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## ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

# Actually Existing Geopolitics of Urban Knowledge Production. Questioning the ‘From Anywhere’ of Urban Theorising

Francesca Governa  | Chiara Iacovone 

DIST, Politecnico di Torino, Torino, Italy

**Correspondence:** Francesca Governa ([Francesca.governa@polito.it](mailto:Francesca.governa@polito.it))

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## ABSTRACT

This article addresses the geopolitics of urban knowledge production by focussing on articles published in the past six years (2018–2023) in six ‘international’ journals. It aims to contribute to ongoing debates on the questioning of Anglo-American hegemony and the decolonisation of geographic scholarship through the analysis of the *where* of urban knowledge production in terms of the location of the authors and the places studied. Our analyses clearly highlight the highly selective nature of the geopolitics of urban knowledge production. And yet, this selectivity is not only based on, and related to, the North-South divide, but also develops between cities and universities, defining an unequal and multiscalar geography of who and from where one can speak and be heard. Moreover, the geography of the places studied contradicts any claims of post/decolonising urban theory, of ‘urban theorising from anywhere’, of Southern, subaltern, alternative urban perspectives, and so on. As it emerges in ‘international’ publishing, the current situation of urban knowledge production clashes with the calls for a global urban knowledge and asks for a common effort to go beyond it.

## 1 | Introduction

Recently, Müller (2021) asked: ‘Who can speak and who can be heard? From where in the world can we speak with authority and from where less so?’ (1441). These questions echo two different but variously intertwined arguments. The first one fits within the ‘carsick’ debate about the hegemony of Anglo-American geography in terms of both the production of geographic knowledge and English as the *lingua franca* of academic publishing and scholarly communication (Belina 2005; Garcia-Ramon 2003; Gutiérrez and López-Nieva 2001). The second argument relates to the repeated calls for ‘urban theorising from anywhere’ (Robinson 2016), built upon the work of feminist, postcolonial, and decolonial scholars (Haraway 1988; Mbembe 2001; Mignolo 2002) and inserted in the quest for decolonising geographic knowledge

(e.g., Daigle and Ramírez 2019; Radcliffe 2022), ‘learning from the periphery’ (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012), and theorising from the Global Souths (Roy 2016; Schindler 2017).

To contribute to the long-standing debates on Anglo-American hegemony and the more recent quest to decolonize geographic scholarship, this article examines the *where* of urban knowledge production by addressing a very specific perspective, namely focussing on six so-called ‘international’ journals (*Antipode*, *City*, *Environment and Planning D*, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *Urban Geography*, *Urban Studies*), selected for their impact factor, consistent cross-referencing, and stated commitment to critical and global perspectives. By analysing articles published over the past six years (2018–2023), our primary aim is to provide clear empirical evidence on the challenges of

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achieving a more global urban knowledge, while interrogating the problematic conflation of Anglo-American journals (and Anglo-American geographic knowledge) with international journals (and international geographic knowledge).

Several articles (e.g., Berg and Kearns 1998; Gutiérrez and López-Nieva 2001; Wai-Chung Yeung 2001; Paasi 2005; Bański and Ferenc 2013; Kong and Qian 2019; Imhof and Müller 2020) have already pointed out that the ‘international’ of ‘international journals’ is (and must be considered) contested and it would be more accurately translated as ‘Anglo-American’ or ‘Anglophone’.<sup>1</sup> As Kitchin (2005) argued, these journals are predominantly edited, reviewed, and published by Anglo-American scholars and publishers who actively serve as gatekeepers, regulating and enforcing modes of academic publishing and scholarly communication, as well as ideas, interpretations, and areas of focus according to the standards they establish. This situation does not seem to have changed in recent years. As Müller (2021) maintains, the ‘linguistic privilege’ of Anglo-American scholars is not only about language but is also actively constructed and maintained by occupying pivotal positions in the publishing ‘global chain’ and ‘not just with respect to the odds of getting published, but, even more so, with respect to getting read, cited and—that most prized thing of all—making a difference in academic debates’ (1441). Nevertheless, language is a co-constituent of a deeper ‘epistemological privilege’, which leads to the suppression of alternative epistemologies and forms of thought and knowledge (Cassano and Zolo, 2007; Escobar et al., 2020), as well as ‘other’ geographical traditions (Ferretti 2019; Celata and Governa 2024). While Rodríguez-Pose (2006) and Kong and Qian (2019) depict an opening of ‘international journals’, progressively becoming less Anglophone (in terms of both authorships and places studied), other scholars (e.g. Paasi 2015; Trubina et al. 2020; Müller 2021; Bekaroğlu and Yazan 2022) argue that the Anglo-American hegemony is probably changing and adapting, but it is far from over. Despite Kitchin’s call (2005) to ‘disrupt and destabilize’, or at least weaken the hegemony of Anglo-American Geography, it seems that nothing or very little has changed since 2000, when Minca (2000) noted that ‘the boundaries as well as the rules/coordinates of what passes for ‘international’ debate within our discipline are determined from within the Anglo-American universe’ (287).<sup>2</sup> By examining the location of authors that is, the original producers of knowledge, at three levels (country, city, and institution), alongside scrutinizing the places actually being studied, the article provides a more nuanced understanding of the entrenched inequalities at national and regional levels, particularly along North/South and West/East divides (Gutiérrez and López-Nieva 2001; Wai-Chung Yeung 2001; Kong and Qian 2019; Trubina et al. 2020). As the centre of urban knowledge production is firmly located in the UK and the US, with some *addendum* in other English-speaking countries (especially Australia and Canada) and the rise of newcomers (especially China, as already noted by Kong and Qian 2019), we echo the claims made years ago ‘to take issue with (...) (the) notion of bounded national universe’ (Samers and Sidaway 2000: 664), insert urban knowledge production in spaces ‘that are shot through with scale politics’ (Berg 2004: 554), denaturalise some divides, and overcome ‘national clichés and enshrining national spaces as inevitable’ (Fall and Minca 2013: 545). By focussing on the location of authors a more complex geography of centres and margins emerges. Actually, the selectivity is not only based on, and reinforced by,

divisions between countries and regions (notably between the Global North and Global South) but also operates across multiple spatial scales. Furthermore, by scrutinising which places are actually studied, our findings resonate with Bhan’s assertion that ‘we simply do not know enough [or at all] about the (...) (urban) realities of many parts of the world’ (2019: 642).

In 2005, Johnston argued: ‘Refereed journals are at the core of the contemporary academic enterprise, probably more so now than ever before: most new knowledge, however defined, is carried in their pages’ (2). However, the urban knowledge contained in such journals, whether new or not, represents only a part of urban knowledge in itself. Beyond academic publications, urban knowledge is also conveyed through novels, films, photographs, paintings, installations, performance art, and everyday practices. Urban knowledge is widespread, plural, intertwined, and manifold: it exists beyond scholars, normally male and white (Gilmore 2002; Berg 2012; Peake 2015), and extends beyond academic roles. Therefore, analysing articles published in Anglophone academic journals to investigate the geopolitics of urban knowledge production is a conscious choice and a deliberate simplification. Actually, it is just one part of the story. And yet it is a part of the story that really matters.

As scholars based in Italy, a so-called ‘South of the North’, we are familiar with this history and the inextricable blend of coercion and ambition in which we are entangled while seeking to enter the global urban debate. Despite our extensive publication experience in Italian, French, and Spanish (as well as English outlets), and our collaborations with artists and activists on urban issues, publishing in non-English languages is insufficient to gain visibility in the international academic arena. Moreover, prestigious grants, such as those awarded by the ERC, prioritize publications in Anglo-American journals, sidelining other contributions and publication venues.

This situation is not unique to us. Scholars from the multiple margins of the global academic power structure daily grapple with Anglo-American hegemony. Grant applications, even at the national level, must be written in English and demand a track record of publications in Anglophone journals as a prerequisite. This dynamic reinforces the dominance of Anglo-American publishing as the standard at which the majority of the word is forced to align. Other academic landscapes, such as the Spanish one, despite a substantial critical mass, have not achieved the same global stature. This disparity is unrelated to the quality of non-Anglophone scholars or their work. Instead, it reflects entrenched power relations within and beyond academia per se, compounded by the aggressive neoliberal turn of academic life and work worldwide (Castree and Sparke 2000; Paasi 2015; Riding et al. 2019). The pressures of competition, the pursuit of funding, and the imperative to publish in English all shape scholarly and personal lives, eroding spaces for critical reflection. Indexed journals and their impact factors have become the de facto measure of research quality, and even of people who are able to publish or not.

A way to escape this imposition could be to confine geographical knowledge within national boundaries or linguistic islands. However, such an approach risks aligning with linguistic, cultural and political sovereigntist, with we oppose both politically

and epistemologically.<sup>3</sup> Instead, we advocate for a more global urban imagination. Achieving such an aim requires to identify and dismantle the barriers preventing the majority of the world from contributing to a more global urban debate, expose the current geographies of authoritative urban knowledge, question their underlying assumptions, and push against existing linguistic and epistemological boundaries.

To reach these aims and discuss these issues, the article is organized as follows. Section 2 presents the construction of the database and the methodological choices made to organize the data and conduct the analyses, as well as examining some of the problems we encountered and how we dealt with them. Section 3 presents and critically discusses our results to suggest how the *where* of urban knowledge production, in terms of the location of the authors and the places investigated, limits the alleged global reach of contemporary urban knowledge. Finally, the conclusions discuss the fragmented nature of the Global North, the Global South, and the Global Everywhere, advocating for the emergence of a more global urban knowledge that challenges existing linguistic and epistemological boundaries, which are entangled in the centre-periphery imaginary operating at multiple scales.

## 2 | Building the Database: Making Stock of Urban Knowledge Production

The database was built by scraping all the articles published from 2018 to 2023 in six of the leading ‘international’ journals in the field of urban studies and urban geography: *Antipode* (502 articles retrieved, 16.3%), *City* (283, 9.2%), *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* (EPD) (342, 11.1%), *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* (IJURR) (387, 12.6%), *Urban Geography* (522, 16.9%) and *Urban Studies* (1046, 33.9%). The journals have been selected both for their metrics and their aims and scopes. Taking the last two years’ Impact Factor (IF) as the reference, all the journals stay between 3.563 of *Urban Geography* to 4.594 of *EPD* (in the middle: *IJURR* 3.732; *Antipode* 4.246; *Urban Studies* 4.418). The only exception is *City*, which has a lower IF (1.761). Nonetheless, it was included in the list because of its editorial choice, based mainly on empirical articles with ‘provocative, cutting-edge and committed insights’.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, all the journals selected share a common positionality in critical (or radical, as far as *Antipode* is concerned) urban theory and present themselves as being at the forefront of critical urban knowledge. *Antipode. A Radical Journal of Geography*, ‘publishes innovative papers that push at the boundaries of radical geographical thinking’ and encourages authors’ to critique and challenge settled orthodoxies<sup>5</sup>; *EPD* favours articles ‘that investigate and challenge the ways that modes and systems of power, difference and oppression differentially shape lives’ and welcomes ‘work that is empirically engaged and furthers a range of critical epistemological approaches (...) and that consciously navigates the fraught politics of knowledge production within and beyond the academy’<sup>6</sup>; *IJURR* defines itself as ‘a groundbreaking forum for intellectual debate’ looking for ‘key material from an unparalleled range of critical, comparative and geographic perspectives’ and ‘articles that make a decisive and original contribution to critical urban scholarship, drawing on evidence from cities and

regions around the world’<sup>7</sup>; *Urban Studies* ‘seeks contributions that focus on matters that are intrinsically urban in nature and studies into urban process and urban outcomes that, while grounded in specific locations, contribute to a wider urban theoretical and conceptual understanding’ and ‘further our understanding of the urban condition and the rapid changes taking place in cities and regions across the globe’<sup>8</sup>; while *Urban Geography* presents itself as ‘forefront of urban scholarship’ for over four decades and seeks for ‘contributions to understanding the current and future global urban condition’<sup>9</sup>.

The dataset includes 3083 articles, consisting of original articles, interventions, debates, commentaries, contributions to symposia and lectures according to the terminologies adopted by the various journals. The data provides two main pieces of information: the location of authors according to their institutional affiliation and the empirical context of the published research. Together, they delineate a geography of where urban knowledge is produced and from where it is performed, adding a novel perspective to complement the already existing quantitative and qualitative analyses on the imbalance of knowledge production, such as the role of journals (Kitchin 2005; Muller 2021) or the ‘politics of citation’ (Mott and Cockayne 2017).

Data related to the institutional affiliation of the author(s) refer to their location at the time the article was published (as is presented on the web page of the journal or imprinted in the article). A small percentage of authors (0.01%) do not have an institutional affiliation: they have been noted as ‘independent researchers’, without any further details. The analysis has been structured listing all the authors with their institutional affiliations (for the vast majority of universities, but also research centres, think-tank, and local government branches), linked with the city and the country. Regarding the multi-authors articles, each of them is considered one single entry for the count. The list of authors then has more entries compared to the articles scraped. It is composed of 5763 authors with their relative affiliations.

Published articles are distinguished into ‘empirical articles’ (2675 entries) and ‘theoretical articles’ (407 entries) according to the title, the abstract, and the keywords. Empirical articles, using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, included single and multiple case studies as well as comparisons between different locations at the urban (1730 articles), national (844), and regional levels (101). In turn, the theoretical articles do not refer to case studies nor are they geographically contextualized but review various strands to contribute to different theoretical (critical) approaches. The list of theoretical articles has been linked to the list of authors to identify where something that can be considered ‘urban theory’ is produced. The empirical articles refer to 3123 not-unique locations, scaled to urban (64.8%), country (31.3%), and regional level (3.9%). However, the latter was excluded from the analyses because it represented a too small and too heterogeneous sample to be representative.<sup>10</sup> When the articles propose multiple case studies or comparison, each location has been taken as a single entry.

By building the database and outlining the various analyses, we have encountered some practical as well as theoretical issues. The first one concerns a tricky question in geopolitical terms, that is, Hong Kong (and mainland China). In 2019, Kong and

Qiang highlighted the rise of Chinese scholars' presence in refereed journals as well as the rising attention of international journals towards urban China. Our database notes that many of the Chinese scholars publishing in the selected journals are located in Hong Kong (263 in mainland China and 110 in Hong Kong). At the same time, the articles devoted to urban China are highly selective in terms of urban location: out of 287 entries, 97 investigate the urban phenomenon at the national scale, 29 took Hong Kong as a case study, 28 Beijing, 27 Shanghai, and 23 Guangzhou. Understanding the reasons behind the 'special' role of Hong Kong in urban research is beyond our aims. However, to acknowledge the power relations in which the production of urban knowledge is inserted, we have chosen to introduce a distinction between Hong Kong (recorded as China-HK in our database) and mainland China.

The second issue refers to an intrinsic limitation of the database, that is, the impossibility of considering the actual nationality of the authors and therefore to scrutinise how the mobility of scholars affects the geopolitics of urban knowledge production. For example, a preliminary observation of the database shows that many authors with Italian names who are not affiliated with Italian institutions (a substantial percentage based in the UK) write about Italy. The result of the analysis would say that a certain percentage of UK-based authors write about Italy passing over the intrinsic information of the presumed Italian origins of these scholars. It is beyond the scope of our research to examine the actual nationality of the scholars, and their mobility patterns related to biographical, scientific, scholarly, and personal reasons. However, the data collected, and the analysis carried out clearly delineate the strong attraction that some centres (at various levels: countries, cities, and universities) exert over others and the power imbalance that affects 'global academia' in general and urban knowledge production in particular, especially at a time of increasing scholar mobility. The catalytic role of these centres must be understood within a complex, multilayered network of historical and political power relations. At the same time, these centres provide a platform for marginal voices to engage with international (or Anglo-American) audiences. The Marxist philosopher Mario Tronti, referring to the institutional evolution of Italian Workerism, argued that the political struggle should continue '*dentro la società e contro di essa*' (Tronti 1966: 11) '*within society and against it*'. This paradox of being 'within and against' also resonates with the tension of producing critical knowledge from within the very centres of power in neoliberal academia.

### 3 | The Where Really Matters: Authors and Places of the "Global" Urban Knowledge

Table 1 presents the location of authors organised at three different levels (country, city, and institutional affiliation) and shows, for each, the top 20 centres where authors do their work. The total record consists of 4588 authors, 76 countries, 679 cities, and 1121 institutions.

At the national level, the absolute dominance of the UK and the US is striking (Figure 1). Together, they account for 43.8% of global urban knowledge production, as reflected in the journals

we analysed (22.7% from the UK and 21.1% from the US). They are followed by two other English-speaking countries: Canada (7%) and Australia (5.8%). Beyond these countries, the list records a Western European presence with The Netherlands, Germany, and Italy (although with 2.1%), and a Chinese presence with both mainland China (4.6%) and the Hong Kong region (1.9%) (even though together, China and Hong Kong are at 6.5%, overcoming Australia and creeping the "linguistic privilege" of English-speaking countries). The last 10 countries on the list are within 1.6% and 0.8% and are mostly Western (mainly northern) European countries, except for South Africa, Israel, Brazil, and Singapore.<sup>11</sup>

At the city level, London (6.4%) and Sheffield (2.3%) take the top spots, followed by Melbourne (2.3%), Toronto (2.1%), and then Hong Kong, Amsterdam, Sydney, Manchester, Los Angeles, and the others (all under 2%). In this case, the results are less sharp, as the differences between cities are flatter than those between countries. Nonetheless, all the cities on the list are from Western and Northern Europe, North America, and somewhere specific in Global Asia, such as Hong Kong and Singapore.

Finally, at the top of the third list, the one showing institutional affiliations, are University College London—UCL (2.4%), the University of Sheffield (2.3%), and the University of Amsterdam (1.7%)<sup>12</sup>. Eleven out of 20 on this list are British universities. Except for the University of Amsterdam, the others are in English-speaking countries or where English is one of the official languages, or where the debated legacy of British colonialism is long-standing (National University of Singapore and University of Hong Kong).

Table 2 (and Figure 2) presents the results of the 20 main countries and cities in which the research is enacted. The total record scraped is 3002 entries, of which 136 are unique countries and 564 are unique cities. The country level refers both to the urban-based case studies (reported by the affiliated country) and the country-based case studies. Respectively, the data amount to 2023 for the urban level and 979 for the country level.

Overall, the US (17.5%), the UK (10.3%), and China (8.6%; China plus Hong Kong, 9.6%) are the most studied countries. Scrolling through the list, few countries (and low in percentage) belong to the so-called Global South, namely India (4%), Brazil (2.6%), South Africa (2.2%), Turkey (1.6%), Mexico (1.5%), Colombia (1.3%), Kenya (1.3%), and Indonesia (1.2%) and from other Souths, such as Southern European countries (Italy, 2.2%; Spain, 2%; and Greece, 1.5%).

The most studied cities mirror the list of countries, with London leading (3.6%) followed by New York City (1.5%). The list of cities shows a dispersive distribution, as from the third entry (Singapore) to the last (Detroit), the percentages remain between 1% and 0.7%. Six out of 20 on the list are Asian megacities (Singapore, Beijing, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Mumbai), while four are North American cities (New York, Los Angeles, Toronto, Detroit), five are European (London, Berlin, Athens, Amsterdam, Barcelona), two are Australian (Sydney and Melbourne) and Latin American (Mexico City and Rio de Janeiro), and only one is from the 'bargaining space' between Europe and the Middle East (Istanbul). Since many of the cities on

**TABLE 1** | Urban knowledge production: Authors' location (country, city, institution).

| Country      | # Authors | % Of total | City                | # Authors | % Of total | Institution                                      | # Authors | % Of total |
|--------------|-----------|------------|---------------------|-----------|------------|--|-----------|------------|
| UK           | 1309      | 22.7       | London              | 370       | 6.4        | University College London                        | 137       | 2.4        |
| USA          | 1215      | 21.1       | Sheffield           | 133       | 2.3        | University of Sheffield                          | 132       | 2.3        |
| Canada       | 401       | 7.0        | Melbourne           | 132       | 2.3        | University of Amsterdam                          | 96        | 1.7        |
| Australia    | 332       | 5.8        | Toronto             | 123       | 2.1        | University of Melbourne                          | 89        | 1.5        |
| Netherlands  | 297       | 5.2        | Hong Kong           | 110       | 1.9        | London School of Economics and Political Science | 78        | 1.4        |
| China        | 263       | 4.6        | Amsterdam           | 105       | 1.8        | University of Manchester                         | 74        | 1.3        |
| Germany      | 223       | 3.9        | Sydney              | 97        | 1.7        | University of Toronto                            | 67        | 1.2        |
| Italy        | 121       | 2.1        | Manchester          | 85        | 1.5        | University of Cambridge                          | 63        | 1.1        |
| Sweden       | 113       | 2.0        | Los Angeles         | 77        | 1.3        | University of California Los Angeles             | 59        | 1.0        |
| China (HK)   | 110       | 1.9        | New York city       | 73        | 1.3        | University of Hong Kong                          | 55        | 1.0        |
| Belgium      | 94        | 1.6        | Berlin              | 71        | 1.2        | Utrecht University                               | 54        | 0.9        |
| France       | 90        | 1.6        | Singapore           | 66        | 1.1        | Durham University                                | 52        | 0.9        |
| Spain        | 84        | 1.5        | Montreal            | 63        | 1.1        | University of British Columbia                   | 50        | 0.9        |
| South Africa | 84        | 1.5        | Cambridge           | 63        | 1.1        | University of Glasgow                            | 44        | 0.8        |
| Switzerland  | 68        | 1.2        | Paris               | 61        | 1.1        | Newcastle University                             | 44        | 0.8        |
| Singapore    | 66        | 1.1        | Utrecht             | 58        | 1.0        | National University of Singapore                 | 43        | 0.7        |
| Israel       | 61        | 1.1        | Newcastle upon Tyne | 57        | 1.0        | York University                                  | 42        | 0.7        |
| Denmark      | 50        | 0.9        | Shanghai            | 55        | 1.0        | Vrije Universiteit Brussels                      | 42        | 0.7        |
| Brazil       | 48        | 0.8        | Oxford              | 55        | 1.0        | King's College London                            | 42        | 0.7        |
| Finland      | 45        | 0.8        | Durham              | 53        | 0.9        | University of Oxford                             | 40        | 0.7        |
| Ireland      | 44        | 0.8        | Vancouver           | 52        | 0.9        | University of California Berkeley                | 40        | 0.7        |

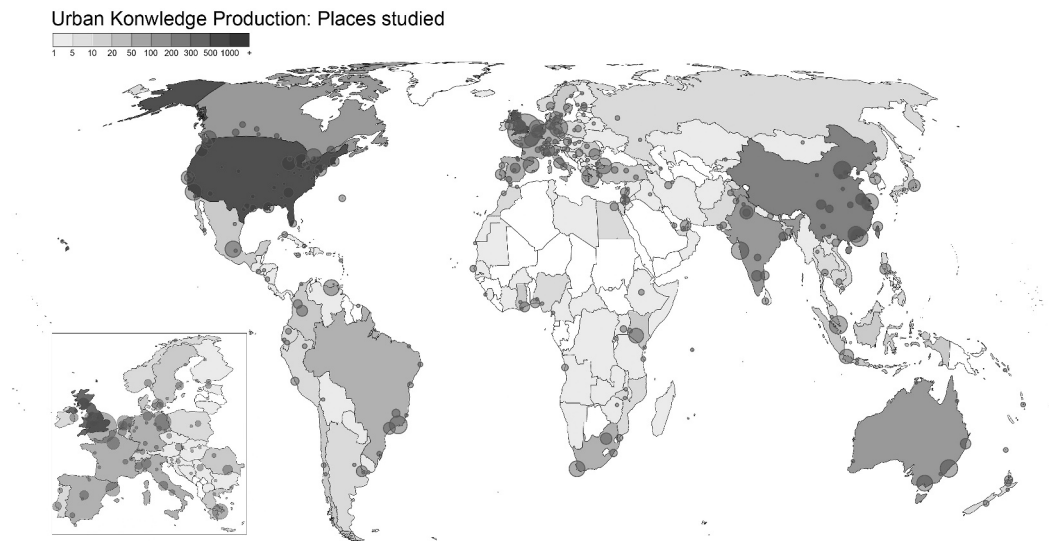
**FIGURE 1** | Urban knowledge production: Authors' location.

the list are in English-speaking countries (or in countries more or less directly influenced by the UK), the 'linguistic privilege' reasserts itself, adding for some of them, notably London, Chicago, and Los Angeles, as the paradigmatic milestones of modern

(Western) urban theory (Cooke 1990), the 'epistemological privilege' of always being 'on point'. Indeed, in the current imbalance of power and knowledge, writing about (and theorising from) London or Chicago needs less specification and justification than

**TABLE 2** | Urban knowledge production: Places studied (country and city).

| Country      | # Cases | % Of total | City           | # Cases | % Of total |
|--------------|---------|------------|----------------|---------|------------|
| USA          | 526     | 17.5       | London         | 107     | 3.6        |
| UK           | 309     | 10.3       | New York City  | 45      | 1.5        |
| China        | 258     | 8.6        | Singapore      | 30      | 1.0        |
| India        | 121     | 4.0        | Berlin         | 30      | 1.0        |
| Canada       | 111     | 3.7        | Rio de Janeiro | 29      | 1.0        |
| Australia    | 107     | 3.6        | Hong Kong      | 29      | 1.0        |
| Germany      | 91      | 3.0        | Sydney         | 28      | 0.9        |
| Brazil       | 78      | 2.6        | Mumbai         | 28      | 0.9        |
| South Africa | 67      | 2.2        | Beijing        | 28      | 0.9        |
| Italy        | 66      | 2.2        | Shanghai       | 27      | 0.9        |
| Netherlands  | 64      | 2.1        | Athens         | 27      | 0.9        |
| Spain        | 61      | 2.0        | Los Angeles    | 26      | 0.9        |
| France       | 52      | 1.7        | Amsterdam      | 25      | 0.8        |
| Turkey       | 47      | 1.6        | Mexico City    | 24      | 0.8        |
| Greece       | 44      | 1.5        | Toronto        | 23      | 0.8        |
| Mexico       | 44      | 1.5        | Melbourne      | 23      | 0.8        |
| Sweden       | 39      | 1.3        | Guangzhou      | 23      | 0.8        |
| Colombia     | 39      | 1.3        | Istanbul       | 23      | 0.8        |
| Kenya        | 39      | 1.3        | Barcelona      | 23      | 0.8        |
| Israel       | 37      | 1.2        | Cape Town      | 23      | 0.8        |
| Indonesia    | 35      | 1.2        | Detroit        | 21      | 0.7        |

**FIGURE 2** | Urban knowledge production: Places studied.

writing about (and theorising from) Turin or Tunis. Writing from the multiple margins of contemporary knowledge production is challenging and sometimes frustrating. Getting an article published about an Italian city, for example, requires taking nothing for granted, not only the city under consideration but also the country's economic and political characteristics (and their evolution), and clearly explaining why an international audience might be interested in learning about it. This is an impossible

mission or, at least, a very challenging one to manage if one would not just present the case but also want to engage in theoretical reasoning and contribute to theoretical debate. Moreover, the locations of the authors and the places they study intertwine and intersect, mutually reinforcing the centrality or marginality that characterizes them. In other words, the current geopolitics of urban knowledge production, as reflected in the articles and their authors, is dominated by one or very few centres—not only in the

generic Global North, but specifically in a few countries, cities, and universities—leaving many other countries, cities, and universities on the margins. While being in Italy or France places one in the Global North, this northern location does not necessarily imply occupying a central position in urban knowledge production, either in terms of the authors' locations or the places they study. Additionally, strong imbalances exist at the national level as well. For example, within Italy, being based in Turin is not the same as being based in Cosenza, just as writing about Milan differs from writing about Rovigo. While this might appear to be a trivial observation, it highlights the persistent unbalance among scholars, cities and universities. Margins and centres are relationally constructed across different spatial scales, with each margin engaging uniquely with the geopolitics of urban knowledge production. Likewise, the tactics and strategies scholars employ to navigate or challenge linguistic and epistemological privileges—as well as disparities in infrastructure and funding opportunities—also differ according to their specific contexts.

Finally, Table 3 lists theoretical articles associated with the threefold location of authors. As data clearly show, in terms of theoretical urban knowledge production, Anglo-American hegemony resonate strongly. Most theoretical articles come from the UK (29.4%), followed by the US (21.4%), Canada (10.7%), and Australia (6.5%). As it is visible in Figure 3, the rest of the

list records mainly northern European countries, except for Italy and Greece, at the bottom. Asia is represented by China and Singapore; the Global South by South Africa (although, see the claim by Müller 2021 recalled on note 5), and Brazil with only 5 articles.

This sharp selectivity is more striking if we look at a more granular scale: London (total 7.3%, with UCL at 2.4% and the London School of Economics and Political Science—LSE at 1.4%), Sheffield (University of Sheffield at 5%), Melbourne (totally at 3.9%, with the University of Melbourne at 3.5%), Vancouver (University of British Columbia at 2.2%), Durham (University of Durham at 2%), Toronto (York University and University of Toronto at 1.9%), and Los Angeles (University of California at Los Angeles - UCLA at 1.5%) are firmly at the top of the list. The only non-anglophone universities from where urban theory is written (and published) are the Vrije Universiteit Brussels (1.5%), the Utrecht University (1.4%), the TU Delft (1.4%), and Tallinn University (0.9%).

Of course, we acknowledge that 'urban theory' can be built through empirical work. However, writing from the multiple margins (wherever they may be), the choice of what and how to write is impossible or at least difficult. While from the centre (few cities and universities within a few countries), one can

**TABLE 3** | Urban theory production (country, city, institution).

| Country         | # Articles | % Of total | City                | # Articles | % Of total | Institution                                      | # Articles | % Of total |
|-----------------|------------|------------|---------------------|------------|------------|--|------------|------------|
| UK              | 217        | 29.4       | London              | 54         | 7.3        | University of Sheffield                          | 37         | 5.0        |
| USA             | 158        | 21.4       | Sheffield           | 38         | 5.1        | University of Melbourne                          | 24         | 3.2        |
| Canada          | 79         | 10.7       | Melbourne           | 29         | 3.9        | University College London                        | 18         | 2.4        |
| Australia       | 48         | 6.5        | Toronto             | 29         | 3.9        | University of British Columbia                   | 16         | 2.2        |
| The Netherlands | 37         | 5.0        | Vancouver           | 16         | 2.2        | Durham University                                | 15         | 2.0        |
| Germany         | 28         | 3.8        | Durham              | 15         | 2.0        | York University                                  | 14         | 1.9        |
| Belgium         | 17         | 2.3        | Berlin              | 14         | 1.9        | University of Toronto                            | 14         | 1.9        |
| South Africa    | 15         | 2.0        | Cape Town           | 12         | 1.6        | University of Cape Town                          | 12         | 1.6        |
| France          | 11         | 1.5        | Los Angeles         | 12         | 1.6        | University of California Los Angeles             | 11         | 1.5        |
| Ireland         | 10         | 1.4        | Manchester          | 12         | 1.6        | Vrije Universiteit Brussels                      | 11         | 1.5        |
| Italy           | 9          | 1.2        | Sydney              | 11         | 1.5        | University of Manchester                         | 11         | 1.5        |
| Switzerland     | 8          | 1.1        | Brussels            | 11         | 1.5%       | University of Cambridge                          | 10         | 1.4        |
| Singapore       | 8          | 1.1        | Utrecht             | 10         | 1.4        | London School of economics and political Science | 10         | 1.4        |
| Sweden          | 8          | 1.1        | Cambridge           | 10         | 1.4        | Utrecht University                               | 10         | 1.4        |
| Estonia         | 7          | 0.9        | Delft               | 9          | 1.2        | TU Delft   | 9          | 1.2        |
| China           | 6          | 0.8        | Paris               | 9          | 1.2        | University of Hull                               | 7          | 0.9        |
| Japan           | 6          | 0.8        | Oxford              | 8          | 1.1        | University of Oklahoma                           | 7          | 0.9        |
| Brazil          | 5          | 0.7        | Chicago             | 8          | 1.1        | Tallinn University                               | 7          | 0.9        |
| Greece          | 4          | 0.5        | New York city       | 8          | 1.1        | Cardiff University                               | 7          | 0.9        |
| China (HK)      | 4          | 0.5        | Singapore           | 8          | 1.1        | University of Oxford                             | 7          | 0.9        |
| Denmark         | 4          | 0.5        | Newcastle upon Tyne | 8          | 1.1        | Newcastle University                             | 7          | 0.9        |



**FIGURE 3** | Urban theory production.

choose to write a theoretical article or empirical research and case studies, from multiple margins, one can break the roof and finally be published in ‘international’ journals only if the article is not purely theoretical and if local case studies are presented. ‘Local scholars’, as Chann (2023) argues, are thus confined to thinking and acting only at the local level. Multiple margins enter urban knowledge production primarily as case study producers or, as Bhan (2019) suggests, as testimonies. This evidence is clearly in line with the arguments of some scholars (e.g., Scott and Storper 2015; Storper and Scott 2016; Randolph and Storper 2023), who call for the adoption of universal concepts (firmly located and produced in Western, actually Anglo-American, centres) and empirical variegation, while practically contradicting the opposing attempts to provincialize any urban knowledge and ground any theoretical reflection (e.g., Edenson and Jayne 2012; Roy 2009, 2016; Sheppard, Leitner, and Maringanti 2013; Amin and Lancione 2022).

#### 4 | Conclusion

During the revision of this article, we repeatedly had to address criticisms suggesting that our focus on Anglo-American journals reinforces Anglo-American privilege. In fact, the opposite is true: we focus on some of the most important Anglo-American journals in the field of urban geography and urban studies not to perpetuate their privilege, but to highlight the inherently unequal landscape of contemporary urban scholarship. Indeed, the first step of any critical practice (Marcuse 2009) is to expose problems and contradictions. Moreover, this stance permeates our academic lives and it is essential for having a voice, being heard, and, hopefully, ‘making a difference’ in the international debate. In the geopolitics of urban knowledge production, ‘space really matters’, even in its most mundane form of location, which is itself enmeshed in a multiscale entanglement.

Amid increasing calls to decolonize geographic knowledge and urban theorizing from a ‘global anywhere’, we have questioned how these demands are being realized within journals that, by no

decision from scholars at the multiple margins, have become international standards for all. The response we found by reviewing the articles published is that this dual request remains largely unmet. The positions of authors and their institutional affiliations depict an unequal and fragmented global knowledge structure rooted in asymmetrical power relations, transcending traditional West/East and North/South divides. As Mignolo (2014, 1) stated; ‘Linear global thinking is the story of how Europe mapped the world for its own benefit and left a fiction that became an ontology: a division of the world into ‘East’ and ‘West’, ‘South’ and ‘North’, or ‘First’, ‘Second’, and ‘Third’’. This decolonial critique aligns with the tactics adopted by several scholars to transcend ‘the imagined geographies of new subjects of theorization’ (Robinson 2016: 188; see also Mbembe and Nuttall 2004; Edenson and Jayne 2012; Oldfield and Parnell 2014; Gillespie and Mitlin 2023). Challenging the Global South/Global North divide is not only significant per se (Shin 2021) but also provides a valuable lens or metaphor to highlight the pluralities and polyphonies within the Global South, the Global North, and the ‘Global everywhere’ (Sparke 2007; Lawhon and Truelove 2020; Waisbich, Roychoudhury, and Haug 2021). In the production of urban knowledge ‘the West’, for example, is not all the same: it is heterogeneous and fragmented, there are margins, few centres as well as a ‘monist core’, constituted by Anglophone, male, white scholars located in just a few Euro-American universities (Leitner and Sheppard 2016). Consequently, being a U.S. or British urban scholar in Los Angeles or London is not the same as being a U.S. or British urban scholar in El Paso or Portsmouth; just as being a London urban scholar at UCL is not the same as being a London urban scholar at Kingston University. It follows that the challenge of the centre/periphery binary does not stem from the weakening of inequality due to the presence of ‘in-between’ scholars, moving across various countries and traditions, as suggested, for example, by Kong and Qian (2019), nor from the growing advantage of using English to enable the understanding and interweaving of various national geographical (or rather: linguistic) traditions, as argued by Rodríguez-Pose (2004). Most important are the wide gaps in power, money, and infrastructure. These gaps are far from being overcome and continue to produce a multiscale hierarchy, reproducing established divisions (such as that between Northern

and Southern cities) and deepening national and urban inequalities. The internal organisation of different countries and the variety of local situations are related to various dynamics such as national academic politics, the state of research funding, variable national and urban research infrastructures, and so on. This means that our findings need to be considered carefully and, to provide further insights, should be complemented by an in-depth exploration of different national and local academic situations. However, as the calls for a global urban knowledge often conflate with the construction of coercive and neoliberal trends in terms of funding opportunities, overlapping between international and Anglophone publishing, and the erasure of linguistic and epistemological variegation of research and writing practices, our findings at least highlight how irreflexive adopting these calls is highly problematic or risks being reduced to a purely rhetorical position without practical effects on the current situation.

Additionally, the division between the Global North and the Global South only partially explains the multidimensional geopolitics of urban knowledge production. Centrality and marginality are not fixed but are interwoven and overlap across various scales. Acknowledging and addressing this complexity is critical to moving beyond reductive dichotomies and simplistic binary understanding. Even within the so-called centre, there are margins. For example, while Italy is part of the Global North, the urban knowledge produced by Italian scholars is marginal and remains marginalized. The same holds true for Spain, France, and Portugal, to name just a few examples within Europe. As we have shown, similar dynamics are evident not only at national levels but also across urban and academic institutional scales. Recognizing the interwoven layers of marginality and centrality is key for developing a more nuanced understanding of the geopolitics of urban knowledge production and beginning to move beyond disillusionment.

Certainly, the inherent 'globalism' of many of today's urban scholars and the increasing presence of 'other' traditions and places in Anglophone journals can be seen as opportunities to challenge the tough boundaries of Anglo-American hegemony. However, this is only part of the problem. The continued leading role of the UK and the US, evident in terms of 'theory production', and the increasing selectivity at the urban and institutional level, both in terms of the location of authors and the cities from which to theorise, show that to challenge established positions and transcend borders, rather than Anglo-American hegemony, one must begin to think in terms of London, Los Angeles, and New York hegemony, stratifying hierarchies, margins, and liminal spaces. To further investigate these issues, we envisage the next step of the research to focus on identifying the network of scholars involved in publications and writing practices, as well as the trajectories of urban knowledge production. Building on the two pieces of information discussed in this article, we aim to explore which locations are involved in studying different places. Specifically, we want to determine if, for example, London is studied only from the UK or also from India, and if Mumbai is studied only from India or also from the UK. We can illustrate this point by considering China's role as a supposed newcomer in the international urban debate (Kong and Qian 2019), both in terms of its authorship and as the subject of study. Of the 202 articles focussed on urban China and written by at least one author affiliated with a Chinese university (including both mainland

China and Hong Kong), only a minority (97) are authored exclusively by scholars based in China. Where is the other author (s) located? Does this pattern apply solely to China, or does it extend to other countries as well? Is there a collaboration pattern that moves in one direction (from the centre to the margins), or do the data outline a two-way model?

At the same time, the geography of places studied contradicts every claim for post/decolonising urban theory, 'urban theorising from anywhere', southern, subaltern, alternative urban perspectives, and so on. As emerging in 'international' publishing, our (urban) planet is really small, marked by three major areas, few dots, and big voids. Most of the planet is not covered by international urban research: as was originally kept by Trubina et al. (2020), the postsocialist Global East seems to be apart of the world and not part of it; the 'asymmetrical ignorance' (Robinson 2003) characterises relations not only among scholars located in the Global North and Global South but also between northern and southern cities, framing how those cities are studied (i.e., the distinction between urban theories and development studies detected by Robinson) and how urban theorising is enacted. The unequal knowledge also affects the Global North, 'for we understand more about Western than Eastern Europe, more about big cities than small ones' (Lawhon and Truelove 2020: 7). What about North and sub-Saharan African, Eastern Europe, Middle Eastern, southern Europe, Latin American cities? To find the top studied cities in the most forgotten regions, one must go very far down the list: Nairobi (20 articles in total), Bucharest (11 articles), and Cairo (6 articles). Since these are the most studied cities in those regions, the others have completely disappeared. They are not part of current (global) urban knowledge and do not contribute to today's urban theorising. As the debate on 'overlooked cities' points out (Ruszczuk et al. 2021; Nugraha et al. 2023), global urban knowledge is marked by 'a kind of indifference' towards the majority of the urban world, keeping most 'cities marginalized, off the map, under-theorized and under-represented due to the logic of domination and control' (Nugraha et al. 2023: 1).

This imbalance does not only entail an empirical blindness. As Roy (2009) pointed out, 'the concern is with the limited sites at which theoretical production is currently theorised and with the failure of imagination and epistemology that is thus engendered' (820). If this is the case and continues to be the case, the claim for globalising urban theory risks to reassert the hegemony always questioned by the same advocates of 'from anywhere' theorising that are part of the manifold centres (Esson et al. 2017; Jazeel 2017; Noxolo 2017) or sitting in the editorial boards of supposed 'international' journals (Müller 2021). After all, according to Mignolo (2002), 'intellectual decolonization (...) cannot come from existing philosophies and cultures of scholarship' (64).

The repeated calls for urban comparison seem to be a possible way to improve our urban knowledge in a more open and 'global' way (Robinson 2016, 2022). However, this quest too frequently compares the same places. It is probably time to make speak (and hearth) a plurality of voices and positions (Lancione and McFarlane 2021), to substitute the UK, China, and South Africa with, for example, Romania, Laos, and Togo; London, Shanghai, and Johannesburg (Robinson et al. 2022) with, for example, Blackpool (UK), Lanzhou (China), and Polokwane (South Africa)

or other anywhere in North Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Balkans, southeast Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa (just to recall the most neglected areas in today global urban debate). Every city can improve urban knowledge, in terms of theory and empirical variety. However, a vast urban majority is absolutely hidden, or silenced, by the supposed global urban knowledge. Wherever these silenced urbanites are, this urban silence is the sign of the perdurance of the hegemonic practices of urban knowledge production, layered at various scales and affecting both the location of scholars and their institutions and the places from where global urban knowledge is actually built.

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> While acknowledging the remarks made by Johnston and Sidaway (2004) about the differences between the UK and the USA, we use the expressions Anglo-American geography and Anglophone geography to refer to the 'linguistic privilege' not only in terms of language but also of positioning (Müller 2021).
- <sup>2</sup> In 2006, Rodríguez-Pose argued that the majority of the debate about a supposedly Anglo-American hegemony has been conducted in editorials and short articles with very few notable exceptions (i.e., Gutiérrez and López-Nieva 2001; Yeung, 2001). However, these 'notable exceptions' are now complemented by a few insightful articles, such as Kong and Qian 2019; Trubina et al. 2020; Müller 2021, which have enlivened the debate so as to break out of the circularity felt, for example, by Fall and Minca in 2012.
- <sup>3</sup> An example of this enclosure is the current political discourse in various European countries, such as the Netherlands, where the far-right government now in power aims to restrict English-taught degrees and reducing the use of English at Dutch universities and colleges (<https://monitor.icef.com/2024/10/dutch-government-set-to-restrict-english-taught-degrees/>).
- <sup>4</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?show=aimsScope&journalCode=ccit20>.
- <sup>5</sup> <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/14678330>.
- <sup>6</sup> <https://journals.sagepub.com/aims-scope/EPD>.
- <sup>7</sup> <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/page/journal/14682427/homepage/productinformation.html>.
- <sup>8</sup> <https://journals.sagepub.com/aims-scope/USJ>.
- <sup>9</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?show=aimsScope&journalCode=rurb20>.
- <sup>10</sup> The regional level gathers articles related to sub-Saharan Africa or the Persian Gulf region, transnational aggregation of cities or countries (as OECD countries, post-socialist cities, Mediterranean cities), or transcontinental studies mostly across Europe, Africa, and Latin America.
- <sup>11</sup> According to Müller (2021), "a blanket attribution of South Africa to the Global South is debatable" (1450). He also notes that India and South Africa "were part of the British empire and English plays an important role in higher education, which likely explains their position" (*ibidem*). This warning applies throughout the article when South Africa, India, and Hong Kong are concerned. The world-regional classification of Global North/Global South, with the South constituted by Africa, Asia, and Latin America, is clearly questionable, and needs to be complemented by a more nuanced understanding to challenge conventional and more or less mainstream theoretical frameworks,

displace inherited positions, and develop new understanding and theoretical directions (Lawhon and Truelove 2020; Bhan 2019).

- <sup>12</sup> The prominence of the University of Sheffield is probably due to the role played by the Urban Institute, which involves, as members or associates, some of the leading scholars in the contemporary debate on urban studies and which has been awarded significant grants.

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