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# Global and World Cities: A View from off the Map\*

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There are a large number of cities around the world which do not register on intellectual maps that chart the rise and fall of global and world cities. They don't fall into either of these categories, and they probably never will — but many managers of these cities would like them to. Some of these cities find themselves interpreted instead through the lens of developmentalism, an approach which broadly understands these places to be lacking in the qualities of city-ness, and which is concerned to improve capacities of governance, service provision and productivity. Such an approach supports some of the more alarmist responses to mega-cities, which are more commonly identified in poorer countries. But for many smaller cities, even the category mega-city is irrelevant. My concerns in this article extend beyond the poor fit of these popular categories, though. I would like to suggest that these widely circulating approaches to contemporary urbanization — global and world cities, together with the persistent use of the category 'third-world city' — impose substantial limitations on imagining or planning the futures of cities around the world.

Part of the adverse worldly impact of these urban theories is, I argue, a consequence of the geographical division of urban studies between urban theory, broadly focused on the West, and development studies, focused on places that were once called 'third-world cities'. This division might simply be an innocent acknowledgement of difference (Szelenyi, 1996). However, apart from the value-laden historical meaning of these categorical ascriptions, the persistent alignment of a 'theory'/'development' dualism with the 'West'/'third world' division in urban studies, suggests otherwise.<sup>1</sup> One of the consequences of these overlapping dualisms, is that understandings of city-ness have come to rest on the (usually unstated) experiences of a relatively small group of (mostly western) cities, and cities outside of the West are assessed in terms of this pre-given

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1 This argument would seem to hold also for other cities 'beyond the West', such as post-Socialist cities (Andrusz *et al.*, 1996). World city theorists now frequently assign cities in former socialist countries to a separate 'exceptional' category, associating their globalization with the privatization of former national services and industries (Beaverstock *et al.*, 1999; Taylor, 2000).

standard of (world) city-ness, or urban economic dynamism. This article explores the extent to which more recent global and world city approaches, although enthusiastic about tracking transnational processes, have nonetheless reproduced this long-standing division within urban studies.

As part of an effort to promote a more cosmopolitan approach to urban studies, I want to trace some paths across this entrenched division between theory and development. I do this by reflecting on some fashionable approaches to cities from a position off their maps. Of course, the cities I am concerned with are most emphatically on the map of a broad range of diverse global political, economic and cultural connections, but this is frequently discounted and certainly never explored within these theoretical approaches. There is a need to construct (or promote) an alternative urban theory which reflects the experiences of a much wider range of cities. This will involve disrupting the narrow vision of a (still) somewhat imperialist approach to cities, which has been reinforced by the strident economism in accounts of global and world cities (Smith, 2001). Elements of urban theory have become transfixed with the apparent success and dynamism of certain stylish sectors of the global economy, despite (and perhaps because of) their circumscribed geographical purchase and most unappealing consequences. These studies have been valuable, and offer great insight into the limited part of the world and economy that they study. My suggestion, though, is that these insights could be incorporated in a broader and less ambitious approach to cities around the world, an approach without categories and more inclusive of the diversity of experience in ordinary cities.

After reviewing some of the effects of global and world city approaches from a viewpoint off their maps, I draw attention to some alternative approaches to different cities. Moving beyond comparative studies (which are a good starting point), I suggest that recent efforts to propose an account of 'ordinary cities' (Amin and Graham, 1997) offer an as yet unrecognized opportunity to develop a more cosmopolitan account of city-ness. By this I mean to build on James Clifford's (1997) idea of 'discrepant cosmopolitanisms', rather than a universalizing or homogenizing cosmopolitan impulse (see Cheah and Robbins, 1998). Clifford's interest is in delocalizing professional anthropology, partly by insisting that cultures are not (only) localized and that the village-based ethnography is a limited and misleading research tool (see also Gupta and Ferguson, 1999). Connections and travels beyond the local are long-standing and constitutive of local cultures all over the world: an important consideration for any urban scholar (Smith, 2001). But, importantly for this article, he also wants to encourage anthropologists to consider the trajectories of their own practices and analyses. Urbanists, too, could find it valuable to think about the contrast between the restricted spatialities of their theories — the geography of urban theory — and the diverse cosmopolitanisms of the cities they write about.

My primary concern, then, is with the persistence of a split between accounts of cities in countries which have been labelled 'third world' and those in the 'West'. Put simply, the segregation is between cities which are captured through the rubric of 'developmentalism' (not [yet] cities<sup>2</sup>) and cities which are thought through to produce (un/located) theory. My contention is that 'urban theory' is based primarily on the experiences and histories of western cities — much as Chakrabarty (2000) suggests that the theories and categories of historical scholarship have been rooted both in western experiences and their intellectual traditions. And, like him, I want to suggest that restructuring the terrain on which different kinds of cities are thought within urban studies could enhance the understanding of cities everywhere. Many writers on cities outside the 'West' continue to complain that urban 'theory' has a restricted purchase — with the cry that 'Western theories of urbanization are not relevant here' — in Cairo, or the

2 Here we might find comparison with the dynamic Homi Bhabha (1994) discusses in the relation between colonizer and colonized, under the rubric — not quite/not white.

Philippines, Malaysia or Jakarta (for example, Kelly, 1999; McGee, 1995; Dick and Rimmer, 1998; Stewart, 1999). This seems to imply that these cities are 'different', that they belong in a different category. Alternatively, it could confirm my point that existing 'theory' is located elsewhere — it is not developed in relation to the experiences and trajectories of these cities.<sup>3</sup> Looked at from this perspective it is clear that there is a geography to urban theory, and one which needs addressing.

This is not a new observation. In 1990, Anthony King wrote that:

The question is whether the real development of London or Manchester can be understood without reference to India, Africa, and Latin America any more than can the development of Kingston (Jamaica) or Bombay be understood without the former. Nevertheless, the real division of scholarship, as well as the ideological underpinnings that help to keep them alive, ensure that histories of 'First', 'Second' and 'Third'-World cities are still kept tidily apart (King, 1990: 78).

In his view, and mine, urban studies is deeply divided against itself. It is my contention that this diminishes the vitality (and certainly narrows the purchase) of urban theory and also, perhaps more importantly, has certain consequences in the field of urban policy which we ought to be concerned about. Anthony King's work (1990; 1995), and a rising interest in both globalization and post-colonialism has meant a partial redressing of this divide, especially within historical writing and a more culturally-inflected urban studies (see especially Rabinow, 1989; Jacobs, 1996; Ross, 1996; Driver and Gilbert, 1998).

More hopefully, in the decade or so since King made this observation, urban studies has seen the consolidation of a significant interest in 'world cities' and 'global cities' which seeks to understand the position and functioning of cities within the world-economy. The situation, then, may appear more propitious than ever for an integration of urban studies across these long-standing divisions of West and third world. An analytical focus on the transnational global economy could ensure that taken-for-granted categorizations of cities (western, third-world, African, Asian, socialist etc.) will no longer be of any relevance. Indeed, this is a claim made by the key advocates of these approaches (Sassen, 2001; Taylor, 2001). The focus of urban theory could arguably shift to understanding the diversity of urban experiences and cities within the world economy. Could this be the basis for a more 'cosmopolitan' account of cities, rather than one that is divided, resting on partial and limited areas of the globe, and quite divergent sets of concerns or subject matter?

The article addresses this question by reviewing, in turn, world cities and global cities approaches, the developmentalist approaches which currently frame most writing on cities in poorer countries, and emerging transnational and 'ordinary' city approaches. The argument is that although there is much scope in these approaches for broadening our understanding of cities and their futures, there is still considerable work to be done to produce a cosmopolitan, postcolonial urban studies. Moreover, the stakes are considerably higher than analytical correctness or theoretical insight. The dearth of alternative vocabularies and approaches currently severely limits imaginations of possible futures for cities. The particular form of this limitation, makes it particularly hard to mobilize creative ways to address the situation of poor and marginalized people in cities around the world.

3 One recent example of this is to be found in Marcuse and van Kempen (2000). Despite specifically inviting people to write in the volume about cities outside of North America/western Europe, the introductory theoretical material makes no attempt to consider whether literature on these other cities might suggest alternative approaches. The category of 'third-world city' is used without reflection — despite decades of suggestions from people who work on these places that it is an inaccurate category — and even the contributions within the volume from these parts of the world are simply relegated to a position of difference. The discussion of the demise of the welfare state, for example, makes no attempt to consider the relationship between US/European experiences and the dramatic and widely documented destruction of state capacities in the name of structural adjustment policies.

## Global and world cities

Three key conclusions of the initial rounds of world cities research can be summarized as:

- World cities articulate regional, national and international economies into a global economy. They serve as the organizing nodes of a global economic system.
- World cities can be arranged hierarchically, roughly in accord with the economic power they command — competition between world cities and the impact of external shocks shape the fortunes of world cities and their position in the hierarchy. Cities can rise and fall through the hierarchy, and their position is determined by the relative balance of global, national and regional influence.
- Many populations are excluded from the space of global capitalism, and thus from the field of world cities: they are ‘economically irrelevant’ (Knox, 1995: 41).

In his account of cities across the world, King provocatively noted that ‘all cities today are ‘world cities’’ (1990a: 82). Unfortunately, research and writing within the rubric of the world cities approach, or hypothesis, has generally not chosen to build on this observation. Rather, in considering the dynamics of the world economy in relation to cities, a structural analysis of a small range of economic processes with a certain ‘global’ reach has tended to crowd out an attentiveness within urban studies to the place and effect of individual cities (King, 1995) and the diversity of wider connections which shape them (Allen *et al.*, 1999). Although status within the world city hierarchy has traditionally been based on a range of criteria, including national standing, location of state and interstate agencies and cultural functions, the primary determination of status in this framework is economic — as Friedmann (1986: 317) notes: ‘The economic variable is likely to be decisive for all attempts at explanation’. This has become more, not less, apparent in the world cities literature, especially as the approach has been closely tied to world-systems theory, and as more recent research has focused on identifying the transnational business connections which define the top rank of world cities, labelled ‘global cities’ (Beaverstock *et al.*, 1999; Sassen, 2001).

In world-systems theory more generally, countries across the world are seen to occupy a place within the hierarchy of the world-economy, and possibly make their way up through the categories (core, periphery, semi-periphery) embedded in the world-economy approach. Following this, the world cities approach assumes that cities occupy similar placings with similar capacity to progress up or fall down the ranks. The country categorizations of core, periphery and semi-periphery in world-systems theory have therefore been transferred to the analysis of cities, and overlain, albeit with a slightly different geography, on an extant but outdated vocabulary of categorizations (such as first/third world) within the field of urban studies.

John Friedmann asks, in his review of ‘World city research — 10 years on’, whether the world city hypothesis ‘is a heuristic, a way of asking questions about cities in general, or a statement about a class of particular cities — world cities — set apart from other urban agglomerations by specifiable characteristics?’ (1995: 22). He suggests that it is both; but that the tendency has been to categorize cities into a hierarchy, in which ‘world cities’ are at the top of the tree of influence. This ‘league table’ approach has shaped the ways in which cities around the world have been represented — or not represented at all — within the world cities literature. From the dizzy heights of the diagrammer, certain significant cities are identified, labelled, processed and placed in a hierarchy, with very little attentiveness to the diverse experiences of that city, or even to extant literature about that place. The danger here is that out of date, unsuitable or unreliable data (Short *et al.*, 1996; although see Beaverstock *et al.*, 2000), and possibly a lack of familiarity with some of the regions being considered can lead to the production of maps which are simply inaccurate. These images of the world (of important) cities have been used again and

again to illustrate the perspective of world cities theorists. Pressing the analysis towards an emphasis on the more limited range of transnational business connections characteristic of global cities, Peter Taylor (2000: 14) notes with disapproval the 'widespread reporting of ... a preliminary taxonomy' of world cities. Revised versions, though, based on a more restricted range of criteria (connectedness to globalizing western producer services firms) draw remarkably similar conclusions, and maps.

In both the broader and the more narrow economic approach to identifying world cities, a view of the world of cities emerges where millions of people and hundreds of cities are dropped off the map of much research in urban studies, to service one particular and very restricted view of significance or (ir)relevance to certain sections of the global economy. Perhaps more importantly, this methodology reveals an analytical tension between assessing the characteristics and potential of cities on the basis of the processes which matter as viewed from within their diverse dynamic social and economic worlds (which, of course, always stretch way beyond any physical edge to the city), or on the basis of criteria determined by the external theoretical construct of the world or global economy (see also Varsanyi, 2000). This is at the heart of how a world cities approach can limit imaginations about the futures of cities, which I will return to below.

World cities research, then, has moved on from the time of Friedmann's review and, much influenced by Saskia Sassen's (1991; 2001) study, *The global city*, has adopted an empirical focus on transnational business and finance networks (e.g. Beaverstock *et al.*, 1999; Morshidi, 2000). Nonetheless, although aiming to emphasize connections and not attributes (Beaverstock *et al.*, 2000), and in the most recent work to suggest a more global reach for the world city networks of non-command centres (Taylor *et al.*, 2001),<sup>4</sup> a limited range of cities still end up categorized in boxes or in diagrammatic maps, and assigned a place in relation to *a priori* analytical hierarchies.

In a prominent contribution to the world cities argument, Saskia Sassen (1991; 1994) has coined the term 'global cities' to capture what she suggests is a distinctive feature of the current (1980s on) phase of the world economy: the global organization and increasingly transnational structure of key elements of the global economy. Her key point is that the spatially dispersed global economy requires locally-based and integrated organization, and this, she suggests, takes place in global cities. Although many transnational companies no longer keep their headquarters in central areas of these major cities, the specialized firms which they rely on to produce the capabilities and innovations necessary for command and control of their global operations have remained or chosen to establish themselves there. Moreover, it is no longer the large transnational corporations which are the centre of these functions, but small parts of a few major cities, she suggests, which play host to and enable the effective functioning through proximity of a growing number of new producer and business services firms (Sassen, 2001). A similar argument concerning the benefits of co-location for finance and investment firms, suggests that these cutting-edge activities are produced in a few major cities. Co-location benefits both these sets of firms as this facilitates face-to-face interaction and the emergence of trust with potential partners, which is crucial in terms of enabling innovation and coping with the risk, complexity and speculative character of many of these activities (Sassen, 1994: 84).

While there have been many criticisms of the empirical basis for claims that 'global cities' are significantly different from other major centres (Abu-Lughod, 1995; Short *et*

4 In this working paper, the very lowest level of connectivity to a system of transnational firms is identified as characterizing Cairo and Casablanca, Lagos and Nairobi, Johannesburg and Cape Town. But the power relations in this hierarchy of cities leave the authors concluding that 'from this power perspective Sassen's notion of global cities transcending the North-South divide seems a trifle sanguine; globalisation begins to look very 'western' as soon as we look at direct expressions of power' (Taylor *et al.*, 2001: 7).

*al.*, 1996; Storper, 1997; Smith, 2001), the global city approach deploys a strong analytical emphasis on process. The category of global city which is identified through this analysis, though, is founded upon a minor set of economic activities based in only a small part of these cities. They may constitute the more dynamic sectors of these cities' economies, but Sassen's evidence of declining location quotients for these activities in the 1990s (e.g. 2001: 134–5) suggests that the concentrated growth spurt in this sector may well be over. And to put these sectors in perspective, in London, for example, where transnational finance and business services are still most dynamic and highly concentrated, the London Development Agency suggests that 'about 70% of employment (in London) is in firms whose main market is national rather than international' (LDA, 2000: 18).

The discursive effectiveness of the global city hypothesis depends on the pithy identification of the 'global city' — a category of cities which are claimed to be powerful in terms of the global economy.<sup>5</sup> Mirroring the world city emphasis on a limited range of economic activities with a certain global reach, as well as its categorizing imperative, the global city approach has a similar effect, dropping most cities in the world from its vision. If the 'global city' were labelled as just another example of an 'industrial' district (perhaps it should rather be called: new industrial districts of transnational management and control), it might not have attracted the attention it did. But on the positive side, some of the consequences for cities in poorer parts of the world might have been avoided.

### **'Filling in the voids':<sup>6</sup> off the world cities map**

According to Sassen, functions of command and control of the global economy also take place in some formerly peripheral cities, which coordinate global investments, as well as financial and business services regionally. In her view, this signifies the emergence of a new geography to the periphery — a select group of cities, some in poorer countries, are now deemed to have 'global city functions' although they fall short of being first-order global cities. She mentions Toronto, Sao Paulo, Mexico City, Miami and Sydney. This signals something of the 'end of the third world' (Harris, 1986) as a category in urban studies. Nonetheless, Sassen acknowledges that her approach 'cannot account for the cases of many cities that may not have experienced any of these developments' (1994: 7).

Despite this, Sassen joins others in consigning substantial areas of the globe to structural irrelevance: 'significant parts of Africa and Latin America became unhinged from their hitherto strong ties with world markets in commodities and raw materials' (*ibid.*: 27); and: 'Alongside these new global and regional hierarchies of cities is a vast territory that has become increasingly peripheral, increasingly excluded from the major economic processes that fuel economic growth in the new global economy' (*ibid.*: 4). Knox goes even further to suggest that 'the mega cities of the periphery will fare no better than the catatonic agrarian societies that have fuelled their (demographic) growth, and in which both will lapse decisively and irretrievably into a 'slow' economic time zone' (1995: 15).

There are obviously important ways in which the changing geography of the international economy has impacted on cities in poorer countries. As Sassen (1994: 83)

5 There are many problems associated with assigning 'power' to the category of global city, when the capacities to control and command which are being identified are located in certain actors and institutions within a small part of the city's economy. 'Cities' as collective actors, may in fact be rendered relatively powerless in these contexts. Moreover, as John Allen (1999) astutely points out, it is unclear where power is produced: in the sites Sassen identifies (the city neighbourhoods) or in the network interactions and flows. Taylor *et al.* (2001) are beginning to explore the idea of networked power. But the sloppy thinking that elides categories of cities with economic agents in relation to power continues to have purchase and, as I will argue below, important effects.

6 From Beaverstock *et al.* (1999: 457).

suggests, the place of the 'developing' countries as sites of investment for western banks has declined precipitously since the 1970s oil surpluses were recycled through poor countries; Latin America has been replaced by South East Asia as the top destination for investment in manufacturing by 'highly developed' countries; and many poor countries are now net exporters of capital (*ibid.*: 63). Nonetheless, within this approach, the international financial centres of many countries perform important 'gateway functions' for the flow of finance and global business services (*ibid.*: 173). I certainly appreciate that the focus of global and more recent world cities work is on a limited set of economic activities, which are assuming an increasingly transnational form, and in which relatively few cities can hope to participate. But it is the leap from this very restricted and clearly defined economic analysis, to claims regarding the success and power of these few cities, their overall categorization on this restricted basis, and the implied broader structural irrelevance of all other cities, which is of concern. These theoretical claims and categorizing moves are both inaccurate and harmful to the fortunes of cities defined 'off the map'.

The 'end of the third world' is perhaps an accurate assessment of changes over the last three to four decades in places like Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea and even Malaysia, and the appearance of these city-states or major urban centres in rosters of first- and second-order global cities reflects this. But in parts of the world where global cities have not been identified — the 'voids' of world and global city approaches — the experience of many countries and cities has been much more uneven than the analyses I have cited suggest. For many, the 1980s and 1990s have been long decades of little growth and growing inequality. It is, however, inaccurate to caricature even the poorest regions as excluded from the global economy or doomed to occupy a slow zone of the world economy. Africa, frequently written off in these large global analyses, has had a very uneven growth record. As the African Development Report (2000: 1) notes:

While the continent has, in overall terms, lagged behind other regions, a few countries have produced remarkable economic results, even by world standards ... In an encouraging development, as many as 12 countries are estimated to have recorded real GDP growth rates above 5% while close to 30 countries had positive real GDP per capita growth.

It is hard to disagree that some countries and cities have lost many of the trading and investment links that characterized an earlier era of global economic relations. A country like Zambia, for example, now one of the most heavily indebted nations in the world, and certainly one of the poorest, has seen the value of its primary export, copper, plummet on the world market since the 1970s. Its position within an older international division of labour is no longer economically viable, and it has yet to find a successful path for future economic growth (Young, 1988; Bonnicksen, 1997). En route it has suffered the consequences of one of the World Bank/IMF's most ruthless Structural Adjustment Programmes (Young, 1988; Clark, 1989). However, Zambia is also one of the most urbanized countries on the African continent, and its capital city, Lusaka, is a testimony to the modernist dreams of both the former colonial powers and the post-independence government (Hansen, 1997). Today, with over 70% of the population in Lusaka dependent on earnings from the informal sector (government bureaucrats are known to earn less than some street traders: Moser and Holland, 1997), the once bright economic and social future of this city must feel itself like a dream — albeit one which was for a time very real to many people (Ferguson, 1999).

Lusaka is certainly not a player in the 'major economic processes that fuel economic growth in the new global economy' (Sassen, 1994: 198). But copper is still exported, as are agricultural goods, and despite the huge lack of foreign currency (and sometimes because of it) all sorts of links and connections to the global economy persist. From the World Bank, to aid agencies, international political organizations, and trade in second-hand clothing and other goods and services, Lusaka is still constituted and reproduced through its relations with other parts of the country, other cities, and other parts of the

region and globe (for example, Hansen, 1994; 1997). The city continues to perform its functions of national and regional centrality in relation to political and financial services, and operates as a significant market (and occasionally production site) for goods and services from across the country and the world.

It is one thing, though, to agree that global links are changing, some are being cut, and that power relations, inequalities and poverty shape the quality of those links (see, for example, Halfani, 1996). It is quite another to suggest that poor cities and countries are irrelevant to the global economy. When looked at from the point of view of these places which are allegedly 'off the map', the global economy is of enormous significance in shaping the futures and fortunes of cities around the world. For many poor, 'structurally irrelevant' cities, the significance of flows of ideas, practices and resources beyond and into the city concerned from around the world stands in stark contrast to these claims of irrelevance; as Shatkin (1998: 381) writes about Phnom Penh: 'In order to arrive at a proper understanding of the process of urbanisation in LDCs, it is necessary to examine the ways in which countries interface with the global economy, as well as the social, cultural and historical legacies that each country carries into the era of globalisation'. These historical legacies, it is clear from his account, are themselves products of earlier 'global' encounters, still very much alive in shaping the global significance of that place in the present.

And to pursue a more polemical line, mineral resources crucial to the global economy are drawn from some of the poorest countries of the world (as mobile phones depend on a mineral found only in Zaire/DRC), where financiers and transnational firms negotiate with warlords, corrupt governments and local armies to keep profits, production and exports flowing (Mbembe, 2001). Widening the compass of analysis might help to encourage a more critical edge to the global and world cities literature. Moreover, it is precisely through avoiding 'risky' investments (and pursuing vastly exploitative and violent forms of extraction instead) in the poorest countries and cities in the world that the western financial 'mode of production' is able to aim to secure the stable shareholder returns which maintain post-Fordist finance based economies (Boyer, 2000). To the extent that they are absent from this aspect of the global economy, these places may well be central to sustaining it.

On a more positive note, viewed from off the (world cities) map, in its initial versions the world city hypothesis does suggest a range of criteria by which to assess the role and functions of different cities — whether they are centres of decision-making and authority in the registers of economic, cultural and political information (Friedmann and Goetz, 1982; Friedmann, 1986; see, for example, Simon, 1995; Hill and Kim, 2000; Kelly, 2000; Tyner, 2000; Olds and Yeung, 2002). This means that the distinctive role of quite a wide variety of cities can be brought into view using this approach. Similarly, the spatial reach of a city's influence can vary, and there is scope for thinking about cities whose primary influences are more to do with their hinterland and nation, than with the global economy. So many more cities might come into view as significant provincial centres, political or symbolic centres, or perhaps as important transport and production hubs in national and regional economies. Guarding against economic reductionism and moving beyond the limitations of the global scale of transnational activities would ensure that the range of cities of concern to world cities theorists is less exclusive (Varsanyi, 2000).

But there is still King's claim that 'all cities are world cities', which we need to consider. And the fact that the world cities literature, even in its most nuanced form, persists in defining some cities out of the game, as 'excluded from global capitalism' and therefore as irrelevant to their theoretical reflections. Writers on cities in Africa, for example, asked to consider world cities in their region, conclude dismally that there are no world cities on the continent — although they point to Cairo and Johannesburg<sup>7</sup> as potentials (Rakodi, 1997). Scholars of other peripheral places, such as Latin America,

7 And Beaverstock *et al.* (1999: 455) note in their roster of world cities that 'Africa has its first city in our list, Johannesburg, but there are still no world cities found in South Asia or the Middle East'.

wonder about the usefulness of these categories in ‘analysing what is occurring’ (Gilbert, 1998: 174), and they have little relevance to places in South Asia or in the Middle East/North Africa. As Stanley (2001: 8) writes, ‘cities in this region are not on the world map’.

If the category of world city is not applicable to a wide range of cities (Simon, 1995), are there other ways in which the world city hypothesis might be mobilized in these ‘irrelevant’ cities? A stronger focus on process than categories could lead one to think about how ‘global’ economic processes affect all cities — as Marcuse and van Kempen frame it, this leads to a focus on ‘globalizing cities’, since ‘globalisation . . . is a process that affects all cities in the world, if to varying degrees and varying ways, not only those at the top of the global hierarchy’ (2000: xvii). This formulation still leaves the enthusiasm about hierarchies and categories in place, though, and retains an emphasis on economic activities with a ‘global’ reach, but at least it identifies a research agenda applicable to a wider range of cities.

And most importantly, perhaps, but seldom mentioned, the particular ‘global economy’ which is being used as the ground and foundation for identifying both place in hierarchy and relevant social and economic processes, is only one of many forms of global and transnational economic connection.<sup>8</sup> The criteria for global significance might well look very different were the map-makers to relocate themselves and review significant transnational networks in a place like Jakarta, or Kuala Lumpur, where ties to Islamic forms of global economic and political activity might result in a very different list of powerful cities (Allen, 1999; Firman, 1999; see also White, 1998 on the ethnocentrism of these approaches). Similarly, the transnational activities of agencies like the World Bank and the IMF who drive the circulation of knowledge and the disciplining power to recover old bank and continuing bi-lateral and multi-lateral debt from the poorest countries in the world (debt, it should be pointed out, which in an earlier phase these agencies recommended to poor countries) would draw another crucial graph of global financial and economic connections shaping (or devastating) city life.

Despite its investment in analysis of the world-economy and transnational economic processes — and in some ways because of it — the world cities approach continues to see cities through the lens of categories, and to privilege the west as the source of economic dynamism and globalization. In this sense it persists in the lineage of an approach to urban studies which divided up the field of cities according to pre-given criteria, such as western, or third world. World city theorists also bring these older categories into play even as they try to capture the ways in which the world is more complicated than this. Knox writes, for example, that ‘just as we can see the world city-ness of regional metropoli, so we can see the Third-World-ness of world cities’ (1995: 15). The category of world city is added in to complicate the pre-existing categorization of cities (and vice versa), but they are still taken to be meaningful descriptors of the world of cities. Or cities beyond the world city radar are simply not mentioned. For these diverse cities off the map, alternative analytical approaches beckon.

## Developmentalism and third-world cities

Scholars of so-called ‘structurally irrelevant’ cities find it hard to pursue research and policy within the frame of world cities theory, although some find creative ways to apply it (e.g. Tyner, 2000). As Browder and Godfrey (1997: 45) point out: ‘Beyond general

<sup>8</sup> It is perhaps appropriate here to raise some questions about the data used to classify world cities — data which in Beaverstock *et al.* (1999) includes no Japanese banks and only US/UK/Australian and Canadian law firms. These firms may be the largest in the largest economies in the world, and thus arguably driving the global economy, but this methodology omits potentially significant dimensions of different economic globalizations and will fail to capture the regional significance of some centres, e.g. in the context of West Asian and North African cities (see Taylor, 2001).

inferences, the implications of recent world city formation for Third World Urbanisation go largely unexamined'. Instead, an alternative frame of reference for many cities in poor countries has been the enormous developmentalist (Ferguson, 1990; Escobar, 1995) literature on cities (for recent reviews and examples, see Pugh, 1995; Burgess *et al.*, 1997; Gugler, 1997; Drakakis-Smith, 2000). A substantial literature has developed on various aspects of urban development — community participation, housing, land tenure, service provision, governance capacities, infrastructure, informal sector and so on. All of these are crucial in so many ways for improving the living environments and livelihoods of people living in poor cities. But they do not show up on the radar of the wider field of urban studies which claims to be concerned with the dynamism and centrality of urban life in the contemporary global economy. The one place where some of these concerns about immense urban poverty do emerge into a wider urban studies is in the considerations of mega-cities. 'Big but not powerful' (Massey *et al.*, 1999: 115; Beaverstock *et al.*, 1999), mega cities attract other forms of theoretical fascination: with the dark and disturbing side of urbanization (Lo and Yeung, 1998; Beall, 2000).

In the same way, then, that global and world city approaches ascribe the characteristics of only parts of cities to the whole city through the process of categorization, mega-city and developmentalist approaches extend to the entire city the imagination of those parts which are lacking in all sorts of facilities and services. Where the global city approach generalizes the successful locales of high finance and corporate city life, the developmentalist approach builds towards a vision of all poor cities as infrastructurally poor and economically stagnant yet (perversely?) expanding in size. Many other aspects of city life in these places are obscured, especially dynamic economic activities, popular culture, innovations in urban governance and the creative production of diverse forms of urbanism — all potentially valuable resources in the quest for improving urban life (Askew and Logan, 1994; Hansen, 1997; Rakodi, 1997; Simone, 2001). Envisioning city futures on the basis of these partial accounts is certainly limiting. And from the point of view of urban theory, these developmentalist city experiences do not contribute to expanding the definition of city-ness: rather they are drawn on to signify its obverse, what cities are not.

This has been a long-standing theme in the criticism of the category of 'third-world cities', that their diverse experiences are pulled through the common lens of third-worldness, and the resultant distinctive features are identified and understood in relation to prior western experiences (rehearsed regularly, but with little apparent effect on the literature: Simon, 1989; King, 1990; McGee, 1995; Drakakis-Smith, 2000). The split in urban studies identified here has been reinforced by the rise of 'third world'-ism and the field of Development Studies, specifically concerned with speeding up the economic growth of less developed countries (Hewitt, 2000). Within this framework, the poorest cities in the world have been characterized by their distinctive features as 'third-world cities'. Although hampered by the idea of 'urban bias' in which cities were seen to be draining the countryside economically, over time a set of strategies have evolved which are designed to help cities in 'third-world' countries address what seem to be their very different concerns from cities in the West — rapid population growth without economic growth; burgeoning informal sector activities; a large, poorly housed or homeless population and extensive irregular settlements.

But while cities have been seen as distinctive sites for (transnational) interventions in the form of targeted development projects mostly at the neighbourhood level, the city as such has been considered broadly irrelevant to economic growth. Urban economies were seen as the outcome of national and international decisions and were considered to be the province of authorities at these scales. National development strategies such as import substitution industrialization had substantial consequences for urban growth, as manufacturing firms and infrastructural development transformed cities and provided employment opportunities for the growing population. But the field of 'urban

development' had neglected what Nigel Harris (1992) has called the 'real urban economy' for decades. Economic growth was not considered an important part of urban development, and was much more the province of national and regional level governments.

Policy-makers interested in promoting development have since come to appreciate the distinctiveness of individual urban economies, whose successful management and development is now seen as a crucial determinant of wider economic growth. Starting with a major World Bank (1991) initiative, this approach saw cities as 'engines of economic growth' rather than parasitic drains on the national economy. They emphasized enabling and partnership strategies for housing and services provision (as opposed to state or donor provision) and highlighted the importance of infrastructure provision and efficient city-wide managerial capacity as essential to support economic enterprise.

From the point of view of addressing poverty, too, the stretching of the urban development imagination to include the city as a whole, rather than targeted projects (although these remain important forms of development intervention), is increasingly seen as key. As the 2001 *Global Report on Human Settlements* notes, addressing inequality is as effective a way of combating poverty as promoting economic growth, if not more so (UNCHS, 2001: xxxii–iii). But for that both poor and wealthy parts of the city need to be considered together. From this position (off the world cities map) it is imperative that the imaginations of the world city analysts and developmentalist urban policy are drawn together. The energy for such a reintegration of the field of urban studies, though, is much more apparent in the literature concerned with urban development in poorer cities than it is in the global and world city approaches, which consign the rest of the world (and its scholarly literatures) to irrelevance!

Recently, then, there has been a theoretical convergence of sorts as advocates of urban economic development policies have turned to analyses of globalization and urban development (Harris, 1992; 1995; Cohen, 1997). Partly as a result of the World Bank's earlier policies, the role of city government is now understood to include the promotion of urban economic development. As Harris summarizes:

hitherto 'urban development' has tended to exclude a concern for the underlying urban economy, making it impossible for city authorities to consider directly measures to enhance urban productivity. The agenda has been broadened from the immediate issues of maintaining order and providing services, to a concern with the environment of the poor. It needs now to consider the economy proper, particularly because increased administrative decentralisation and a more open world economy are likely to make the role of city managers much more important (however these are identified). This will require considerable inputs of technical assistance, particularly to identify the city-specific agenda of issues and continuing mechanisms to monitor the changing economy. Hitherto, local authorities have had little incentive to trouble themselves about the economy within their administration. However, decentralisation with greater democracy could enforce on local authorities an increasing interest in the sources of the city's revenues as well as the citizens' income (Harris, 1992: 195).

Urban development initiatives at the end of the 1990s have dovetailed with substantial administrative decentralization in poorer countries to produce a set of policy proposals focusing on promoting urban economic development at a local level. These initiatives are also reinforced by a growing awareness of the competitive role of cities across the world in the 'global' economy (Wolfensohn, 1999; Stren, 2001). Drawing on and extending the experiences of local economic development initiatives already prominent in many western cities, urban development policies in poor countries at the turn of the century have started to follow the path which Harris was predicting at the beginning of the 1990s. Urban development initiatives at a city-wide level (called City Development Strategies) are advocated by major international agencies and increasingly implemented by cities around the world (Campbell, 1999; World Bank, 2000; UNCHS, 2001).

Within the developmentalist framework, cities can be seen as significant new territorializations of the global economy, following Sassen (2001), Taylor (2000) and Brenner (1998), but arguably for different reasons than those which they emphasize. In this case it is decentralization, democratization, tighter aid and policy control by IFIs, as well as new forms of economic liberalization which have contributed to the growing emphasis of development practice in poorer countries on recognizing the city as a significant site of developmental planning (Robinson, 2002a). Increasingly, policy-makers suggest that cities which are well organized and managed can build on their own distinctive combinations of economic activities and broader assets to act as a competitive platform for attracting and directing economic investment and encouraging economic growth. This way of thinking about cities and their potential for development has much in common with other prominent approaches to local economic development which have been primarily based on the analysis of western cities' experiences in the context of globalization (Cox and Mair, 1988; Harvey, 1989; see the section on 'The policy imperative' below). However, crucially, this set of urban development policy approaches have at least proclaimed a sensitivity to the diversity of city economies, rather than encouraging their subordination to any particular global logic.

In poorer cities, it is precisely the coexistence of local and translocal informal economic activities, as well as national and transnational formal economic connections, in the context of a desperate need for basic services, which is challenging policy-makers (see, for example, Parnell and Pieterse, 1998; Rogerson, 1999; 2000; World Bank, 2000; Robinson, 2002b). Both global and world city approaches, and the developmentalist literature, have little to contribute on how to work with this diversity of city economies, rather than only characteristic segments of them. Neither of them offer us many resources for imagining possible development paths which cut across and work with the coexistence of 'global' formal activities and translocal informal trading, or help foster links between city-wide or neighbourhood-based firms and the transnational firms involved with internationally traded commodities which sustain many economies. The challenge for urban studies, then, is to develop creative ways of thinking about connections across the diversity and complexity of city economies and city life. This is not simply to more accurately represent and understand cities, but to contribute to framing policy alternatives which can encourage support for a diversity of economic activities with a wide range of spatial reaches, rather than prioritizing only those with a global reach. This would also ensure that urban interventions could address the inequalities which stretch across and between cities and which sustain poverty in them (UNCHS, 2001). The following section explores some alternative approaches which have established some paths beyond the categorizing and hierarchizing imperatives of global and world cities approaches, and which could potentially stimulate more creative thinking about city-wide development.

## **Towards cities without categories**

### **Comparative traditions**

In one recent attempt to grapple with the divisive geography of urban theory, Dick and Rimmer (1998) have proposed an assessment of whether 'third-world' and 'western' cities are becoming more like each other over time (or not).<sup>9</sup> Writing to the title of 'Beyond the third world city', they suggest that there have been periods in which third-world and western cities have converged (such as the 1880s–1930s when there was an

9 This is a question Michael Cohen (1997) asks too — and answers by suggesting that the developmentalist concerns of southern cities are broadly applicable to all cities, although he suggests they are 'similar, if not identical'.

increase in economic and political control exerted by metropolitan powers through colonial rule, trade, investment and new transport technologies), and periods when they have diverged (such as the 1940s–70s, with the breakdown of colonial political and economic control, the rise of indigenous administration and the disintegration of infrastructure and prevalence of the informal economy). More recently, they note that: ‘Convergence between urban forms in metropolitan countries and Southeast Asia was renewed in the 1980s by increasing trade and investment and the application of telecommunications and high-speed transport’ (*ibid.*: 2306).

In their view, Southeast Asian cities have seen first-world forms of investment, such as large-scale private land development and the proliferation of shopping malls — ‘clearly First World not Third World’ (*ibid.*: 2316). These developments are dominated by American architectural influences as well as by another set of American concerns, the ‘perceived deterioration in personal security’ with crime, racism and a sense that ‘public space has become an area of uncertainty’ (*ibid.*: 2317). Alongside shopping malls, gated communities have also appeared on the landscape. They are clear that the processes underpinning these changes in the urban landscape are somewhat different in Southeast Asia than in the USA. But they conclude that: ‘The emerging urban forms take after North American patterns to a remarkable degree that has yet to be recognised, let alone explained . . . Scholars need to challenge prejudices which have allowed them to partition the world into separate spheres according to their own particular areas of expertise’ (*ibid.*: 2319–20). This is certainly a sentiment that I share, and one which goes some way to addressing my concerns with the dominant world and global city approaches, and the residual category of cities in need of development. Their strategy, though, retains what I have identified as a rather harmful categorization of cities and encourages us to assess one (assumed) set of cities in terms of another; even if the purpose is to show that the categorizations may be more muddled than originally thought. But what Dick and Rimmer do point to is the diversity of interactions that shape city life. Formal economic networks, positions of command or dependence in a ‘world-economy’ are only one part of the story about what makes cities distinctive and what shapes their trajectories (Smith, 2001). They also cite cultural and architectural trends as well as the importance of tracking a diversity of longer term historical influences on city life (on which, see Askew and Logan, 1994).

Most writing on cities, though, remains broadly confined to particular national contexts or tracks the limited world of western economic globalization, both of which draw on literatures restricted to certain groupings of cities. Furthermore, the limited applicability of different accounts of (western) cities conventionally remains unstated, even if it is implicit in the content.<sup>10</sup> An important exception was Castells’ innovative work in *The urban question* (1976) and *The city and the grassroots* (1983). Both of these theorized on the basis of material from South America and Europe (and North America in the latter) to develop Castells’ influential accounts of urban politics. This represented a quite different trajectory for theorizing cities and generated a minor interest in ‘comparative urban politics’ (e.g. Harloe, 1981; Pickvance and Preteceille, 1991), although authors seemed to settle for cross-European or Anglo-American comparisons (this is repeated in the more recent efforts to think comparatively about regime theory: DiGaetano and Klemanski, 1993; Stoker and Mossberger, 1994). While most writing did not adopt Castells’ strategy of a wider transnational frame, there were some comparative pieces on socialist and capitalist cities (for a recent review, see Szelenyi, 1996).

10 This is much less the case for writing about cities outside the West, where explicit naming of the region or cities covered highlights the implicit universalist assumptions underpinning the often unremarked localness of much writing on western cities. In addition, writers on cities outside the West are routinely expected to frame their contributions within the theoretical terms and concerns of western scholars. Expecting reference to a wider range of cities’ experiences on the part of western writers might be one strategy for promoting a more cosmopolitan urban theory.

The theoretical possibilities implicit in an earlier tradition of comparative research on cities in Africa, such as that outlined by Mitchell (1987), have also not been pursued. A much older school of urban studies, including anthropologists working on the Zambian Copperbelt and influenced by the Chicago School urban sociologists, focused on what could be learnt in each context (the USA and central Africa) to advance a general theoretical understanding of urban social life (for recent reviews, see Hansen, 1997; Ferguson, 1999). As Mitchell (1987: 244) writes: 'In principle what is being achieved in comparative analysis is that the manifestation of certain regular relationships among selected theoretically significant features in the two instances is being demonstrated by showing how the operation of contextual variations enhances or suppresses the expected pattern'. The ambition was to understand the nature of social life and interaction in cities, which it was assumed would vary with different structural contexts (racial orders, rate and nature of economic growth, political power) and also with different situations even within the same city, or within one person's life.

It was expected that investigations in the United States and in Africa could inform one another in the task of understanding social processes in these cities (*ibid.*: 245). Mitchell does this, for example, by showing how his analysis of migration to cities in Africa can enhance the understanding of Chinese immigrants' experiences in US cities (*ibid.*: 292). Drawing on Philip Mayer's research on Xhosa migrants to East London, South Africa, Mitchell extends existing accounts of urban social life, elaborating on the idea of the city as a 'network of networks' (*ibid.*: 310), in which individuals are located within varying types of networks of social relations, involving different qualities or intensities of interaction (varying from very intense and intimate in relation to kinsfolk, for example, to distant and passing in relation to people one passes on the street — the classic *blasé* urban attitude). Relations between people might be multidimensional (multiplex) or single-stranded, and counter to the Chicago School's suggestion that urban life is characterized by single-stranded, distant and often *blasé* interactions, he suggests that there are varied kinds of networks in which city dwellers are located, and that depending on the nature of the social network and the nature of the situation, or place, of interaction, the character of urban social relations is diverse and changing. These differences are apparent not only between discreet communities (as with the 'Red' or 'School' groups amongst Xhosa migrants to East London), but within the life and daily paths of individuals in the city a variety of different types of social relations are evident.

Dick and Rimmer, Castells and Mitchell's comparative projects move us towards an alternative way of dealing with differences amongst cities, within a broader framework of advancing an understanding of cities and their possible futures. Firstly, they take the time to look beyond the immediate circumstances of their own research topic: they adopt a cosmopolitan theoretical perspective. Secondly, both examples of comparative analysis avoid placing the different cities they are considering within a hierarchy, without losing sight of the distinctiveness of each of the cities or groups of cities. Thirdly, I noted that Dick and Rimmer direct our attention to the diversity of cultural and economic global, international or transnational links that shape cities around the world — in their case, from Los Angeles to Jakarta. And, finally, Mitchell has reminded us that cities are composed of multiple social networks, of varying intensity, associated with many different kinds of economic and social processes, and with different kinds of locales, or places, within the city. In a bid to direct our attention to a wider range of social processes and city-spaces than global, world and developmentalist city approaches bring into view, a number of contemporary writers are proposing a new approach to 'ordinary' cities, which builds on insights such as these. I suggest that these approaches could also play an important role in enabling urban studies to attend to a wider range of cities.

### Ordinary cities

In place of the global and world city approaches which focus on a small range of economic and political activities within the restrictive frame of the 'global', or developmentalist approaches which bring into view only poorly serviced parts of poorer cities, a number of writers are offering more generalized accounts of cities. Michael Storper (1997) has focused on the economic creativity of urban agglomerations in his description of the 'reflexive city'. He generalizes the need for 'proximity' in economic interactions to cement relations of trust amongst complex organizations and between individuals and organizations. Storper sees the city as providing a key context for these reflexivities, so crucial to the 'untradable' and 'tacit' elements of economic life. However, rather than being limited to a focus on the workings of single-industry production complexes, or to production chains, or filieres, reflexivity is a generalized possibility in city life. He suggests, then, that we think of 'the economies of big cities ... as sets of partially overlapping spheres of reflexive economic action ... [including] their conventional and relational structures of co-ordination and coherence' (*ibid.*: 245). Cities thus remain attractive locations for business activity across a range of sectors and offer an environment that enables economic production and innovation. This is to make a case for the broad economic potential of all cities.

Amin and Graham (1997) concur, suggesting that (at least to some extent) cities generally foster creativity. In western policy circles, they argue, there is a rediscovery of 'the powers of agglomeration', and an excitement about cities as creative centres. Agreeing that many accounts of cities highlight only certain elements of the city (finance services, information flows) or certain parts of the city — both leading to a problem of synecdoche — they rather describe (all) cities as 'the co-presence of multiple spaces, multiple times and multiple webs of relations, tying local sites, subjects and fragments into globalizing networks of economic, social and cultural change ... as a set of spaces where diverse ranges of relational webs coalesce, interconnect and fragment' (*ibid.*: 417–8). Within this spatialized imaginary of cities as sites of overlapping networks of relations, in which people, resources and ideas are brought together in a wide variety of different combinations, within complex geographies of internal differentiation and dis/ordering, the futures of cities are both uncertain, to be made, and limited by the historical circumstances of that city (Allen *et al.*, 1999; Pile *et al.*, 1999; Pryke, 1999; on the path dependency of urban change, see Harloe, 1996). Power relations are, of course, not absent and crucially shape specific outcomes.

These approaches stress the importance of acknowledging overlapping networks of interaction within the city — networks which stretch beyond the physical form of the city and place it within a range of connections to other places in the world. The range of potential international or transnational connections is substantial: cultural, political, urban design, urban planning, informal trading, religious influences, financial, institutional, intergovernmental and so on (Allen, 1999; Smith, 2001). To the extent that it is a form of economic reductionism (and reductionism to only a small segment of economic activity) which sustains the regulating fiction of the global city, this spatialized account of the multiple webs of social relations which produce ordinary cities could help to displace some of the hierarchizing and excluding effects of this approach.

A diverse range of links with places around the world are a persistent feature of cities. They can work for or against cities everywhere (Harris, 1995) and are constantly being negotiated and renegotiated. To aim to be a 'global city' in the formulaic sense may well be the ruin of most cities. Policy-makers need to be offered alternative ways of imagining cities, their differences and their possible futures — neither seeking a global status nor simply reducing the problem of improving city life to the promotion of 'development'. In developmentalist perspectives cities in poor countries are often seen as non-cities, as lacking in city-ness, as objects of (western) intervention. Ordinary cities, on the other hand

(and that means all cities), are understood to be diverse, creative, modern and distinctive, with the possibility to imagine (within the not inconsiderable constraints of contestations and uneven power relations) their own futures and distinctive forms of city-ness.

Categorizing cities and carving up the realm of urban studies has had substantial effects on how cities around the world are understood and has played a role in limiting the scope of imagination about possible futures for cities. This is as true for cities declared 'global' as for those which have fallen off the map of urban studies. The global cities hypothesis has described cities like New York and London as 'dual cities', with the global functions drawing in not only a highly professional and well-paid skilled labour force, but also relying on an unskilled, very poorly-paid and often immigrant workforce to service the global companies (Sassen, 1991; Allen and Henry, 1995). These two extremes by no means capture the range of employment opportunities or social circumstances in these cities (Fainstein *et al.*, 1992). It is possible that these cities, allegedly at the top of the global hierarchy, could also benefit from being imagined as 'ordinary'. The multiplicity of economic, social and cultural networks which make up these cities could then be drawn on to imagine possible paths to improving living conditions and enhancing economic growth across the whole city.

The main concern of this article has been with the implications of this divided condition of urban studies for cities which are hidden from view by these approaches, or intellectually ghettoized in empiricism and development policy. A more cosmopolitan urban theory might be more accurate or helpful in understanding the world; it might also be more resourceful and creative in its output. But interrogating these categorizations of cities and theoretical divisions within urban studies matters primarily, I think, because they limit our potential to contribute to envisioning possible city futures. And given the gloomy prognoses for growth in poor cities within the context of the contemporary global economy (e.g. Storper, 1995), creative thinking is certainly needed! As Amin and Thrift commented some time ago: 'Somewhat bleakly, then, we are forced to conclude that the majority of localities may need to abandon the illusion of the possibility of self-sustaining growth and accept the constraints laid down by the process of increasingly globally integrated industrial development and growth' (1992: 585).

From the viewpoint of global and world cities approaches, poor localities, and many cities which do not qualify for global or world city status, are caught within a very limited set of views of urban development: between finding a way to fit into globalization, emulating the apparent successes of a small range of cities; and embarking on developmentalist initiatives to redress poverty, maintain infrastructure and ensure basic service delivery. Neither the costly imperative to go global, nor developmentalist interventions which build towards a certain vision of city-ness and which focus attention on the failures of cities, are very rich resources for city planners and managers who turn to scholars for analytical insight and assessment of experiences elsewhere. It is my opinion that urban studies needs to decolonize its imagination about city-ness, and about the possibilities for and limits to what cities can become, if it is to sustain its relevance to the key urban challenges of the twenty-first century. My suggestion is that 'ordinary-city' approaches offer a potentially more fertile ground for meeting these challenges.

## **The policy imperative: the political case for ordinary cities**

If cities are not to remain inconsequential, marginalized and impoverished, or to trade economic growth for expansion in population, the hierarchies and categories of extant urban theory implicitly encourage them to aim for the top! Global city as a concept becomes a regulating fiction. It offers an authorized image of city success (so people can buy into it) which also establishes an end point of development for ambitious cities. There are demands, from Istanbul (Robins and Askoy, 1996) to Mumbai (Harris, 1995), to be global. As Douglass (1998: 111) writes, 'world cities are the new shibboleth of global

achievement for governments in Pacific Asia' (see also Douglass, 2000; Olds and Yeung, 2002). But, as a number of authors have noted, calculated attempts at world or global city formation can have devastating consequences for most people in the city, especially the poorest, in terms of service provision, equality of access and redistribution (Berner and Korff, 1995; Robins and Askoy, 1996; Douglass, 1998; Firman, 1999). Global and world city approaches encourage an emphasis on promoting economic relations with a global reach, and prioritizing certain prominent sectors of the global economy for development and investment. Alternatively, the policy advice is for cities to assume and work towards achieving their allocated 'place' within the hierarchy of world cities (Taylor, 2001).

Most cities in poorer countries would find it hard to reasonably aspire to offering a home for the global economy's command and control functions which Sassen identifies as concentrated in certain global cities. Although, as Tyner (2000) argues, different aspects of the global economy require coordination and organizing, and some of these activities are concentrated in cities which are not usually labelled as global. Manila, for example, has a concentration of agencies and institutions which facilitate the movement of low-paid migrant labour to wealthier countries. More feasible for many poorer cities is to focus on some of the other 'global functions' Sassen associates with global cities. These include promoting attractive 'global' tourist environments, even though these have nothing of the locational dynamics of command and control global city functions. Disconnected from the concentration of arts and culture associated with employment of highly skilled professionals in global cities, the impulse to become global in purely tourist terms can place a city at the opposite end of power relations in the global economy, while substantially undermining provision of basic services to local people (Robins and Askoy, 1996, discuss this in relation to Istanbul). In addition, Export Processing Zones may be 'global' in the sense that they are 'transnational spaces within a national territory' (Sassen, 1994: 1), but they too involve placing the city concerned in a relatively powerless position within the global economy, which is unlikely to be the city's best option for future growth and development (Kelly, 2000). These are not places from where the global economy is controlled: they are at quite the other end of the command and control continuum of global city functions. More than that, the reasons for co-location would not involve being able to conduct face-to-face meetings to foster trust and cooperation in an innovative environment. Rather, they are to ensure participation in the relaxation of labour and environmental laws which are on offer in that prescribed area of the city. Cities and national governments often have to pay a high price to attract these kinds of activities to their territory. Valorizing 'global' economic activities as a path to city success — often the conclusion of a policy reversioning of world cities theory — can have adverse consequences for local economies.

This is a familiar story, but one which scholars are more likely to blame on others — capitalists, elite urban managers — than on their own analyses, which are seldom the object of such reflection (King, 1995). It is when attention slips from economic process to a sloppy use of categorization that I think the most damaging effects of the world and global city hypotheses emerge. Categorizing a group of cities as 'global' on the basis of these small concentrated areas of transnational management and coordination activity within them is metonymic in that it has associated entire cities with the success and power of a small area within them (Amin and Graham, 1997, and as Sassen, 2001, acknowledges). In the process a valid line of analysis has reproduced a very familiar hierarchization of cities, setting certain cities at the top of the hierarchy to become the aspiration of city managers around the world.

This has happened just as a burgeoning postcolonial literature became available to critique earlier categorizations of cities into western and third world (Douglass, 1998), a categorization which had emphasized difference and deviation from the norm as bases for analysis and which had established certain (western) cities as the standard towards which all cities should aspire. Instead of pursuing the postcolonial critique, urban studies has

replicated this earlier division by accepting the categories of world/global city as analytically robust and popularizing them in intellectual and policy circles. Global cities have become the aspiration of many cities around the world; sprawling and poor megacities the dangerous abyss into which they might fall should they lack the redeeming (civilizing) qualities of city-ness found elsewhere. This may not have been the intention of urban theorists,<sup>11</sup> but ideas have a habit of circulating beyond our control. It is my contention that urban theory should be encouraged to search for alternative formulations of city-ness which don't rest upon these categories and which draw their inspiration from a much wider range of urban contexts.

A question which writers about cities in peripheral areas pose, looking at this theory from off the map, is how to distinguish cities they know from those which can be identified as 'world' cities. This leads quite quickly to asking how cities get to be world cities, as Alan Gilbert (1998: 178) puts it: 'So what transforms an ordinary city into a world city?' But as Mike Douglass (1998; 2000) writes, and Olds and Yeung (2002) concur, there is little explanation in this literature for 'world city formation' — or for how cities become world cities. Douglass (1998) reminds us that this is a highly contested process with profound consequences for the built environment of cities and for the wellbeing of citizens.

The emphasis of the world cities approach, then, has been on understanding the 'structural' positions of cities — the ways in which actors and institutions as active agents in cities make the world city-ness of cities have not been very well explored (see Machimura, 1998; Douglass, 2000; Varsanyi, 2000). It is likely that these processes of world city formation are of most relevance to those cities defined off the map of world cities, but eager to make their way onto it. And these are usually not very progressive or helpful processes. They have been much discussed elsewhere in urban studies, including place-marketing, tourist promotion, subsidies to attract productive enterprises, costly remaking of the urban environment, all relying on often destructive forms of competition between cities and the emergence of copy-cat forms of urban entrepreneurialism (Logan and Molotch, 1987; Harvey, 1989; Berner and Korff, 1995; Hall and Hubbard, 1998; Beauregard and Pierre, 2000; Jessop and Sum, 2000). Critically evaluating these world-city-making processes and incorporating them into their explanatory frameworks and empirical research (they are notably absent from the key studies within the field: Sassen, 1994; 2001 and the GAWC 'global observatory' project at Loughborough) could help to sustain the critical edge of the world cities approach, and also ensure that it remains a 'heuristic' rather than categorizing device (Friedmann, 1995). A greater emphasis on process rather than assigning cities to a category would certainly enable the world cities approach to be more applicable to cities off its maps — but it might also lead us to dismiss the activity of categorizing cities altogether and vastly widen the relevant range of processes, both geographically and functionally (Smith and Timberlake, 1995).

The political need for a new generation of urban theoretical initiatives is apparent. How can the overlapping and multiple networks highlighted in the ordinary city approaches be drawn on to inspire alternative models of development, which see the connections, rather than conflict, between informal and formal economies? Approaches which explore links between the diversity of economic activities in any (ordinary) city (Jacobs, 1961: 180–1), and which emphasize the general creative potential of cities, are crucial, rather than those which encourage policy-makers to support one (global) sector to the detriment of others. How can urban managers be convinced that the spatial reach of an activity is no guarantee of its value to a city (whether this be local or global activities)? Here again, creative work is being done in poorer cities, outside the purview of dominant

11 As Saskia Sassen commented at a recent conference (Urban Futures, Johannesburg, 2000), she is often asked to advise city authorities on their development plans, and always advises them to look to the specific advantages of that city, rather than be driven by an externally derived set of ambitions.

approaches. For example, Benjamin (2000) reports on economic clusters in Bangalore which embrace a range of diverse but interconnected activities. Simone (2001) suggests that 'ephemeral' or temporary public spaces enable actors from all sorts of sectors, involved in all sorts of different enterprises to meet together for a while and explore the potential interactions across a range of resources and contacts often kept apart in city spaces. Such studies and examples extend the classic uni-sectoral western industrial cluster model, and extend ideas about how proximity in cities can support creativity. This should offer some significant food for thought for both academics and policy-makers. But so long as the discursive field of urban development remains both divided and hegemonized by global and world cities and developmentalist approaches, these insights will unfortunately probably fail to impress policy-makers and academics alike.

## Conclusion

The academic field of urban studies ought to be able to contribute its resources more effectively to the creative imagining of possible city futures around the world. One step in this direction would be to break free of the categorizing imperative, and to reconsider approaches which are at best irrelevant and at worst harmful to poor cities around the world. I have suggested that in place of world, global, mega-, Asian, African, former Socialist, European, third-world etc. cities, urban studies embark on a cosmopolitan project of understanding ordinary cities (Jacobs, 1961; Amin and Graham, 1997).

A second step must be to decolonize the field of urban studies. Theoretical reflections should at least be extremely clear about their limited purchase and, even better, extend the geographical range of empirical resources and scholarly insight for theorizing beyond the West and western-dominated forms of globalization. This has been initiated in a restricted form, through the transnational emphasis of global and world cities approaches, and the growing interest in globalization within a developmentalist frame. But a more cosmopolitan empirical basis for understanding what cities are, and how they function, is essential to the future relevance of the field of urban studies. In an age — as the World Bank and other international agencies like to remind us — when most people now live in cities, and most of this urban population is in poor countries, irrelevance is a very real possibility for a field whose wellsprings of authorized theoretical innovation remain firmly fixated on the West and its successful satellites and partners.

This is not to insist that every study consider everywhere. But there is considerable scope for the spatial trajectories of theoretical imaginings to come closer to the spatiality of cities themselves, which are constituted on the basis of ideas, resources and practices drawn from a variety of places — not infinite, but diverse — beyond their physical borders. The conditions of incorporation though, are crucial. Firstly, simply mobilizing evidence of difference and possibly deviation within the frame of dominant theory is not enough. Such as in world cities' caricatures of post-socialist economies (Beaverstock *et al.*, 1999), or various efforts to include 'developing' cities alongside examples more familiar to the western literature (Marcuse and van Kempen, 2000; Marvin and Graham, 2001; Scott, 2001). Consideration needs to be given to the difference the diversity of cities makes to theory (not simply noting the difference that they are). How are theoretical approaches changed by considering different cities and different contexts, by adopting a more cosmopolitan approach? And here, even Marvin and Graham's (2001) excellent study, *Splintering urbanism*, which specifically sets out to cast a broader net across cities normally kept apart in urban theory, still managed to write their theoretical piece with no reference to places or literatures beyond the purview of western and global cities analyses. And secondly, as with cities themselves, power relations and their geographies cannot be avoided. If a cosmopolitan urban theory is to emerge, scholars in privileged western environments will need to find responsible and ethical ways to engage with, learn

from and promote the ideas of intellectuals in less privileged places. This is not a call to western writers to appropriate other places for continued western intellectual advantage. It is a plea to acknowledge the intellectual creativity of scholars and urban managers in a wider range of urban contexts. Of course, this is a project which already has a place within this intellectual field — and the *IJURR* has played a not inconsiderable part in this — but it is one which I am suggesting needs renewed vigour if it is to be taken further, and to actually make a difference to how cities and their futures are thought.

This will involve a critical analysis of the field's own complicity in propagating certain limited views of cities, and thereby undermining the potential to creatively imagine a range of alternative urban futures. It will require more cosmopolitan trajectories for the sources and resources of urban theory. Much innovative work is already being undertaken by scholars and policy-makers around the world, who have had to grapple with the multiplicity, diversity and ordinariness of their cities for some time. Ordinary cities are themselves enabling new kinds of urban imaginaries to emerge — it is time urban studies caught up. More than that, I would suggest that as a community of scholars we have a responsibility to let cities be ordinary.

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