

Global/globalizing cities

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I The object of analysis?

As theoretical and empirical research on 'globalization' balloons, the concept of globalization has become subject to more critical scrutiny from the perspectives of both advocates and sceptics. While most would agree that it 'represents a serious challenge to the state-centrist assumptions of most previous social science' (Sklair, 1998a: 1; 1998b), critics range from those who doubt its newness, inevitability or epoch-making qualities; those who point to the lack of specificity in theories of the global and the inadequacies of mere polemical eloquence in more popular pronouncements; those who argue that the globalization literature neglects issues of social regulation by the nation-state; to those who take the view that globalization is not simply a 'natural' term for a set of material processes shaping the contours of geographical space but a discourse (or even a myth) drawn upon to legitimize particular political and economic agendas (Hall, 1991; Robertson, 1992; Massey, 1994; Hirst and Thompson, 1996; McMichael, 1996; Allen and Thompson, 1997; Amin, 1997; Kelly, 1997; Thrift, 1994; 1997; Chua, 1998a; Larner, 1998; Robertson and Khondker, 1998; Tickell, 1998).

Given that cities have long been integral nodes in the organization of space beyond national boundaries, it is not unexpected that a major strand of the debates on globalization and the remapping of the world space economy focuses on metropolitan manifestations and impacts.¹ As Brenner (1998; see also Taylor, 1996; 1926) argues, research on world cities has continued to propel the 'urban question' as a vital analytical window into the geography of global capitalism. At least three sociospatial urban configurations have emerged in the literature.

First, the term *global cities* has now gained common currency to represent the 'mega-cephalic' corporate and financial epicentres and localized 'basing points' for capital accumulation within a 'hierarchical articulation of global space' (Knox, 1996a: 125). This involves the identification and recoding of cities at the top of the pecking order (London, New York and Tokyo) in Friedmann's (1986) 'world city' hypothesis as 'global cities' distinguished by a disproportionate concentration of corporate headquarters, international financial services, advanced producer services, advanced

telecommunication facilities and other supporting social and physical infrastructure. The concept of a global city has also been given an analytical edge by Sassen's (1991) global city hypothesis, which links global city formation to the concentration of command-and-control functions in a few cities and points to increasing socioeconomic polarization as a consequence. While the hypothesis has been rehearsed and challenged on numerous counts (for example, see the recent exchange between White, 1998a; 1998b, and Sassen, 1998, on social and spatial polarization in the global city; see Burnley, 1998; Rhein, 1998, as well as Badcock's, 1997, urban geography progress report in this journal), the global city concept is often used not so much as an analytical tool but as a 'status' yardstick to measure cities in terms of their global economic linkages, to locate their place in a hierarchy of nested cities and to assess their potential to join the superleague. For example, a 1996 special issue of *Urban Geography* was devoted to characterizing cities further down the hierarchy in the USA city system which have 'experienced mounting linkages to the world economy . . . although they may not be truly "global cities"' (Warf and Erickson, 1996: 2; see also Kresl and Gappert, 1995, on North American urban systems; Dematteis, 1997, on the Italian urban system; Yeung, 1995, on an Asian world cities hierarchy; Short *et al.*, 1996; Taylor, 1997, on constructing a 'global city hierarchy'). In counterpoint to global cities at the pinnacle and instead occupying niches at the bottom of the hierarchy, the term 'fourth-world cities' has been coined to describe those 'excluded' from and 'structurally irrelevant' to the current round of global capital accumulation (see Tardanico and Lungo, 1995; Forbes, 1997; Shatkin, 1998, for debates on the impact of global restructuring and the degree of global integration of these cities). Smith (1998: 482) argues that such efforts to construct urban hierarchies on the basis of positivist taxonomies and map the 'real' causes and consequences of global cities overlook the fact that the notion of a global city is socially constructed 'within a wider public discourse on globalization' and is in itself 'a contested political project advanced by powerful social forces'.

A somewhat related critique has been offered by Oncu and Weyland (1997: 6), who argue that approaching cities from the perspective of 'a grand systemic framework . . . create[s] an image of the world that is empty beyond global cities, a borderless space which can be reordered, integrated, neglected or put to use according to the demands of globally articulated capital flows' (see also Friedmann, 1996, on shifting his focus from world cities to 'intercity networks'; also Afshar, 1998, on moving beyond the global city to consider the 'global village'). Instead, they have opted for the term *globalizing cities* to encompass "other" cities in "other" places which illustrates the impasses and paradoxes of globalization' (Oncu and Weyland, 1997: 2). This semantic recoding is not only meant to acknowledge that there are 'different *degrees* of "world-city-ness"' (Knox, 1996a: 126) and to redress the conspicuous absence of cities in emerging nations in the globalization literature (Gregory, 1995: 304), but also to signify the active pursuit of 'the rhetoric of opening up to the global' (Oncu and Weyland, 1997: 14) in many places on the globe as cities strategize and renegotiate their visions and identities *vis-à-vis* the new world order. Rather than a 'grand narrative of global capital usurping local political elites' which positions global cities as the epicentres of global capital accumulation, Smith (198: 485–86) envisages a 'world of crisscrossing articulations of global and local' in which 'all cities can be viewed in the fullness of their particular linkages with the worlds outside their boundaries'.

Following from the above, Smith (1998: 485) goes one step further to argue that 'there

is no solid object known as the global city appropriate for grounding urban research, only an endless interplay of differently articulated transnational *networks and practices*'. This redirects attention 'from the object of discourse (the city) to the subject constructing it (the author)' (King, 1995: 216). Hannerz (1996: 127–39) identified four streams of transnational human flows which constitute the global city: the transnational business class comprising highly mobile, highly skilled professional, managerial and entrepreneurial élites; a large group of low-waged immigrants filling unskilled and semi-skilled niches in the urban service economy; expressive specialists who enliven the cultural and artistic scene; and world tourists attracted by the cosmopolitan ambience in these cities. Following this line of thought, Olds (1995; 1997) highlights the importance of 'epistemic communities' (small, global networks of knowledge-based experts and professionals with authoritative claims to policy-relevant knowledge within particular domains) in the production of contemporary megaprojects in Pacific rim cities. Through more contextualized, provisional narratives about the 'global space of flows', Olds (1998) also attempts to humanize and embody transnational connections by focusing on the agency of local and global actors that shape and sustain these networks (see also Smith and Guarnizo, 1998; Olds and Yeung, 1999).

II The global–local nexus and the production and politics of 'new' urban spaces

Alongside attempts to identify *global(izing) cities* and *transnational urban networks* as new theoretical objects/subjects, another significant vein in the literature focuses on the complex forces of globalization and the production of 'new' urban spaces in these cities as they gain ground as the optimal spatial scale for capital accumulation. Most of such work locates cities within 'the impassable dialectic of local and global' (Lipietz, 1993: 16), particularly in terms of 'the relationships between world-city status and the political economy of urbanization' (Knox, 1996a: 126). Urban space is not solely produced by flows of hypermobile capital, people, images and icons, signs and symbols; instead 'the reality is that globalization is variously embraced, resisted, subverted, and exploited as it makes contact with specific cultures and settings' (Knox, 1996a: 126). Some, like Oncu and Weyland (1997: 1), deliberately choose to adopt 'the optics of the local' in order to frame the way 'globalization articulates with distinctive ensembles of class and culture, power constellations and patterns of state/society relations specific to each locality'. Brenner (1998) further argues that attempts to identify the theoretical object should move away from privileging the global/local dualism towards a more complex understanding of the global city formation as located at the interface of multiple, superimposed spatial scales, giving attention not only to the reconfigurations of global restructuring but also the reterritorializing power-geometries of the 'glocalized' state.

Given that global systems theory privileges transnational practices in the economic sphere (above those in the political and cultural-ideological; see Sklair, 1998b; White 1998a) and represents global cities first and foremost as centres of transnational corporate headquarters, business services, international finance, telecommunications and information processing, the bulk of current work focuses on the urban impress of economic globalization (Knox, 1996b; Moulaert and Scott, 1997). The emerging literature elaborates the interplay between local and global forces in the characteriza-

tion of these cities as bearing the spatial impress of ebbs and flows of foreign direct investments, imports and exports, and migrant labour (Godfrey, 1996; Harvey, 1996; Hicks and Nivin, 1996; Kaplan and Swartz, 1996; Nijman, 1996; Walker, 1996); as a marketplace for global information (Boyle *et al.*, 1996); as nodes and networks of advanced telematics and new communication technologies (Thrift, 1996; Graham, 1994; 1997); and as a site for corporate control functions (Ho, 1998; Perry *et al.*, 1998; Yeung, 1998) and industrial agglomerations (Fujita and Hill, 1993; 1995; Perry and Tan, 1998). Another vein that can be traced in the literature focuses on skilled international migration as a process contributing to the production of the global city (Beaverstock, 1996a; 1996b; Beaverstock and Smith, 1996; Findlay *et al.*, 1996). Such work details the construction of a single global labour market for high-waged professional and managerial workers in global cities and, in turn, the significance of the agglomeration of skilled international migrants in extending the reach of global cities.

While it is apparent that economic analyses of global(izing) cities have been privileged at the expense of social relations most of the time, there is now increasing attention to other dimensions of globalization and the revaluation of urban space, even if these are seen to be necessarily 'interdependent with the extension of transnational economic impulses' (Knox, 1996b: 115). From this perspective, the global city is produced by a high density of 'new' social and cultural transnational practices, relations, networks and sensibilities, and propagates a 'new urban politics' across 'a disjointed terrain of global media flows, transnational migrant networks, state-centred actors that side with and oppose global actors, local and global growth machines and green movements, multilocal entrepreneurs, and multilateral political institutions, all colluding and colliding with one another, ad infinitum' (Smith, 1998; 486). Edited collections which set out to move the agenda away from economic processes and to focus on making sense of the 'new' social relations and identities apparent in the global(izing) city include Eade's (1997) *Living the global city*; Keil *et al.*'s (1996) *Local places in the age of the global city*, and Oncu and Weyland's (1997) *Space, culture and power: new identities in globalizing cities*. The first (Eade), focused on London, draws on the notion of the 'socoscape' (adapted by Albrow, 1997, from Appadurai's, 1996, 'ethnoscape') to reflect the fluidity and fragmentation of social formations and the struggles over locality under conditions of global cultural flows. The second (Keil *et al.*) considers issues of urban sustainability, citizenship and social movements in the context of the contradictory logics of globalization and localization. While centred on Toronto, it goes beyond to 'represent experiences and reflections of many places – in African, Asian, European, South and North American cities'. The third (Oncu and Weyland) focuses on place-based, political struggles over cultural identities in the 'new opportunity spaces' opened up by global movements in 'distant' cities which have 'so far remained on the edges of scholarly interest' (1997: 2).

Many of the themes raised by these edited collections have also been dealt with elsewhere. An important focus which has attracted considerable attention is the globalization of the 'symbolic economy' (Zukin, 1995) and the social production of urban space and place identities. Mele (1996; see also McGee, 1995; Hall and Hubbard, 1996), for example, argues that place entrepreneurs have capitalized on the opportunities afforded by the increasingly globalized economy of cultural production and consumption to appropriate and reinvent the neighbourhoods of marginalized communities for the local and global marketplace. Chua (1998b) examines the way

Singapore as a world city is constituted by the discursive terrain of global consumer culture, or what Knox (1996b: 116) calls 'a sort of "global metropolitanism" . . . rooted in the materialistic culture-ideology of consumerism'. In the context of urban tourism boosterism, a number (Bramwell and Rawding, 1996; Chang *et al.*, 1996; Chang, 1997a; 1997b; Cartier, 1998; Chang and Yeoh, 1999) have turned their attention to the strategic vision of state institutions in orchestrating the reinvention and reinscription of place identities using urban imaging strategies in order to compete in the cosmopolitan tourist market.

There are also a number of recent pieces that have identified the global city with a new urban politics and the forging of new social and political identities. Constantly (re)shaped by transnational flows, metropolitan cultures open up (and shut down) different bases for infinitely hybridized forms of identifications and mobilizations. The cosmopolitan urban turf becomes a locality and life-space marked out by the stakes of a variety of radical grassroots movements, social alliances, informal networks, immigrant and ethnic 'others', as well as other culturally inscribed bodies which selectively appropriate both local and global social images and imaginaries in their engagement with identity politics and active struggle over resources (Berner and Korff, 1995; Smith, 1995; Sassen, 1996; Law, 1997; Schmidt, 1998). Turning specifically to gender identities, Weyland (1997; see also Yeoh and Khoo, 1998) points to the fact that global space in the metropolis of the late twentieth century is unmistakably 'gendered space', an observation which seems to have slipped through most analytical meshes. Yet gender is of crucial significance in the globalization of metropolitan spaces; as Weyland (1997) argues, the global (highly paid) corporate and managerial labourforce which sustains the 'public' multinational business space epitomizing globalism is itself reproduced by the presence of a female 'privatized' global space, often shored up by (unpaid) corporate wives as well as (lowly paid) foreign maids. Like the industrial city of the nineteenth century, the global city is mapped and bifurcated along distinct gender lines. With the unprecedented transnational movement of women to global(izing) cities as paid, substitute reproductive labour, there is now more attention as to how gender politics contest (or fail to contest) metropolitan spaces (Bakan and Stasiulis, 1997; Constable, 1997; Yeoh and Huang, 1998; 1999).

III 'The global city' as discourse

More radical shifts in the literature which challenge economic conceptions of globalization push beyond 'adding' sociocultural or sociopolitical dimensions and argue instead for the need to theorize globalization as a discursive formation. This, according to Larner (1998: 612), has powerful effects: 'once globalization is understood as an historically and spatially contingent process, rather than the inevitable economic logic of a "new reality", the potential to identify a range of contested political strategies and alternative spatial imaginaries can be realized.' In this vein, Machimura (1998) argues that 'global city stories' clearly differ between Asian cities such as Tokyo and other hegemonic western cities such as New York and London. In Tokyo, the political ideology of globalization is appropriated and used to mask the contradictions in envisioning the city as a growth-orientated, future-orientated, internationalized, multiethnic centre, on the one hand, and a re-Japanizing of the westernized city based

on a revalorization of a traditional past on the other. Also focusing on the visionizing powers of the global city logic, Olds (1995: 1737) views the production of megaprojects in Pacific rim cities as a means to symbolize 'a global urban "Utopia"' for the twenty-first century, even though it is not at all clear whether they 'actually act as symbolic and functional nodes in "hooking" cities and regions up to the world economy'.

IV The way forward?

In an earlier progress report, Badcock (1996) brought to attention the disquiet over the postmodern fringe in urban geography where it is argued that poststructuralist accounts have reduced the city to a metaphor (likened to *Alice in Wonderland's* 'looking-glass world'), redirecting attention from 'messy political practice' and the 'real problems of cities' to the 'politics of representation' (see a more sanguine view of 'representing' the city in Goss, 1997). Given that global city research is firmly embedded in the study of transnational circuits, networks and practices and the current creative pre-occupation to embody these flows, Alice has been much more hesitant in following the elusive, and probably illusory, white rabbit down the hole to a postmodern wonderland of images and immateriality. That globalization and transnationalism have 'real' material consequences in the city is perhaps best illustrated by the growing literature on urban governance and planning to address the paradoxes of globalization (Hall and Hubbard, 1996; Borja and Castells, 1997; Friedmann and Lehrer, 1997; Gleeson, 1998). This does not mean that global cities are more 'real' than 'represented'; indeed, there is considerable disagreement over how the theoretical object can be defined. While some identify the object by consulting a calibrated chart of urban functions and hierarchies, others have counselled moving beyond functionalist explanations to view global cities and their agents as 'active constituents, both "mirror" and "mould", of global processes' (Hall and Hubbard, 1996: 159). This has generated both economic and socio-cultural actor-centred readings of transnational flows in the production of global city spaces. Yet others have argued that the 'global' has become an 'icon' or a 'mobilizing myth' which, 'employed as a spatial metaphor[,] imbues it with considerable political power' (Kelly, 1997: 168). The global city as a discursive category conjures up imaginaries of high modernity, megadevelopment, twenty-first century urbanity, progressive urban futures in the new millennium. Cities all over the world clamour to subscribe to this globalizing logic as they jostle for a place in the new urban Utopia.

Anthony King (1995: 217) observes that both world city and global city terms are 'somewhat greedy in what they have appropriated under these labels' and that 'as with any over-ambitious theory, they occlude much, if not more, than they reveal'. King (1996: 1956) counsels more attention to the genealogy of global cities, building on 'a specific archaeology of and, however critical and contestatory, a revitalization of imperial and colonial knowledges'. This is but one route to explore. From a different vantage point, Storper (1997: 4) calls for new ways of analysing the 'urban' which cut across the normal categories of activity ascribed to globalizing cities (services, informational, high technology, advanced services), suggesting that the way forward is to focus on the distinctive ways in which urban actors tied together by 'relations and conventions' engage in 'specific processes of economic and social reflexivity'. While several paths present themselves, the need exists for theorizations of the global city

which weave together historical, economic, cultural, sociopolitical and discursive dimensions. This is an urgent task, if both the 'global' and the 'urban' are not simply to be reduced to articles of faith. The fact that the term 'global city' is increasingly accepted as common currency does not necessarily imply theoretical rigour; instead, the metaphorical hubris, with which the term is often invested, signals the need to knuckle down to making real sense of what has been frequently called the 'new sensibility' informing urban futures.

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Note

1. The realization that the city is a 'key stakeholder' in the processes of globalization is a relatively recent one dating from the 1980s and pioneered by a multidisciplinary group of researchers writing from predominantly North American and Western European perspectives sometimes described as the 'World cities group' (Gregory, 1995: 303). World city theorists argued for a shift towards a 'city-centred configuration of capitalism' with reference to, first, the emergence of the 'new international division of labour' dominated by transnational corporations and, secondly, the postwar crises in the Fordist-Keynesian technological-institutional system (Brenner, 1998: 5).

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