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# Global cities of the South: Emerging perspectives on growth and inequality

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This paper attempts to reframe debates on the equity implications of spatial, socioeconomic, and political change in global cities in developing countries through a review of recent literature on this topic. It begins by critiquing the view that global cities in developing countries are converging around a model of development similar to that of the prototypical global cities of the United States, Europe, and Japan. It argues that three emerging perspectives hold the key to an analysis that better accounts for local agency and divergent outcomes in such cities: a focus on the diversity of cities' experience with globalization; recognition of the inherently negotiated nature of global impacts on urban outcomes; and a focus on actor-centered perspectives in urban analysis. The combined influence of these ideas amounts to a shift from a focus on global city 'models' to an examination of the interaction between global and local actors and institutions in a particular setting. Building on this literature review, the paper suggests an alternate framework for analyzing the link between global city development and inequality that focuses on three processes of change: the formation of public–private partnerships in urban governance, the spatial implications of the privatization of planning, and the flexibilization of labor. It argues that a focus on these processes has important implications for both theory and practice, as it allows us to understand similarity and difference in urban development, and more importantly, to understand the actors, institutions and interests that are driving change.

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## Introduction

The literature on global and world cities asserts that the spatial, social, and political development of certain cities is profoundly shaped by their function as 'command and control' centers in the global economy. Very large cities in developing countries have increasingly been analyzed under this rubric, and some have argued that we are seeing a convergence of global/world cities around a model of urbanization that originates in the West, and particularly in the United States (Cohen, 1996; Dick and Rimmer,

1998; Cowherd and Heikkila, 2002; Leichencko and Solecki, 2005). This assertion has proven controversial, however, and a growing chorus has argued that the global/world city concept overstates the power of actors and institutions operating at a global level, and underestimates local agency and contingency (Robinson, 2002; Flusty, 2004; Hill, 2004; Roy, 2005). The question at the center of this debate is: How do we understand change in global cities, and how do we account for local contingency and agency in our analysis? Given the pace of urbanization in developing countries, the unprecedented scale of emerging urban regions, and their economic and political importance for their countries, addressing this question would appear to be a central task of contemporary urban theory.

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In this paper, I add to critiques of the idea of convergence, and, through a review of recent studies, identify alternative models for analyzing global city development in developing countries that I believe better account for local agency and variation in outcomes.<sup>1</sup> The problem with prevailing perspectives on convergence, I argue, is that they are too quick to zoom in on observed similarities in urban trends, and gloss over important sources of difference rooted in cultural, geography, and institutional dynamics. In other words, many studies begin with outcomes in a few paradigmatic cases such as New York, London, and Los Angeles, and then look to see whether this global city ‘shoe’ fits in places like Shanghai, Mexico City, or Buenos Aires. In the first section of the paper, I provide a brief review of critiques of the perspective of convergence, and then identify three emerging trends in theorizing global cities that hold the key to analysis that better accounts for local agency: a growing focus on the diversity of cities’ experience with globalization; recognition of the inherently negotiated nature of global impacts on urban outcomes; and a focus on actor-centered perspectives in urban analysis. The combined influence of these ideas amounts to a shift from a focus on global/world city ‘models’ to a more grounded examination of the interaction between global and local actors and institutions in a particular setting. This is an important development for theory as it allows for a much more precise understanding of urban development, and also for policy and planning, because it more accurately identifies the actors who shape and legitimize urban change, and strategies they employ in doing so.

In the final section, the paper draws on these alternative perspectives to reassess one of the central hypotheses of the global cities literature—that certain social inequalities are inherent to the process of global city development. Three specific manifestations of inequality have been a focus of attention:

The first is social inequality, which emerges as social classes in the global city become polarized between a wealthy professional class and an impoverished low-wage service sector class (Mollenkopf and Castells, 1991; Friedmann, 1995; Sassen, 1998).

The second is uneven development, which occurs as social polarization becomes embedded in the spatial form of the city in the form of socioeconomic segregation and unequal access to livable space. This is manifest in the American context in the suburbanization of the wealthy, the phenome-

non of gated communities, and the formation of central city ‘ghettoes’ of the poor (Marcuse, 1997; Marcuse and van Kempen, 2000a).

Finally, political inequality refers to the process by which urban politics comes to be dominated by interest groups who favor growth-oriented policies over the interests of neighborhoods (Logan and Molotch, 1987).

Several recent studies have argued that these outcomes are also apparent in cities like Jakarta, Shanghai, Istanbul, and Mexico City. While certain similarities do indeed exist, I argue that focusing on these similarities distracts us from an examination of important differences, and also from asking questions about what is causing change. Drawing on the literature review presented in the first half of the paper, I endeavor to reframe the global city-inequality hypothesis by employing an actor-centered, historically informed, and contextually grounded approach. I propose alternative conceptualizations of spatial, political and socioeconomic inequality in global cities that avoid the assumption that such cities in developing countries will inevitably follow the trajectory of the global cities of the advanced economies.

### Refocusing the global/world cities lens

Robinson (2002, p. 531) has argued that one of the central contradictions in contemporary urban theory is that cities throughout the world are consistently analyzed with reference to “the (usually unstated) experiences of a relatively small group of (mostly western) cities.” This observation is particularly relevant to the literature on ‘global’ and ‘world’ cities, which has brought attention to the emerging function of certain cities as command points in the world economy and as locations for specialized business firms (Sassen, 2001). A number of empirical studies, notably those of the Globalization and World Cities group (GAWC), have categorized many large developing country cities as global/world cities based on their economic function and the presence of global headquarters and producer service firms. One oft-cited study found that 18 of the 25 largest cities outside of Europe, the United States and Japan ranked somewhere on the roster of world cities (Beaverstock et al., 1999—see Table 1 for a detailed breakdown). These cities tend to achieve global/world city status due to their role in coordinating the integration of their national economies into the global economy, and often lie at the center of large ‘global city-regions’ (Scott et al., 2001). For example, Metro Manila, Bangkok and Jakarta have emerged as ‘gamma’ world cities as they have become the center for national headquarters of transnational corporations and producer service firms that coordinate manufacturing production, and increasingly export-oriented services, in their extended metropolitan regions.

<sup>1</sup> The focus throughout the paper will primarily be on cities in Asia, although examples will be drawn from other regions. This reflects both my own background and the greater prevalence of studies on Asian cities.

Table 1 The world city status of the 25 largest cities in developing countries according to Beaverstock et al.'s 'Roster of World Cities'

City	Population (thousands)	Beaverstock et al. ranking <sup>a</sup>
Mexico City, Mexico	19,013	Beta
Mumbai (Bombay), India	18,336	Evidence
Sao Paulo, Brazil	18,333	Beta
Delhi, India	15,334	Evidence
Calcutta, India	14,299	N/A
Buenos Aires, Argentina	13,349	Gamma
Jakarta, Indonesia	13,194	Gamma
Shanghai, China	12,665	Gamma
Dhaka, Bangladesh	12,560	N/A
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	11,469	Evidence
Cairo, Egypt	11,146	Evidence
Lagos, Nigeria	11,135	N/A
Beijing, China	10,849	Gamma
Metro Manila, Philippines	10,677	Gamma
Karachi, Pakistan	10,032	N/A
Istanbul, Turkey	9760	Gamma
Seoul, South Korea	9592	Beta
Tianjin, China	9346	N/A
Lima, Peru	8180	Evidence
Bogota, Colombia	7594	Evidence
Tehran, Iran	7352	Evidence
Hong Kong, China	7182	Alpha
Chennai (Madras), India	6915	N/A
Bangkok, Thailand	6604	Gamma
Bangalore, India	6532	N/A

Source: Derived from Beaverstock et al. (1999) and UN Habitat (2005).

<sup>a</sup> 'Alpha' city status means that a city is a 'prime' center for producer service firms, while 'beta' and 'gamma' refer, respectively, to 'major' and 'minor' centers for such firms. 'Evidence' means that there is evidence of world city formation. These rankings are based on an empirical evaluation of the office locations of multinational accounting, advertising, banking and law firms.

Focus on these cities' role as 'command and control' sites has led to questions about the implications of this function for their development. A growing set of studies has attempted to apply frameworks developed primarily in the United States, examining social polarization, the development of urban regimes, and emergent consumer landscapes in a wide range of contexts (Dick and Rimmer, 1998; Firman, 1998; Pirez, 2002; Graizborg et al., 2003; Chiu and Lui, 2004; Firman, 2004; Salcedo and Torres, 2004; Wu and Webber, 2004; Keyder, 2005; Leichencko and Solecki, 2005). Many of these studies have argued for a convergence of urban form and politics, although there is considerable variation in the degree to which the causes of convergence are theorized and potential sources of difference are explored.

While the methodology of quantitative studies measuring global/world city functions undertaken by the GAWC and others can and should be questioned, this paper does not deny that cities play such command and control functions, and that this has a profound impact on their spatial, social and political development. Rather, it argues that many studies have privileged similarity with the experience of cities in the West, notably New York and London, and their analysis is consequently skewed. I hypothesize that global/world cities in fact have quite diverse experiences with global integration and may be diverging along some parameters in

their functions in the global economy, and in their development. This study is not the first to argue that the search for a specific and universal set of outcomes may be fruitless. In a seminal comparative study, for example, Marcuse and van Kempen (2000a) propose abandoning the term 'global city' altogether, instead adopting the more general term 'globalizing cities'. Inasmuch as all cities in today's world could be said to be 'globalizing' in some way or another, however, this alternative concedes important observations about the role of certain cities as points of coordination of global production and in the process of production. I argue for keeping the terms global and world city, but thinking more carefully about the implications of these roles for a city's development.

The strength and appeal of the global/world cities literature is that it provides a coherent and theoretically grounded account of the dramatic processes of change that many cities have undergone in the past half century. In this account, the restructuring of the global economy has created a need for new types of cities that coordinate decentralized forms of production by playing host to highly centralized coordinating functions such as corporate headquarters, legal and financial services, and research and development (Friedmann, 1995; Sassen, 2001). The modification of cities to these new roles has a profound effect on social and cultural change, leading specifically to the emergence of a new class of highly

skilled professionals, and the marginalization of the old industrial working class and immigrants, who are relegated to low-wage jobs in the service economy (Mollenkopf and Castells, 1991; Friedmann, 1995; Sassen, 1998). These economic functions also create an impetus for the retrofitting of the built environment of cities, as developers create new types of office, residential and commercial space to meet the demands of business and the new elite (Marcuse, 1997; Marcuse and van Kempen, 2000a). Simultaneously, the politics of redevelopment require a new type of governance, one that is able to identify the shifting demands of capital in an unstable and rapidly changing economic climate and bring capital to the table in pushing a redevelopment agenda (Logan and Molotch, 1987; Fainstein, 1995). The result is increasingly 'entrepreneurial' local governments.

This narrative has largely been formulated with reference to a select number of cities in advanced industrial economies. Yet it is arguably a rather blunt instrument for understanding change, as it tends gloss over obvious sources of diversity rooted in history, culture, institutions, and geography (Abu-Lughod, 1999). Three specific critiques of the application of the global city model are notable. The first questions the narrowness of the focus on "certain stylish sectors of the global economy," notably producer and business services and high technology industries, as the dominant sectors shaping contemporary urban development (Robinson, 2002, p. 532). It questions the dualistic portrayal in the urban studies literature between places that are being transformed by these sectors and others which are presumed to be shaped by exclusion and marginalization. The implicit critique is that, given the varied ways in which cities articulate with global flows of money, goods, people, and ideas, the meaning of globalization is not adequately captured by a focus on the location decision of a small number of multinational producer service firms.

The second critique argues that the global cities literature as a whole is tinged with ethnocentrism as it assumes that all such cities will follow the trajectory of New York and London, when in fact these cities are uniquely shaped by a liberal economic ideology, a consumerist culture, and a polarized social structure (White, 1998; Hill and Kim, 2000; Hill, 2004). In societies where the state is more inclined to intervene in social issues, the hypothesized outcomes for socioeconomic, political, and spatial polarization in cities are not nearly as pronounced—Paris, Tokyo, and Seoul have been used as examples to illustrate this. As White (1998, p. 464) puts it, "states can allow or disallow a city to globalize and dualize."

A third critique argues that much of the global city literature is ahistorical. Davis (2005a) points to a long tradition of studying cities in developing countries in ways that link urban change to integra-

tion into the world economy, most notably dependency theory. She questions the recent rediscovery of such links during the current era of market triumphalism, and argues that the global cities literature has started down the slippery slope of past theories of development, and particularly modernization theory, which view the advanced economies as an end state that developing countries are inexorably advancing towards.

At the core of each of these critiques is the contention that the global city models have failed to explain social change, or to prescribe appropriate paths towards desired change, because they have failed to understand both the contingency of local change on dynamics rooted in history and culture, and the shifting nature of the world economy (Davis, 2005a). In response, proponents have defended the global/world cities concept by arguing that "the gains [of generalizing about global/world cities] have far outweighed the losses" (Taylor et al., 2002, p. 231). While this may be true, there is certainly scope for a more fine-grained analysis. As Yeoh (1999, p. 613) argues, even as we might accept the core premises of the global cities concept:

...the need exists for theorizations of the global city which weave together historical, economic, cultural, sociopolitical and discursive dimensions. This is an urgent task, if both the 'global' and the 'urban' are not simply to be reduced to articles of faith. The fact that the term 'global city' is increasingly accepted as common currency does not necessarily imply theoretical rigour; instead, the metaphorical hubris, with which the term is often invested, signals the need to knuckle down to making real sense of what has been frequently called the 'new sensibility' informing urban futures.

One important step in this direction is an effort to find ways to generalize about the experience of global cities that do not depend on myopia with respect to difference and contingency. The next section reviews some of the growing number of studies that have undertaken this task. It identifies three central themes that emerge from these studies: recognition of the diversity of cities' experience with global economic integration; adoption of a perspective that views urban change as a negotiated rather than a top-down process; and a focus on actors in analyzing the global-urban interface.

#### Recognizing diversity in forms of integration into the global economy

Robinson's (2002, p. 535) important critique of the global city model argues that the exclusive focus on command and control functions of cities results in a perspective in which "millions of people and hundreds of cities are dropped off the map...to service one particular and very restricted view of the significance or (ir)relevance to certain sections of the global economy." There are three main reasons

that the focus on finance and producer services is inadequate to explain the diversity of outcomes for cities in developing countries. First, because they function as ‘command and control centers’ of a much lower order than New York or London, multinational corporate headquarters and producer service firms shape their development to a far lesser degree. Roberts (2005), for example, finds that producer services aimed at organizing production for global markets simply do not constitute as significant a factor in the urban economies of Latin American cities as is predicted by the global cities literature. Second, as Chakravorty (2000) argues, globalization has accompanied the industrialization of many cities in developing countries, and they are consequently unlikely to exhibit the same spatial and social characteristics of ‘post-Fordist’ cities, such as the decay of old central city industrial districts. Finally, while the global cities literature focuses on cities’ role in coordinating manufacturing production for the global market, cities in fact export an increasingly diverse array of products and services, each of which has their own spatial logic. Some examples are listed below:

Labor has become an increasingly important export commodity ‘produced’ by global/world cities, and remittances to developing countries from overseas workers totaled an estimated \$125 billion in 2004 (Maimbo and Ratha, 2005). In many countries this has far outstripped other sources of foreign investment—in the Philippines, for example, remittances amounted to seven times the amount of foreign direct investment in recent years (Maimbo and Ratha, 2005). Popular perceptions aside, in many countries migrants are disproportionately urban and educated, and the labor export industry is often highly concentrated in large cities (Tyner, 2000). Researchers have only recently begun to examine the implications of this phenomenon for urban development, but in Metro Manila, for example, ‘overseas contract workers’ and their families have supported a boom in residential and commercial real estate at a time when economic growth in other areas has stagnated (Burgess and Haksar, 2005).

Tourism is the second largest export sector in the world, and the construction of tourism enclaves is often an important impetus for urban redevelopment (Fainstein and Judd, 1999). This is certainly true in most large Asian cities, which have experienced dramatic increases in tourist arrivals, and which tend to view the promotion of urban tourism as part of a larger agenda of place-marketing. In their efforts to construct a positive image and foster tourist consumption, public and private sector actors may create enclaves that exacerbate socio-

economic segregation. However, urban tourism also provides broad-based economic opportunity as the tourism economy may support a large number of small enterprises such as guest houses, shops, restaurants and craft production (Mullins, 1999). The growth of business process outsourcing (BPO) is having a profound impact on urban development and real estate markets in a growing number of cities, with some of the more notable examples being Bangalore, Guadalajara, and the planned high-tech city of Cyberjaya outside of Kuala Lumpur (Bunnell, 2002; Audirac, 2003). This form of development has significant implications for urban development, as it fosters the creation of a new class of highly educated worker, and also creates a powerful imperative for new forms of real estate development and infrastructure.

The development of cities may be shaped by other global forces, including integration into markets for natural resource extraction, through the global criminal economy, through foreign aid, and through international institutions and non-governmental organizations (Simon, 1995; Shatkin, 1998; Robinson, 2002; Taylor, 2005).

The recognition of this diversity has several implications for our understanding of equity issues in global cities. While the distribution of the costs and benefits of these different forms of integration varies, each has created economic opportunity for a large segment of urban populations. Nonetheless, these various forms of integration all carry with them the instability and intense competition for investment that characterize economic development in a globalizing world, and each subsequently brings with it the potential for new forms of economic insecurity. Hence the equity implications of these new economic activities are not immediately apparent, and are contingent on the economic activity in question, and the context of the society.

#### Historicizing analysis and understanding urban change as a negotiated process

Studies rooted in a variety of disciplinary backgrounds have called for a grounding of global and world city studies in an understanding of local history, and a view of urban change not as imposed from above but rather as an inherently negotiated process (Abu-Lughod, 1999; AlSayyad, 2001a; Kusno, 2000; Nasr and Volait, 2003b; Hill, 2004). They have employed a range of theoretical frameworks to do so, including: one that examines structures of global political and economic power as a ‘nested hierarchy’ in which “parts and wholes are not subordinated to one another,” and cities therefore “both facilitate the globalization process and follow their own relatively autonomous trajectories” (Hill, 2004, p. 374);

examination of the role of ‘planning culture’ in shaping planning outcomes (Sanyaleed, 2005); and an examination of cultural hybridity and the development of a ‘third space’ between the local and the global as people in localities reshape cities according to local social, cultural and political imperatives (Kusno, 2000; AlSayyad, 2001a). The common thread in these frameworks is an effort to restore agency to urban analysis, and refute perspectives that depict local residents as “impotent, passive and guileless...spectators observing physical and spatial [as well as social and political] changes that they neither control nor understand” (Nasr and Volait, 2003b).

This emphasis on negotiation between the local and the global has been applied most prominently to studies of the built environment (AlSayyad, 2001a; Nasr and Volait, 2003a; King, 2004). In one recent example, Kusno (2000) demonstrates how the Suharto regime in Indonesia sought to rearticulate both local and colonial/global references in architecture and urban design in Jakarta to create a national memory that suited its own agenda of export-oriented growth and authoritarian politics. In the realm of urban politics, studies have contested the tendency to deny local agency both in critical studies, and in a prescriptive literature emerging from the World Bank and other organizations, which argues that the demands of globalization merit the empowerment of private sector interests and a modest and deferential role for local government (World Bank, 2000). In Asia specifically, studies have argued that ‘developmental’ states are capable of creating growth and moderating socioeconomic inequity where there is political accountability, and that such accountability emerges where there exist widely held cultural norms concerning state–society relations and close ties between the state and civil society (Douglass, 1994; Douglass, 1995; Hill and Kim, 2000). Two notable examples are Hong Kong and Singapore, which Castells et al. (1990, p. 331) argue have managed to achieve steady economic growth in part by building social cohesion through interventions in the realm of collective consumption, most importantly through the development of public housing. They attribute their ability to do so to historical conditions that led to the emergence of strong states in these two city-states.

Two observations emerge from these perspectives. First, it is apparent that ‘models’ of urban form and politics that are transmitted by actors operating at a global level inevitably go through a process of adaptation and reinterpretation, and sometimes rejection, as they meet local cultures, institutional dynamics, and social formations. Second, these models may go through a process of transformation over time as local actors gradually reshape them to their own needs. History provides many examples of such transformation. For example, Clarence Perry’s neighborhood unit concept has profoundly influ-

enced urban planning in many parts of the world, including India. Yet, in the Indian context, extra-legal modifications of neighborhood layouts over time have led to such a dramatic physical transformation that the influence of this model is no longer apparent in most cities today (Vidyarthi, 2005).<sup>2</sup> Similarly, although political institutions in many postcolonial societies are often modeled on those of the metropole, and have been influenced in many contexts by the diffusion of international ‘models’, outcomes for the distribution of power in society can vary quite dramatically. It is necessary therefore to avoid premature conclusions about the convergence of urban form or politics, and shift our focus to these processes of adaptation, if we are to understand the impacts of globalization.

#### Grounding our understanding of globalization in actors and actions

Closely related to the emerging perspective of hybridity is the employment of actor-centered frameworks of urban analysis, which, it has been argued, provide a more concrete understanding of how global forces shape and are shaped by local forces, and how local contingency and agency play a role in urban development (Yeoh, 1999; Olds, 2001; Markusen, 2004). An actor-centered perspective focuses on the social power actors employ and the interests and ideologies they pursue. It views local actors as active participants both responding to pressures in their external environment and trying to shape them to their own ends. This is therefore a view in which “(s)tructure and agency are not contrasted, but complexified and integrated” (Nasr and Volait, 2003b). It is also one that stresses a need for deep historical analysis as a basis for understanding the interests of actors and their basis of power in institutions, social networks, and cultural beliefs.

In general, attention has focused on how actors operating at a global level have shaped urban development, including corporate actors (Beaverstock et al., 1999; Grant and Nijman, 2002), principals at international architectural firms (Olds, 2001; Marshall, 2003; Sklair, 2005), and representatives of international aid and lending organizations (Burgess et al., 1997). However, local actors, or actors whose interests straddle geographic scales, play a key role in shaping outcomes as well. These include local developers and realtors (Dick and Rimmer, 1998; Haila, 2000; Sajor, 2003; Sajor, 2005), and an emerging consumer classes (Davis ed, 2000). Perhaps most importantly, local and national governments play a key role in providing the legal, policy and regulatory framework in which development occurs (Firman, 1997; Kelly, 2001). There is also a growing realization that the interests and preferences of these actors cannot be understood with reference to the transmission

<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to Sanjeev Vidyarthi for this observation.

Table 2 Reinterpreting the global/world city-social inequality link

	Socioeconomic inequality	Political inequality	Uneven development
Diversity in the global city experience	Labor relations and economic opportunity vary by the degree of global economic integration a city is experiencing and the types of products it produces. Yet global economic integration creates common pressures to develop flexible and competitive labor regimes, creating an inherent tension between growth and equity.	While governments in market economies face a common context of incentives to engage new actors in city-building, who these actors are and the political strategies they pursue are in part a function of the mode of insertion into the global economy (e.g. through manufacturing, business services, tourism, or other export products).	Different modes of incorporation into the global economy have different spatial implications, e.g. different degree of centralization and decentralization, and different impacts on real estate markets.
Historical perspective and hybridity	Efforts to make cities competitive in the global economy play out in the forging of capital-labor relations and local and national state interventions in these relations that reflect historically specific state-society relations.	The political forms that emerge—the form of public-private partnership and the relative strength of the public and private actors involved—is shaped by the historical state-community relations and cultural norms.	Spatial development also reflects the preferences of urban residents, which are shaped in part by global influences, but also importantly by historical spatial patterns, household relations, ethnic, class and other differences, and other social and cultural variables.
Actor-centered perspective	The relative inclusion and exclusion of actors from the benefits of globalization's economic impacts is in part a function of social group relations based on caste, race, ethnicity, property ownership, and other variables.	Fundamental to understanding urban politics is an understanding of who the actors involved in global city-building are and what their basis of social power is.	Spatial change in part reflects demands for new types of space by both firms and households, which in turn reflects changes in social relations in society at large. On the supply side, it also reflects new powers and imperatives to foster 'global city' development among developers and government.

of ideas from the West alone, but rather reflect deep rooted cultural norms and social patterns. Yet local actors also confront incentives and imperatives in the context of global economic and political change. It is through the interaction of these actors and interests that contemporary 'hybridity' is constituted.

#### Towards a more flexible framework

What emerges from these perspectives is a view of global city development that rejects a uniform model of change and instead focuses on the unique nature of the interaction between global and local actors and institutions in a particular setting. Actors in cities throughout the world are presented with certain opportunities and threats with globalization—opportunities to realize material enrichment and new forms of cultural and political expression through new forms of production and consumption, and threats to existing economic arrangements, political institutions, and ways of life from both external and internal actors who have an interest in global change. The preferences of actors in shaping urban development are informed by their attraction to or repulsion from these new ideas, images, and institutions. The power that they bring to the table in influencing urban development is shaped by historically formed social relationships, institutional frameworks, cultural paradigms, and spatial patterns. The nature of the opportunities and threats posed by globalization also shift with changes in the global economy (for example the recent shift towards the offshoring of services), and these shifts are reflected in changes in urban development.

Table 2 brings this discussion back to the question of the link between global city development and inequity by sketching out the implications of these three emerging perspectives for the three central hypotheses of global city-social inequality theory discussed earlier. It is worth noting that the framework that emerges from this table is fruitful for examining variation in the experience of global cities in both developed and developing countries. Hence, while the specific focus of this paper is to question the common view of convergence of developing countries with the Western experience, this paper also finds common ground with those who question more generally the usefulness of broad generalizations about the equity outcomes of global city development. In the next section, I will build on critiques of the idea of convergence and the alternative frameworks presented above by attempting to reframe the link between global city development and inequality in global cities of developing countries.

#### Understanding change and inequality in the global cities of developing countries

In some respects, cross-national similarities in patterns of urban development are quite apparent. Pub-

lic and private sector actors seek to build the tallest building, the sleekest rail system, or the most impressive airport, in an effort to draw attention to their global linkages. Wealthy elites in many non-Western countries seek housing that is explicitly modeled on what are perceived as European and American styles. Cities throughout the world have experienced trends towards political and fiscal decentralization that have given them new powers. Such surface similarities, however, mask important differences. This section attempts to reframe discussions of the link between global city development and inequality in a manner that recognizes urban change as a negotiated process, allows for the possibility of divergence in urban outcomes, and explores the role of both global and local actors in shaping equity outcomes. I argue that there is a need to move beyond frameworks developed with reference to the West—specifically, the hypothesized trends towards political inequality/growth regime politics, socioeconomic inequality/polarization, and uneven development/segregation and spatial mismatch—to adopt frameworks that are more adaptable to diverse circumstances. Based on a review of recent studies, I propose three alternative ways of conceptualizing political, spatial and social development that are intended as a first step towards a broadly comparative framework for explaining inequity in global cities. These are: the formation of public-private partnerships in urban politics and planning; the spatial implications of the privatization of planning; and the flexibilization of labor.

#### The formation of public-private partnerships in urban politics and planning

One process of change that is perhaps universal to the experience of global cities is the increasing role of for-profit private sector actors in urban politics, and the growing tendency for local governments to seek partnership with these actors in pursuing development goals. This is evident in the formation of public-private partnerships in urban infrastructure provision, the growing role of the private sector in building and managing urban environments, and increased participation by the private sector in urban policy and planning decisions. This section will explore the applicability of concepts in vogue in the United States and Europe that attempt to explain this phenomenon, notably regime theory and growth regime politics, to cities of developing countries. It argues that these frameworks hold a great deal of promise, but that profound variation in the relationship between the state, the for-profit private sector, and civil society belies any simplistic depiction of the convergence of urban politics.

Fainstein (1995, p. 35) argues that the question of the influence of social power and the "issue of whether urban politics can affect distributional



outcomes” lies at the core of any discussion of urban planning and policy. The literature on planning in developing countries, however, retains a strong focus on the planning process, largely disregarding the role of politics and power. A large prescriptive literature on urban politics, such as that coming out of the World Bank, assumes a pluralist conception which posits that all social groups have sources of power that they can use to achieve their ends. The predominant paradigm is the ‘enablement model’, which posits that a decentralized, democratic, and market oriented form of governance will not only provide for economic efficiency and global competitiveness, but will also provide venues for popular influence on government through non-governmental and community organizations (World Bank, 2000). Critical studies of global/world cities in developing countries also often assume little agency for local government in the face of economic and political pressures from global economic actors, local elites, and national governments bent on growth.

Recently, however, a handful of studies have endeavored to apply regime theory, the dominant framework for analyzing urban politics in the United States, to a variety of developing country contexts (Zhang, 2002; Xu and Yeh, 2005). Regime theory starts with the assumption that, in cities marked by competition to capture footloose capital, “leaders must develop policies in concert with those who have access to that capital” (Fainstein, 1995). An urban regime has been defined by Stone (1989, p. 6) as “the informal arrangements by which public bodies and private interests function together in order to be able to make and carry out governing decisions.” Yet regime theory avoids economic determinism by emphasizing that government does enjoy some autonomy from corporate interests through the space created by democratic politics, and that urban politics is therefore defined by:

...the creation of preferences and the translation of those choices into policy. There is a sophisticated recognition that policy is not simply the imposition of preferences by an economic elite but rather the shaping of public opinion by upper class groups. Thus, ideology or public values become crucial to an understanding of what government of the third sector can or should do (Fainstein, 1995, p. 36).

Regime theory thus disavows a view of urban planners and policy-makers as disinterested technocrats, instead seeing them as political actors who can either promote or contest the dominance of capital by shaping the discourses that surround the implementation growth-oriented politics.

Is regime theory applicable to the context of global cities in developing countries? Stone (1993, p. 2) argues that there are two conditions that regime theory takes as given:

One is a set of government institutions controlled to an important degree by popularly elected officials chosen in open and competitive contests and operating within a larger context of the free expression of competing ideas and claims. Second, the economy of a liberal order is guided mainly but not exclusively, by privately controlled investment decisions. A regime, whether national or local, is a set of arrangements by which this division of labor is bridged.

These conditions exist to some degree in the context of most developing countries, where the vestiges of authoritarian regimes are gradually being cast off in favor of electoral political systems and market-oriented political orders. The emergence of the export-oriented industrialization model of development has coincided with the development in many parts of the world of decentralized, democratic governance frameworks. In Asia, for example, Jakarta, Taipei, Bangkok, Seoul, Kuala Lumpur, and Metro Manila all have elected local leaders, are engaged in intense competition for global investment, have varying degrees of freedom of the press, and have increasingly embraced the orthodoxy of the public-private partnership. Each has a contingent of non-governmental organizations representing diverse interests. Many cities have experienced recent reforms for decentralization that are premised at least in part on a belief that local government will be able to bring a broader set of resources and interests into the urban development process, thus encouraging growth (Burki et al., 1999).

Yet regimes elsewhere will not necessarily look anything like the quintessential American urban regime. Regime theory as it has developed in the United States reflects a distinct context of racial politics, post-Fordist urban development, liberalism, and localism. Countries also vary in the degree to which electoral contests actually matter. Severe restrictions on political mobilization outside of the ruling party exist in some contexts (such as Singapore, Malaysia, and China), while vote-buying and patronage politics influences outcomes in others (such as Thailand and the Philippines). There is also variation in the degree of freedom of expression in the press and other forums. Nonetheless, the time seems ripe in many cities to raise the questions that are central to the regime theory framework, while remaining alert to contextual differences (Zhang, 2002).

Two particularly important differences warrant special attention. The first is the historical and contemporary relationship between the central and local state. In many countries this relationship has been a significant source of tension, as colonial and post-colonial states have attempted to extend their control over peripheral regions in efforts at nation-building. Centralization further intensified in many countries during the cold war as a consequence of anti-insurgency efforts. Contemporary trends towards decentralization have reflected intense struggle over

local power by a variety of actors, including entrenched national bureaucracies, local elites, social movements, and others. The outcomes of these struggles, and the extent of control gained by these actors, have varied widely between different countries and cities. The second source of variation is the relative power and legitimacy of government, which has also been profoundly shaped both by post-colonial experiences with nation-building and central rule, and experiences with global economic integration.

Understanding these two sources of variation is necessary to interpret change in a particular setting. For example, analysts have attributed the fragmented nature of urban governance in Metro Manila, and the consequent capture of local government by economic interests, to the power of local elites and weakness of central government, both of which have deep roots in the Philippines' colonial and post-colonial history (Kelly, 2000). In China, by way of contrast, national governments have exerted a great deal of influence in providing incentives and autonomy to appointed local officials to encourage them to pursue globalization-oriented urban redevelopment (Xu and Yeh, 2005). Here, the lack of accountability of local governments both to capital and communities paradoxically leads to the potential for overinvestment and economic instability.

Analyses of this sort requires an understanding of historical and social context that is taken for granted in studies of urban regimes in the United States. If modified to account for local context—differences in state power and legitimacy, central-local relations, social relations based on gender, ethnicity, caste, landownership, and other variables—regime analysis captures better than any other conceptualization the ways that local governments seek to form partnerships for political change, and the constraints and opportunities they confront in doing so. It may therefore help to explain the roots of contemporary political inequities both in history and in contemporary forms of integration into the global economy, and reveal the ideological constructs that perpetuate these inequalities. At the same time, regime analysis retains a focus on the power of the state, and its potential as an agent for more redistributive policy and planning outcomes. It therefore enables us to ask policy and planning-relevant questions about socio-economic and political change in the global era: What political and economic interests do urban development outcomes represent? What alternative sources of power exist? And, how might planners employ these to foster more equitable outcomes?

#### The spatial implications of the privatization of planning

In globalizing cities, urban space is shaped by the interaction between global networks and local actors and institutions. Inasmuch as local cultures

and political economies differ, spatial outcomes will differ as well. Yet recent literature has focused on the idea of global convergence of urban form. Inherent in many such analyses are two assumptions: that 'Western' urban form is directly imposed on developing countries through the hegemony of Western planning ideas, and that the desires of emergent elites in developing countries with respect to spatial development simply mimic those of the Western middle class. I argue, however, that cultural differences and local political and institutional dynamics render these assumptions untenable. A more powerful mode of analysis focuses on the shared interests of local and national governments, and both local and multinational investors, to maximize the profitability and global economic competitiveness of urban spaces. This convergence of interests has resulted in some contexts in what I refer to as the privatization of planning, a process that results in different spatial outcomes in different contexts.

The idea of the privatization of planning goes beyond the simple assertion that the private sector influences urban development. Friedmann has defined planning as purposeful social action in the shaping of place, and privatization has been defined as an increase in private sector ownership of or power over activities or assets that had previously been in government hands (Friedmann, 1987; Savas, 2000). Hence I define the privatization of planning as the transfer of responsibility for and power over the visioning of urban futures and the exercise of social action for urban change from public to private sector actors. This shift has been predicated on a view that the for-profit private sector is more qualified and better equipped to restructure urban space in order to realize the goal of economic advancement through global economic integration. This stems in part from a perception that the public sector has failed to achieve these goals due to its proclivity for corruption, inefficiency and authoritarianism, and in part from a belief that the corporate sector is better attuned to the imperatives of economic growth and the desires of multinational corporations and an emerging consumer classes.

The privatization of planning is a function of several common constraints and incentives that governments face in the global era:

The development of an export-oriented economy has given rise to powerful new political actors, most notably foreign and domestic corporate interests and a consumer class, who demand new types of consumer, residential, office and industrial space that are more economically efficient and consumer-oriented. In Asia in particular, the devaluation of the Japanese Yen following the Plaza Accords resulted in a wave of Japanese offshoring

from the mid-1980s on that set in motion fundamental changes in the political economy of urban development (Bello, 2004).

At the same time, governments in many parts of the world find themselves hemmed in by pressures for fiscal austerity and therefore incapable of responding to imperative to retrofit cities to the needs of capital and consumers. Governments in many parts of the world also face crises of legitimacy stemming from legacies of authoritarianism. In this context, privatization has become part of new models of governance advocated by international aid and lending organizations, which emphasize scaled back government, local control and public-private partnership (Burgess et al., 1997; Mirafteb, 2004a).

These changes have accompanied the emergence of a number of multinational architectural and planning consulting firms, and growth in domestic real estate development industries. The latter has been most notable in Asia. In Southeast Asia in particular, developers, often of Chinese heritage, have tapped into abundant sources of equity from international capital markets and networks of overseas Chinese (Haila, 2000; Olds, 2001; Sajor, 2003). It is also evident, however, in cities in Latin America and elsewhere (Pirez, 2002).

In Asia, this process of privatization has been manifest most clearly in the development in many cities of private sector built integrated megaprojects including residential, commercial and industrial space. Notable examples include Lippo Karawaci near Jakarta, Muang Thong Thani near Bangkok, and Fort Bonifacio Global City in Metro Manila, which when initiated had projected populations upon completion of between 250,000 and one million (Dick and Rimmer, 1998; Hogan and Houston, 2002; Marshall, 2003).<sup>3</sup> These megaprojects are linked up by premium transportation infrastructure, including light rail lines and toll roads, that is also usually developed by the private sector, and sometimes by the developers of the megaprojects themselves (World Bank, 2004). Facilitated by government assistance in land acquisition, subsidies for transportation infrastructure, and political support, these projects represent efforts to transfer responsibility for the visioning of urban futures and the definition of social goals to the private sector. In some cities a few large developers have begun to develop 'portfolios' of geographically diversified megaprojects that are reshaping urban landscapes.

A perspective of the privatization of planning helps to explain some cross-national similarities in

changes to urban form while revealing the limitations of comparisons with the racially polarized landscapes of many American cities, defined as they are by blighted inner cities surrounded by anti-urban sprawl. It is apparent that, even as urban regions are being reshaped by new types of residential development and spatial expansion, the rejection of urbanity itself that characterizes urban development in many American cities has yet to fully take hold in most other parts of the world, and may never do so. In many megacities, central city housing markets continue to be strong, and integrated megaprojects are often quite dense and urban in character. Indeed, some have argued that the reliance of the wealthy in many societies on services provided by a relatively immobile urban poor precludes the type of spatial polarization seen in the United States (Chakravorty, 2000). One study in Chile finds that the development of gated communities has actually decreased spatial separation of the wealthy and the poor as it allowed the wealthy to live close to poor communities while still feeling secure, and that this proximity has had a positive impact on interclass relations (Salcedo and Torres, 2004). Regardless of whether this dynamic can be found elsewhere, the point to be made is that local context and agency are critical to an understanding of spatial change.

Importantly, the perspective of the privatization of planning shifts the focus from a supposedly uniform process of adoption of 'Western' cultural and social mores to policy-relevant questions about how the goals of urban development should be defined, who should define them, and the potential roles of public and private sector interests in bringing about desired change. Why has the transfer of responsibility for city-building been shifted to the private sector, and what is the public rationale for doing so? What roles do public and private actors play in redevelopment and infrastructure projects? What levers of influence does the public sector continue to employ, and to what ends does it use this influence? Whose interests are reflected in resulting changes to urban form, whose are disregarded, and why?

These questions point to the important observation that any process of privatization must involve active government facilitation through the restructuring of urban bureaucracies and relaxation of public influence over urban development. The potential remains for the public sector to influence the direction of change even as the private sector plays a growing role by: playing a role in defining the objectives of privately developed plans; mandating desired outcomes like the development of affordable housing or public participation; and shaping the public discourse around private development projects. Government can also exercise control over regional development through land use regulation and other forms of intervention in land markets, and through transportation planning. There is considerable variation in the degree to which they do so.

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted, however, that current populations are much smaller.

In sum, the idea of the privatization of planning departs from a focus on convergence in that it leaves the door open to government and community-based agency. It leads to practical and important questions about the exercise of urban governance for equity objectives.

### The flexibilization of labor

Finally, this paper suggests the concept of the flexibilization of labor as an alternative to the perspectives of socioeconomic dualization and polarization. There are at least two reasons that the perspective on dualization and social polarization does not adequately capture the social outcomes of globalization in all contexts. First, as [Chakravorty \(2000\)](#) notes, the deindustrialization that has bred the decline of the middle class in the United States and other post-Fordist societies implies its opposite in developing countries, many of which have seen a growth in manufacturing production. The benefits of this deconcentration of industrial production have spread unevenly, with Latin America and Africa experiencing severe economic dislocation and less benefit than Asia, but a simple focus on polarization denies the significant amount of economic opportunity that this process has afforded. Second, the idea of polarization, if defined based on material living conditions alone, does not capture the complex relationship between economic well being and social status that has emerged with the globalization of many urban economies. It is apparent that the rhetoric surrounding global city development has shaped popular perceptions of social class in important ways ([Machimura, 1998](#); [Kelly, 2000](#)). An excellent example of this is [Auyero's \(1999\)](#) poignant description of the paradoxical situation of residents of one Argentine slum, who have experienced gradual improvement in material living conditions even as their employment prospects have become increasingly tenuous and they have experienced intense discrimination due to public perceptions of their community as economically redundant and socially dysfunctional.

The concept of the flexibilization of labor attempts to capture the coexistence of opportunity and insecurity that characterizes labor markets in the globalizing cities of developing countries. Corporations face increasing competition even as they are able to tap into a global labor pool, and they have reacted by seeking labor that is flexible, trainable, adaptable, and cheap. As labor markets and legal frameworks have responded to this imperative, practices such as outsourcing, employment of home-based workers, and contract work have become commonplace in the corporate sector, and increasingly the public sector as well.

An important outcome of this process has been the employment of a range of formal and informal institutions by local and national governments, and firms, to discipline labor. These include the use by firms of

contract and short-term labor, and the placement of age and gender restrictions on employment, and the use by local government of both formal powers and informal social relations to reduce the power of unions and foster the development of a compliant labor force. Research has only begun to examine the development of what [Kelly \(2001\)](#) has referred to as local labor control regimes. One exception is his study of labor market processes in export processing zones in the Philippines, which attempts to overcome simplistic depictions of "straightforward exploitation of abundant, cheap, and place-bound labor by space-controlling international capital" ([Kelly, 2001, p. 2](#)). His analysis reveals the ways in which labor relations are shaped by norms governing local social relations that are deeply rooted in the historical development of the locality. Specifically, it points to the role of gender relations in Philippine households, and to the role of local political bosses in the Philippine political economy, in shaping labor markets and working conditions.

Another aspect of this process of flexibilization is the role of the informal economy. In order to be useful, the concepts of informalization and the informal economy must first be stripped of their ideological overtones. The informal economy represents neither heroic entrepreneurship, as represented in the work of [DeSoto](#) and others, nor uniform oppression, as often represented by some on the political left ([Roy, 2005](#)). The informal also does not constitute a separate 'sector', cut off from the rest of the economy and mired in backwardness. Rather, the informal economy should be viewed as a set of economic activities that are "unregulated by the institutions of society, in a legal and social environment in which similar activities are regulated," and that constitute an increasingly important part of the flexible and adaptable labor markets that drive the global economy ([Castells and Portes, 1989: 12](#)). The informal economy has persisted with globalization, and grown in many contexts, reflecting the strategies of economic actors and state institutions as they have sought new modes of economic organization that are conducive to export-oriented production. [Castells and Portes \(1989\)](#) refer to several specific causes of informalization linked to globalization, including: growing anti-union sentiment both among firms and, to a lesser degree, elements of the working class, as a reaction to economic crisis and new opportunities in the global economy; reaction by firms and workers against state regulation of the economy for the same reasons; and the emergence of a particular form of industrialization in many developing countries that relies on less regulated labor markets.

A third aspect of flexibilization is the use of legal and illegal immigrant labor ([Douglass, 2001](#)). While this has been discussed extensively in the context of global/world cities in the advanced economies, immigrant labor has come to play a significant role

in labor markets in many cities, including Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Taipei, and many others.

As is apparent from the preceding discussion, the concept of the flexibilization of labor is useful in analyzing change in most parts of the world, including the developed economies, many of which are witnessing increases in immigration, the rise of contract labor, and informal economic activities. What a focus on the flexibilization of labor allows us to do, however, is to focus on the distinct contexts in which these processes play out rather than an assumed set of socioeconomic outcomes modeled primarily on the American experience. This framework draws attention on the actors involved in urban economic development, including state agencies, firms, and workers, and the social institutions and external pressures that shape their behavior. It also incorporates an understanding of the distributional impacts of changes in labor markets, which may reflect the influence of gender, age, race, ethnicity and other variables on social behavior (Mirafteb, 2004b). It reveals specific issues related to labor rights, discrimination based on gender and other forms of difference, and the lack of representation of labor and community interests in local governance, that provide more detail to a political agenda for equity in urban development.

## Conclusion

This paper has argued that the growing focus on convergence of political, social and spatial outcomes serves to distract us from a more careful analysis of globalization and urban change in developing countries. It has reviewed a number of emerging perspectives in the global/world cities literature that reveal the highly divergent experiences that cities have had with global economic integration, the ways in which the local interacts with and reshapes global influences, and the importance of understanding actors and interests in an analysis of urban change. Finally, it has made a tentative attempt to reframe the hypothesized link between global city development and social, political and spatial inequality in a way that accounts for difference and local agency.

While the paper has focused specifically on critiquing the strong tendency of studies of global cities in developing countries to assume that their development is following a similar trajectory to those of the West, it has also found common ground with critiques of generalizations about global city development more generally. Indeed the framework developed here might be useful to rethinking global city development in the context of developed country cities as well. It would seem that much of the global cities literature is caught in a rut, repeatedly revisiting the core debates that emerged from the remarkable set of observations regarding the impacts of globalization on a select set of cities made

by Sassen and others during the 1980s and early 1990s. The terms of debate appear to have hardened somewhat too early and with reference to too little data. Indeed, it would seem that local responses, and the process of globalization itself, have proven too dynamic and complex to be understood with reference to a small set of 'models' of change (e.g. segregation, polarization, and American style growth regime politics).

Underlying this discussion has been a concern that a focus on convergence provides a less detailed and precise analysis that causes us to miss critical issues that face global cities. Such cities face a number of pressing challenges—intense economic competition, a global atmosphere of market triumphalism, pressures for fiscal austerity, and calls from international agencies for a scaled back role for government in city-building. A critical task of urban theory is to understand how actors in cities respond to these challenges, and who benefits from the outcomes. How have new economic and political pressures shaped national and local government efforts to bring other actors into policy and planning? And, what are the distributional outcomes of the resulting changes in governance? This paper has argued that the answers to these questions differ significantly in different contexts, and that there is much to be learned from these differences for both theory and for the practice of urban planning and policy. This process of learning, however, requires that we move beyond generalizations based on the experience of global cities in the West and adopt frameworks that embrace complexity and difference, and that contribute to cross-national comparison and learning.

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