"From Global Cities to Globalized Urbanization"

Neil Brenner and Roger Keil

Editors' Introduction

As with the emergence of the modern industrial city and the twentieth-century metropolis, the rise of a new kind of urban reality in the age of globalism has spawned an enormous body of descriptive, analytical, and theoretical literature that has led – and continues to lead – to a fuller understanding of the still-emerging urban future. No scholars have studied that literature more carefully and persuasively than Neil Brenner and Roger Keil, the co-editors of *The Global Cities Reader* (2006) in the Routledge Urban Reader Series.

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In "From Global Cities to Globalized Urbanization," specially commissioned for this edition of *The City Reader*, Brenner and Keil begin by stating that currently "all major indicators suggest that urbanization rates across the world economy are now higher and more rapid than ever before in human history." That revolutionary new reality, they argue, was prophesied by the French philosopher of urbanism Henri Lefebvre in his book *The Urban Revolution* (1970) where he "anticipated the 'generalization' of capitalist urbanization processes through the establishment of a planetary 'fabric' or 'web' of urbanized spaces." Today, they note, Lefebvre's "prediction is no longer futurist speculation" and that urbanization has now "come to condition all major aspects of planetary social existence and . . . the fate of human social life."

Very different from the realities analyzed by the Chicago school of urban researchers, and even from the visions of pioneers like Patrick Geddes who used the term "world cities" as early as 1924, Brenner and Keil argue that the contemporary urban world reveals "new forms of global connectivity – along with new patterns of disconnection, peripheralization, exclusion and vulnerability – among and within urbanizing regions across the globe." Examining the new urbanization as an expression of global capitalism in the post-World War II and post-Cold War contexts, they see new global cities that are increasingly detached from nation-states and subject to "supranational or global forces" that have been explored by Neo-Marxists like Lefebvre, David Harvey, and Manuel Castells (p. 572). In the

eyes of these theorists, they observe, urbanization has now become "an active moment within the ongoing production and transformation of capitalist sociospatial configurations."

Turning their attention to global interurban networks and the ground-breaking work of Saskia Sassen (p. 554), Doreen Massey, Ananya Roy, Jennifer Robinson, and especially Peter Taylor and the Globalization and World Cities (GaWC) group at the University of Loughborough in the UK (p. 563), Brenner and Keil argue that world cities are not just major corporate headquarters locations nor even global command and control centers. Rather, the new global cities raise questions about "restructuring urban governance and the new contexts for urban social struggles." Increasingly, the process of studying these cities must engage "a broad range of globalized or globalizing vectors" that include not just "economic flows" but "the crystallization of new social, cultural, political, ecological, media and diasporic networks as well." In the end, the authors issue an "invitation to research – and action" to a new generation of urbanist scholars who, they hope, are reading this book. Building on the work and example of John Friedmann and others, Brenner and Keil challenge us to think, and act, more clearly about the realities of globalization that they regard as "a fundamentally disjointed, yet profoundly authoritarian, new world order." Whether this will lead to new "possibilities for radical or progressive social change," they write, "is ultimately a political question that can only be decided through ongoing social mobilizations and struggles."

For further reading about global cities and global urban networks, the best introductions are Neil Brenner and Roger Keil (eds), *The Global Cities Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006) and the bibliographies attached to each selection in this part of *The City Reader*. Peter Taylor, *World City Network: A Global Urban Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2004) is fundamental to the study of global urbanism. Also important are Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), *Globalization and its Discontents* (New York: New Press, 1998), *Global Networks/Linked Cities* (London: Routledge, 2002), and *Cities in a World Economy*, 3rd edn (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2006); and Manuel Castells, *The Informational City: Information Technology, Economic Restructuring, and the Urban-Regional Process* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) and his magisterial Information Age Trilogy, especially *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

Other important sources include Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1970), Peter Marcuse and Ronald van Kempen (eds), *Globalizing Cities: A New Spatial Order?* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), Doreen Massey, *World City* (London: Polity, 2007), and J. John Palen, *The Urban World*, 8th edn (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2008).

Of special importance to the study of cities in a globalizing society are the works of Mike Davis (p. 195), especially *City of Quartz* (London: Verso, 1990) and *Planet of Slums* (London: Verso, 2006). Other useful overviews of the field include Fu-Chen Lo and Yue-Man Yeung (eds), *Globalization and the World of Large Cities* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1998), John R. Logan (ed.), *The New Chinese City: Globalization and Market Reform* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), and Mark Abrahamson, *Global Cities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

INTRODUCTION

Urbanization is rapidly accelerating, and extending ever more densely, if unevenly, across the earth's surface. The combined demographic, economic, socio-technological, material-metabolic and sociocultural processes of urbanization have resulted in the formation of a globalized network of spatially concentrated human settlements and infrastructural configurations in which major dimensions of modern capitalism are at once concentrated, reproduced and contested. This pattern of increasingly globalized urbanization contradicts earlier predictions, in the waning decades of the twentieth century, that the era of urbanization was nearing its end due to new information technologies (such as the internet), declining transportation costs and new, increasingly dispersed patterns of human settlement. Despite these trends, all major indicators suggest that urbanization rates across the world economy are now higher and more rapid than ever before in human history.

Four decades ago, in his pioneering book, *The Urban Revolution* [1970], the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre anticipated the "generalization" of capitalist urbanization processes through the establishment of a planetary "fabric" or "web" of urbanized spaces. Today, Lefebvre's prediction is no longer a futuristic speculation, but instead provides a realistic starting

point for inquiry into our global urban reality. This is not to suggest that the entire world has become a single, densely concentrated city; on the contrary, uneven spatial development, sociospatial polarization and territorial inequality remain pervasive, endemic features of modern capitalism. Rather, Lefebvre's prediction was that the process of urbanization would increasingly come to condition all major aspects of planetary social existence and, in turn, that the fate of human social life – indeed, that of the earth itself – would subsequently hinge upon the discontinuous dynamics and uneven trajectories of urbanization.

The urban revolution poses major challenges for the field of urban studies. As other contributions to *The City Reader* demonstrate, the origins of this research field lie in the concern to investigate relatively bounded urban settlements, understood as internally differentiated, self-contained "worlds," in isolation from surrounding networks of economic, political and environmental relationships – as, for instance, in the concentric ring model developed in the work of Chicago school of urban sociology. Today, however, it is not the internal differentiation of urban worlds within neatly contained ecologies of settlement, or the extension of such urbanized settlements into rural hinterlands, that constitutes the central focal point for urban studies. Instead, in conjunction with the uneven yet worldwide generalization of urbanization, we are confronted with new forms of global connectivity – along with new patterns of disconnection, peripheralization, exclusion and vulnerability – among and within urbanizing regions across the globe. How to decipher these transformations, their origins, and their consequences? What categories and models of urbanization are most appropriate for understanding them, and for coming to terms with their wide-ranging implications?

Since the early 1980s, critical urban researchers have devoted intense energies to precisely these questions: on the one hand, by analyzing emergent forms of globalized urbanization and their impacts upon social, political and economic dynamics within and beyond major cities; on the other hand, by introducing a host of new methods and conceptualizations intended to grasp the changing realities of planetary urbanization under late-twentieth and early-twenty-first-century capitalism. The resultant literatures on "world", "global" and "globalizing" cities contain fascinating, provocative and often controversial insights. Meanwhile, ongoing debates on the missing links and open questions within these literatures continue to inspire new generations of urban researchers as they work to decipher the urbanizing world in which we are living. In this brief chapter, we cannot attempt to survey the intricacies of these diverse research traditions (for a detailed introduction, overview and suggestions for further reading, see *The Global Cities Reader*, Routledge, 2006). Instead, we outline some of the methodological foundations and major lines of investigation within research on globalizing cities, while also alluding to several emergent debates and agendas that are currently animating this field, with specific reference to the conceptualization and investigation of global interurban networks. In so doing, we hope to stimulate readers of this book, the next generation of urban researchers, to contribute their own critical energies to the tasks of understanding and shaping the future dynamics and trajectories of planetary urbanization.

URBANIZATION AND GLOBAL CAPITALISM

Although the notion of a world city has a longer historical legacy, it was consolidated as a core concept for urban studies during the 1980s, in the context of interdisciplinary attempts to decipher the crisis-induced restructuring of global capitalism following the collapse of the post-World War II political-economic and spatial order. Until this period, the dominant approaches to urban studies tended to presuppose that cities were neatly enclosed within national territories and nationalized central place hierarchies. Thus, for example, postwar regional development theorists viewed the nation-state as the basic container of spatial polarization between core urban growth centers and internal peripheries. Similarly, postwar urban geographers generally assumed that the national territory was the primary scale upon which rank-size urban hierarchies and city-systems were organized. Indeed, even early uses of the term "world city" by famous twentieth-century urbanists such as Patrick Geddes and Peter Hall likewise expressed this set of assumptions. In their work, the cosmopolitan character of world cities was interpreted as an outgrowth of their host states' geopolitical power. The possibility that urban development or the formation of urban hierarchies might be conditioned by supranational or global forces was not systematically explored.

This nationalized vision of the urban process was challenged as of the late 1960s and early 1970s, with the rise of radical approaches to urban political economy. The seminal contributions of Neo-Marxist urban theorists such as Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey and Manuel Castells generated a wealth of new categories and methods through which to analyze the specifically capitalist character of modern urbanization processes. From this perspective, contemporary cities were viewed as spatial materializations of the core social processes associated with the capitalist mode of production, including, in particular, capital accumulation and class struggle. While these new approaches did not, at that time, explicitly investigate the global parameters for contemporary urbanization, they did suggest that cities had to be understood within a macrogeographical context defined by the ongoing development and restless spatial expansion of capitalism. In this manner, radical urbanists elaborated an explicitly spatialized and reflexively multiscalar understanding of capitalist urbanization. Within this new conceptual framework, the spatial and scalar parameters for urban development could no longer be taken for granted, as if they were pre-given features of the social world. Instead, urbanization was now increasingly viewed as an active moment within the ongoing production and transformation of capitalist sociospatial configurations.

Crucially, these new approaches to urban political economy were consolidated during a period in which, throughout the older industrialized world, cities, regions and national economies were undergoing any number of disruptive sociospatial transformations associated with the crisis of North Atlantic Fordism and the consolidation of a new international division of labor dominated by transnational corporations. Fordism was the accumulation regime that prevailed in much of the Western industrialized world during the post-World War II period through the early 1970s. Productivity increases in the Fordist model were grounded upon mass production technologies and tied closely to a class compromise between capital and labour that contributed to relatively collaborative industrial relations and rising working class incomes; the latter were in turn reinforced through an expanding welfare state apparatus that stabilized domestic demand for consumer goods. Internationally, Fordism was regulated and reproduced through American cultural, financial and military hegemony and was rooted in the impressive dynamism of large-scale industrial regions across the older industrialized world. This sociospatial formation was widely superseded, after the 1970s, due to the consolidation of increasingly flexible, specialized models of production, industrial organization and inter-firm relations, a tendential liberalization of various inherited institutional restraints upon market competition, a creeping commodification of social reproduction, generally weaker welfare states, and the emergence of new patterns of regional growth and decline across the world economy. In the global North, older industrial regions such as Detroit, Chicago, the English Midlands, the German Ruhr district and parts of northern Italy underwent major economic crises characterized by plant closings, high unemployment rates and infrastructural decay. Meanwhile, new industrial districts generally located outside the traditional heartlands of Fordism – for instance, in Silicon Valley, southern California, parts of Southern Germany, Emilia-Romagna and parts of southern France – were experiencing unprecedented industrial dynamism and growth. Outside of the global core zones of capitalism, new forms of industrialization were emerging in key manufacturing regions within late developing states, for instance in Mexico, Brazil, South Korea, Taiwan and India. These transformations were accompanied by an increasingly prominent role for transnational corporations in all zones of the world economy.

Following the crisis of Fordism, extensive research emerged among urban scholars on topics such as industrial decline, urban property markets, territorial polarization, regionalism, collective consumption, local state intervention, the politics of place and urban social movements. Among many other, more specific insights, these research initiatives indicated that the sources of contemporary urban transformations could not be understood in purely local, regional or national terms. Rather, the post-1970s restructuring of cities and regions had to be understood as an expression and outcome of worldwide economic, political and sociospatial transformations. Thus, for instance, plant closings and workers' struggles in older industrial cities such as Chicago, Detroit, Liverpool, Dortmund or Turin could not be explained simply in terms of local, regional or even national developments, but had to be analyzed in relation to broader secular trends within the world economy that were fundamentally reworking the conditions for profitable capital accumulation and reconstituting the global geographies of industrial production. Analogous arguments regarding the significance of global context were meanwhile articulated

regarding other major aspects of urban and regional restructuring, for instance, the crystallization of new patterns of intra-national spatial inequality, the emergence of new, place- and region-specific forms of economic and social policy, and the activities of new territorially based social and political movements.

In opening up their analyses to the global dimensions of urban restructuring, critical urban political economists in the 1970s and early 1980s also began to draw upon several newly consolidated approaches to the political economy of capitalism that likewise underscored its intrinsically globalizing dimensions. Foremost among these was the model of world system analysis developed by Immanuel Wallerstein and others, which explored the worldwide polarization of economic development and living conditions under capitalism among distinct core, semi-peripheral and peripheral zones. World system theorists insisted that capitalism could be understood adequately only on the largest possible spatial scale, that of the world economy, and over a very long temporal period spanning many centuries. World system theorists thus sharply criticized the methodologically nationalist assumptions of mainstream social science, arguing instead for an explicitly globalist, long-term understanding of modern capitalism. The rise of world system theory during the 1970s resonated with a more general resurgence of Neo-Marxian approaches to geopolitical economy during this period. In the context of diverse studies of transnational corporations, underdevelopment, dependency, class formation, crisis theory and the internationalization of capital, these new approaches to radical political economy likewise explored the global parameters of capitalism both in historical and contemporary contexts.

It is against this background that the emergence of the research field that has today come to be known as global cities research must be contextualized. Like the other critical analyses of urban restructuring that were being pioneered during the 1980s, global city theorists built extensively upon the analytical foundations that had been established by Neo-Marxist urban political economists, world system theorists and other radical analysts of global capitalism during the preceding decade.

GLOBAL CITIES AND URBAN RESTRUCTURING

According to Peter Taylor, "The world city literature as a cumulative and collective enterprise begins only when the economic restructuring of the world-economy makes the idea of a mosaic of separate urban systems appear anachronistic and frankly irrelevant." During the course of the 1980s and 1990s, the latter assumption was widely abandoned among critical urban researchers, leading to a creative outpouring of research on the interplay between urban restructuring and various worldwide economic – and, subsequently, political, cultural and environmental – transformations. Numerous scholars contributed key insights to this emergent research agenda, but the most influential, foundational statements were presented by John Friedmann and Saskia Sassen. To date, the work of these authors is associated most closely with the global city concept, and is routinely cited in studies of the interplay between globalization and urban development.

During the course of the late 1980s and into the 1990s, global city theory was employed extensively in studies of the role of major cities as global financial centers, as headquarters locations for TNCs and as agglomerations for advanced producer and financial services industries. During this time, much research was conducted on several broad issues:

- *The formation of a global urban hierarchy*. Global city theory postulates the formation of a worldwide urban hierarchy in and through which transnational corporations coordinate their production and investment activities. The geography, composition and evolutionary tendencies of this hierarchy have been a topic of intensive research and debate since the 1980s. Following the initial interventions of Sassen and Friedmann, subsequent scholarship has explored a variety of methodological strategies and empirical data sources through which to map this hierarchy (see the work of the GaWC research team at Loughborough University – www.lboro.ac.uk/gawc/, and the concept of a "new meta-geography" developed by Beaverstock, Smith, and Taylor in this part of *The City Reader*). However, whatever their differences of interpretation, most studies of the global urban system have conceptualized this grid of cities simultaneously not only

as a fundamental spatial infrastructure for the accelerated and intensified globalization of capital, including finance capital, but also as a medium and expression of the new patterns of global polarization that have emerged during the post-1970s period.

- *The contested restructuring of urban space*. The consolidation of global cities is understood, in this literature, not only with reference to the global scale, on which new, worldwide linkages among cities are being established. Just as importantly, researchers in this field have suggested that the process of global city formation also entails significant social, technological and spatial transformations at the urban scale, within cities themselves, as well as within their surrounding metropolitan regions. According to global cities researchers, the globalization of urban development has generated powerful expressions in the built and sociospatial environment. In Castells' influential terminology, the construction of a global "space of flows" necessarily entails major transformations in the "space of places." For example, the intensified clustering of transnational corporate headquarters and advanced corporate services firms in the city core overburdens inherited land use infrastructures, leading to new, often speculative, real estate booms as new office towers and high-end residential, infrastructural, cultural and entertainment spaces are constructed both within and beyond established downtown areas. Meanwhile, the need for new socio-technological infrastructures and the rising cost of office space in the global city core may generate massive spillover effects on a regional scale, as small- and medium-sized agglomerations of corporate services and back offices crystallize throughout the urban region. Finally, the consolidation of such headquarters economies may also generate significant shifts within local housing markets as developers attempt to transform once-devalorized inner city properties into residential space for corporate elites and other members of the putative "creative class." Consequently, gentrification ensues in formerly working-class neighbourhoods and deindustrialized spaces, and considerable residential and employment displacement may be caused in the wake of rising rents and housing prices. Global cities researchers have tracked these and many other spatial transformations at some length: the urban built environment is viewed as an arena of contestation in which competing social forces and interests, from transnational firms, developers and corporate elites to workers, residents and social movements – struggle over issues of urban design, land use and public space. Of course, such issues are hotly contested in nearly all contemporary cities. Global cities researchers acknowledge this, but were particularly concerned in the 1980s and 1990s to explore their distinctive forms and outcomes in cities that had come to serve key command and control functions in the global capitalist system.
- *The transformation of the urban social fabric*. One of the most provocative, if also controversial, aspects of global cities research during its initial phase involved claims regarding the effects of global city formation upon the urban social fabric. Friedmann and Sassen, in particular, suggested that the emergence of a global city hierarchy would generate a "dualized" urban labor market structure dominated, on the one hand, by a high-earning corporate elite and, on the other hand, by a large mass of workers employed in menial, low-paying and/or informalized jobs. For many, at the time, the so-called *Blade-Runner*-scenario, named after the famous futuristic movie directed by Ridley Scott in 1982, provided a fitting set of images for these new patterns of sociospatial polarization within globalizing cities. Based on an imaginary Los Angeles, the film expressed what many social scientists saw as a possible future in which most urban inhabitants would be migrants, many of them poor and often spatially sequestered in residential enclaves and ghettos. John Carpenter's film *Escape from New York* (1981) developed a similarly grim prognosis for the future of New York, representing all of Manhattan as a high-security prison. For Sassen, this "new class alignment in global cities" emerged in direct conjunction with the downgrading of traditional manufacturing industries and the emergence of the advanced producer and financial services complex. Her work on London, New York and Tokyo suggested that broadly analogous, if place-specific patterns of social polarization were emerging in these otherwise quite different cities, as a direct consequence of their new roles as global command and control centers. This "polarization thesis" has attracted considerable discussion and debate. Whereas some scholars have attempted to apply their argument to a range of globalizing cities, other analysts, for example Peter Marcuse

and Ronald van Kempen, have questioned its logical and/or empirical validity.

In close conjunction with the consolidation of global cities research around the above-mentioned themes, many critical urban scholars began to extend the empirical scope of the theory beyond the major urban command and control centers of the world economy – that is, cities such as New York, London, Tokyo; as well as various supraregional centers in East Asia (Singapore, Seoul, Hong Kong), North America (Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami, Toronto) and Western Europe (Paris, Frankfurt, Amsterdam, Zurich, Milan). In this important line of research, the basic methodological impulses of global city theory were applied to diverse types of cities around the world, but particularly in the global North, that were undergoing processes of economic and sociospatial restructuring that had been induced through geoeconomic transformations. Here, the central analytical agenda was to relate the dominant socioeconomic trends within particular cities – for instance, industrial restructuring, changing patterns of capital investment, processes of labor-market segmentation, sociospatial polarization and class and ethnic conflict – to the emergence of a worldwide urban hierarchy and the global economic forces that underlie it. In this manner, analysts demonstrated the usefulness of global city theory not simply for analyzing the transnational command and control centers that had been investigated in the first wave of research in this field, but for exploring a broad range of urban transformations – also now including questions about the restructuring urban governance and the new contexts for urban social struggles – that were unfolding in conjunction with the post-1970s wave of geoeconomic restructuring. They thus signaled a significant reorientation of the literature away from "global cities" as such, to what Marcuse and van Kempen famously labeled "globalizing cities," a term intended to underscore the diversity of pathways and the place-specific patterns in and through which processes of globalization and urban restructuring were being articulated.

GLOBAL INTERURBAN NETWORKS – DEBATES AND HORIZONS

The debate on global city formation thus no longer focuses primarily on the headquarters locations for transnational capital, the associated agglomeration of specialized producer and financial services, and the resultant transformation of urban and regional spaces. Increasingly, work on globalizing cities engages with a broad range of globalized or globalizing vectors – including not only economic flows, but also the crystallization of new social, cultural, political, ecological, media and diasporic networks. In this context, scholars have begun to reflect more systematically on the nature of the very network connectivities that link cities together across the world system. Such explorations have animated various strands of empirical research on cities, as well as ongoing debates about the nature of globalized urbanization itself. The contours of research on global cities are now increasingly differentiated as the field expands and advances, but certain shared concerns have nonetheless emerged. Accordingly, we summarize here four major dimensions of global interurban connectivity that have, in recent years, been inspiring both research and debate among contemporary urbanists.

- *Types of interurban networks.* In the 1980s and 1990s, scholars tended to assume that a single global urban hierarchy existed; debates focused on how to map it, and on what empirical indicators were most appropriate for doing so. However, the discussion has shifted considerably during the last decade [since 2000], as researchers now argue that the world system is composed of multiple, interlocking interurban networks. While the question of transnational corporate command and control remains central, there is now an equal interest in global cultural flows, political networks, media cities and other modalities of interurban connectivity, including those associated with large-scale infrastructural configurations. For instance, the cases of Washington DC, Geneva, Brussels, Nairobi and other bureaucratic headquarters of the global diplomatic and NGO communities point towards a network of global political centers. Religious centers such as Mecca, Rome and Jerusalem, among many others, constitute yet another such network. Moreover, in some cases, places that ostensibly lack strategic economic assets nonetheless acquire global significance through their role in the worldwide networks of social movement activism. Porto Alegre, Brazil, where the World Social Forum has been based, and Davos, Switzerland, where the World Economic Forum

takes place every January, are cases in point. This line of investigation suggests that, interwoven around the structures of capital that underpin the world urban system, there also exists a complex lattice-work of interurban linkages that are constituted around a broad range of interconnectivities.

- *The spatiality of interurban networks.* In contrast to the somewhat simplistic understanding of global cities as neatly bounded, local places in which transnational capital could be anchored, several scholars have suggested alternative understandings of the geographies produced through the processes of globalized urbanization. Doreen Massey, for instance, argues against the notion that global cities contain distinct properties that make them inherently global. Instead, she suggests an understanding of the global cities network as a set of dialectical relationships that connect actors in cities, and cities as collective actors, through a variety of simultaneously globalized and localized streams. Thus, the space of global cities is "*relational*, not a mosaic of simply juxtaposed differences" and the global city "has to be conceptualized, not as a simple diversity, but as a meeting place, of jostling, potentially conflicting, trajectories." Other scholars have explored the ways in which processes of global city formation have been connected to rescaling processes that rework inherited configurations of global, national, regional and local relations, often in unpredictable, unexpected ways. Newer research explores the methodological and empirical implications of these interventions with reference to diverse aspects of globalized urbanization, from urban political ecologies and governance realignments to new social movement mobilizations. Each breaks in important ways with inherited, relatively place-bound conceptualizations of global cities, pointing instead towards new concepts of relationality, topology and rescaling as bases for understanding the dynamics of globalized urbanization.
- *The scope of interurban networks.* Much global cities research in the 1980s and 1990s focused on major cities and city-regions in the global North. More recently, several scholars have questioned this focus, and explored some of its problematic implications for the conceptualization of global city formation itself. For instance, in an influential intervention, Jennifer Robinson criticized the project of classifying cities by their alleged importance in a single global hierarchy or network, arguing instead for a broader understanding of the diverse, often rather "ordinary" ways in which the globality of cities might be constituted and reproduced. While directing attention back towards locally embedded and place-based social relations, Robinson's work also advocates a reconceptualization of transnational flows and interconnectivities themselves, from points of view that are not focused one-sidedly on the logics of capital investment and finance. An analogous idea is taken up by Ananya Roy in her plea for a rethinking of the theoretical geographies of urban studies. She suggests

> a rather paradoxical combination of specificity and generalizability: that theories have to be produced *in* place (and it matters *where* they are produced), but that they can then be appropriated, borrowed, and remapped. In this sense, the sort of theory being urged is simultaneously located and dislocated.

In practical terms, the dynamic relationships between specificity and generalizability, expounded forcefully by Robinson, Roy and others, refer back, to some degree, to the necessity for all cities under contemporary capitalism to manage two divergent dynamics: their internal contradictions and their external integration. More generally, though, this line of research and theory suggests some highly productive ways in which cities throughout the world system – including those located outside of the economic "heartlands" of the global North – might also be investigated through the tools of a critical revised approach to globalized urbanization.

- *The dangers of interurban networks.* Although critical of them, most global city research in the 1980s and 1990s emphasized the newly emergent strategic connectivities of capital, labor and information across the world economy, which were widely viewed as the preconditions for local economic development. In that context, foreign direct investment and thick webs of interfirm relationships were seen as the "stuff" of which global city relationships were made. Of course, as noted earlier, such "positive" connectivities were seen as being deeply contradictory insofar as they intensified polarization and sociospatial inequalities both within and among cities. Yet, aside from this emphasis on the problem of polarization *in situ*, the downsides of interurban

connectivity itself and failures in the network have only recently been recognized among critical urban researchers. There has always been a sharp divide between optimistic, normative versions of global city parlance and the often dystopic, critical or analytical uses of concepts such as global city or world city. Among the former, we can count the boosterist, hyperbolic attempts by city governments to rank a particular place among the top tier global cities that everyone talks about and that apparently attract all attention and investment. In recent years, the attention on mega-infrastructures such as airports and convention centres has been supplemented by an obsession with "human capital" and creativity. Yet in both the boosterist and the critical literatures, little has been said specifically about the pitfalls and vulnerabilities that lie *within* the global interurban network itself. It is only recently that scholars have begun to track some of the dangers that lie in being networked per se. However, as a new strand of scholarship on networked vulnerabilities indicates, globalizing cities today find themselves increasingly confronted with challenges that lie beyond their control. First, in the wake of the global economic crisis of 2008–2010, the limits and contradictions of market-based, competition-oriented forms of urban governance are becoming more pervasive across the worldwide interurban network: crisis-tendencies and socio-ecological disruptions are no longer contained within particular niches within the network, but spread increasingly rapidly across its various conduits. Second, the worldwide urban political ecology that emerges through such crisis-tendencies is characterized and structured by rising vulnerabilities within the network as a whole. Such vulnerabilities are articulated not only through the traditional network of global economic centers, but also through international networks of infectious disease transmission and attainment, as well as through metropolitan infrastructural networks.

AN INVITATION TO RESEARCH – AND ACTION

What we know now about global cities in a world system has confirmed some and contradicted other predictions that were made in the 1980s. At the time, the world was still in the midst of the Cold War, and the so-called "Third World" was little more than an afterthought in much social research and theorizing. We live in a different world now. Moscow is not behind an "iron curtain", Berlin is unified, South Africa has overcome apartheid and hosted the 2010 World Cup, Brazilian cities are players in the global game, Shanghai, Dubai, Mumbai and Lagos have become household names not only in specialized urban lexica but also in popular discourse, film and musical imagination. Bollywood movie production has transgressed the boundaries of the Indian subcontinent, hiphop music is the vernacular of an urban and suburban youth around the globe, and the American coffee multinational Starbucks has captured the street corners of cities around the world and has changed the way those who can afford it consume coffee, whether in Romania, China or Peru. If anything, the post-Cold War world has become more tightly connected through a range of overlapping global urban networks. Hong Kong, London and Vancouver exist on a tangible map in which plausible connectivities exist that are lived and sustained across three continents through complex and expanding family and business relationships. While geographical proximities among cities and their inhabitants have increased, social distancing inside cities and across networks has often increased dramatically. Although the much touted *Blade Runner* scenario has not materialized in most cities of the West, internal sociospatial divisions have, and have led to new forms of exclusivity, ghettoization, gated communities and the like. On a global scale, the "planet of slums" predicted by Mike Davis in the early 2000s has indeed emerged and stands in contrast to the shining citadels of banking, culture and entertainment centres in Europe, Asia and North America. Across urban regions themselves, the tendency of the 100-mile city has dramatically intensified, as rapid urbanization in most parts of the world continues to push into the ever more distant hinterlands of erstwhile "rural" zones. New forms of politics have also emerged as globalized and diversified urban communities lay claim to the right to the city in new, potentially revolutionary ways. And as the consequences of the global economic crisis of 2008–2010 continue to be felt around the globe, we can anticipate new alignments and realignments of political-economic power relations and socio-natural metabolisms. All of this (and more) has necessarily challenged the assumptions and agendas associated with the first generation of global cities research. Yet, despite these transformations, the classic texts of global

city theory remain a foundational reference point today due to their salient emphasis on the major role of globally networked city-regions in the making (and unmaking) of globalizing capitalism.

One of the more persistent criticisms that has been leveled at global city researchers is that their work serves to glorify the status of particular cities in worldwide interurban competition, and thus represents an uncritical affirmation of global neoliberalism. Relatedly, it has also been insinuated, at times, that research on global cities tends to affirm the policies of municipal boosters concerned to acquire distinction for their cities on the world stage. In our view, the misunderstanding that underlies these criticisms is based on a mistaken identification of the colloquial notion of the global/world city with the scholarly concept developed in the literatures we have discussed above. While the former is a descriptive, affirmative notion often used by municipal power brokers to draw attention to specific places, the latter is a polysemic analytical term that has been employed by critical urbanists concerned to decipher the globalizing dimensions of contemporary urbanization.

Still, some of the confusion around the notion of the global city may also be attributed to the substantive content of social science research on this topic. In some cases, such as Los Angeles, it would appear that the "hype" generated through studies of the purported "globality" of a particular place actually permits academic researchers to be enlisted, often unwittingly, as "mercenaries" into the camp of global city boosterism. In this context, it is crucial to recall that John Friedmann and Goetz Wolff's first foray into global cities research contained the programmatic subtitle, "an agenda for research and *action*" (our emphasis). For Friedmann and many of his colleagues, the analysis and description of the global city was meant to be a first step in actively effecting positive, progressive and even radical social change. Thus, data on the formation of global urban hierarchies and on the intensification of sociospatial polarization within global cities was clearly understood as a call to arms for progressive planners. Their role, in Friedmann's view, was to mobilize new public policies designed to reduce the suffering of the global city's increasingly impoverished internationalized working classes and migrant populations and, more ambitiously still, to subject the apparently deterritorialized operations of transnational capital to localized, democratic political control. For others, of course, this call to action was interpreted as an imperative to establish the positive business climate and general investment conditions that were deemed necessary for world city formation. However, in an incisive intervention into the public policy debate in East Asian city states craving world city status in the 1990s, Friedmann reminded his audience:

> [U]rban outcomes are to a considerable extent the result of *public policies*. They are, in part, what we choose them to be. The cities of the next century will thus be a result of planning in the broadest sense of that much abused term. This is not to fall into the naïve belief that all we need to do is to draw a pretty picture of the future, such as a master plan, or adopt wildly ambitious regulatory legislation as a template for future city growth. . . . Instead of waxing enthusiastic about megaprojects – bridges, tunnels, airports, and the cold beauty of glass-enclosed skyscrapers – which so delight the heart of big-city mayors, I am talking about people, their habitat and quality of life, the claims of invisible migrant citizens and now, in yet another turn, the concept of civil society.

What, then, can research on world cities/global cities teach us about the situation and prospects of contemporary capitalism? Beyond its significance to urban specialists, does research on global cities make a more general contribution to our understanding of contemporary social life, and to our ability to shape the latter in progressive, emancipatory ways? Global city research, in our view, offers us some bearings, some intellectual and political grounding, as we attempt to orient ourselves within a fundamentally disjointed, yet profoundly authoritarian, new world order. Whether or not this intellectual perspective can help open up possibilities for radical or progressive social change is ultimately a political question that can only be decided through ongoing social mobilizations and struggles.