Since the 1990s, neoliberalism has become something of a master concept in anthropology and a number of other disciplines. The term is typically used to describe certain ideological, political, and governmental practices associated with the post-1970s globalization of the capitalist economy: the strengthening of private property rights; the expansion of free markets and free trade; the privatization of public and commonly held goods; and the veneration and spread of private-sector practices and concepts (Harvey 2005). With respect to cities, neoliberalism usually is understood as a response to the intensified interurban competition characteristic of globalization (Peck and Tickell 2002).

Despite these widely agreed-upon generalities, the use of the concept of “the neoliberal city” raises significant theoretical, methodological, and political questions. Where and when does neoliberalism begin and end? How deeply has it affected cities across the globe? What other political, economic, and governmental projects might also be at work in the rapidly urbanizing world today? In what ways is the concept of use to urbanists, and in what ways might it impede our understanding of new processes of urbanization and urbanism?

This chapter begins with a brief historical account of the neoliberalization of the city. We then present three ways of conceptualizing neoliberalism: as a global class project, with particular implications for urban restructuring; as an
articulation of “actually existing” metropolitan political and governmental forces and arrangements; and as an unstable metropolitan political and governmental project that seeks, but often fails, to achieve hegemonic status. These overlapping conceptualizations help to critically theorize the neoliberal city without suggesting that its proponents have advanced their projects in stable, unitary or uncontested contexts, or that there is a singular, overarching view or account of what it is. The third part of this chapter reviews ethnographic case material that illustrates the necessity of using the concept of neoliberalism in a careful and nuanced manner when analyzing urban life. The chapter concludes by discussing the limits, limitations, and strengths of the neoliberal city paradigm.

In sketching out a critical, anthropological approach to the study of the neoliberal city, we draw on the work of critical geographers and other scholars in the interdisciplinary field of urban studies who have focused on large-scale patterns of economic restructuring and shifting modes of urban regulation and whose work has been the most prominent in shaping the concept of the neoliberal city (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Hackworth 2007; Harvey 1989; Jessop 2002; Peck and Tickell 2002). However, we pay especially close attention to anthropological and other ethnographic approaches that locate neoliberal projects in particular places and spaces and that attend to concrete realities “on the ground” (Brash 2011; Fairbanks and Lloyd 2011; Goode and Maskovsky 2001; Kingfisher and Maskovsky 2008; Ong 2006). In our view, anthropology’s major contributions to studies of the neoliberal city are twofold. The first is its capacity to illuminate the historically and geographically embedded political, cultural, and governmental practices through which purported abstractions such as the free market, property rights, free trade, productivity, privatization, corporate stewardship, investment, and other major tenets of urban neoliberalism are made and remade. The second, related contribution is to illustrate the cultural dimensions of neoliberalism: the ways in which urban identities, ideologies, subjectivities, and imaginaries shape and are shaped by the constitution and trajectory of specific neoliberal projects.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF URBAN NEOLIBERALISM

The roots of neoliberalism famously lie in the writings of economist Friedrich August Hayek, whose reinvention of classic liberalism in the 1930s and 1940s became increasingly influential in the last decades of the Cold War and beyond, particularly among Chicago School economists such as Milton Friedman. Hayek and Friedman were staunch critics of the egalitarian liberalism associated with Keynesian policy interventions and welfare statism in the United States and parts of Europe (which, according to their view, shared a dangerous governmental interventionist ethos with the fascist or totalitarian states of Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union). They argued instead for the revival of classic notions of liberalism — unfettered international competition, flexible and deregulated labor markets, and the non-interventionist state, in particular — as better
guarantors of personal and political freedom and prosperity. These ideas were concretized in the policy domain in the global North with the rise of the Reagan/Thatcher era, and in the global South with the “structural adjustment” programs put into place, beginning in the mid-1970s, first by Pinochet in Chile and then elsewhere (Gledhill 2004; Harvey 2005).

In recent decades, neoliberalism’s global prominence can be attributed to the actions of a shifting and sometimes unwitting conglomeration of large corporations, right-wing media and think tanks, centrist politicians, and liberal policy experts who first pushed government to rollback key regulatory mechanisms, social welfare policies, and public funding streams, and then to devise a technocratic, marketized, audit-oriented mode of governance more suitable to the economic imperatives of capitalist globalization in its current form (Peck and Tickell 2002) (see Chapter 14, “Global Systems and Globalization”). Examples of the policy shifts that are typically glossed as neoliberal should be quite familiar to scholars: the privatization of public services and space; the increased use of public–private partnerships; the restructuring of welfare provisioning to increase attachment to the workforce; pro-gentrification “revitalization;” and commercial upscaling.

At the level of ideology, neoliberals have sought to reinvigorate and refine classical liberalism’s conceptions of “freedom” and “democracy” in a context in which modern, egalitarian notions of liberalism have taken hold. This typically entails a redefinition of freedom and democracy to prioritize the rights of individuals to participate in markets and of markets themselves to act unhindered by governmental regulation (Harvey 2005). Neoliberal ideology’s economistic notion of freedom can be productively contrasted with the welfarist notion of freedom famously espoused by Roosevelt, in 1941, to consolidate support for the New Deal and US military action abroad: freedom of speech; freedom of religion; freedom from want; and freedom from fear.

It is not always easy, however, to distinguish neoliberal ideology from other reigning political ideologies (cf. Robotham 2009). For example, because neo-conservatives tend to worry more than neoliberals about the market’s effects on society, they also typically endorse authoritarian governing arrangements, and assertions of moral and political authority more broadly, as necessary instruments that can stabilize the social disorder that accompanies market expansion and commodification (see Chapter 7, “ Markets”). Libertarians, in contrast, typically take an even more strident position against governmental intervention than do neoliberals, who tend actually to approve of “limited government” as a necessary instrument for enabling market reforms and extending the reach of the market. Labeling as “neoliberal” market reforms in authoritarian, not democratic, contexts, such as in Pinochet’s Chile or Deng Xiaoping’s China, is also controversial (Harvey 2005; Kanna 2011; Nonini 2008; Ong 2006).

With respect to cities, the earliest examples of the neoliberal turn include the economic policy reforms and austerity programs that were first imposed on New York City in the aftermath of the mid-1970s fiscal crisis, and then spread to other American cities (Susser 2012; Tabb 1982). Here, and elsewhere, fiscal crisis justified and legitimated the rollback of municipal (and state and federal)
governmental intervention, a reduction in its redistributive functions, and the loosening of its regulatory control. This opened the door for “reinvented,” “technocratic,” and “good government” movements that elevated corporate partnerships, privatization, and entrepreneurialism, along with law and order, to the top of the urban agenda (Brash 2011; Hackworth 2007; Smith 1996).

As was the case with neoliberalism writ large, the spread of urban neoliberalism was aided by the development of a theoretical armature centered on ideas of market freedom, competition, and deregulation (Peterson 1981); entrepreneurialism in urban governance (Osborne and Gaebler 1993); and the necessity to attract and retain productive residents, such as “the creative class” (Florida 2002), whose entrepreneurialism, innovation, expertise, and money would serve as engines of local growth and development. The circulation of these theories in scholarly and policy circles, and their operationalization and popularization by the members of the burgeoning “economic development” profession, was an important element in the rapid spread and often imitative nature of urban neoliberalism (Eisinger 1988).

The spread of urban neoliberalism, like neoliberalism more generally, was highly uneven and variegated over space. In the advanced industrial nations of Western Europe and the Anglosphere, urban neoliberalism was very much an effort to roll back Keynesian state welfarism and social democracy and to reconstitute the local state in line with the description laid out above. Here, cities had often been the base of liberal reformism, social democracy, and more radical projects of the left. Cities had also been important sites of liberatory struggles involving racial, ethnic, sexual, and cultural minorities and immigrants (see Chapter 27, “Social Movements”). Deeply held anti-urban beliefs provided fertile soil for the reactionary ideological shifts that accompanied neoliberal restructuring. As a result, in these regions, the city was also often a privileged site of neoliberal interventions and projects (Hackworth 2007; Peck and Tickell 2002).

Outside North America, patterns of urbanization were different, with different governing priorities and agendas and different connections to – and disconnections from – global capitalism, national and local development agendas, and democratizing projects. There is not room here to detail all the varieties of neoliberalization in these places, though several examples are discussed below. Suffice it to say that the rollback of economic autarky and the developmental state, the imposition of structural adjustment programs, and the opening of markets to global capital set into motion a number of processes in Lagos, Dubai, and Rio de Janeiro and in other cities of the global South: the growth of “mega slums” (Davis 2004); the fortification of urban enclaves, spatial segregation, and growing social inequality (Caldeira 2001); and the spectacular development of elite and business districts that were landing places for global capital and its investment (Kanna 2011; Ren 2011). Likewise, the fall of the Soviet Union and the opening up of the former Soviet bloc to capitalist relations and investment created the context for another permutation of urban neoliberalism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (Stenning et al. 2011). The extent to which all of these developments can be usefully understood as “neoliberalization” is questionable, however.
Unsurprisingly, critical responses have accompanied neoliberalism’s rise. Many point to its links with rising social and economic inequality and widespread impoverishment, precariousness, discontentment, and insecurity for the less affluent, as well for segments of the middle classes (Ferguson 2006; Gledhill 2004; Saad-Filho and Johnston 2005). Others point to its unique capacities to undermine liberal democracy and to strengthen authoritarian rule: Trouillot (2003), for instance, criticizes neoliberalism’s “market extremism,” which subsumes formerly semi-autonomous political and social spheres necessary for the exercise of democratic citizenship, to the economic realm. Along similar lines, Bourdieu (2003) denounces neoliberalism for eroding the social welfarist “left hand” of the state while simultaneously empowering the more coercive “right hand” of the state. Still others point out the fallacy of neoliberal ideology’s stance against government intervention (Brash 2011; Brenner and Theodore 2002; Gledhill 2004; Maskovsky and Kingfisher 2001).

There are also specifically urban critiques of neoliberalism. For instance, critical urban theorists have drawn productively on Henri Lefebvre’s famous “right to the city” formulation (Brenner, Marcuse and Meyer 2011; Lefebvre 1996: 147–159) to call for a full-scale spatial and social reorganization of our urbanizing world. Marcuse calls for an end to the reckless pursuit of profit and for a “decent and supportive living environment” (Marcuse 2009: 199) for both the deprived and discontented. Others have critiqued the commodification and privatization of urban space, and particularly the urban public space that has long been seen as an important site for the enactment of democratic citizenship (Low and Smith 2006) (see Chapters 4 and 26, “Citizenship” and “The Commons”). The academic critique of neoliberalism in many ways thus resonates with popular uprisings that have challenged neoliberal hegemony from the 1980s to the 2010s, including the global justice movement, Occupy Wall Street, the food sovereignty movement, and other transnational movements.

**Theorizing the Neoliberal City**

In geography, urban studies, and anthropology, three paradigms have predominated in studies of urban neoliberalism. These are, of course, overlapping modes of thought, and are for the most part distinguished by emphasis rather than by stark theoretical divides. Indeed, while there are theoretical disagreements, the study of urban neoliberalism has generally proceeded through the absorption of alternative perspectives and through relatively friendly critique. The kind of vituperative argument that characterized debate over gentrification in the 1980s or between “Marxists” and “post-structuralists” in the 1990s has been largely absent from discussions of urban neoliberalism.

The first paradigm, influenced by Marxism in general and the work of David Harvey (2003, 2005) in particular, views neoliberalism as the central guiding principle of economic management for the new imperial capitalist class (see Chapter 9, “Class”). The primary goal of neoliberal reforms is, according to Harvey, the restoration of capitalist class power on a global scale in the context of a decades-long global economic crisis. Accordingly, privatization,
the proliferation of free-trade agreements, deregulation, and other neoliberal reform measures are best understood as instruments that enhance the ability of capital to overcome barriers to production, circulation, and financialization (Harvey 2005: 152–182). For Harvey, urbanization, defined as a “spatially grounded social process” (1989: 5), has been central to the advance of neoliberalism (see also Brenner and Theodore 2002; Peck and Tickell 2002). Indeed, the shift in urban governance from “managerialism,” which used full-employment and redistributive policies to facilitate economic growth and keep social peace to “entrepreneurialism,” to use the term Harvey employed, in a prescient early (1989) discussion of what would later be dubbed urban neoliberalism, reflects a new pattern of capitalist development at the macroeconomic level. For Harvey, urban governance must be distinguished from urban government, in the sense that government officials do not establish the entrepreneurial agenda alone. Rather, they are part of a broader governing coalition that takes the form of a public–private partnership.

Harvey also makes clear that the new urban entrepreneurialism takes many forms: export-oriented redevelopment, with perks and tax incentives for investors; consumerist styles of urbanization designed to stimulate mass consumption in the urban region; finance-oriented urbanization to increase an urban area’s share of control and command functions for the global economy; or attempts to harness government resources and redistributive elements of national, state, and local economies in the service of building up vital economic sectors such as the military, health care, and education. Yet its primary purpose is to facilitate the broader transition from Fordist production systems and Keynesian state welfarism to a geographically more open market-based system of flexible accumulation, to the benefit of particular fractions of the capitalist class (Harvey 1989; see also Sassen 2001). The strengthening of entrepreneurialism and inter-municipal competition has encouraged the proliferation of urban regimes preoccupied by obsessive image enhancement, urban branding, place marketing, commercial upscaling, gentrification, and speculation with public funds to leverage private investment. It has also intensified economic volatility, displacement, and slumification across the municipal landscape. Overall, the new entrepreneurship has thus been crucial to the growth of new forms of dispossession that operate on a global scale (Harvey 2003).

Following Harvey, several theorists have conceptualized neoliberalism as a mode of urban regulation (Jessop 2002; Peck and Tickell 2002). Here the emphasis is often on the extra-local regulation of cities, and not necessarily, as with the influential “regulation” school in urban studies, with the impact of economic regimes on urban politics (Aglietta 2000), though there is clearly a relationship between the two. Peck and Tickell (2002), for example, link the global spread of neoliberalism to the validation of US economic policies and practices of the 1990s, and to the transnational transfer and translation of American social and economic policies. This process has facilitated neoliberalism’s instantiation as an “extra-local” form of “meta-regulation” (albeit one that masquerades as antiregulatory), that is in some respects insulated from local challenges. They also periodize neoliberalism into “roll-back” and “roll-out”
phases, to distinguish the state form during which Keynesian and other collective governmental strategies are dismantled from the state form during which full-fledged market saturation, competition, and expansion is enacted.

A second theorization emphasizes the hybrid or composite structure of “actually existing” urban neoliberalisms (Larner 2000). The point here is not just that the global imposition of neoliberalism has been highly uneven and that it has taken on a variety of governmental and spatial forms; rather, it is to emphasize the “contextual embeddedness,” as Brenner and Theodore put it (2002: 351), of neoliberal restructuring projects. Proponents of this perspective direct attention to the spaces of neoliberalization, and, from this view, cities are conceptualized as important laboratories for neoliberal policy experiments, and as specific places where neoliberal programs and polices are “interiorized.” “Actually existing” neoliberalisms are thus localizations that entail the rescaling of government, the imposition of fiscal austerity, the devolution of public tasks onto the civic sector, the privatization of public infrastructure, the restructuring of housing and labor markets, and the imposition and reproduction of a variety of other concrete programs but with different effects and through different political pathways in different places.

A third perspective de-centers neoliberalism in explorations of contemporary urban governance. Proponents of this perspective see neoliberalism as a “social-political project that attempts to conform the world to its logic” (Clarke 2004: 10, emphasis in original; see also Kingfisher and Maskovsky 2008; Ong 2006). Here, neoliberalism is part of an assemblage of people governing practices that coalesce in forms of urban governance in which it may or may not be hegemonic. This perspective recognizes that neoliberalism is but one of many projects with totalizing desires in the world today – Christianity, secularism, libertarianism, neoconservativism, and Islam also come to mind – and that neoliberal attempts to reform urban government occur in contexts in which, say, powerful elites, right-wing intellectuals, socialists, Islamists, social democratic, and populist forces may oppose it, and in which corruption, machine politics, and other longstanding and new urban governing arrangements may block or undermine its reforms. The point is then to problematize and decenter neoliberalism in accounts of contemporary urban governance.

**THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF CONTEMPORARY URBAN GOVERNANCE**

For many anthropologists, examples of urban governance that are typically glossed as “neoliberal” are in fact highly contingent, complex, varied, and unstable. In the following section, we provide a brief and selective primer of urban anthropological findings that support this point in three specific ways. What becomes clear, even in this brief discussion, is that simplistic and unidirectional models of neoliberalism’s spread are no longer useful in capturing the power dynamics that make up urban governance today. Rather, it is the particular manner in which neoliberal reforms, ideological precepts, and logics are coupled to specific governing projects that helps us to perceive most clearly
the dominant and emerging patterns of urban governance of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

1. Neoliberalism Is Not Alone
We highlight first the extent to which governmental practices and urban phenomena closely associated with neoliberalism are in fact part and parcel of processes and projects external to or preceding neoliberalism. Take, for example, the case of community redevelopment and governance in the US inner city since the 1980s (see Chapters 3 and 5, “Community” and “Built Structures and Planning”). The participation of inner city residents, once shunned and ignored by city planners in community planning and redevelopment, was increasingly stressed at the same time as municipal elites routinely championed neoliberal strategies of privatization, marketization, and consumerism. We might see the advent and spread of community planning models as direct consequences of an ascendant urban neoliberalism, whose advocates wisely co-opted the energies of neighborhood activists who fought against the urban renewal projects of the 1960s and 1970s via cultural marketing strategies, neighborhood heritage celebrations, as well as community-based planning (Boyd 2008; Dávila 2004). Yet upon further inspection, this strategy is marked more by failure than by success: not just the failure to guarantee residents, especially low-income residents, the safety, security, resources, and quality of life that they desire, but also the failure to manage racial, ethnic and class differences and inequalities using strategies based on post-civil-rights-era notions of diversity and multiculturalism (Gregory 1998; Maskovsky 2006; Mullings 2005). In particular, neoliberal projects often find themselves foundering on the shoals of racial conflict, even as their advocates attempt to circumvent such conflict in ways that themselves create new racial fault lines and forms of class division that are neither reducible to neoliberalism nor entirely separate from it (Boyd 2008; Gregory 1998; Maskovsky 2006) (see Chapters 9 and 12, “Class” and “Race”). While neoliberalism clearly impacts, draws upon, and exacerbates the complex relationship between class and race in the American city, this relationship has its own independent dynamics and currents that may overwhelm those of neoliberalism in certain instances.

One can also see a similar pattern in the “spectacular development” of cities like Dubai, Mumbai, or Beijing. The creation or reconstruction of urban commerce and consumption has typically been seen as part of the class project of neoliberalism, as global elites have pursued opportunities for profitable investment in environments hospitable to their economic, social, political, and cultural needs and desires. But as a number of anthropologists have demonstrated, such spaces are not homogeneous and deterritorialized expressions of global and neoliberal actors and processes. For instance, the stunningly fast and monumental development of Dubai has been shown to be inspired as much by national struggles for modernity, interpretations of Islam, and notions of cultural authenticity as by economic value, intra-urban competition, class
projects, technocracy, or orthodoxies of global urbanism (Kanna 2011). In a similar vein, the rapid global spread of “starchitecture” draws on both the transnational circulation of capital, reputation, status, and professional expertise and specific national and urban architectural histories and traditions, real-estate markets, cultural vernaculars, and state projects (Ren 2011). In such cases, and in others not mentioned here, one sees how the development of urban neoliberalism in a specific context cannot be said to be a result of the imposition of “neoliberalism” understood as a global or extra-local force, but rather a much more complex articulation of forces, projects, and actors operating at a variety of different geographic and temporal scales.

2. Beyond the Neoliberalism/Resistance Duet
Recent anthropological work also demonstrates the limitations of the view of neoliberalism as a unitary external structural force – conceived of as a set of economic policies or discourses – that bears down on states, civil society institutions, populations or individuals, whose agency is conceived narrowly in terms of either accommodation or resistance. For example, there is no doubt that urban neoliberalism is underwritten by endemic ideologies of efficiency, flexibility, rationality, growth, modernization, status, globalism, and cosmopolitanism. Yet the political struggles that transform metropolitan areas, and the complex forms of political alliance and opposition that emerge in the context of struggles over resources, land, public space, and redevelopment cannot always be captured in paradigms that line up neoliberals on one side of the political aisle and resisters on the other.

For example, in his discussion of the political struggle over the redevelopment of the Far West Side of Manhattan, Brash (2011) shows how the city’s old guard real-estate elite sided with middle-class residents to successfully block Mayor Bloomberg’s plan for a new stadium, even though Bloomberg had the backing of financial and new media elites as well as construction unions. Further, the ideological battle reflected in this case cannot be reduced simply to a struggle between those who supported a neoliberal redevelopment project and those who opposed it. Rather, it is best understood as a struggle among factions of the urban elite – a struggle that required these factions to address longstanding anxieties over globalism, quality of life, technocracy, citizenship, and inclusion in the public positions they staked out.

Similarly, Arlene Dávila’s (2004) work on cultural development in East Harlem demonstrates how this ostensibly paradigmatic neoliberal strategy cannot be understood simply as one imposed by city officials and others aiming to commodify the area’s culture and history. Instead Dávila paints a much more complex picture in which some residents and stakeholders in El Barrio – property owners, non-profit professionals, and local politicians for instance – see such strategies as an opportunity for professional advancement, profit, or ethnic uplift, while others see them as threatening or bowdlerizing the area’s distinctive cultural and political history (see also Boyd 2008 on the Bronzeville area of Chicago).
Just as struggles around neoliberalization involve complex political dynamics, as various constituencies align themselves in unpredictable ways, so too do such struggles involve complex dynamics of urban identity, ideology, and imaginary: rarely does one find domineering neoliberal, market-triumphalist globalists on one side and resisting “militant particularists” on the other. For instance anthropological work makes it clear that urban neoliberalism, far from being a bloodless, dull, and technocratic affair, is in fact subject to the sorts of utopianism and modernist flights of urban fancy that have long accompanied the production of the urban environment (Brash 2012; Chesluk 2008; Hourani 2012). In a similarly unpredictable vein, anthropological work depicts opponents of neoliberal schemes successfully drawing on the grandiose idea of New York as “greatest city in the world” (Brash 2011), gentrifying developers speaking the language of black self-determination (Maskovsky 2006), and recovering drug addicts in a poverty-stricken neighborhood reimagining themselves as paradigmatic neoliberal citizens – entrepreneurial, individualized, and self-reliant (Fairbanks 2009).

Moreover, while opponents of neoliberal projects may invoke locally based ideologies and histories, so too do proponents of these projects. Indeed the specificities of local urban histories and narratives are often the grist of neoliberalizing projects, as they serve both as a means for particular cities to distinguish themselves in inter-urban competition for tourists, residents, and so on, and as an effort to secure local political support by invoking shared narratives and claims to local authenticity (i.e., McDonogh 1999; Rutheiser 1996).

The point of all this is two-fold. First, anthropological work is not just interested in tracing how state- and corporate-sponsored visions of neoliberal entrepreneurship, efficiency, and citizenship are sometimes transferred to various domains of city life, including work, home life, and civics, and how they are sometimes contested (see Chapter 4, “Citizenship”). Instead, such work is interested in locating these dynamics within the complex fields of power that shape urban governance, and in tracing the new and old forms of urban identity, subjectivity, and citizenship that frequently accompany, and/or stymie, them. All this requires a painstaking diagramming of the specific agents, collectivities, ideologies, histories, and contexts entailed in specific projects of neoliberalization. Second, such work demonstrates that the neoliberalism/resistance binary, while noble in attempting to show the extent to which significant portions of the urban population are unimpressed by, and may even be opposed to, neoliberal projects, may actually obscure the concrete projects and political configurations that are at work today in transforming the city (Kingfisher and Maskovsky 2008).

3. The Complex Trajectories of Neoliberalism
A final important way that anthropology helps to elucidate the workings of urban governance is by tracing in detail the ways that neoliberal policy knowledge and implementation flow transnationally. What becomes immediately clear in anthropological work on the concrete mechanisms of policy transfer is that
neoliberal practices follow unpredictable trajectories. If at first it seems commonsensical to assume that neoliberalism flows uninterrupted from the global North to the global South, or from the center of the Anglophone world – the United States – to its periphery – parts of Europe, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand – and then beyond (McCann and Ward 2011; Peck and Theodore, 2001), more in-depth investigation shows multidirectional flows, rooted in complex political–economic arrangements (see Chapter 2, “Flows”). For example, geopolitics shape the flow of neoliberal policy transfer, but sometimes in unexpected ways, as, for instance, when Alberta, Canada, seeking in part to find an alternative roadmap to welfare “reform” from that of the United States, borrowed policy proposals from experts in New Zealand (Kingfisher 2013).

Further, policy transfer is also shaped by the limitations of neoliberal projects wherever they appear, and by the need to retool them in the face of these limitations. This is made clear by the example of New York City, where, after a decade (the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s) in which narrow welfare-to-work policies dominated the anti-poverty agenda with limited success, the Bloomberg Administration embraced a new set of programs organized around broad “human capital” building priorities, the inspiration for which was a program called *Opportunidades* from Mexico City, which had first been popularized in the developing world. In fact, policy proposals from the developing world increasingly shape the policy agenda in the developed world. For example, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, hyper-development in Dubai became a model for neoliberalizing Nashville (Lloyd and Christens 2012), and “models of pacification, militarization, and control, honed on the streets of the global South, are spread to the cities of the capitalist heartlands in the North” (Graham 2011: xvi–xvii). Essential to this process are the activities of global civil society actors, urban planners, and consultants, whose policy prescriptions are not reducible in every instance to the interests, agendas, and ideologies of the nation-states from which they come. In the final analysis, it is nearly impossible to overstate either the extent to which neoliberal projects require near-constant revision, even – or perhaps especially – in their places of origin, or the extent to which the constant reinvention of the neoliberal wheel creates new forms of connection and disconnection across multiple scales. Sometimes this happens in ways that take policies so far away from neoliberal ideals that they are unrecognizable as neoliberal. In this respect urban neoliberalism is part and parcel of the centuries-long trajectory of policy experimentation that has given rise to the modern city, not a significant departure or rupture from it.

**CONCLUSION**

Anthropological analyses of urban neoliberalism have played a crucial role in providing empirical support and avenues of theoretical elaboration of all three schools of thought concerning urban neoliberalism. By elaborating the specificities of urban neoliberalism in different contexts, such analyses have made clear the articulations, contradictions, and complications of “actually existing
neoliberalisms” and “neoliberalism as a hegemonizing project.” Moreover, by specifying the class fractions and formations that have advocated for and resisted neoliberal projects in particular urban contexts, anthropological analyses have added nuance and local specificity to the understanding of “neoliberalism as a global class project.” Interdisciplinary urban studies has for the most part given relatively short shrift to anthropological analyses of urban neoliberalism. This is ironic, as such analyses have many of the ingredients that urbanists outside of anthropology have argued are necessary for a more robust understanding of urban neoliberalism: a sensitivity to culture, conflict, and local context; a global purview; and an awareness that neoliberalism is just one of the many forces at work in contemporary cities (Fairbanks and Lloyd 2011).

Today, neoliberalism is in crisis in several interconnected senses of the word, and its failures are now writ large across the urban landscape. At the level of policy, we have seen, in both the global North and South, the repeated failure of urban neoliberalism to deliver on its promises. While one can point to the global economic crisis of 2008 as strong evidence for this failure, the truth of the matter is that cities that have embraced fiscal conservatism and other neoliberal austerity measures since the 1970s have faced nearly continuous challenges of fiscal crisis, economic volatility, economic inequality, inadequate infrastructure provision, and social unrest. Nonetheless, the ability of neoliberalism’s proponents to adapt themselves – to co-opt and accommodate themselves to external projects and local contexts – has allowed neoliberal projects to remain, if not the, dominant mode of governance in cities across the globe.

At the level of government, urban neoliberal regimes have also revealed themselves to be ineffective and limited in producing the kinds of flexible, agentive, productive citizens that they have sought to create. As the evidence above suggests, widespread refusals to accept the intrusion of the economic realm into social and political realms have been accompanied by the rejection and creative appropriation of neoliberal modes of citizenship, the consequence of which are new and unexpected modes of political participation, alliance, and division (see Chapter 4, “Citizenship”). Urbanization and urbanism continue to be shaped by illiberal governing practices as well. As our discussion of anthropological work demonstrates, neoliberal projects frequently articulate with modes of domination, corruption, and authoritarianism with origins outside of neoliberalism but without which neoliberal reforms could not be enacted. We thus need to talk about domination and consent, the liberal and the illiberal, as part and parcel of contemporary urban governing regimes. In other words, without emphasizing neoliberalism’s articulations with other governing, institutional and structural forces and practices, we cannot fully understand contemporary urban governance.

At the level of ideology, neoliberalism’s future is similarly cloudy. On the one hand, neoliberalism has led to something of an “urban renaissance”: whereas 40 years ago, cities were commonly held to be in decline, today downtowns from Atlanta to Zanzibar are often held up as centers of cultural vibrancy and economic prosperity. While such images often fall apart upon close inspection, as the inequality, instability, repression, and injustice that they obscure comes
into view, the association of neoliberal policies with “comeback cities” is an undeniable ideological victory. On the other hand, in the aftermath of the financial and economic crises of 2008, the market triumphalism, celebration of competition, and veneration of the private sector that constitutes the economic orthodoxy upon which urban neoliberalism is based have rapidly lost their ideological power and legitimacy. While neoliberal economic orthodoxy continues to hold sway in some quarters, particularly inside of the United States and in Europe, it is quite clear that neoliberal ideology is unpersuasive, and that neoliberal projects lack political legitimacy. Indeed, if the “there is no alternative” mantra of the Reagan/Thatcher era was once uttered in order to cajole reluctant political factions and parts of the general public into coming on board with neoliberal reforms, unrest from Egypt to Greece to Wisconsin and Zuccotti Park in New York City is but one indication of the extent to which few today believe in neoliberalism’s promises (see Chapters 26 and 27, “The Commons” and “Social Movements”). How urban managers and elites will cope with this contradictory situation – neoliberal urban renaissance on the one hand and the demise of neoliberal orthodoxy on the other – is anyone’s guess. Clearly authoritarian repression and the further social segregation of cities are options, but so perhaps are new and more progressive approaches to urban governance.

Finally, urban neoliberalism is in crisis at the level of epistemology. Scholars are now keenly aware of the imprecision that frequently accompanies the term’s use, and there is growing suspicious that the concept fails to explain important aspects of power and governance (Kingfisher and Maskovsky 2008; Barnett 2005; Clarke 2008; Gibson-Graham 2008). There is certainly good reason at this point to think carefully about if and how the term should be used. It does no good to use it in ways that appear to give it some sort of magical power to reshape governmental, economic, social, and political domains without regard for the concrete actors and institutions involved.

It is no surprise, given all of these failures, that calls can now be heard across the academy to abandon the term neoliberalism altogether. Yet, we are not convinced that the term should be banished. It continues to hold a great deal of explanatory power in analyses of urban governance and urban regulation. It is not enough to make reference to particular peoples, territories, states, and cultural formations that may be hailed by neoliberalisms. We must also direct our attention to its limits, limitations, and especially to its failures, and the alternative governing projects that articulate with it and that in many cases supersede it.

REFERENCES


