

**Ashley Dawson
and Brent
Hayes Edwards**

At the dawn of the new millennium, humanity is rapidly approaching a significant but insufficiently acknowledged milestone: by 2007, UN demographers say, more than half the world's population will live in cities.¹ On a scale that dwarfs previous experience, urban spaces have become cosmopolitan entrepôts through which vast quantities of capital, goods, information, and people flow daily. Contemporary cities, it should be noted, are also the primary sites for natural resource consumption and environmental pollution. The cradles of civilization, cities now lie at the core of a potential ecological crisis.

In her scholarship on the “global city” (initially focused on New York, London, and Tokyo), Saskia Sassen has noted the destabilizing impact of the city's increasing centrality on older spaces of governance such as the nation-state.² Over the past fifteen years, the global cities model has influenced much social science research on the global economy as a network of overlapping flows between urban spaces. But the global cities of the developed world are an increasingly anomalous embodiment of the urban realm and public space. In fact, 95 percent of urban population growth during the next generation will occur in cities of the developing world. By 2010, for example, Lagos is projected to become the planet's third-largest city, after Tokyo and Mumbai. By 2025 it is predicted that Asia will contain nearly a dozen “hypercities” (with populations of 25 million or more), including Mumbai, Jakarta, Dhaka, and Karachi.³ Such predictions suggest the inadequacy of recent attempts to theorize globalization by focusing on cities in the developed world. Many of the twenty-first century's gravest ecological, political, and social issues will gestate and mature in the urban spaces of the developing world.

This is not to imply that global cities scholarship has been content to focus only on Sassen's original examples. Indeed, much recent scholarship has been devoted to the expansion of the model to such urban spaces as Mexico City, Beirut, Hong Kong, Shanghai, São Paulo, and Buenos Aires.⁴ The articles collected in this special issue approach the global cities paradigm from an interdisciplinary perspective (including anthropology, sociology, performance studies, history, subaltern studies, literary studies) not simply to expand the repertory of sites but, more pointedly, to ques-

tion the focus on economic explanations that have characterized global cities scholarship. For Sassen, it is necessary to analyze the global city because of the role of urban spaces as “command points” in the expansion of capitalist globalization,⁵ as indispensable bases for the most powerful transnational corporations, finance companies, and information industry firms. Global cities scholarship has often concentrated on a few examples because of a concern with the few developed cities that have been able to provide the advanced corporate services crucial to transnational capitalist organizations. That is, New York, London, and Tokyo have garnered a disproportionate level of attention because they have been the “most *advanced* production sites” of high-level business services,⁶ alone able to provide what Sassen calls the “central functions” that accompany capitalist expansion, including accounting, banking, law, finance, advertising, public relations, telecommunications, and security services.⁷

Given such a focus on the pinnacle of economic globalization, it is not surprising that global cities scholarship has tended to approach cities in the global South either through a developmental narrative or through a pluralistic framework. One can either look at global cities of the South to track “a dynamic in formation”⁸ among those cities ranking “in the mid-range of the global hierarchy”⁹ or identify secondary networks of global economic flows, turning from the highest order of capitalism to “new geographies of centrality” that foster capitalism on lower levels, which may be continental and regional rather than global.¹⁰ In both cases, this approach is limited by assuming that the telos of economic dominance and centralization defines all activity within globalization; moreover, it evaluates global cities in relation to a normative model defined by the handful of cities that are “most advanced” in their roles in economic globalization. If a turn to a discourse of the *global South* is to offer a useful intervention, a new cartography (rather than simply a more palatable term for the “third world”), then the term *South* must indicate a critique of the neoliberal economic elite and its management of the globe according to a developmentalist paradigm.¹¹ In his article in this special issue, Mike Davis outlines some of the consequences of defining global cities through other lenses (not, however, disconnected from the economic), looking at urban spaces that are “advanced” in how they channel transnational flows of, say, religious fundamentalism or political solidarity.

This is in part to insist that the task of analysis is to attend to cultures of globalization marked by a dialectical relationship between “economic global city functions” and “political global city functions.”¹² It is also to ask about the politics of selecting objects of analysis. Clearly, to examine foreign affiliates of advertising firms or the international property market is a rather different undertaking than, for instance, Brian Larkin’s atten-

tion to Nigerian *bandiri* music in his article in this special issue. Larkin's approach, starting from a commodity set in motion transnationally among urban spaces, uses the circulation of that form to raise a host of issues aside from the economic: translation, religion, memory, reception, identity formation, sexuality, and political discourse, among others. Different as they are, the articles collected here share an approach similar to some other recent scholarship that has critically engaged with the global cities model by shifting the focus "from broad generalization to particular examples, from global networks to the ways in which they are experienced locally."¹³

According to Sassen, cities function differently in the contemporary world economy than they did under colonialism, in particular because global cities are never singular (concentrating power as the old imperial metropolises did) but always "a function of a cross-border network of strategic sites."¹⁴ But many of the contributors here (Rashmi Varma charting a trajectory between London and Bombay; Larkin following music from India to Nigeria; Ashley Dawson tracking the literary representation of a French urban planner in Martinique) demonstrate that even in decolonization, the old imperial maps still influence the circuits of culture and capital, underneath and in tension with the "new imperialisms" of economic globalization. One would think that such an insight might imply that the analysis of global cities of the South would be a fertile area of inquiry in recent postcolonial studies. Oddly, though, postcolonial scholars have been largely silent. This omission is perhaps a product of postcolonial theory's largely retrospective gaze. The legacy of colonial power, anticolonial nationalism, and the postcolonial nation-state have been compelling subjects of scrutiny for much invaluable work over the last two decades. But if postcolonial theory is to retain its relevance by attending to the forces of globalization, it will have to address the evolving social conditions and economic situation of the twenty-first century's megacities.

In focusing on a wide range of expressive media—literature, music, photography, television, film, street performance—the articles here contend in different ways that a consideration of global cities of the South must account for the cultures of globalization as much as the financial markets and corporate networks that globalization facilitates. They draw on a long lineage of scholars, including George Yúdice, Arjun Appadurai, and Néstor García Canclini, to argue that, in the words of Yúdice, "the role of culture in capital accumulation" is never limited to an "ancillary function."¹⁵ Victor Vich demonstrates how humor is integral to the functioning of the Peruvian informal economy; Rossana Reguillo points out that the affective (particularly the mobilization of fear, enabled in no small part by the media industry) is directly linked to political domination and social control;

Returning to
"Harlem" should
force us to
ask about the
consequences
of accepting
any easy binary
between North
and South as we
chart the cultures
of globalization.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak cautions that discourses of pride and identity can be used to undergird the invasive ambitions of economic gentrification; Dawson considers how a novelistic representation of a Caribbean squatter community aims to imagine an "impossible" policy innovation: a "creole urban planning." This is not simply an issue of the politics of the imaginary and of the ideological formation of subjects. Some of the "cultural" forms charted here are economic strategies. The most obvious example is the *cómicos ambulantes* in Vich's essay: their performances on the streets of Lima are a form of what Davis has elsewhere termed "informal survivalism," the "new primary mode of livelihood" among economically disenfranchised subjects in the quickly expanding slums of most cities in the developing world.¹⁶ But neither can performativity and aesthetics be reduced to their economic functions: the essays here strive to track the ways in which, in the global cities of the South, "culture" is also a mode of agency by which those subjects wrench a space of self-fashioning and social impact away from the economic narrative that would paint them as powerless, as empty, as silent.

We have chosen to include Spivak's essay as a coda to the issue, despite the risk that it may come across as tangential or incongruous. Returning to "Harlem" should force us to ask about the consequences of accepting any easy binary between North and South as we chart the cultures of globalization, particularly if we aim to attend to the ways in which urban space is shaped by forces such as racialization, economic inequality, appropriation ("re-lexicalization"), and collective identitarianism. Elsewhere, Spivak has written suggestively that from one perspective ("a bit retro," as she admits), New York,

a city full of immigrants seeking to enter one civil society, to earn one set of civil rights, for variegated reasons, is precisely not a "global" city; it brings the globe to the metropolis and redefines "the American." . . . technically, the old description of New York as a bunch of neighborhoods is still in the running. There is indeed an ongoing virtualization of the city, an effort to reconstruct it as the nexus of electronic capital, to which the recent redoing of Times Square bears witness. But New Yorkers are fighting to sustain the older definition, even as they change its class-composition.¹⁷

In other words, "global city" is not simply an empirical designation but one articulation of urban space among others, competing for traction. As Spivak writes in the article included here, Harlem is neither purely within nor wholly divorced from globalization. This point is related to Varma's perhaps surprising argument about how one emergent global city, Bombay, is also and at the same time the space of a fervent "peripheralization."

Spivak's consideration of the medium of photography and "evidence of identity" is above all an attempt to theorize an approach to culture that would allow one to "catch its vanishing track," to "honor" inscriptions of collectivity in the city in the fleeting moment before they are fixed into signs of identity, as markers of a "neighborhood" or a "community" or a "nation." This attempt should make us question, on another level, the temporality assumed in the invocation of the "global" that is required for the comparative evaluation of global cities—can we indeed presuppose some "overarching temporality subsuming local times"¹⁸ that would allow us to consider the cultures of globalization in Fort-de-France and Lima as parallel spaces in some common, single process? This is also to ask about knowledge production, about what it means to move between a novel that records the entire history of a nation, leaping polyphonically through hundreds of years, and a monologue delivered on a fisherman's wharf one day in July 1998. The strikingly different examples gathered in this special issue should force us to navigate among various modes of reading the global city, noting their political stakes while striving to recognize, when possible, what Spivak calls our common critical positions.

The need for new forms of critical urbanism and citizenship on a global scale could not be more pressing. Despite the massive expansion of wealth over the last thirty years, global inequality has been growing at unprecedented rates. The world is now characterized by grotesque discrepancies in income and wealth. From 1960 to 1991, the ratio of income shares of the richest to the poorest segments of humanity grew from 30:1 to 61:1.¹⁹ These statistics are the product of two processes. First, the least developed nations have been dropping further and further behind, to the point where the entire continent of Africa has been effectively cut out of global economic development. In tandem with this process, inequality within countries has been growing. This is true both in newly industrialized areas such as East Asia as well as in core countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, where the doctrinaire imposition of neoliberal policies has created the highest levels of inequality on the planet.

On a global scale, neoliberal doctrines have entailed a new round of "enclosure of the commons" through the conversion of collective land tenure into private property.²⁰ Structural adjustment programs, widely deployed throughout the developing world by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund since the debt crisis of the early 1980s, have turned the state into a mechanism to expand this dynamic of privatization. As countries slashed spending on domestic programs such as education, health, and agricultural production, local production sectors were hollowed out. Just as was true during the initial round of what Marx called primitive accumulation in British agrarian capitalism, the neoliberal dispossession of

the commons has pushed peasants off their land, but this time on a global scale. Inequality, political instability, persecution, and environmental degradation have generated a massive exodus toward urban areas. Notwithstanding differing regional and national dynamics, the end result of this burgeoning inequality has been the growth of massive squatter settlements, where people live and die in conditions of appalling misery.

The megacities of the global South embody the most extreme instances of economic injustice, ecological unsustainability, and spatial apartheid ever confronted by humanity. Despite the efforts of elites to barricade themselves in guarded compounds and behind rigorously patrolled borders, the disruptive effects of global inequality cannot be contained. Urbanization is causing a massive increase in the amount of resources consumed and pollution generated in the megacities of the global South.²¹ The most unequal cities are also those with the highest levels of pollution and political instability. As 9/11 made all too apparent, the networked economy of the twenty-first century is highly vulnerable to the forms of environmental degradation, cross-border migration, and international terrorism that it is helping to generate. The key nodes of the global economy, the glittering capitals of New York, Tokyo, and London, are tied intimately to the historically unparalleled poverty and suffering generated in cities such as Cairo, Lagos, and Buenos Aires. As a result, efforts to ignore or contain the violence resulting from inequality are shortsighted in the extreme. The essays in this volume collectively underline the urgency of fresh efforts to address social justice and environmental sustainability on both an urban and a global scale.

Notes

1. UN Population Division, *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2003 Revision*, quoted in “Half the World’s People to Live in Cities by 2007,” *Los Angeles Times*, 27 March 2004.

2. Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

3. See Mike Davis, “Planet of Slums: Urban Involution and the Informal Proletariat,” *New Left Review* 26 (2004): 5–6.

4. Among many other examples, see Saskia Sassen, ed., *Global Networks, Linked Cities* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

5. Sassen, *Global City*, 3.

6. *Ibid.*, 6.

7. *Ibid.*, xx; Saskia Sassen, “Introduction: Locating Cities on Global Circuits,” in *Global Networks*, 8.

8. Sassen, *Global City*, 3.

9. Sassen, “Introduction,” 2.

10. Saskia Sassen, "Reading the City in a Global Digital Age: Between Topographic Representation and Spatialized Power Projects," in *Global Cities: Cinema, Architecture, and Urbanism in a Digital Age*, ed. Linda Krause and Patrice Petro (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 23.

11. On this issue see Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Sylvia Wynter, "Is 'Development' a Purely Empirical Concept, or Also Teleological? A Perspective from 'We the Underdeveloped,'" in *Prospects for Recovery and Sustainable Development in Africa*, ed. A. F. Yansane (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1996), 299–316; Maria Josephina Saldaña-Portillo, *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

12. Sassen, "Reading the City," 28n9. At times, Sassen argues that there is a "dialectics" between economics and politics in the functioning of global cities. But her own scholarship tends to focus almost exclusively on economic concerns.

13. Krause and Petro, *Global Cities*, 2.

14. Sassen, *Global City*, 348.

15. George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

16. Mike Davis, "Planet of Slums," 24.

17. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Megacity," *Grey Room* 1 (2000): 21.

18. Ranajit Guha, "Subaltern Studies: Projects for Our Time and Their Convergence," in *The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader*, ed. Ileana Rodríguez (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 37. Guha, in considering the relation of Subaltern Studies in India to the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group, uses this phrase in suggesting that the link between the groups be considered not a comparison or a similarity but instead a "convergence," an "orientation toward some horizon." This orientation comes down to an issue of politics, the possibility of what he terms a *lateral solidarity*.

19. Jan Nederveen Pieterse, "Global Inequality: Bringing Politics Back In," *Third World Quarterly* 23 (2002): 1023–46.

20. David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 145.

21. Richard Rogers, *Cities for a Small Planet* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997), 173.

