

3 Global Cities as Cultural Nodal Points

Global cities around the world are the terrain where a multiplicity of globalization processes assume concrete, localized forms. These localized forms are, in good part, what globalization is about. (...) The large city of today has emerged as a strategic site for a whole range of new types of operations—political, economic, ‘cultural,’ subjective. It is one of the nexi where the formation of new claims, by both the powerful and the disadvantaged, materializes and assumes concrete forms.

(SASSEN 2005: 40)

In the above-mentioned quote, the American sociologist and urban critic Saskia Sassen highlights the intrinsic relationship of globalization and global cities. The effects of economic globalization processes manifest themselves in global cities, as can be seen in the interconnectedness of the world’s economy revealed by e.g. urban-based transnational corporations, international institutions, the labor market, fiscal centers, or stock markets. Additionally, global cities function as *organizational nodes* (Friedmann 1986) of different types. Global cities also operate as informational nodes for national and global communication and transportation as well as organizational centers for social infrastructure and cultural networking. As stressed in Sassen’s quote, this intersection of different flows, individuals, and ideas leads to an environment of innovation, but also to conflicts.

In this brief introductory chapter, the main characteristics, functions, and qualities of global cities are presented. Special emphasis is put on the cultural significance of urban centers because the focus of this study is on the interplay of globalization, culture, identity formation, and urban space. Hence, the global city’s peculiarity as a *cultural nodal point* of a global network of flows is of particular importance. As Sassen explains, the global city represents the connecting

link between different ways of life, resulting in new movements and trends when creativity takes shape. Moreover, the concept of global cities as creative centers for translating a city's cultural multiplicity into literature is of interest. In literary works, the changing values and attitudes of society are often challenged and discussed in an innovative way before the 'real' urban society deals with it. Therefore, the definitions of the 'real' city will lay the groundwork for the subsequent discussion of the 'literary' global city in contemporary North American literature.

3.1 URBAN STUDIES

Global cities are mainly examined with regard to geography, sociology, anthropology, and economics but are also of particular interest in cultural studies. Urban studies summarize the collective interests of the different fields. The two rivaling academic movements of urban theory are the traditional *Chicago School of Urban Sociology* of the early twentieth century, influenced by scholars such as Georg Simmel or Max Weber, and the more recent *Los Angeles School of Urbanism*, which emerged in the mid-1980s and was mainly influenced by postmodernism and critics such as Edward Soja and Mike Davis. Both schools argue that their city, Chicago or Los Angeles, is 'paradigmatic' for the general analysis of cities (Brenner 2003: 205). Whereas the Chicago School focuses on the city around its core, Los Angeles and Southern Californian studies include the edges as well.⁹ With the evolvement of the L.A. school as a second school, comparative urban studies were encouraged. Further schools of urban theory based in New York or Miami failed to build momentum. A counter-movement called *anti-urbanism* subsists. This movement dates back to the industrial revolution and gained significance in the 1980s along with *ecocriticism* (Wilson 1991: 9), which is the interdisciplinary study of the environment and literature (e.g. Heise 2008). Nowadays, ecological interests and urban planning are not necessarily antagonistic, as, for example, studies on environmental policies in Los Angeles and Toronto show (Keil et al 2003).

Key terms applied in urban theory include the expression *metropolis*, originally referred to the 'chief city of a country,' which is now used to describe any larger city (Rodger 2010: 85). Edward W. Soja (2000) introduced the term *post-metropolis* as a compound blend of 'metropolis' and 'postmodernism' to define

9 For more information about the two schools of urbanism, see Dear, Michael J. (ed.) *From Chicago to L.A.: Making Sense of Urban Theory* (2002).

‘the new urbanism’ (2000: xiii) and “the heterogeneous mega city of the post-modern age” (Brandt 2010: 125). The terms *world city* (e.g. Friedmann 1986) and *global city* (Sassen 1991), however, are the predominating expressions employed in the analysis of larger cities in a global context. Both terms are recurrently used interchangeably.

The expression ‘global city’ was coined by Saskia Sassen to describe a new kind of city emerging in a globalizing age (1991). New York, London, and Tokyo function as Sassen’s leading examples to explain the parallel changes in the spatially distant and culturally diverse cities. In this study, Sassen’s term and concept is used to highlight the parallel developments (‘synchroniCity’) of the three selected North American global cities of Toronto, New York, Los Angeles.

Friedmann’s hierarchy of world cities laid the groundwork for the definition of Sassen’s ‘global cities’ as a new type of city in a globalizing age. In his renowned *World City Hypothesis*, Friedmann presents a hierarchy of world cities, featuring Toronto as a world city of second tier as well as New York and Los Angeles as world cities of first tier (1986: 72). Friedmann’s seven interrelated theses of world cities are concerned with global capital, division of labor, integration with the global economy, global control functions, structural design, and cities as important destination points for migrants. In this study, the emphasis is on the last thesis. Thus, based on Friedmann’s definition of world cities as organizational nodes (1986), the common quality of Toronto, New York, and Los Angeles as cultural nodal points in a global network is stressed. Nevertheless, economic issues cannot be disregarded because apart from global effects, the peculiarities of a city are determined by its economic, social, and spatial attributes (Abu-Lughod 1999: 417).

The city as such and larger cities in particular are defined by their ability to concentrate and control flows of individuals, goods, and ideas (Augé 2008: vii [1995]).¹⁰ With the world-wide rise of cities to about 20 with over 10 million citizens and 400 with at least one million citizens by the end of the millennium (Lehan 1998: 287f.), urban space has become “the predominant form of settlement” (Clark 1996: 186) and “the world’s dominant social structure” (Lehan 1998: 287f.). This agglomeration of people and resources in a comparably limited space is intensified in a globalizing age. Similar to the concept of globalization as an amplification of global interconnectedness, an acceleration of financial

10 The term ‘city’ designates a crucial difference between the English and the American conception (Raleigh 1968: 310). In the U.S., the expression ‘city’ can refer to a wide range of different urban areas, including a small town or a village as well as a larger city or megacity.

and cultural flows, and a growing trend towards border porosity, global cities are differentiated by their range and sphere of influence as global control centers of different types.

The contrary but concurrent processes of *decentralization* and *concentration* summarize the effects of globalization on global cities (Sassen 1991: 106). On the one hand, space and distances have been increasingly neutralized by technological advancements, such as faster flows of information via the Internet or better means of transportation. This furthers decentralization. On the other hand, financial, migratory, and other cultural flows are concentrated and coordinated in urban centers. Global cities serve as nodes in a global network with each node functioning as a cluster of transnational flows. A global city thus operates as the *center of a complex network* (Abu-Lughod 1999: 44). This complex urban network of interlinked global cities is characterized by exchange, dependency, simultaneity, and immediacy. Major cities function according to their own system, which is detached from the nation-state (Sassen 1991: 8) and mirrors the demise of political borders as an effect of globalization.

Global cities are studied predominantly in economics and sociology. Analyzing urban space can enhance the understanding of global processes in general and the world economy in particular. According to most critics, a global city must first and foremost be a strong financial center with powerful transnational connections to a complex web of other global cities that are synchronized by specific globalizing forces such as increased flows of capital and information. Yet, these characteristics of the global city are not an entirely new phenomenon because New York showed these signs of an emerging global city as early as the late nineteenth century (Abu-Lughod 1999: 2). These signs included its economic power and the cultural diversity of its inhabitants. Los Angeles and Toronto followed much later. The global cities of today, however, are set apart by both “the *scope* of internationalization, in terms of both capital and labor” (Soja 2000: 184) and its population’s range of diversity.

Global capitalism is rooted in global cities. It is “a process of constant negotiation between homogeneity and difference, played out locally and globally, which makes itself especially manifest in the changing physical and cultural geography of cities” (Shiel 2001: 13f.). Hence, capitalism, globalization, culture, and urban space cannot be analyzed separately. Global cities function as global economic nodes, as “loci of industrial production; centers of command and control over inter-urban, interstate and global circuits of capital” (Brenner 1998: 17). Since the 1980s, the command centers for transnational businesses and organizations are concentrated in global cities (Sassen 1991: 5). Thus, a few important places coordinate a majority of global flows of capital, goods, and information.

Most global cities are home to several Fortune 500 headquarters, thereby fulfilling the criteria for being important financial centers. Global cities function as economic networks in which, for example, the transnational corporations and international institutions are linked between cities. This ‘networked economy’ (Sassen 2005: 40) does not work ‘internationally’ as in ‘between nations’ but between cities, often facilitating an erosion of socio-political influence.

Politics and geopolitics also play a major role. Political and international institutions are commonly concentrated in global cities. The location of a state capital is often a strategic decision, such as investments made in transportation systems. Therefore, global cities function as nodes of political power of a certain state or, as in the case of New York, as the United Nations headquarter. As a consequence, global cities accumulate economic forces and reterritorialize political power and cultural exchange.

3.2 CULTURAL NODAL POINTS

In addition to their quality as global hubs for financial transactions and transportation of goods, global cities operate as structural centers of a network of border-crossing flows. Global cities are sites of intense, accelerated processes of cultural exchange, facilitated by their physical networks of transportation, communication, information, and digital networks that, in a global age, “can double as networks of transportation, at least for virtualized media, goods, and services” (Freyermuth 2010: 67). Thus, global cities are determined by their connecting qualities and “spatially, their importance can be measured by their quality and scale of the highway and rail networks linking them with their airports” (Augé 2008: vii). One measurement for inter-city relationships, for example, is air travel between global cities (Smith et al 2002: 118). Consequently, the physical and digital networks of transport and exchange constitute even now an important quality of global cities in economic, political, and cultural terms.

Similar to the earlier presented topic of globalization and its effects, the global city’s quality as cultural node is the most significant with regard to analyzing urban literature and identity politics. Consequently, ethnic diversity, immigration, and the integration of different cultures into a society play a major role in the description and analysis of global cities. Therefore, the peculiar quality of global cities as cultural nodal points in a global network of world-encompassing flows is examined in the following.

Urban space serves as a *contact zone*, where different worlds meet and a constant encounter and intermingling of a multitude of cultures is taking place. A

global city is a place where the different cultural flows or so-called ‘scapes’ (Appadurai 1996) come together. Due to the richness of cultural resources and the diversity of urban space under extreme spatial density, global cities feature many worlds. As Marc Augé puts it, every city is “a summary of the world with its ethnic, cultural, religious, social and economic diversity” (2008: xii [1995]). Due to their large population and high degree of global interconnectedness to other urban spaces, global cities constitute the best example for this phenomenon.

A global city’s public space is very diverse and is shared by a diversity of people. This diversity encourages creativity but causes conflicts as well. On the one hand, the various different cultural influences encounter each other in a cultural contact zone, often resulting in new and creative forms of interaction, and cosmopolitan trends and styles. On the other hand, the different ideologies inherent in one city collide from time to time, causing social, cultural, or political frictions. Therefore, it is no coincidence that cultural clashes, such as the 1992 L.A. Riots, occur chiefly in global cities. Conflicts and contradictions arise in global cities partly due to the concentration of global capital and the mass of immigrants, underprivileged minorities, and low-income groups within one territory (Sassen 2005: 39).

One of the main characteristics of the metropolis is that it “has always been the preferred destination of migration, and thus a site of highly intensified ethnic, social, and cultural diversity” (Reif 2010: 33). Hence, increased immigration from within and outside the national borders is another characteristic. Immigrants are generally welcome as cheap labor in prospering global cities. In times of recession, however, minority workers and immigrants often become a subject of hatred due to non-immigrants’ fear of unemployment and social degradation. Immigrants nevertheless represent a vital part of city life and urban culture because they “are the active formulators of metropolitan aesthetics and life styles, reinventing the languages and appropriating the streets” (Chambers 1994: 23). Immigrants change urban space and urban life. The different ethnicities, religions, and ideologies often create urban subcultures or worlds, transforming the streetscape, spreading beyond the city limits.

Ethnic urban neighborhoods often serve as destinations, access points, and global connecting hubs for immigrants and transmigration. The concentration of particular ethnicities in one area is a result of the increasing number of immigrants (Hou 2004: 2). Global cities as significant parts of this global network are often subject to an occurrence of so-called *chain migration* (Foner 2000: 19), describing the process of how earlier immigration influences later immigration of the same ethnic group. Global cities then function as ethnic clusters that support

their families or ethnic group in terms of infrastructure, import and export, or monetary funding. Thus, supportive networks are created in global cities worldwide. Examples of different ‘city-worlds’ are neighborhoods with a majority of one ethnicity or underdeveloped ghettos (Augé 2008: xiii [1995]). Gated communities, however, also qualify as an ethnic cluster because a cluster does not necessarily depend on low-income inhabitants. Income-levels are likely to be similar within ethnic clusters. The descriptions of ethnic neighborhoods range from minority clusters to ethnic enclaves or silos to a ghettoization process. Whether in infrastructural, geographical, political, or imaginative terms, different urban neighborhoods and districts represent separate worlds and, taken together, the diversity of the world.

3.3 TORONTO, NEW YORK, AND LOS ANGELES

In 1986, John Friedmann categorized New York and Los Angeles as a *primary* and Toronto as a *secondary world city* (Friedmann 1986: 72). The significance of each world or global city is measured by how often the three cities are used as an example global city by a selection of scholars. A study of sixteen texts on world city research published between 1971 and 1999 revealed that New York is cited every single time while Los Angeles is mentioned thirteen times and Toronto an astonishing eleven times (Taylor 2004: 40f). Whereas New York and Los Angeles are ranked first and second with regard to metropolitan areas by population by the US Census Bureau in 2000 (Pacione 2009: 97), the Greater Toronto Area is ranked first with regard to census metropolitan areas and agglomerations in Canada (2011). Los Angeles and New York are considered “the two American cities with the strongest claims to global city status” (Gladstone et al 2003: 79). Likewise, Toronto, which is often considered the smaller and safer Canadian copy of New York City (Rosenthal 2011: 7), has the strongest Canadian claim to a global city status (Hall 2010: 63).

The three North American global cities Toronto, New York, and Los Angeles play a major role in the global network of flows, forming a so-called *clique* in the world city network (Taylor 2004: 117), translating into a high connectedness of flows between the three cities. With regard to their connectivity in the global network, New York is in the lead while Los Angeles and Toronto follow up respectively with a very high and high degree of connectedness (Taylor et al 2002; Taylor 2004: 73). In a contemporary study of global cities in terms of businesses, banks, stock markets, flight passengers, harbors, and international institutions, New York is in the lead, while Los Angeles is ranked six as a city with partial

global ‘command function,’ and Toronto is ranked twenty-fourth as a city with a specialized command function (Bronger 2004: 191). Moreover, New York and Los Angeles are described as American ‘headquarters’ that function as ‘corporate centers’ for financial control, including international banks and transnational corporations, infrastructural centers for transportation and communication as well as the leading place for cultural production (Pacione 2009: 124). Toronto, Canada’s financial hub and ‘multicultural city,’ functions as the Canadian head-quarter equivalent.

Although Toronto, New York, and Los Angeles differ in size and population, the three urban regions are united in their high cultural diversity. In 1996, both, Toronto and Los Angeles feature a higher rate of foreign-born population of almost 50 percent and 31 percent, respectively (Anisef et al 2003: 3) than the former number one American immigrant city New York with 23 percent. New York, however, has a greater range of diversity of its immigrants (Foner 2000: 5). Although the cities are united by their cultural multiplicity, their different histories, politics, geographies, and infrastructure have formed a different ground for how each of the diverse ethnic groups integrate in the respective global city. Due to its geographical position at the Southern West Coast of the United States, for example, the ‘Pacific Rim’ Los Angeles features a proximity to Asia and Mexico that Toronto and New York do not have.

The phenomena of urban growth and the *urbanization of the globe*, which refers to the increase of population in big cities, are linked to the globalization of major cities. This dialect or *global-local nexus* (Pacione 2009: 8) of globalization and urban space, also referred to as *glocalization*, translates into the localization of the global and becomes particularly visible in global cities. Urbanism, which is the extension of urban lifestyles, turns into a way of life to the whole society. A *global urban society* (Clark 1996: 187) emerges in which different values are transported, communicated, copied, and adapted across the world. Increasing connectivity, for example, conveys the idea that the world we know has become one. The constant and multidirectional exchange of information results in this global-local dialogue, thereby implicating global ‘unicity’ (Tomlinson 2001: 10).

Globalization and urbanization have made global cities more similar in economic, but also in cultural terms (Huyssen 2008: 4). Thus, apart from being ranked as global cities of first or second tier with regard to economy, politics, and infrastructure, Toronto, New York, and Los Angeles stand out because of their remarkable ethnic diversity and several waves of immigration, continuously changing the city’s population, space, and images, thereby indicating certain parallel developments (‘synchroniCity’). To describe and analyze the integration

of different minorities into a particular urban society as well as particular attitudes towards immigrants, however, the different national and local forms of acceptance and incorporation need to be investigated ('specifiCity'). In the next chapter on 'Cultural Diversity in a Globalizing Age,' the variety of the terms describing 'diversity' will be presented, providing an overview of the exhaustive field of study and the differences and similarities of the numerous different terms used, such as 'hybridity,' 'multiculturalism,' or the 'melting pot.'

