Chapter 7

Saskia Sassen: Space and Power

NG   Over the past ten years you have approached the question of globalization from a number of different angles, and analyzed, amongst other things, inequalities in the world economy (Sassen, 2000), the transnational mobility of people and money (Sassen, 1998), immigration trends and policies (Sassen, 1999) and global changes in state power and political sovereignty (Sassen, 1996). This body of work seems to be unified by a basic underlying position, namely that the study of globalization is to take urban geography seriously, and with this place the city (or city networks) at the centre of its analysis. But why approach the question of globalization in this way? What may be gained by focusing on the nature and geography of urban space, and what is sociological about such an approach?

SS   You are right in emphasising the fact that I have tried to study globalization through various specific, often localized processes rather than an encompassing overview of global processes. You are also right in seeing that the city is a key space where I keep returning in my research. But I would neither say that I put the city at the centre of globalization, nor that it should be at the centre of its study. Each historic phase brings with it strategic articulators of dynamics, processes, and institutional orders. The city is today one of these, along with others. The city was also a crucial articulator in earlier phases, notably the city-states of the renaissance and the world cities studied by Braudel.

More generally, we know that there have long been cross-border economic processes - flows of capital, labour, goods, raw materials and travellers. And over the

centuries there have been enormous fluctuations in the degree of openness or closure of the organizational forms within which these flows take place. In the last hundred years, the inter-state system came to provide the dominant organizational form for cross-border flows, with national states as its key actors. It is this condition that has changed dramatically over the last decade as a result of privatisation, deregulation, the opening up of national economies to foreign firms, and the growing participation of national economic actors in global markets.

In this context we see a re-scaling of the strategic territories that articulate the new system. With the partial unbundling or at least weakening of the national as a spatial unit come conditions for the ascendance of other spatial units and scales. Among these are the sub-national, notably cities and regions; cross-border regions encompassing two or more sub-national entities; and supra-national entities, i.e. global digitized markets and free-trade blocs. The dynamics and processes that get terrritorialized or are sited at these diverse scales can in principle be regional, national and global. There is a proliferation of specialized global circuits for economic activities that both contribute to and constitute these new scales and are enhanced by their emergence.

The organizational architecture for cross-border flows that emerges from these re-scalings and articulations increasingly diverges from that of the inter-state system. The key articulators now include not only national states but also firms and markets whose global operations are facilitated by new policies and cross-border standards produced by willing or not-so willing states. Among the empirical referents for these non-state forms of articulation are the growing number of cross-border mergers and acquisitions, the expanding networks of foreign affiliates, and the growing numbers of financial centres that are becoming incorporated into global financial markets. As a

result of these and other processes, a growing number of cities today play an increasingly important role in directly linking their national economies with global circuits. As cross-border transactions of all kinds grow, so do the networks binding particular configurations of cities. Today we have about 40 global cities, with five major ones at the top (besides New York, London, Tokyo, Paris and Frankfurt) and then several levels of such cities. This in turn contributes to the formation of new geographies of centrality that connect cities in a growing variety of cross-border networks. It is against this larger picture that I see cities as strategic sites today.

NG   By focusing on city structures and networks it would seem that you bypass approaches that simply oppose 'the national' to 'the global'. For example, you talk of cities not only as spaces where the global and the local might meet, but also as places which, in certain circumstances, become disconnected from both regions and nation-states (Sassen, 1998: xxvi). You term such places 'global cities'. But what is meant by the term global here? Is globalization to be seen as a movement towards the concentration of economic powers or services in key cities (e.g. London, New York, Tokyo) or as a process of spatial expansion of particular economic and political forms across the globe, or both? Put simply, does globalization involve processes of centralization <u>and </u>dispersal?

SS   Indeed, a focus on cities does force me to see that the global is not simply that which operates outside the national, and in that sense, to see also that the national and the global are not mutually exclusive domains. The global city is a thick environment that endogenizes the global and filters it through 'national' institutional orders and imaginaries. It also helps render visible global internal (national) components of the

economy and, especially, the imaginaries of various groups. Studying globalization in this manner means you can engage in thick descriptions and do empirical research in specific sites rather than having to position yourself as a global observer. Now that I have been at it for a while I can see that no matter what feature I am studying, over the last 15 years or more I have gravitated towards these thick environments. It feels like a hundred years of digging.

As for the second element in your question - what I mean by the global and by globalization in using this type of approach - it touches on a distinction that is dear to me and has gotten me into lots of trouble, especially when I started this work.

Let me start by asking the question: what it is we are trying to name with the term globalization? In my reading of the evidence it is actually two distinct sets of dynamics. One of these involves the formation of explicitly global institutions and processes, such as the World Trade Organization, global financial markets, the new cosmopolitanism, the War Crimes Tribunals. The practices and organizational forms through which these dynamics operate are constitutive of what is typically thought of as global scales. They are formally global institutions, some more institutionalised (the WTO, the War Crimes Tribunals) than others (the new cosmopolitanism), but still recognized as global no matter how particular and national the focus of their work.

The second set of processes I think are part of globalization do not necessarily scale at the global level as such, yet, I argue, are part of globalization. These processes take place deep inside territories and institutional domains that have largely been constructed in national terms over the last several hundred years in much, though by no means all, of the world. What makes these processes part of globalization even though localized in national, indeed sub-national settings, is that they involve transboundary networks and formations connecting or articulating multiple local or

'national' processes and actors. Among these processes I include crossborder networks of activists engaged in specific localized struggles with an explicit or implicit global agenda, as is the case with many human rights and environmental organizations; particular aspects of the work of states, e.g. certain monetary and fiscal policies critical to the constitution of global markets that are hence being implemented in a growing number of countries; the use of international human rights instruments in national courts; non-cosmopolitan forms of global politics and imaginaries that remain deeply attached or focused on localized issues and struggles, yet are part of global lateral networks containing multiple other such localized efforts. A particular challenge in the work of identifying these types of processes and actors as part of globalization is the need to decode at least some of what continues to be experienced and represented as national.

In my work I have particularly wanted to focus on these types of practices and dynamics and have insisted in conceptualizing them as also constitutive of globalization even though we do not usually recognize them as such. When the social sciences focus on globalization - still rare enough deep in the academy - it is typically not on these types of practices and dynamics but rather on the self-evidently global scale. And although the social sciences have made important contributions to the study of this self-evident global scale by establishing the fact of multiple globalizations, only some of which correspond to neoliberal corporate economic globalization, there is much work left to do. At least some of this work entails distinguishing a) the various scales that global processes constitute, ranging from supranational and global to sub-national, and b) the specific contents and institutional locations of this multi-scalar globalization. Geography, more than any other of the social sciences today, has contributed to a

critical stance toward scale, recognizing the historicity of scales and resisting the reification of the national scale so present in most of social science (see Sassen, 2003).

All of this indicates that what I mean by the global is not only an extension of certain forms to the globe but also a repositioning of what we have historically constructed and experienced as the local and the national. Further, this repositioning happens in many different and specific ways and in a growing number of domains - economic, political, cultural and ideational.

And now to the final issue you raise in your question: the contradictory notion (very present in my work indeed) that globalization involves both centralization and dispersal. This dynamic gets at the heart of how I have conceptualized the rise of global cities. One of the key hypotheses in my global city model is that the more far-flung and dispersed the network of a firm's offices, factories and service outlets, the more central management functions become complex and weighty. When the sector is globalized and involved in uncertain and speculative markets, the pressures and complexity of these functions are such that firms need to buy some of these functions from specialized service firms. The latter need to operate in thick, varied environments that also are nodes where multiple global information loops intersect producing added value in the form of knowledge, better understanding and insights. Global cities are such environments. The key dynamic is that the more global a firm's operations, the more its central functions are subject to agglomeration economies. And the key condition is that the firm is an integrated corporation that seeks to maintain control and centralize profit appropriation – rather than distribute control and profits in parallel to its service and production functions.

NG   In the preface to the second edition of <u>The Global City</u> (Sassen, 2001) you talk of a new 'conceptual architecture' for the study of globalization. Does this mean that a new sociological methodology is needed for the study of global forms? If so, what might this look like?

SS   Yes, it does mean for me that we need new conceptual architectures. But it does not mean that we have to throw all existing research techniques and data sets out the window. I use this term conceptual architecture with care: an organizing logic that can accommodate multiple diverse components operating at different scales (e.g. data about various localized dynamics and self-evidently global ones) without losing analytic closure (maintaining at least a modicum of such closure). Studying the global, then, entails not only a focus on that which is explicitly global in scale, but also a focus on locally scaled practices and conditions that are articulated with global dynamics, and a focus on the multiplication of cross-border connections among various localities. Further, it entails recognizing that many of the globally scaled dynamics, such as the global capital market, actually are partly embedded in sub-national sites and move between these differently scaled practices and organizational forms. For instance, the global capital market is constituted both through electronic markets with global span, and through locally embedded conditions, i.e. financial centres.

A focus on such sub-nationally based processes and dynamics of globalization requires methodologies and theorizations that engage not only global scalings but also sub-national scalings as components of <u>global</u> processes, thereby destabilizing older hierarchies of scale and conceptions of nested scalings. Studying global processes and conditions that get constituted sub-nationally has some advantages over studies of globally scaled dynamics; but it also poses specific challenges. It does make possible

the use of long-standing research techniques, from quantitative to qualitative, in the study of globalization. It also gives us a bridge for using the wealth of national and subnational data sets as well as specialized types of scholarship, such as area studies. Both types of studies, however, need to be situated in conceptual architectures that are not quite those held by the researchers who generated these research techniques and data sets, as their efforts mostly had little to do with globalization.

One central task we face is to decode particular aspects of what is still represented or experienced as 'national', which may in fact have shifted away from what had historically been considered or constituted as national. This is in many ways a research and theorization logic that is present in global city studies. But there is a difference: today we have come around to recognize and code a variety of components in global cities as part of the global. There is a broader range of conditions and dynamics that are still coded and represented as local and national. They are to be distinguished from those now recognized global city components. In my current research project I focus on how this all works out in the realm of the political.

NG   A large section of <u>The Global City </u>(Sassen, 2001:197-325) addresses 'The Social Order of the Global City'. But what do you mean by the term 'social' here? Is there a connection between the social and society, or between societies and nation-states? Or does the emergence of global cities mark the birth of new transnational social forms?

SS   Let me answer your question about the specific issue of social forms in combination with the question you ask about the social order of the global city. You ask if my work signals the need for a new sociological methodology for the analysis of

social forms, and whether the global city marks the emergence of new, transnational social forms. My answer is yes and no.

First, on the methodology. Yes, in the sense in which I spoke earlier about the need for new conceptual architectures to study some of this, including social forms. No, in the sense that not everything - research techniques and data sets - is new. Rather, the design of these new conceptual framings allows us to use techniques and data sets produced with different questions in mind. And not just in sociology.

Secondly, on the emergence of new types of transnational social forms. Indeed, I think we are seeing this. The global city is a very specific type of site for these processes. It endogenizes global dynamics that transform existing social alignments. And it enables even the disadvantaged to develop transnational strategies and subjectivities. Often this enablement is at heart a prise de conscience. What I mean here is that it is not always a new social form as such but rather a subjective, self-reflexive repositioning of an old social practice or condition in a transnational framing. Transnational immigrant households, and even communities, are perhaps emblematic of this.

There are, however, also new social forms. The most familiar instance is the new transnational elites in various professions, from accountants to art curators - the accountants evidently being as creative as the curators. There are also new social forms that may look like they have nothing to do with globalization, but are in fact deeply articulated with it, even though intermediated through a variety of local dynamics, such as the housing market. These are not transnational per se, but they are globalization-linked new social forms. For instance, I interpret the vast growth of homelessness and its transformed composition in global cities as representing a new social form. We have long had homelessness, but it can get constituted through

different social forms. Today, in major global cities it is deeply linked with the need for global actors to develop urban space in ways and in quantities that have produced a vast displacement of low-income residents. Thus in terms of the social composition of homelessness we see more families, more women and children. This is clearly so in London and New York. In Tokyo, the numbers are far smaller and it is largely elderly men and women. Here is where the global city is a powerful lens through which to examine globalization in its concrete, on the ground operation, deep inside what is still the national realm.

In my current research on political aspects I am trying to get at these on-the-ground operations, still deeply coded in national terms, and in that sense hermetic to the standard approaches for the study of globalization. On a more theorized level, this work also includes a specification of the formation of new social forces that come together and get actualised in global cities. Thus these cities are the spaces where global corporate capital hits the ground and becomes embedded in processes of social reproduction, including that of its managers and professionals. In this regard, the global city is the site where global capital begins to constitute itself as a social force, one in contest with the other emergent social force in global cities – the new types of urban workforces constituted largely through minoritized workers - whether natives or immigrants.

NG   You also use the term 'social geography' (Sassen, 2001:256-284). What is meant by this term?

SS   Yes, I somehow find concepts such as geography and architecture enormously useful. I think it has to do with the fact that a term such as social structure, which is

the one I would be expected to use as a sociologist, has become a sort of designator rather than a heuristic tool. Perhaps I am trying to get at something akin to Beck's memorable <u>zombie categories</u>. Geography and architecture are working categories for me in my work of interpreting empirical details and patterns.

So when I use social geography in the case of an examination of global cities, I am getting at at least two matters. One is the notion that there are multiple and distinct socio-spatial formations present in a city. A given built environment can be inhabited by more than one of these. For instance, Wall Street at night is the locus for a social geography that is partly constituted in the immigrant community of Northern Manhattan, and very different from that of the high-income areas of the city and the suburbs where most of Wall Street's top professionals live. The second is that I use the notion of social geography to deconstruct and then re-synthesize assemblages of micropractices and their spatial patterning. In brief, both of these uses allow me to work with a dynamic, spatially sensitive analytic grid for examining, what can I say, social structurations.

NG   It seems that this social geography is closely tied to the study of economic globalization, and more specifically to the mapping of inequalities existing within <u>and</u> between cities. Does your definition of global social forms result from the mapping of such inequalities? For example, you use the term class in your work. Is class synonymous with 'the social' (as it is for most Marxist social theorists), and is it an overridingly economic category resulting from 'income polarization'? Or is class something different when studied at the level of the city? Is it possible to argue, like Zygmunt Bauman, that we are witnessing the emergence of new global class formations?

SS   This is not an easy question for me. When I use class in <u>The Global City</u> I am capturing at least two features of class. One is related to class dynamics: its instantiation in concrete, thick environments. In other words, class becomes activated under particular conditions; it is not simply an attribute. Further, it has multiple locations in which it becomes activated. The city is one of them, the factory is another, and, we now know, the ethnic or immigrant community is another. The global city is a very acute location today for activating class dynamics. In this type of conceptualization or use of class, I leave somewhat unexamined the issue of the genesis, or nature, of class and hence the whole debate between Marxist formulations and the more nuts and bolts, often empiricist, interpretations/definitions of US sociology especially.

Class for me is not simply an economic category. I would say in much US sociology it is a bit that way and it works as an attribute. I resist that. Hence I focus on class dynamics and their activation. Once you introduce a specific concrete focus, class activation is the moment when class ceases to be a hermetic category, though there is a lot of interpreting that goes on before you get there. But once you are there, class is a complex, thick social condition and event that includes economic, spatial, subjective and ideational elements. I do not know exactly - you are making me think here - where I would go from here if I were a class theorist. Would I wind up in a different place because my starting point is a thick environment where some of the most powerful dynamics of today's world hit the ground and encounter some of the most disadvantaged people from all over the world constituted as 'workers'? Interesting. I think that the way I deal with class leads me to focus or capture the formation of social

forces in global cities. I am not certain whether class as we have used it would best capture the nature of these social forces as I described them briefly above.

NG   Further to this, you place great emphasis on global cities as sites of 'post-industrial production' with their 'own infrastructure of activities, firms and jobs' (Sassen, 1998:xxiii; 2000:84-5). How are these sites and these forms of production connected to the emergence of 'new class alignments', and to what you call the 'practice of global control'?

SS   Yes, I emphasize - over and over, one might say in the hope of melting down any opposition here - that global cities are production sites. What they are uniquely positioned to produce is a capability: the capability for global control of the operations of global markets and firms. This is then a very different type of production site from that we usually think of, and it is a different meaning than the common understanding of post-industrial production. Secondly, it is a different way of conceptualizing high-level professional work and their outputs. The usual one is to emphasize the high levels of human capital involved and to emphasize the output, a highly specialized service. I want to emphasize the multiple material practices and human resources that need to be brought together in order to produce global control capability. This includes the sphere of social reproduction for both the top-level professional workers and the low wage service workers. By new class alignments I am signalling that production of this crucial input for economic globalization (global control capability) articulates workers, professionals, owners of capital, control practices, the components of social reproduction, and the political subjectivities that get mobilized under these new conditions, into specific socio-spatial and political formations. In this sense, also, the

city represents the moment in the complex process that is global capitalism, when the latter can be actualised as a social force rather than being the abstraction of an electronic market.

NG   Aside from class inequalities, you also point to 'enormous' economic inequalities between men and women in global cities such as New York, London and Tokyo (see Sassen, 2001:250). In your book Globalization and Its Discontents you take up this issue by outlining a 'feminist analytics of the global economy' (Sassen, 1998:81-109). Your argument here addresses first, the 'the incipient unbundling of the exclusive territoriality of the nation-state' and second, changes in political sovereignty that may come with the emergence of international law. But why did you select these two issues as a way opening up 'an analytic terrain' for feminist inquiry into globalization? And why did you choose to avoid analysis of global forms of patriarchy?

SS   The reason for starting the analysis with the broader issues of how legitimate power is reconstituted at a time of economic globalization is that I did not want to start with the empirical or analytic categories through which the specific condition of women is usually examined. The empirical recording of inequalities between men and women is part of the story, but I argue, these inequalities have been around under all kinds of highly diverse socio-political and economic systems. I am interested in understanding the specific conditionalities of gendering today, and, even more narrowly, the specific conditionalities of gendering underlying the new global economic system dominated by finance. Finance is as far removed as you can get from the analytic categories of feminist scholarship. It is not enough to measure ongoing inequalities and oppressions if the purpose is to understand how the current phase

constructs these, or at least some of these outcomes. One question then might indeed be: how do the current transformations destabilize older forms of patriarchy and to what extent do they contribute to their reduction or their reinvention? I also emphasize how the particular production issue crucial to global cities - global control capability - positions women in very specific ways in these globalized sectors, both at the top and at the bottom of the system.

NG   In taking this position in <u>Globalization and Its Discontents</u> you seem to place great faith in the democratizing forces of international law. You say, for example, that 'Once the sovereign state is no longer viewed as the exclusive representative of its population in the international arena, women and other nonstate actors can gain more representation in international law; contribute to the making of international law; and give new meaning to older forms of international participation, such as women's long-standing work in international peace efforts' (Sassen, 1998:94). Is the nation-state then to be viewed as the main cause of the problem here. If so, why do there continue to be such 'enormous' inequalities between men and women even in global cities that have disconnected themselves from national-state boundaries? And what evidence is there that international law will work to counter <u>de facto</u> economic inequalities between men and women?

SS   When I emphasize developments in international law or in the new constitutions that allow individuals of particular groups, such as indigenous peoples, to go directly to international forums for claim-making and bypass national states, I am not necessarily positing that this is the solution to inequality. Not at all. There are two matters I am trying to get at. The more general argument is that globalization

destabilizes existing formalized hierarchies of power, of legitimacy and for claim-making. In so doing it produces openings, both rhetorical and practical for new types of actors and claims. These include a variety of actors and claims: from multinationals and their enormous claims on national states and on global cities, to the new politics of claim-making by disadvantaged people especially in cities. Even at its best, e.g. the Keynesian state, by formalizing inclusions/entitlements formalizes exclusions. When national states privatize and deregulate they not only reduce entitlements for the included, they also create possibilities for the excluded to emerge as political actors in their own right.

The second matter is what instruments can serve struggles for equality (this holds for all kinds of groups, notably, indigenous peoples who are using international forums for claim-making). Law by itself is not enough, but it is one of the instrumentalities. Past experience suggests that it will take struggle and mobilization to make law work for the pursuit of equality and enablement.

As for the question about global cities then having to reflect this effect and being places of lessened inequality...it does not quite work that way. The logic is a different one; it points to political possibilities rather than reduced inequality. Global cities are sites where the new trends towards inequality materialize in highly concentrated doses, and in that sense these cities are almost a natural experiment situation. One component of these trends towards inequality is the large low-wage workforce, with few if any entitlements in the past, highly internationalized and feminized. Today it has acquired a new type of visibility and what I call 'presence' - presence to power and to itself. I interpret this as the beginning of a micropolitics, of new types of political subjectivities, and as the beginning of the formation of a social

force that finds itself in contestation with global capital as it hits the ground in these cities.

NG   You also say that with the emergence of global cities comes the possibility of transnational politics (1998:xx). What might this politics look like? You talk of a politics 'going beyond the politics of culture though at least partly likely to be embedded in it'. What do you mean by this?

SS   Continuing with the preceding answer, these new types of micropolitics and subjectivities can be transnational. The large numbers of people from all over the world who often encounter each other for the first time in the streets, workplaces and neighbourhoods of today's global cities, including encounters with co-ethnics who are in high professional jobs (i.e. a class encounter) produce a kind of transnationalism right there in situ, in one city. The city endogenizes the transnational in the microstructures of daily life in the city. We see an emergent recognition of globality, often in the form of recognizing the recurrent struggles and inequities in city after city, a recognition enabled by global media and by the visibility of the global in these cities.

Some of this goes beyond the politics of culture we have seen in the last two decades which has been much less embedded in these questions of globalization and globality. Some of it takes the politics of culture to the global scale. The latter case is illustrated by some of the issues concerning gay, lesbian and queer struggles and claim-making. As someone concerned with how actual practices can shape and reshape, destabilize and strengthen formal institutions, I find that the city, especially today's large cities, are strategic spaces where some of these dynamics are made legible, and perhaps also produced. In this regard, urban space becomes productive of these forms

of subjectivity among the disadvantaged and enables them to emerge as a social force. 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. Thus they are also sites where some of the new forms of power can be engaged.

What is being engendered today in terms of political practices and political subjectivity in the global city is quite different from what it might have been in the medieval city of Weber. In the medieval city we see a set of practices that allowed the burghers to set up systems for owning and protecting property and to implement various immunities against despots of all sorts. Today's citizenship practices have to do with the production of 'presence' by those without power, and a politics that claims rights to the city. What the two situations share is the notion that through these practices new forms of citizenship are being constituted and that the city is a key site for this type of political work, and is, indeed, partly constituted through these dynamics (see Sassen, 2002). After the long historical phase that saw the ascendance of the national state and the scaling of key economic dynamics at the national level, the city is once again today a scale for strategic economic and political dynamics

NG A further proposition outlined in <u>Globalization and Its Discontents</u> is that global cities might become 'strategic sites for disempowered actors' (1998:xxi). How might this be the case?

SS It is precisely the coexistence of the sharp concentrations of the powerful and the powerless that gives the global city also a strategic political character. If we consider that large cities concentrate both the leading sectors of global capital and a

growing share of disadvantaged populations - immigrants, many of the disadvantaged women, people of colour generally, and, in the megacities of developing countries, masses of shanty dwellers - then we can see that cities have become a strategic terrain for a whole series of conflicts and contradictions. We can then think of cities also as one of the sites for the contradictions of the globalization of capital. This brings us back to some of the earlier historical formations around questions of citizenship and struggles for entitlements, and the prominent roles played by cities and civil society. The large city of today emerges as a strategic site for these new types of operations. It is one of the nexuses where the formation of new claims materializes and assumes concrete forms. The loss of power at the national level produces the possibility for new forms of power and politics at the subnational level. The national as container of social process and power is cracked. This cracked casing opens up possibilities for a geography of politics that links subnational spaces. Cities are foremost in this new geography. One question this engenders is how and whether we are seeing the formation of new types of politics that localize in these cities.

NG   How does this vision of politics connect to your work on migration and immigration? In Guests and Aliens you discuss the 'de-facto transnationalization of immigration policy making' (1999:156). The purpose de jure of such policy, however, is surely to reinforce the borders of particular nation-states. Indeed, it is interesting that all the data cited in the appendix to your book details the flow of people between different nations. Given this, how does your work on immigration connect to your writings on global cities? For surely global cities are still in some way located within the legal jurisdiction of a nation or a region?

SS   We might start by noting that immigration is one of the localizations of the global. It is a major process through which a new transnational political economy and translocal household strategies are being constituted. It is one largely embedded in major cities insofar as most immigrants, certainly in the developed world, whether in the US, Japan or Western Europe, are concentrated in major cities. It is, in my reading, one of the constitutive processes of globalization today, even though not recognized or represented as such in mainstream accounts of the global economy.

As for the last question you ask here, the relation between my work on global cities and my work on immigration, there are at least two connections. Global cities tend to be crucial destinations for immigrants, even though not always the final destination. Second, global cities are very special types of politico-cultural environments. What we might bring in here, to frame the question of immigrants in the global city, is the significance of the city today as a setting for engendering new types of often informal political practices, and new types of incompletely formalized political subjects. Immigrants, including unauthorized ones, can participate and often are involved in these practices and emerge as such informal subjects. The global city is a partly denationalized space both for global capital and for a broad mix of groups that are either immigrants or minoritized citizens.

NG   Perhaps what is at stake here is the question of state sovereignty. In your book Losing Control? (Sassen, 1996) you talk of the emergence of a 'new geography of power'. What exactly is this 'new geography'? And how does 'power' itself change in nature with the emergence of new forms of global politics?

SS   We are seeing a repositioning of the state in a broader field of power and a reconfiguring of the work of states. This broader field of power is partly constituted through the formation of a new private institutional order linked to the global economy, but also through the growing importance of a variety of other institutional orders, from the new roles of the international network of NGOs to the international human rights regime.

The changed condition of the state is often explained in terms of a decrease in regulatory capacities resulting from some of the basic policies associated with economic globalization: deregulation of a broad range of markets, economic sectors and national borders, and privatisation of public sector firms. But in my reading of the evidence, this new geography of power confronting states entails a far more differentiated process than notions of an overall decline in the significance of the state suggest. And it entails a more transformative process of the state than the notion of a simple loss of power suggests.

I have been working on these issues for the last few years, and it is my new project since the global city work. My argument is not that we are seeing the end of states but, rather, that states are not the only or the most important strategic agents in the new emergent global institutional order. Secondly, states, including dominant states, have undergone profound transformations in the sense that they have begun to function as the institutional home for the operation of powerful dynamics of denationalization of what were once national agendas. This raises a question about what is national in several of the key institutional components of states (central banks, ministries of finance, specialized regulatory agencies) linked to the implementation and regulation of economic globalisation. We can also raise this question in regard to the

growing introduction of international human rights instruments in national legal and judiciary work.

Let me elaborate on this by focusing on economic globalization. One of the marking features of this new (mostly but not exclusively) private institutional order in formation is its capacity to privatize what was heretofore public, and to denationalize what were once national authorities and policy agendas. This capacity to privatize and denationalize entails specific transformations of the national state, more precisely of some of its components. Of particular concern in this regard is that this new institutional order also has normative authority - a new normativity that is not embedded in what has been and to some extent remains the master normativity of modern times, raison d'etat. Rather, this new normativity comes from the world of private power yet installs itself in the public realm, and in so doing contributes to de-nationalize what had historically been constructed as national state agendas.

The structural foundations for my argument lie in the current forms of economic globalization. Economic globalization, in my conception, does not only have to do with the crossing of geographic borders captured in measures of international investment and trade. It also has to do with the relocation of national public governance functions to transnational private arenas and with the development inside national states - through legislative acts, court rulings, executive orders - of the mechanisms necessary to accommodate new types of rights/entitlements for global capital in what are still national territories in principle under the exclusive authority of their states. The accommodation of the interests of foreign firms and investors under these conditions entails a negotiation. The mode of this negotiation in the current phase has tended in a direction that I describe as a de-nationalizing of several highly specialized national institutional orders. Geared toward governing key aspects of the

global economy, both the particular transformations inside the state and the new emergent privatized institutional order are partial and incipient but strategic. Both have the capacity to alter possibly crucial conditions for liberal democracy and for the organizational architecture for international law, its scope and its exclusivity. In this sense, both have the capacity to alter the scope of state authority and the inter-state system, the crucial institutional domains through which the 'rule of law' is implemented.

NG   You have also written about 'electronic space and power' (Sassen, 1998:177-94). You say that we are witnessing the 'spatialization of inequality' in both the 'geography of the communications infrastructure' and in 'the emergent geographies in electronic space itself' (1998:182). Does this mean that electronic space to some extent mirrors the political terrain of physical space? And is digital power simply a mirror image of other non-digital forms?

SS   Yes, digital space is partly inscribed by the larger power dynamics and cultural forms of the institutional orders or larger societies within which it is embedded. But digital power is not simply a mirror image of that world.

Let me elaborate on this. These new types of networks and technologies are deeply imbricated with other dynamics; in some cases the new ITs are merely derivative - a mere instrumentality of these dynamics - and in other cases they are constitutive. Yet, even when partial, digitization is contributing to the re-scaling of a variety of processes with the resulting implications for, among others, territorial boundaries, national regulatory frames and, more generally, the place of interstate relations in the expanding world of cross-border relations.

The widespread practice of confining interpretation to a technological reading of the technical capabilities of the new technologies is very problematic. Such an interpretation neutralizes or renders invisible the material conditions and practices, place-boundedness, and thick social environments within and through which these technologies operate. Another consequence of this type of reading is to assume that a new technology will ipso facto replace all older technologies that are less efficient, or slower, at executing the tasks the new technology is best at. We know that historically this is not the case. Such readings also lead, ironically, to a continuing reliance on analytical categorisations that were developed under other spatial and historical conditions, that is, conditions preceding the current digital era. Thus the tendency is to conceive of the digital as simply and exclusively digital and the non-digital (whether represented in terms of the physical/material or the actual, all problematic though common conceptions) as simply and exclusively that, non-digital. These either/or categorizations filter out alternative conceptualizations, thereby precluding a more complex reading of the intersection and/or interaction of digitization with social, material and place-bound conditions.

We can illustrate this using one of the key effects of these technologies: the enhanced mobility of capital and the growing dematerialization of economic activities. Both mobility and de-materialization are usually seen as mere functions of the new technologies. This understanding erases the fact that it takes multiple material conditions, including infrastructural and legal, to achieve this outcome. Once we recognize that the hypermobility of the instrument, or the de-materialization of the actual piece of real estate, had to be produced, we introduce non-digital variables in our analysis of the digital. One of the implications for resource-poor states or organizations in an international system with enormous diversity in resources is that

simply having access to these technologies does not necessarily alter their position in that system because it takes a wide array of other resources to maximize the economic benefits of these technologies.

Obversely, much of what happens in electronic space is deeply inflected by the cultures, the material practices, the legal systems and the imaginaries that take place outside electronic space. Much of what we think of when it comes to cyberspace would lack any meaning or referent if we were to exclude the world outside cyberspace. Thus, much of the digital composition of financial markets is inflected by the agendas that drive global finance which are not technological per se. Digital space and digitization are not exclusive conditions that stand outside the non-digital. Digital space is embedded in the larger societal, cultural, subjective, economic, imaginary structurations of lived experience and the systems within which we exist and operate.

NG   Finally, are new social forms emerging as life itself becomes increasingly digitalized, or does digitalization spell not only the end to all distinctions between public and private space, but to the very idea of 'the social'?

SS   For this type of analysis we need to go beyond the impacts of these technologies on society. Impacts are only one of several forms of intersection. In the social sciences most of the focus has been on impacts, with the new technologies functioning as the independent variable that variously alters the dependent variable (organization of work, social practices, whatever the social condition under study). But there are other forms of intersection, including the constitution of new domains (for instance, electronic financial markets, large-scale Internet based conversations) and major transformations in old domains (e.g. computer aided design or surgery).

Understanding the place of these new computer centred network technologies and their capabilities from a social science perspective requires avoiding a purely technological interpretation, and recognizing a) the embeddedness and b) the variable outcomes of these technologies for different economic, political, and social orders. They can indeed be constitutive of new social dynamics, but they can also be derivative or merely reproduce older conditions. Further, some of their capabilities are distinct and exclusive to these technologies, and others simply amplify the effects of older technologies.

The issue is not to deny the weight of technology, but rather to develop analytic categories that allow us to examine the complex imbrications of technology and society. We want to go beyond the very common notion that understanding this interaction can be reduced to the question of impacts - more precisely, the impacts of these technologies on the specific domains constructed as objects of study in the various social sciences. These technologies have also shaped whole new socio-technical systems and practices. It also means examining the specific ways in which these technologies are embedded in often very specialized and distinct contexts. And it requires examining the mediating cultures that organize the relation between these technologies and the users or the objectives of their use. These mediating cultures can be highly diverse and specific; for example, when the objective is control and surveillance the practices and dispositions involved are likely to be different from those involved in using electronic markets or engaging in large-scale computer based conversations.

We can start with the recognition that these new technologies and their associated information and communication dynamics are characterized by variability and specificity. That is, they are likely to be present in ways that are uneven and

contradictory across sectors, unfolding in particular contexts, and hence difficult to generalize. The uneven and often contradictory character of these technologies and their associated information and communication structures also signal that these technologies should not be viewed simply as factor endowments. This type of view is present in much of the literature, often implicitly, and presents these technologies as a function of the specifics of a region or an actor - ranging from regions and actors fully endowed or with full access, to those without access. Rather, we can view these technologies also as a function of the operational logics of social forms such as networks and markets. Technologies relating, for instance, to the Internet, satellite surveillance, and data banks can be strongly associated with cooperative policies and practices (e.g., transborder access to IT infrastructures, data, and human capital or greater transparency), or they can be linked to conflict, such as applications of IT in the military, the identity politics of ethnic groups involved in violent conflicts, the contentious politics of activists, and the competition for economic supremacy among states.

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