Transnational Urbanism: Locating Globalization. By Michael Peter Smith. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001. 221 pp. $29.95 paper.

Jefferey M. Sellers, *University of Southern California*

At crucial turning points in the history of U.S. political science, urban politics has moved to the center of the discipline. In the early 1900s comparative studies of local government and administration contributed to the emergence of professional political science. In the postwar era, studies of community power played a critical role in the behaviorialist revolution. In recent years, the rethinking of national boundaries and institutions may also present new opportunities for studies of politics at the local level to reformulate approaches to state-society relations in general. This extended theoretical essay, though addressed to "urban studies" rather than to political scientists as such, offers glimpses of how such a synthesis might look.

Michael Peter Smith starts out from a critique of several literatures that have analyzed the economic, social and cultural transformations linked to globalization from the standpoint of cities. The targets will be more familiar names to those versed in the sociological, anthropological and geographical literatures concerned with urban politics, but students of comparative politics and international relations will recognize many of the arguments.

Taking issue with urban geographers like David Harvey, Smith criticizes them for neglect of the role that national policies play in transnational processes, as well as of the cultural and social dimensions that can make globalization a source of mobilization on the part of local communities and disadvantaged groups. The critique carries special force as an argument against the growing body of work devoted to "global cities" (48-71). In these settings, according to such

authors as Saskia Sassen and John Friedmann, a few global command centers of international financial and corporate activities are replacing national states as centers of power. Smith takes these authors to task not only for their neglect of both national states and local agency, but for a posture that takes for granted the consequences of neoliberal deregulatory policies. Theorists who have stressed social, cultural and religious movements as elements of globalization, like Manuel Castells or Benjamin Barber, suffer from different shortcomings. For Smith, these authors have too often romanticized disadvantaged and contentious groups as locally oriented reactions to global capital. The geographers and sociologists of the "Los Angeles School", who have treated that city as a model of globalized economic and cultural influences, also "take the political out of political economy and treat the cultural as entirely derivative of epochal economic transformation" (73).

The critiques culminate in a sweeping alternative vision that Smith calls "transnational urbanism" (165-183). At the most general level, this approach entails what students of comparative politics and international relations might recognize as a multilevel approach to the political economy of cities. Between the local or the global, Smith contends that national and other intermediate elites, policies and institutions need to be taken into account. At the same time, he insists that global and other forces are what the businesses, immigrants, activists and others within cities make of them. Neither businesses nor immigrant minorities fit neatly into local or transnational or even economic and ethic categories. Transnational networks of grassroots activism are as much a part of contemporary globalization as the forces and claims of global capitalism. In his most concrete exposition of how this transnational approach would shift the focus of urban studies, Smith sketches a "reimagining [of] Los Angeles from the ground up" (72-98). In place of the a global command center proclaimed by the Los Angeles School and others,

he portrays a an economically dependent city whose businesses elites struggled over the 1980s and 1990s to revive the downtown economy. At the same time, new immigrant workers and entrepreneurs from Latin America and from Asia have contributed new, transnational sources of economic dynamism.

For other subfields of political science as well as for the urban experts Smith explicitly addresses, the question at the core of this book poses a potentially far-reaching challenge. If he is correct, then not only must domestic and international politics be considered inextricable, but research on transnational phenomena needs to be reconceived. Domestic political phenonema in the United States or any other country need to be reconceptualized in terms of networks, markets or other connections that transcend national boundaries. International markets, social movements, immigrant networks and policy exchanges among states must be considered in terms of relations between localities as well as between countries. Neither nation-states and their boundaries nor localities alone can serve to define cases for research.

As both a sophisticated critique of existing literatures in a number of urban disciplines and a theoretical provocation to those working in this area, the argument generally succeeds. To bring off the larger project of "locating globalization" would require a much fuller treatment than Smith offers. His call for more attention to the sources and dynamics of globalization "from below" (146) points in directions that should prove constructive for numerous disciplines concerned with the subject. To pursue these new avenues requires a shift toward greater scrutiny of transnational influences within communities and among individuals. For most social scientists concerned with globalization beyond its urban dimensions, however, Smith's simultaneous injunction to pay more attention to the national politics of neoliberalism will have all the resonance of a pronouncement that the earth is round. The project he advocates ultimately

requires ways to test national influences with those at local and other levels. To enable rigorous testing of this sort, the rather simple designs that Smith proposes for research in the area–different transnational networks in the same city, network practices across space, localizations of the neoliberal project (pp. 176-182)–are likely to require greater elaboration.

In contrast with the expansive theoretical ambitions expressed at points in the book, the specific focus of Smith's account often remains highly selective. Nowhere does he address why transnationalism should be urban, rather than extend into suburbs or agricultural areas enmeshed in global markets. He has much more to say about transnational networks among immigrant groups than about, say, the effects of globalization on policy innovations or on nonethnic markets for provision of goods and services. His account also draws far more on U.S. examples, and in particular on U.S. cities with the largest immigrant populations, than on cities in Europe, Asia or the developing world.

These shortcomings are partly a product of the book's theoretical aspirations. The arguments Smith makes resonate well beyond urban studies. Future transnational research in numerous fields will undoubtedly have to grapple with the issues his book raises.