

*City of Men* is a well-written and highly enjoyable book. Chowdhury's ethnographic descriptions of commuting, particularly in shared autorickshaws, brings readers right into the intimate domain of urban bustle. While this book lacks elements that signpost most urban ethnographies (the presence of key interlocutors and familiar faces, for instance), Chowdhury does provide sufficient motivation for why an approach that focuses on surface level encounters (pp. 23-24) — highly effervescent, though at times recurrent, mobile practices of urban commuting — can be useful for urban scholarship, as well as gender and masculinity studies. This book will be of special interest to readers in not just urban studies and urban anthropology, but also feminist geographers and those interested in studying urban mobility in creative and experimental ways.

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**Garbin, D., Coleman, S. and Millington G. (eds).** 2023. *Ideologies and Infrastructures of Religious Urbanization in Africa: Remaking the City*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

In this edited volume, the authors show how religious groups have remade cities by the infrastructure they create. The most emphasis is on Pentecostal Christians, the focus of six chapters and part of another, who have substantially remade the areas around them as they built ancillary establishments and churches to express and further their beliefs. As in mainstream Christian denominations, they often emphasized health care and education. Two chapters focused on Islamic areas, one within a city, the other a sacred city, while a third is a comparative study of Islamic and Christian school campuses. A final chapter considers multiple religions, including the Kimbanguists, founded in what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo, where they are working to transform a rural town into a modern holy city.

Despite the differences in the religions, there were similarities in their creation of urban infrastructures. First, construction was often a response to the retreat of the state from the provision of social services since the mid-1980s and the implementation of structural adjustment policies. At the same time, because believers saw the existing secular world as potentially evil, it was important to build sacred spaces where believers could live closer to holiness. These actions could lead to new alliances between religions and the state, most notably the introduction's example of a flyover bridge financed by a Pentecostal church (Ch. 1). The Church's agreement to do so brought planning permission for a new 30,000-seat auditorium and other development. Alternatively, churches could develop areas without attending to state requirements; one church came to own more than one-third of

an inner-Lagos neighbourhood where it then built new buildings, many without formal permits (Ch. 7).

How do churches fund this development? Donations of local members appear to play a large part, but significant construction seems to rely on other, sometimes external sources. Many large churches and mosques have adherents in the diaspora, often emigrants or their descendants.

They contribute to major church development efforts at home. Some Pentecostal denominations are branches of international churches, who assist in some efforts. Some Muslim institutions have connections to establishments in the Gulf States, especially helpful for creating schools. By offering health and education services, religious organizations have the potential to become Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs), recognized as NGOs by development organizations looking for local participants to carry out health or education activities (Ch. 4).

Although some chapters discuss religious infrastructure development in central cities (Chapters 2, 4 and 7), more concern a kind of frontier development: the creation of new urbanized enclaves in semi-peripheral areas. In these areas, churches have more freedom to build not only meeting and worship areas but also associated facilities. The university campuses are found in these areas (Chapters 9 and 10). On the one hand, this choice is a response to increasing land costs and the absence of buildable land in central cities. On the other, it was often linked to a desire to sanctify bush areas, conceptualized as spirit-laden and satanic. Using religious worship spaces to spur urbanization also occurred in more isolated areas. Touba, the Mouride holy city, created in rural Senegal, has become a major city (Ch. 5). Kimbanguists planned something similar for Nkamba (Ch. 3). Moreover, building churches has been a strategy to urbanize smaller centres throughout Southwest Benin (Ch. 6), enhancing cosmopolitanism brought there by returned migrants.

As these religious enclaves grow, they encourage secular growth as well. At minimum, they attract multiple vendors on worship days; independent entrepreneurs provide services to visitors, students and employees at schools and health centres. Some churches displaced existing residents when they built new infrastructure; to alleviate future problems, some have become local benefactors, contributing to community concerns or needs (Ch. 7). The holy cities of Touba and Nkamba have both invested in secular development activities such as health, education, micro-credit, agricultural cooperatives, while FBOs in South Africa address community concerns about youth crime and poverty (Chapters 3, 4 and 5). At times, this extended interaction can lead to the conceptualization of an entire neighbourhood as religious; in an area with 14 mosques, the rhythms of Muslim life (language use, prayer times, clothing) have touched all residents, including Christians (Ch. 2).

Not surprisingly, this rapid growth led to tensions and contractions, as underlined in the ethnography. The supposedly timeless city of Touba has

undergone fundamental change in response to rivalries among kin, common to much of Africa (Ch. 5). Even though some Pentecostalists emphasize the importance of faith-healing, many also invest in health infrastructure, which offers the potential for outside funding, but also the possibility to meet new potential converts (Ch. 3). To get external funding as an FBO, a church needs to imagine its goals in terms of "projects" deemed legitimate to potential funders; if successful they may become local patrons to new clients (Ch. 4). The religiously motivated universities presented here focused not only on creating moral religious actors, but simultaneously on training successful professionals for the secular, often evil, world. Students could learn to be in the world, but not of it (Chapters 9, 10).

A final problematic was raised in an editors' note (Ch. 11). Chapters were based on research just before the COVID pandemic. The chapters described achievements that depended on interactive events, including mass worship, which obviously stopped during the pandemic. This was disastrous for many churches.

This book offers a meaningful snapshot of some effects of religious urbanism in Africa. The strongest chapters are those that focus on the ethnographic, where the reader can get an in-depth understanding of people's struggles as they pursue multiple religious and urban goals. In the future, it would be interesting to compare these examples with more secular urban development. How do processes, beneficiaries and losers vary? Also, it would be interesting to compare contemporary religious urbanism with the common religious urbanism of the past, where cities were often built around religious structures, e.g., cathedrals or pilgrimage sites. For now, this is a useful book for those who want to understand more about how and why African religious institutions create contemporary urban infrastructure.

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**Klinenberg, E.** 2024. *2020: One City, Seven People, and the Year Everything Changed*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

With *Heat Wave* (2002), New York University sociologist Eric Klinenberg emerged as a major analyst of US urban life. Over 700 died in Chicago's heat disaster in July 1995, victims — Klinenberg explained — of disintegrated institutions and social networks: the isolated elderly, the poor in decayed neighbourhoods, disconnected people in a city with enough cracks to fall through. This perspective enabled Klinenberg to realize in early 2020 that despite flowery talk of shared sacrifice, Covid-19 would likely exacerbate the atomization he had by now spent decades researching. He worried about the corrosive potential of stay-at-home measures, given New York's class and status divides. The city's professionals and its financial and corporate establishment had options. Prosperous New Yorkers could rely on selective protection and withdrawal, albeit supported by service, delivery, and office workers and

small business operators whose lives were an exposed scramble in the best of times.

With Covid-19 racing through his family, Klinenberg published a *New York Times* essay pleading for "social solidarity" despite the interruption of customs and routines that bring people together. However vital "social distancing" might be in the short term, it was a "crude and costly public health strategy" that would further tear at a society desperate for acknowledgement of "interdependence and linked fate" (pp.11-12; *New York Times*, 14 Mar 2020). As the author ruefully recalls, such a suggestion was "far-fetched", given how long "Americans had been losing their sense of shared purpose" (p. 12). Drowned out amid the polarization and rancour of that year, Klinenberg resorted to creating this in-the-moment record of the "critical blow" the events of 2020 inflicted on the country's already ragged social bonds (p. 367).

Klinenberg builds his book around profiles of people from all five boroughs who represent aspects of the city's overall experience. A Chinatown school principal learned early — through the neighbourhood's trans-Pacific information network — that the pandemic would be far more disruptive than city and school officials realized, while also grasping how unprepared the city was for the struggles families would face. A Bronx political operative with a background in the borough's hospital system scrambled to organize assistance and supplies despite the trauma that pervaded her work and household. A Brooklyn couple found itself more shunned than most New Yorkers because the husband, a corrections officer at Riker's Island, had the dubious honour of being labelled an essential worker. When *2020* appeared last year, US media focused on the profile of a bar owner in Staten Island — the most pro-authority, pro-Trump borough — who became a right-wing media celebrity through increased defiance of shutdown orders. The struggle to maintain his business in the face of convoluted bureaucracy and threats rather than help left him feeling "abandoned by state and society", mired in anti-government theories (p. 345).

Even in mostly liberal New York, Klinenberg stressed in interviews and in the book, the tacit message was that Americans were "on their own" (p. 348). In this context, probably the most significant profile focuses on Nuala O'Doherty, a neighbourhood activist who set up a do-it-yourself assistance network, COVID Care, in Jackson Heights. In spring 2020, ethnically diverse central Queens "experienced more cases, more hospitalizations, and more deaths than any part of the city, and any part of the world" (p. 207). Anti-Covid precautions had strong support. Yet people were out of work, shut in and desperate. By taking practical steps to ward off hunger, eviction and isolation, O'Doherty's group modelled "social closeness" through "mutual aid" (p. 209).

To these stories, Klinenberg adds profiles of a South Asian immigrant, one of more than 125 Metropolitan Transit Authority workers who died early in the pandemic, along with a photographer from Atlanta who had recently moved into an apartment above a Brooklyn funeral home and who threw himself into the George

Floyd protests. The book intersperses personal stories with policy and cultural analysis of factors affecting the country's botched response: distrust in government and experts; resistance to masks; the exploitation of essential workers; the failure to protect nursing home residents and prisoners; differential vulnerabilities based on race; and the meaning of lockdowns for New Yorkers who lived alone and of disrupted education for university students. All Western and Asian democracies exhibited considerable anxiety and stress, but only the United States, Klinenberg documents, experienced a meaningful increase in crime and other "violent and antisocial behavior" (pp. 340-42).

With the partial exception of the United Kingdom under Prime Minister Boris Johnson, nearly all Western leaders endeavoured "to promote social cohesion, mutual responsibility, and shared purpose" (p. 347). Nearly everywhere, meanwhile, resistance to covid restrictions built over time, and the pandemic seems to have accelerated disaffection with political establishments. Still, Klinenberg details the singular US misfortune of Donald Trump, who personifies the "collapse of shared moral order" (p. 19). (Well, Brazil had Jair Bolsonaro.) In November 2020, the electorate voted Trump out, whatever he, his coup plotters, and his rioters claimed to the contrary. Four years later, 77.3 million voters rejected a government that attempted a social response to the pandemic and brought Trump back into office. In early 2025, the second Trump administration's purge of the country's medical research and public health apparatus encountered remarkably tepid pushback. Klinenberg's counterfactual that humane and forthright leadership might have persuaded the country to set aside excessive individualism and use the pandemic to "rediscover its better, more collective self" does seem far-fetched (p. 369).

Vaccines have made it possible to forget the fear and confusion of the early pandemic. In New York, COVID-19 was hard to downplay; everyone could see refrigerator trucks outside hospitals and knew what was happening in their apartment buildings. Most Americans, however, live in their own versions of Staten Island: suburbs and small cities where the catastrophe was insidious rather than insistent. In much of the country, the tattered, on-your-own aspect of American life is a given. These would be limitations on telling the story of Americans' experience with and attitudes toward the coronavirus pandemic from New York. Klinenberg's *2020* is a masterpiece of sociology as social criticism. It will be a while before the country can learn from it.

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