REVIEW ESSAY
Exploring Critical Approaches to Global Cities Studies

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Contemporary globalization, specifically the recent three decades, and the related discussion and debate on the formation of global society occupy the center of sociological research and urban studies today. The city is where the impacts of economic, social, political and cultural forces have been most keenly felt, thereby becoming the polemical and political space to be further reexamined and retheorized in the global age. In contrast to studies celebrating the success of market-driven globalization, critical approaches that reexamine the dynamics and restructuring of global capitalism, theorizing the formation of global cities and reasserting the importance of local politics, provide us with a fresh look at the complicated consequences of contemporary globalization.

New critical efforts on global cities scholarship have been made, although many of them are still not widely referenced. I introduce two of them here: a collection edited by John Eade, *Living the Global City: Globalization as a Local Process* (1996), and a book edited by Ayse Öncü and Petra Weyland, *Space, Culture and Power: New Identities in Globalizing Cities* (1997).

An Overview of the Literature

Early work in this area focused on *world cities* (Hall 1984; Friedmann and Wolff 1982; Friedmann 1986; King 1990; Knox and Taylor 1995). This approach inherited its theoretical legacy from world system and modernization theory, influenced in large part by the works of Immanuel Wallerstein (1976, 1980, 1989, 1999). The city was seen as a production site for grounding and linking the world economy and the international division of labor, a process starting in the 1960s. The early research focus sought to identify the characteristic symbols of world cities and to show the uneven development within or among cities, while later work in this area described systems or networks of cities and the hierarchical relationships among them.

Works in the related field of *global cities* studies include Sassen (1991, 1994, 1998), Castells (1989, 1996), and Abu-Lughod (1999). Sassen (1991) is the most influential work in this group. By examining the flow of financial capital and its impact on the formation of a hegemonic class in New York, London and Tokyo, her work explored deeper political manifestations by addressing the concepts of "centrality of space" and "geometry of power."

A third division of the literature, *global city-region* studies, is mainly led by scholars who based their researches on city-regions in southern California (Scott 2001; Soja 2000). By adding concepts such as "new regionalism," as well as borrowing from different disciplines such as geography and sociology, this approach takes a broader perspective to tackle the complexity and heterogeneity that globalization has brought to contemporary cities. City-regions are seen as active motors, instead of passive containers, in leading local redevelopment, simultaneously demonstrating the interactive dynamics of global/local processes and providing the potential for new coalition-based politics at the local level.

Research based on the world city hypothesis provided many important empirical cases that can now be used to understand the formation of the global economy. Despite the attention it pays to the unevenness of capital accumulation within and among cities, the world city hypothesis has an unquestioned focus on the developed world, and the capitalist world order that supports it. A similar bias can also be found in modernization theory, in that it tends to justify the development of capitalism and therefore views the expansion of western values as an essential process. This monolithic image of the world tends to make footloose capital and de-territorialized nation-states the only visible actors on the world stage, concealing other agents from view.

While sharing a similar bias, Sassen's theorizing on the global city makes a significant contribution to later empirical studies. Relabeled "globalizing cities," this framework has been modified by reinterpreting globalization as a continuing process instead of an established or static stage of development, and by paying closer attention to accelerating social inequality and spatial mismatch associated with the interplay of race and class (Marcuse and van Kempen 2000). There are other critiques of Sassen's work. With an overemphasis on the questions of centrality and of footloose capital, Sassen's framework tends to encourage a view of the labor force playing a passive role in globalization and of cities as containers instead of active agents. Furthermore, because it inherits the old binary framework of capital and labor, Sassen's work does not address how other political regimes or local groups might play roles in reshaping global/local dynamics.

Introducing the Social-Cultural Approach

Taking a cue from the work of Saskia Sassen yet avoiding its limitations, the works collected by John Eade in *Living the Global City* successfully articulate the local with the global. The volume engages itself in the debate by prioritizing everyday life and experiences of ordinary people as the main subjects for theorization.

In contrast to the business-focused rhetoric of world city theory, these case studies (based on the city of London) refresh our understanding of the old world center. The majority of the works consider the experiences of different social and cultural groups and how they actively participate in the process of globalization and strategically formulate new localities in response to global changes (see, for example, Alleyne-Dettmers's piece on the Notting Hill Carnival). The book maps out the new "geometry of

power" in the global city of London, which ranges from the politically diverse boroughs of Lambeth and Wansworth to the "inner-city" regions of Notting Hill/Ladbroke Grove, and out towards the newly "regenerated" districts of Docklands and Spitalfields. In doing so, the global city is presented as a heterogeneous political space where different groups and communities live with opportunity and resist the new oppression.

The case studies in this volume see globalization as consisting of different kinds of global flow. In analyzing cultural flows in relation to the perspectival dimensions of "ethnoscape, mediascape, technoscape, finanscape and ideoscape," in the terms of the anthropologist Appadurai (1997), they try to chart the relative stability of social relationships, networks, groups and organizations under globalized conditions. These works operate within a socio-cultural framework, contesting and reexamining traditional concepts of community and culture in the global context.

As editors of *Space, Culture and Power: New Identities in Globalizing Cities*, Ayse Öncü and Petra Weyland share a similar theoretical concern with local and political space in the global city. However, this volume significantly shifts its focus from the old center to the margin, from the "first world cities" of advanced capitalist economy to the "third world cities" of developing countries. It includes a number of case studies in non-western cities and regions: two on South East Asian cities, Singapore and Manila, as well as the Middle Eastern cities of Istanbul, Cairo and Beirut.

The historical process and political situation in non-western areas are quite different from older Western centers. First of all, these nation-states are not weakening with the advent of the market-driven global economy. Instead, they have been playing pivotal roles in leading political and economic development. Economic projects are often accompanied by political concerns such as national identity building. Theorizing globalization in non-western cities needs to reconsider this role. In addition, where globalization is expressed as a power relation, a key question should be how state elites appropriate, interrogate and translate the idea of globalism and how they turn the equation to local advantage forging new identities.

Öncü and Weyland's volume hits the nail squarely on the head by grappling with how globalization intersects locally with "distinctive ensembles of class and culture, power constellations and patterns of state/society relations" and by exploring the changing nature of metropolitan living. Beng-Huat Chua's research on Singapore shows how state elites have successfully integrated the Singaporean population into global capitalism, and how cultural differences are being eroded by a program designed to inculcate a nationally-based identity. Suzanne Kassab's case study of Beirut continues this line of analysis. She shows that from the rubble of the civil war, state elites have imposed a new spatial order through a process of urban restructuring and have helped residents to carve out economic niches that meet the needs of urban survival. In the final section, the editors deconstruct the essential version of globalization in Middle Eastern cities by showing that the

global is viewed from the local through the prism of Islam. In particular, they examine "how global discourses and consumer goods are appropriated and negotiated in the struggle of Muslims to live in the present" (16).

Contemporary globalization brings new limitations but also opportunities to different cities with differing historical processes, implying the need for analysis that is carefully situated and politically contextualized. Through the critical perspectives in these two books, we begin to see the spaces where the oppressed might have opportunities to change their situation that new historical conditions have wrought. We also come to understand how incomplete and unsatisfying current studies of global cities still are.

Living the Global City: Globalization as a Local Process. Edited by John Eade. Routledge, London. December 1996. 208 pp. ISBN 0-41513-886-8 (cloth), ISBN 0-41513-887-6 (paper).

Space, Culture and Power: New Identities in Globalizing Cities. Edited by Ayse Öncü and Petra Weyland. Zed Books, London. August 1997. 224 pp. ISBN 1-85649-503-5 (cloth), ISBN 1-85649-504-3 (paper).

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