



**Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China, March 2010 (Elvin Wyly).** Hong Kong is one of the world's most highly urbanized societies, and one of the wealthiest. Yet urbanization does not always deliver prosperity: more than a billion of the world's urban people live in severe poverty in the slums of fast-growing "megacities."

## **Contemporary Urbanization and Global City-Systems**

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### **A World of Urbanization**

*...In Wealthy Countries (the Global North)*

The history of truly urbanized society is quite recent. Although there were many fairly large cities throughout the world by the end of the eighteenth century,<sup>1</sup> "It was not until about the turn of the twentieth century that the first urbanized society came into existence. At that time, Great

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<sup>1</sup> In 1800, twenty-nine of the world's 100 largest cities were in Europe, while sixty-four were in Asia; sixty-five of the one hundred largest worldwide exceeded populations of 100,000. Peking, China (Beijing), was the only millionaire city in 1800, but fifty years later it was joined by London and Paris. By 1900 there were sixteen millionaire cities, most of them in Western Europe and North America. United Nations (1996). *An Urbanizing World: Global Report on Human Settlements, 1996*. Oxford: Oxford University Press / United Nations Centre for Human Settlements.

Britain became the first society in history whose urban population exceeded its rural population.”<sup>2</sup> This is a key distinction: *urbanization* refers to the process by which a rising share of a society’s population lives in cities. Growing cities are not necessarily a sign of urbanization, and indeed there have been many periods when city growth was simply a product of overall population growth.

But the century or so since 1900 has been a dramatic era of urbanization: “industrialized nations in Europe and North America have passed through a recognizable pattern of urbanization: an S-shaped curve, beginning slowly, moving sharply upward, then leveling off. In rural preindustrial societies, urbanization proceeds slowly. Then, if the society experiences an industrial revolution, it shoots up. At the most advanced stages, it tends to level off.”<sup>3</sup> This process -- the **urban transition** -- suggests an important linkage between cities, development, and improvements in living standards.

*Urbanization is the increase in the share of a society’s population that lives in cities.*

*The urban transition: an S-shaped growth curve showing the urbanization process over time.*

Overall, the urban share of population for the world’s more developed regions is more than 75 percent, and is projected to increase at a comparatively modest rate over the coming years, to approximately 84 percent by 2025.<sup>4</sup>

*...In Poor Countries (the Global South)*

A wide variety of terms has been used to characterize and categorize the world’s poorer societies: a few of these terms include emerging, developing, underdeveloped, less developed, backward, modernizing, the Third World, and the Global South. Each of these terms has its own histories and connotations. But there is no question that urbanization today is a phenomenon of the world’s comparatively *poor* countries. The

annual urban population growth rate of the poorest countries (classified according to one United Nations development criterion) is 4.6 percent, more than seven times the growth rate of urban populations in wealthy, industrialized countries.<sup>5</sup> In 1950, 60 percent of the world’s urban

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<sup>2</sup> E. Barbara Phillips (1996). *City Lights: Urban-Suburban Life in the Global Society*, Second Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 98.

<sup>3</sup> Phillips, *City Lights, Second Edition*, p. 99.

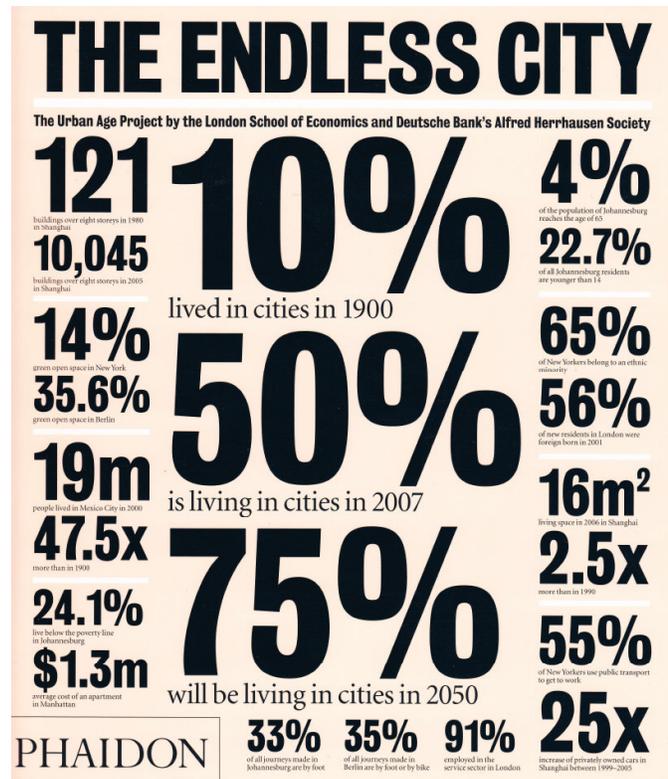
<sup>4</sup> Michael Pacione (2001). *Urban Geography: A Global Perspective*. New York: Routledge, p. 70.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations (2002). *State of the World’s Cities, 2002*. New York: United Nations Center for Human Settlements.

<sup>6</sup> It’s certainly worth a few minutes of your time to study a few of the many tables that rank cities of the world -- but don’t get carried away with it. According to a 1993 almanac, the projected top-ranked metropolitan areas in 2000 included Mexico City (25.6 million), Sao Paulo (22.1), Tokyo (19.0), Shanghai (17.0), and New York (16.8). The dirty little secret of comparative urban research, however, is that there is no single indisputable source of data, and thus rankings vary widely. Paul Knox and Sallie Marston cite 1998 U.N. projections for 2010 showing the top five as Tokyo (28.8), Mumbai (23.7), Lagos (21.0), Sao Paulo (19.7), and Mexico City (18.7). Blair Badcock cites alternative U.N. projections for 2010 yielding a ranking of Tokyo (28.7), Mumbai (27.4), Lagos (24.4), Shanghai (23.4), and Jakarta (21.2). Setting aside the inevitable hazards of projections, most of the discrepancies can be

population was in the wealthy, developed, industrialized countries. Sometime in the 1970s the center of gravity shifted, and a majority of the world's urbanites now live in the globe's poorer, still-developing countries. Right now, the developing-country share is about 73 percent. By 2030, developing countries will account for about 80 percent of the world's total urban population.<sup>7</sup>

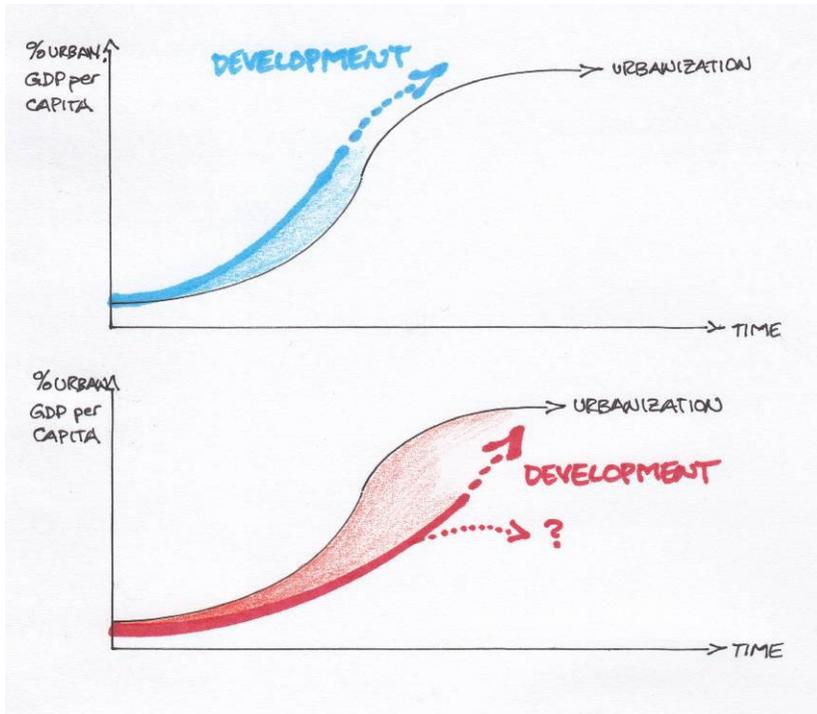
*The annual urban population growth rate of the world's poorest countries is about 7 times the urban growth rate in the world's wealthiest countries.*



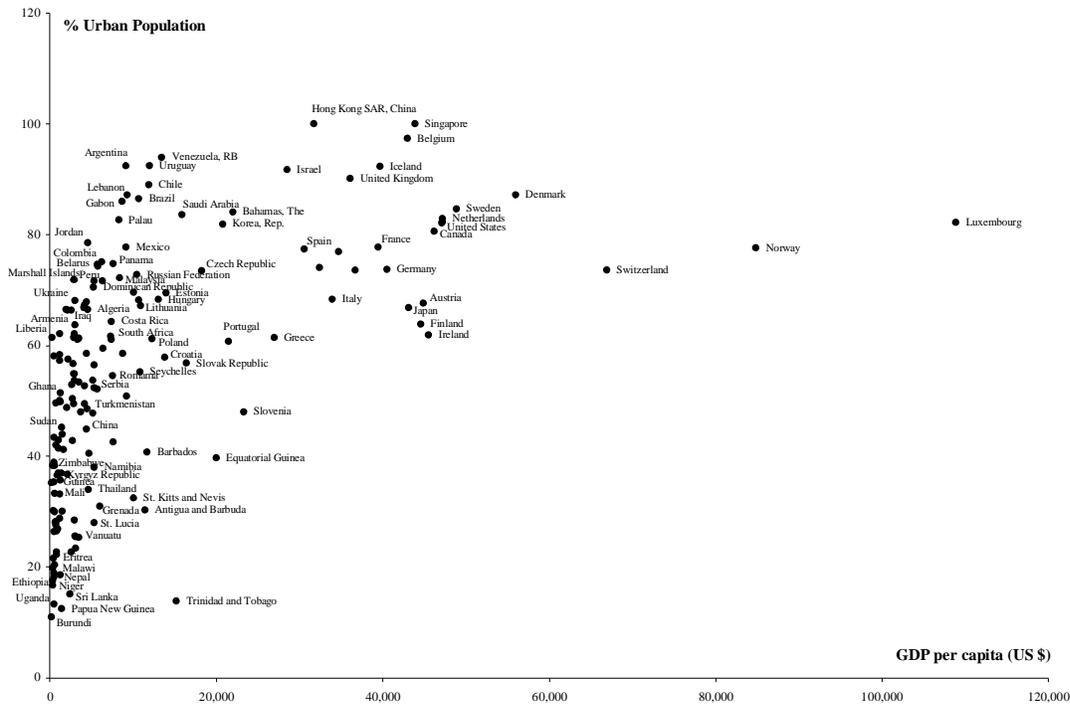
Source: Ricky Burdett and Deyan Sudjic, eds., *The Endless City: The Urban Age Project*. London: Phaidon.

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traced to two factors. First, there are enormous variations in the availability, timing, and reliability of official statistics. Where national census figures are not available, it is common to estimate populations from satellite images and assumptions on settlement density. Second, there is no single correct way of defining the limits of urban agglomerations. The Tokyo-Yokohama corridor is a prime example. The twenty-three wards of the central city had a combined population of 8.1 million in 1990; the entire prefecture, 11.8 million; the greater metropolitan area, including Yokohama, 31.5 million; and the National Capital Region, 39.5 million. Blair Badcock (2002). *Making Sense of Cities*. London: Arnold. Paul L. Knox and Sallie A. Marston (2001). *Places and Regions in Global Context*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall. For a valuable critical view of world-cities research, see John R. Short, Y.H. Kim, Merje Kuus, and H. Wells. (1996). "The Dirty Little Secret of World Cities Research: Data Problems in Comparative Analysis." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 20(4), 697-717.  
<sup>7</sup> Edward Soja and Miguel Kanai (2007). "The Urbanization of the World." In Ricky Burdett and Deyan Sudjic, eds., *The Endless City: The Urban Age Project*. London: Phaidon, 54-69, figures on p. 58.



**Urban Transitions.** In an optimistic case (top), development generates wealth and draws people from rural areas -- or other countries -- into the cities. But a pessimistic scenario is also possible (bottom): cities grow because of colonialism, rural poverty, or war -- but development is slow to generate wealth or improvements in living standards. Between 1970 and 1995, for instance, Sub-Saharan Africa's urban population grew by more than 5 percent per year, but Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita shrank by 0.66 percent per year. *Source:* Adapted and modified after Michael Pacione (2009). *Urban Geography: A Global Perspective, Third Edition*. New York: Routledge, p. 78. See also World Bank (2009). *Reshaping Economic Geography: World Development Report 2009*. Washington, DC: The World Bank, p. 59.



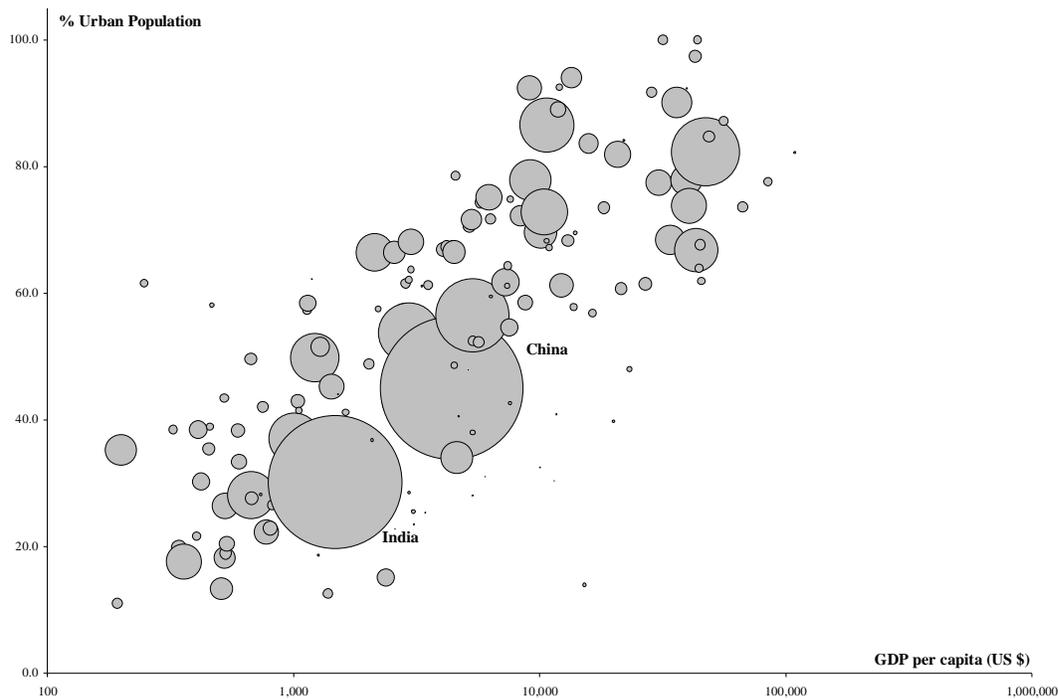
(A)



(B)

**Wealth and Urbanization: Three Views.** (A) Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is a widely-used estimate of the level of wealth in a society. All of the world's wealthiest societies (with GDP per capita over \$25,000) have urbanization rates over fifty percent, suggesting a strong link between urbanization and wealth. But poorer countries seem to range widely, from urbanization rates below 20 percent (Burundi, Uganda) to 50 percent or more (the Gambia, Liberia, Bolivia, Iraq). (B) The relationship appears a little bit stronger when income is plotted on a logarithmic scale. (C, next page) But the scale of the urban development challenge -- the billions of people currently living in poverty who hope that urbanization will deliver improvements in living standards -- only

becomes clear when we scale each point proportional to country populations. *Data Source:* World Bank (2011). *World DataBank*. Washington, DC: World Bank.



(C)

## Contingent Urbanization

Important questions are raised by the contrasts between the rapid urbanization of the world's poor countries, compared with the slow, steady rates observed in wealthy countries. Will today's rapidly urbanizing societies follow the same path traced out by the world's wealthiest societies? What is the contemporary link between urbanization, industrialization, and prosperity?

There certainly are some precedents for the rapid pace of urbanization seen today in the Global South. The average rate of increase in the urban population share for low-income countries today is about the same as the corresponding figure for European and North American countries between 1890 and 1900.<sup>8</sup> Official, mainstream discussions of world urbanization, therefore, are dominated by a sense of hopeful optimism that poor countries today are going through the same kind of urban and development transition as that experienced by the world's wealthiest societies more than a century ago. According to the World Bank, "Today's developing countries are sailing in waters charted by developed nations, which experienced a similar rush to towns and cities. The speed is similar, and the routes are the same."<sup>9</sup> Eventually, it is hoped, this transition will create an integrated urban world of prosperity and opportunity.

There are three reasons, however, to be very cautious about these kinds of historical comparisons.

<sup>8</sup> The World Bank (2009). *World Development Report: Reshaping Economic Geography*. Washington, DC: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, pp. 70-71.

<sup>9</sup> World Bank, *Reshaping*, p. 49.

*It took 10,000 years of human history for the world's urban population to reach 1 billion, around 1960.*

*The next billion: 25 years  
The next billion: 18 years  
The next billion: 15 years  
(estimated)*

*The histories of wealthy urbanized countries may not be repeated, because*

*1. The magnitude of today's urbanization is unprecedented.*

*2. It is neither possible nor desirable to replicate the history of urbanization of the Global North.*

*3. The link between urbanization and economic prosperity has become **contingent**.*

*1. The magnitude of today's urbanization is like nothing ever seen before.*

It's one thing to compare the percentage changes in urbanization of groups of countries today with that of the late nineteenth century. It's another matter entirely to consider the absolute numbers of people. It took 10,000 years of human history before the world's urban population reached 1 billion around 1960. It took another 25 years to add another billion. The third billion required only 18 years, and the United Nations now estimates about 15 years for the fourth.<sup>10</sup>

*2. It is neither possible nor desirable to replicate every part of the history of urbanization of the Global North.*

The urbanization of Europe in the nineteenth century was a complex drama, and there are many parts of the story that we would not want to repeat. The "historically unprecedented rates of urbanization" in nineteenth-century Europe were driven by "the coincidence of colonialism and capitalism," with all the violence and dispossession of imperial wars, exploitation, and slavery.<sup>11</sup> Colonialism often restructured the entire space-economy of societies in Asia and Africa -- turning them "inside out, as they became externally dependent rather than internally oriented."<sup>12</sup> Centuries of colonial relations created urban patterns -- and investments in transportation infrastructure and political institutions -- that are long-lasting and very difficult to change. For many former colonies, these path dependencies make it impossible for urbanization to follow the path the Global North countries -- which had very different histories.

Another problem is that the first countries to be transformed by industrial capitalism had a monopoly. Today, every urbanizing country faces stiff competition in the economic development game.

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<sup>10</sup> World Bank, *Reshaping*, p. 71.

<sup>11</sup> Eric Sheppard, Philip W. Porter, David R. Faust, and Richa Nagar (2009). *A World of Difference*. New York: Guilford, p. 467.

<sup>12</sup> Sheppard et al., *Difference*, p. 465.

Europe, the United States, Australia, and Japan are well-established competitors. After forty years of annual economic growth rates of 7 percent or more, so are the four “Asian Tigers” -- Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore. The Tigers’ success offers the promise of prosperity to other countries, but also present an ever more competitive landscape. Every available path to economic development is intensely competitive: natural resource extraction has unstable terms of trade; multinational companies can choose from many different low-cost labor assembly-line locations across China, India, Mexico, and many other countries; and tourists have ever more destinations to choose from.

### *3. The link between urbanization and economic prosperity has become contingent.*

The nineteenth century transformation of Europe involved a close relationship between urbanization and industrialization -- and this linkage produced massive concentrations of wealth. This wealth was, of course, shockingly unequal in its distribution, at least at first. It took more than a century of class conflict and class struggle before there were successful negotiations and compromises on how to distribute various benefits from the new prosperity of the industrial age. Today, the urbanization-industrialization-prosperity linkage is *contingent*. In other words, there is no guarantee that urbanization will deliver economic prosperity, and even less assurance that such prosperity will be widely shared. The linkage is contingent, meaning that it is conditional and dependent on other factors. In some cases -- the most widely-cited examples are Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore -- industrialization and urbanization have proceeded in tandem, bringing prosperity that is fairly broad-based.

But in some parts of the Global South, the Global North history of prosperous urbanization seems to provide little guidance for today’s experience. Between 1970 and 1995, the urban population of Africa south of the Sahara grew by 5.2 percent per year, while GDP per capita actually declined at a rate of 0.66 percent each year. This collision of rapid population growth amidst shrinking economies is disastrous. World Bank researchers have questioned the conclusion that many observers have drawn from these trends -- the idea “that urbanization does not necessarily accompany development.”<sup>13</sup> The World Bank specialists reinterpreted the population and economic growth data, trying to support the claim that the urbanization-development linkage does indeed apply; but in so doing, the specialists exclude countries with recent or current wars and other violent conflicts. Such violence demonstrates contingency: urbanization may deliver growth and prosperity, but *only in the absence of war and conflict*.

In sum, there is no absolute guarantee that urbanization will deliver economic prosperity. But because rural conditions are often worse than urban life, the cities continue to grow. Garth Myers, a specialist on African urbanization, sums up the dilemma:

“Because of its monopoly of economic opportunities and political power, the city in sub-Saharan Africa has created a perception on the part of rural-urban migrants of certain and immediate opportunities for socioeconomic improvement, a perception that is rarely realized. The phenomenal growth of shantytowns and

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<sup>13</sup> World Bank, *Reshaping*, p. 59.

squatter settlements and the proliferation of informal employment in the cities ... are the result of this miscalculation.”<sup>14</sup>

Contingent urbanization thus gives us a complex world of megacities -- vast urban regions with many millions of people in wealthy countries (Tokyo-Yokohama, London) but also megacities of the Global South, like Lagos, Nigeria, which struggles with mass unemployment, poverty, environmental degradation, and overtaxed infrastructure.

### Urbanization Without Development?

Urban specialists have been concerned about the problem of urbanization without genuine development for many years. Kingsley Davis (1908-1996), one of the most prominent historical urbanists of the 1960s, spent much of his career focusing on the demographic facets of urbanization. He emphasized the distinction between urbanization and city growth, and he also drew intriguing parallels between the urbanization process and ideas about the “demographic transition” that were becoming highly influential at the time. Near the end of his famous 1965 article, Davis cautioned that

“One sign of trouble ahead turns on the distinction I made at the start between urbanization and city growth *per se*. Around the globe today city growth is disproportionate to urbanization. The discrepancy is paradoxical in the industrial nations and worse than paradoxical in the nonindustrial. It is in this respect that the nonindustrial nations, which still make up the great majority of nations, are far from repeating past history. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the growth of cities arose from and contributed to economic advancement. Cities took surplus manpower from the countryside and put it to work producing goods and services that in turn helped to modernize agriculture. But today in under-developed countries, as in present-day advanced nations, city growth has become increasingly unhinged

**“We have now entered an era where poverty tourism (poorism) has become a popular holiday, Favela Chic is a hot night club in London, and the words ‘slum dog’ and ‘jai ho’ were among the 15 finalists in contention to become the 1 millionth English word.”**

Source: Winy Maas, Alexander Sverdlov, and Emily Waugh (2009). *Visionary Cities*. Rotterdam: Nai

<sup>14</sup> Garth Myers (2008). “Cities of Sub-Saharan Africa.” In Stanley D. Brunn, Maureen Hays-Mitchell, and Donald J. Zeigler, eds., *Cities of the World: World Regional Urban Development*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 340-383, quote from p. 382.

from economic development and hence from rural-urban migration. It derives in greater degree from overall population growth, and this growth in nonindustrial lands has become unprecedented because of modern health techniques combined with high birth rates.”<sup>15</sup>

**Lonely Planet of Slums?** A company called “Reality Tours & Travel offers tours through Dharavi, “one of Asia’s largest slums, and home and workplace to over a million people.” The tours are promoted through influential media outlets and travel guides in the Global North, including the *New York Times*, *Lonely Planet*, and *Frommer’s*.

*Source:* Reality Tours & Travel, <http://www.realitytoursandtravel.com>, Reproduced here pursuant to Sections 29 (“Fair dealing for the purpose of research, private study, education, parody, or satire”) and 30.04 (“work available through Internet”) provisions of Canada Bill C-11.

<sup>15</sup> Kingsley Davis (1965), “The Urbanization of the Human Population,” *Scientific American*, September.

Davis's words in 1965 identify a problem that is still widely discussed today. Consider this recent interpretation:

“Urbanization is not, of course, a new phenomenon. The push out of agriculture and the trek from the countryside are well known themes in 19th and 20th century western history. Up to the mid-20th century, however, that migration resulted -- if not immediately, then within a relatively short space of time -- in regularized employment in the mills, docks, construction industry, public-sector enterprises or other large-scale and labour-intensive worksites, or else in domestic service. Another route out of village life was through emigration to countries that were still struggling with under-population. Economic refugees fleeing from Europe were welcomed as colonists in these settler states, reputed for their perseverance and enterprising spirit. They brought to these ‘empty’ territories the labour power required to valorize vast new tracts of natural resources. Up to thirty years ago, the assumption was that this transformation from an agrarian-rural to an industrial-urban mode of production would be duplicated in the ‘backward’ parts of the world. But the notion of industrialization as the handmaiden of urbanization is no longer tenable. This goes a long way to explain why huge numbers of the new arrivals to the city are slum-dwellers, and are likely to remain so throughout their lives.”<sup>16</sup>

The magnitude of slums across the poorer parts of the world led Mike Davis to pen an entire book titled *Planet of Slums*.<sup>17</sup> As part of a review of Davis's book, one author provided a breathtaking overview of the world's largest slums:

“Mumbai, with 10 to 12 million squatters and tenement dwellers, is the global capital of slums, followed by Mexico City and Dhaka, with slum populations of 9 or 10 million, and then Lagos, Cairo, Karachi, Kinshasa-Brazzaville, Sao Paulo, Shanghai, and Delhi, with around 7 million each. If the largest mega-slums -- contiguous zones of urban poverty -- are in Latin America (an estimated 4 million living in Ciudad Nezahualcoyotl, Chalco, Iztapalapa and other south-eastern municipios of Mexico City; over 2 million in the Caracas shanty town of Libertador, or the El Sur and Ciudad Bolivar districts of Bogata) the Middle East has Baghdad's Sadr City (1.5 million) and Gaza (1.3 million) while the corrugated-iron shacks of Cite Solei, in Port-au-Prince, and Kinshasa's Masina district each hold half a million souls. India has nearly 160 million slum-dwellers, and China over 190 million. In Nigeria, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Tanzania, Ethiopia and Sudan, over 70 percent of the urban population lives in slums.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Jan Breman (2006). “Slumlands.” Review of Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums*. *New Left Review* 39, 141-148, quote from p. 141-142.

<sup>17</sup> Mike Davis (2006). *Planet of Slums*. New York: Verso.

<sup>18</sup> Breman, “Slumlands,” p. 142.

Why does urban poverty on this scale persist? Will things improve? These questions have been debated for many generations. Despite many changes in the details of various perspectives, the basic positions have remained surprisingly consistent.

**Modernization** theorists remain optimistic that traditional, agrarian societies will enjoy economic

*Modernization theorists are optimistic that urbanization will deliver prosperity, so long as poor countries work to attract technology and investment from rich countries. The alternatives -- theories of urban bias, dependency, and world-systems analysis -- provide evidence that development and urbanization can reinforce inequality and exploitation.*

growth as urbanization proceeds, so long as they do whatever is necessary to attract technology and capital investment from industrialized countries. The most influential version of modernization theory was devised by Walt W. Rostow (1916-2003), an economist and political theorist who was a staunch anti-communist and served as an advisor to U.S. President Lyndon Johnson. As a political advisor, Rostow shaped U.S. policy in the 1960s, including the U.S. war in Vietnam. As an academic, he wrote a book -- *The Stages of Economic Growth* -- that promised a steady progression to wealth and prosperity if poor countries followed the leadership of their “modernizing elites” who were trying to replicate the experience of Western Europe and the United States. The subtitle of Rostow’s book reflected the deeply political nature of the theory: it was offered as “A Non-Communist Manifesto.”<sup>19</sup> *Stages* was reprinted and revised several times, and the ideas of modernization theory continue to dominate theory and policy at powerful institutions like the World Bank.

Theorists of **urban bias** are more critical, and believe that governments have followed misguided or politically corrupt policies that make rural life unbearable, thereby encouraging excessive rural-to-urban migration.

**Dependence theorists** generally see the emergence of mega-cities in poor countries as a sign of global structure inequalities. Dependence theorists point to a vast body of evidence of enduring neo-colonial patterns and inequalities

that persist long after the end of formal colonial rule. All too often, former colonies remain trapped by unequal trade relations; yesterday’s formal colonial dictates are replaced by the competitive rule of multinational corporations able to shift their operations across many locations in the Global South. All of these processes mean that we cannot be too optimistic that modernization theory will solve all the world’s problems.

Dependence theorists are deeply influenced by Immanuel Wallerstein, whose **world-systems theory** distinguishes between a wealthy core (Western Europe, the U.S. and Canada, Japan) that exploits a poor, dependent periphery for raw materials, cheap labor, and toxic dumping sites. An intermediate group of countries in what Wallerstein calls the “semi-periphery” have managed to

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<sup>19</sup> W. W. Rostow (1960). *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

achieve some level of industrialization, thereby exploiting the resources of the poorest parts of the periphery. But semi-peripheral states are still themselves exploited by the wealthiest powers in the global core. World-systems theorists, like those who are persuaded by dependency theory, argue that major, structural changes will be required in the global economy before modernization will be able to deliver the benefits it promises.

## The World Urban System

Debate on the optimistic and pessimistic views of development is likely to continue. What is clear, however, is that urbanization must be understood as a global phenomenon. We have seen a transition from an old international division of labor, built primarily by colonial relations in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to a new international division of labor (the NIDL, or “needle”) marked by the rise of large, complex multinational corporations. In the old division of labor, wealthy, highly urbanized nation-states dominated industrial production, while poor,

*In the New International Division of Labor (NIDL), cities have been linked in networks of giant transnational corporations.*

mostly rural nation-states served as sources of agricultural products, natural resources, and cheap labor. In the NIDL, the powers of nation-states have been overshadowed by corporations and other non-state actors, and “cities everywhere are interdependent, linked by a network of giant transnational corporations that engage in production, exchange, finance, and service functions.”<sup>20</sup>

There is now a consensus that most, if not all, cities are part of a world urban system, an interdependent web of urban places bound together by uneven flows and relations of goods, people, capital, ideas, and power. All these cross-border processes have made it much harder to classify companies, or even products. Complex products like automobiles are now made of up components made and assembled at multiple sites in many different countries, in what is widely referred to as the global assembly line. “One observer notes that IBM is Japan’s

largest computer exporter, and Sony is the largest exporter of television sets from the United States. It is the world in which Brother Industries, a Japanese concern assembling typewriters in Bartlett, Tennessee, brings an anti-dumping case before the U.S. International Trade Commission against Smith Corona, an American firm that imports typewriters into the United States from its offshore facilities in Singapore and Indonesia.”<sup>21</sup>

## Canadian and U.S. Cities in the World Urban System

It’s now almost impossible to classify companies or products according to their “home” countries. But what about cities? Cities have been transnationalized, but it still can be useful to try to classify different cities inside a country to make sense of key differences in urban functions and ways of life.

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<sup>20</sup> Phillips, *City Lights*, p. 104.

<sup>21</sup> E. Barbara Phillips (2009). *City Lights, Third Edition*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 157.

In an influential book, the sociologists John Logan and Harvey Molotch suggested a five-fold classification of U.S. cities dealing with the challenges of global economic integration.<sup>22</sup> Each of their types (headquarters cities, innovation centers, module production places, third world entrepots, and retirement centers) were distinguished by unique combinations of local politics and subsequent inequalities for residents. Barbara Phillips augments this classification with a sixth city type (leisure-tourist playgrounds) to capture the growing importance of city competition for tourists, hallmark events, and conventioners.<sup>23</sup> This classification approach is valuable and interesting, but it is crucial to recognize two limitations.

1. There is an infinite range of possible city classifications, and there is no way of deciding which is “correct”; the issue is *whether a particular taxonomy is useful for a particular kind of understanding or application.*
2. The entire classification exercise treats cities as single, unified objects -- even though many if not most cities have elements of each category: “Every third-world city has a first-world city in it; every first-world city has a third-world city in it.”<sup>24</sup>

*In Canada, 81 percent of the population lives in urban areas (defined as an area with a population of at least 1,000 and a density of at least 400 persons per square kilometer*

Canada’s urban network has been deeply shaped by developments in the world urban system. Since the late 1960s, the Canadian population has continued urbanizing, with the national urban proportion rising from 69.6 percent in 1961 to 77.9 percent in 1996, to almost exactly 80 percent in 2001, and then to 81 percent in 2011. In the last thirty years, this urbanization has also been concentrated in the largest metropolitan areas: between 1996 and 2001, the four largest metropolitan areas captured 62 percent of the total national population growth, while rural areas lost population. Jim Simmons and Larry Bourne summarize the evidence simply: “Cities, effectively, now define what it means to be Canadian; they shape our lifestyles, affect our health, and alter our attitudes to immigrants and our views on social issues and policies.”<sup>25</sup> In a wide-ranging analysis of Canadian urban trends and their relations to continental and global changes, Simmons and Bourne conclude that “knowledge of the recent history of the Canadian urban system does not really prepare us to project the future. As systems become more open, they become less predictable,” particularly in light of the

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<sup>22</sup> John R. Logan and Harvey L. Molotch (1987). *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

<sup>23</sup> See also Wilbur Zelinsky (1994). “Conventionland USA: The Geography of a Latterday Phenomenon.” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 84(1), 68-86.

<sup>24</sup> Janice Perlman, quoted in Sam Roberts (1990). “Mega-Cities Join to Fight Problems.” *New York Times*, June 25, A13.

<sup>25</sup> Jim Simmons and Larry Bourne (2003). *The Canadian Urban System, 1971-2001: Responses to a Changing World*. Research Paper 200. Toronto: Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto.

dominance and proximity of the American urban system and its effects on exports, skilled worker migration, and political relations.

For most of the twentieth century, Canada's urban network was dominated by a core-periphery structure -- a dense web of population, industry, and cities along the St. Lawrence along the southern edges of Quebec and Ontario, with the rest of the national territory given over to cities that generally served local and regional markets and large territories of natural resource extraction. This broad division has not disappeared, but parts of it have become a bit more complicated in the last thirty years or so. "Globalization increases the likelihood of change within urban systems," and in Canada "The simplistic contrast between core and periphery has been replaced by a much more complex pattern of multiple cores and peripheries. There are growing centres in declining regions (Halifax); declining centres within the original core region of southern Ontario and Southern Quebec (Sarnia, Cornwall, Belleville, Trois Rivieres); and emerging cores in the central Alberta corridor (Calgary to Edmonton) and British Columbia's Lower Mainland." Still, the dominant contrast is still that between the largest metropolitan areas (and their surrounding regions) and smaller places distant from these dominant cities. "The places that grow are larger, and connected with the global economy -- including trade and immigration -- either directly or indirectly."<sup>26</sup>

### **New Perspectives on World Urban Systems**

The world's cities are changing fast, and so is urban studies. Recent years have brought four major changes in how urbanists view contemporary world urban systems.

*Not long ago,  
cities were seen  
as subordinate to  
an all-powerful  
"global  
economy."  
Analysts now  
agree that cities  
are the global  
economy.*

**First**, there has been a pronounced evolution in thinking beyond the simplistic view of cities as subordinate to an all-powerful global economy. Urbanists now agree that the world urban system is shaped by cross-cutting forces that undermine any notion of the end of cities: cities **are** the global economy. Saskia Sassen is one of the most prominent urbanists focusing on this topic; in her widely-read *Global City*, she emphasizes how the territorial dispersal of economic activity has actually privileged the power of centrality, especially for a few places in the world's wealthiest economies. These cities now act as command nodes and strategic corporate sites for dispersed, worldwide networks of production, distribution, and investment. The *dispersal* of economic activity, surprisingly, leads to the *concentration* of powerful decision-making activities. Recent work by Sassen and other urbanists has analyzed how the familiar form of corporate globalization creates not just a space of command centers, but a corresponding space of marginality: "the city concentrates diversity" through immigration, poverty, and informality; we must therefore "see that globalization is not only constituted in

terms of capital and the new international corporate culture (international finance,

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<sup>26</sup> Simmons and Bourne, Canadian Urban System, 61-61.

telecommunications, information flows) but also in terms of people and noncorporate cultures. There is a whole infrastructure of low-wage non-professional jobs and activities that constitutes a crucial part of the so-called corporate economy.” Sassen argues that “marginalized people have come into representation and are making claims on the city” in new and powerful ways. Especially in the wealthy countries of the world, it is the intermediate, middle-class interests who have left the city: “The two sectors that have stayed, the center and the ‘other,’ find in the city the strategic terrain for their operations.”<sup>27</sup>

**Second**, there have been sustained efforts to move beyond the obsessive focus on cities at the peak of the hierarchy of the world urban system. For at least twenty-five years, all experts have agreed that the three cities that unquestionably qualify as “global” are London, New York, and Tokyo. Beyond these three, however, nearly everyone disagrees on how cities should be ranked

*It is widely agreed that the dominant “global cities” are London, New York, and Tokyo. Beyond these three, however, there are great disagreements over world-city rankings.*

in terms of their ‘globality’ or ‘world-city’ qualities. And yet it is widely understood that to really understand how urban life is changing with globalization, we cannot limit our view just to London, New York, and Tokyo. And so there is intense interest in studying the similarities and differences in how global processes play out in Mexico City, Sao Paulo, Beirut, Shanghai, Buenos Aires, Amsterdam, and many, many other places.<sup>28</sup>

There is now a widespread movement to understand cities in specifically “non-hierarchical” ways. Ranking cities according to measures of economic power is useful. But it does not tell us everything we need to know about the majority of the world’s urbanites -- who do not live in powerful, command-and-control centers or Global North cities. In her influential book *Ordinary Cities*, Jennifer Robinson argues that “the foundational texts of Western urban theory” have created an idea of “the dynamism and modernity of the Western city” that depends on caricatures of “some other places as traditional, at best ‘rural,’ at worst ‘primitive.’”<sup>29</sup> The result has been a

tendency to treat cities in the Global North as the leaders of “modernity,” with cities elsewhere understood as places in need of development, as places dominated by tradition, or as places that resemble the *past* of today’s wealthy Western places.

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<sup>27</sup> Saskia Sassen (1994). *Cities in a Global Economy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press. Quotes from pp. 11-12. The theme of difference and marginality -- the city as the most unstable site where formal state and corporate power must contend with enormous cultural diversity and cultural demands for recognition -- is also a central theme in the work of Leonie Sandercock, who reconceives the global city as *Cosmopolis*, or even as a *Mongrel City*. Leonie Sandercock (1998). *Towards Cosmopolis*. New York: John Wiley. Leonie Sandercock (2003). *Cosmopolis II: Mongrel Cities*. New York: Continuum.

<sup>28</sup> Sassen, *Global Networks*. See also Peter Marcuse and Ronald van Kempen, editors. (2001). *Globalizing Cities: A New Spatial Order?* Oxford: Blackwell.

<sup>29</sup> Jennifer Robinson (2006). *Ordinary Cities: Between Modernity and Development*. New York: Routledge, quote from p. 13.

In fact, all cities are mixtures of modernity and tradition. We find poverty in wealthy cities of the Global North: Vancouver is Canada's most expensive housing market, but it is here that we find one of Canada's poorest neighborhoods, the Downtown Eastside. On the other hand, Lagos, Nigeria is a mega-city with a population of more than 17 million in a country where four-fifths of people live on less than \$2 per day. But it also has its wealthy districts -- on an island and a peninsula stretching into Lagos Lagoon, where one can find a luxurious shopping mall selling giant flat-screen televisions for \$53,000; living costs in this part of the city can be higher than Berlin and Madrid. "Violent robberies, fraud and kidnappings pit the haves against the have-nots," so "Restaurants post armed guards," we learn from an Associated Press story reprinted in the *Los Angeles Times* -- a city with more than its own share of armed guards and suburban lawn signs warning "Armed Response." In Lagos,

"the homes of the wealthy have walls with razor-wire, flood lights, cameras, and security guards. Newspaper ads for luxury armored Hummers blare: 'You are a person in authority and influence. Protect yourself.'"<sup>30</sup>

*All cities are defined by a mixture of modernity and tradition, wealth and poverty.*

But Hummers -- those giant vehicles based on the U.S. military's "High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle" (HMMWV) that got so much attention in the U.S. Persian Gulf War of 1991 -- can't go anywhere in Lagos's disastrous traffic jams. The truly elite of the elite have private yacht moorings and heli-pads.

**Third**, urbanists have begun to pay close attention to the evolving complexity of "spaces of flows" of economic, political, and cultural influences. These flows and influences are often rich with irony, as illustrated by one of the protest

banners carried at one of the demonstrations protesting the policies of the World Trade Organization in 2000: "Worldwide Coalition Against Globalization." But this not just about irony. Many urbanists are coming to see the flows and networks of contemporary urban life not in terms of a simple hierarchy (neighborhood, city, country, then some 'global' realm); instead, *cities are constituted by flows and networks*. And so disputes over which cities are more global than others is really beside the point.<sup>31</sup> There is now an active debate on whether the constellation of urban economic, cultural, and political changes underway is best understood as coming from 'above' or from 'below.' In some ways this ties into the debate about whether cities should be seen as subordinate to an all-powerful global realm of economy, culture, and politics; but it is also a debate on the importance of formal institutions of the nation-state and the global economy -- as opposed to the 'informal' activities of left, right, and center. From an almost limitless array of empirical examples, consider the complex global city-networks of al-Qaeda and similar organizations;<sup>32</sup> the urban dimensions of military actions by the United States, Russia, Israel, and other nation-states;<sup>33</sup> and the transnational urban connections of inherently

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<sup>30</sup> Katharine Houreld (2009). "Nigeria's Rich Elite Live it up Amid Squalor." *Los Angeles Times*, September 27.

<sup>31</sup> Saskia Sassen, editor (2002). *Global Networks, Linked Cities*. New York: Routledge.

<sup>32</sup> United States Directorate of Central Intelligence (2003). *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*. Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency.

<sup>33</sup> Derek Gregory (2004). *The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq*. Oxford: Blackwell.

local instances of street gang activity and policing, the nation-state prerogatives of immigration and deportation practices, and the international networks of individual and family migration decisions.<sup>34</sup>

**Fourth**, we are beginning to see -- in reality as well as theories we use to understand the urban world -- a hybrid West/East urbanism. This is a subtle and complicated change, but it's worth thinking carefully through what is happening. Consider that in 1800, Beijing was the world's largest city, and Guangzhou was nearly tied with London for the No. 2 spot. Now, two centuries after the peak of European colonization, a European Great War, a globalized Great Depression, and truly World War, and amidst the current revival of eighteenth-century economic doctrines of free markets and free trade, we see something entirely new yet familiar: a world led by Asia. The influential corporate consulting firm McKinsey & Company describes what we're seeing:

*Urbanism, like modernity, "is too often interpreted as emerging from the West and spreading to the rest."*

*The link between urbanized modernity and "the West" may be the historical exception.*

"The economic rise of the developing world is emphatically underway and driving a wave of global urban expansion. At the heart of this story is the spectacular renaissance that we are seeing in Asia, with China and India at its vanguard in returning to the global prominence they played before the European and North American industrial revolution."<sup>35</sup>

Revolution: "one complete turn in the action of revolving," the dictionary tells us, or "a fundamental social change," or the time taken for a planetary body to complete an orbit.<sup>36</sup> "Planetary," however, is precisely the all-encompassing, Newtonian concept that Aihwa Ong warns us against, when modernization theorists -- or their critics -- describe a "planetary capitalism." The danger is that if we think about "the world" as a planetary experience of development over time, then we'll fall into the deepest abyss of misunderstanding. "Modernity is too often interpreted as emerging from the West and spreading to the rest," the brilliant urban planner Ananya Roy reminds us; "So it is with urbanism."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Michael Peter Smith (2001). *Transnational Urbanism: Locating Globalization*. Oxford: Blackwell. Ginger Thompson (2004). "Gangs Without Borders, Fierce and Resilient, Confound the Law." *New York Times*, September 26, A1, A14. James Wolfensohn (2001). "The World Bank and Global City-Regions: Reaching the Poor." In Allen J. Scott, editor, *Global City-Regions: Trends, Theory, Policy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 44-49.

<sup>35</sup> McKinsey & Company (2010). *India's Urban Awakening: Building Inclusive Cities, Sustaining Economic Growth*. New York: McKinsey & Company, cited in Ananya Roy (2012). "Postcolonial Urbanism: Speed, Hysteria, Mad Dreams." In Ananya Roy and Aihwa Ong, eds., *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*, 307-335, quoted on p. 328.

<sup>36</sup> Bernard S. Cayne, ed. (1990). *The New Lexicon Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language*. New York: Lexicon Publications, p. 852.

<sup>37</sup> Roy, "Postcolonial Urbanism," p. 309.

We have misunderstood modernity. In the eighteenth century, the Scottish economist Adam

“Smith ... was the last major (Western) social theorist to appreciate that Europe was a Johnny-come-lately in the development of the wealth of nations. ‘China is a much richer country than any part of Europe,’ Smith remarked in 1776. Smith did not anticipate any change in this comparison and showed no awareness that he was writing at the beginning of what has come to be called the ‘industrial revolution.’”<sup>38</sup>

Today’s global consultants McKinsey & Company are reminding us about *places* -- China and India -- that were *before* and *outside* of Europe’s “industrial revolution,” but now represent the future of that revolution. The term “industrial revolution” was coined by Blanqui, a Frenchman, in 1837, to describe “a set of dramatic changes occurring in the British economy c. 1760-1840”; the phrase was then redefined to include “changes taking place across Western Europe and North America in the nineteenth century.”<sup>39</sup> But in reality, there have been a series of industrial revolutions rolling around the world for centuries now -- each one reorganizing economic activity, migration, and inequality, sometimes in surprising ways. The established industrial power of a set of places that could be recognized as “the West” may be remembered as the historical exception, not the norm. Put another way, if our Frenchman Blanqui were with us today, he’d be writing about the industrial revolution of China’s Pearl River Delta -- a region known as “one of the most dynamic economies in the world,” with the “instant city” Shenzhen, part of the “factory of the world” in a small region that contains much more than Canada’s entire national population.<sup>40</sup> Perhaps, two hundred years from now, Blanqui will be writing about Manchester again, or perhaps Lagos, Nigeria -- and maybe there’s a Friedrich Engels walking around Guangzhou or Shenzhen right now. But in the meantime, we can learn from what happened when Ananya Roy joined a group of urban scholars at a conference in Shenzhen. Here’s how she describes the scene:

“We had been assembled by our gracious hosts to be interviewed by local reporters. Young men and women, they were not interested in the usual media sound bytes but, instead, settled in for a long conversation about the conference theme: ‘Global Cities and the World Economic Crisis.’ Their eager questions sought to uncover the mystery of the ‘global city.’ What precisely makes a city global? ... at the heart of this global imagination was a persistent concern: Shenzhen. These Shenzhen reporters quite boldly imagined Shenzhen as the global city of the future.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Andre Gunder Frank (1998). *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, p. 13, cited in Giovanni Arrighi (2007). *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the Twenty-First Century*. London and New York: Verso, p. 26.

<sup>39</sup> Jon Stobart (2009). “Industrial Revolution.” In Derek Gregory, Ron Johnston, Geraldine Pratt, Michael J. Watts, and Sarah Whatmore, eds., *The Dictionary of Human Geography, Fifth Edition*. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 378-379, quote from p. 378.

<sup>40</sup> Allen J. Scott, with images and captions by Elvin Wyly (2011). “Emerging Cities of the Third Wave.” *City* 15(3/4), 289-321, quotes to other authors on p. 302, 315.

<sup>41</sup> Roy, “Postcolonial Urbanism,” p. 315.

The young reporters of Shenzhen today sound a lot like the eager boosters in the “era of imaginary villages” in the United States in “the exuberant spirit of Midwestern town-booming in the period before the Panic of 1837.”<sup>42</sup> The Shenzhen reporters’ questions hinted at a broader boosterish climate reminiscent of another place described by another Frenchman -- Alexis de Tocqueville, visiting Manchester in 1835, described it as a place where “civilization works its miracles.” The Shenzhen reporters ask if Shenzhen should build a tower higher than Dubai’s Burj Khalifa -- the tallest in the world. Roy learns that the phrase widely used to describe the speed and flexibility of the world’s workshop is “Shenzhen speed.”

But speed kills. When de Tocqueville saw “miracles” in Manchester in 1835, he also saw their cost:

“Here humanity attains its most complete development and its most brutish; here civilization works its miracles, and civilized man is turned back almost into a savage.”<sup>43</sup>

Roy learns that articles in the “*Shenzhen Special Zone Daily*” thank model workers for their ‘painful labor’ and sacrifices undertaken for ‘their company and for the zone,’ and for thereby having ‘stepped into the new century.’<sup>44</sup> But as Roy reminds us, this new century isn’t easy. Workers have jumped to their deaths from dormitories and factory structures at Foxconn Technologies, the giant assembly-line contractor for Apple, Dell, and Hewlett Packard. This, too, resembles Manchester in the 1840s, or Detroit a century later, where an African American bluesman writes a song that goes like this:

“Please, Mr. Foreman, slow down your assembly line.  
Please, Mr. Foreman, slow down your assembly line.  
No, I don’t mind workin,’ but I do mind dyin.’”<sup>45</sup>

Add it all up: Adam Smith remarking on the superior wealth of China, today’s celebration of “Shenzhen Speed” amidst worker suicides, de Toqueville’s “most brutish” experiences of industrialization, and the Motown rhythms of the Detroit assembly line. The West/Rest division is blurring. “Where, then, does Asia begin and end?” Roy asks in her analysis of the many “worlding” practices of Asian cities.<sup>46</sup> East/West divisions are blurring along with the distinctions between tradition/modernity, culture/economics, agricultural/industrial, and rural/urban. The world urban system is, in short, becoming the truly dynamic, uncertain, competitive cosmopolitanism of earlier times and places -- before things were put into the

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<sup>42</sup> Anonymous (1845). “Commercial Delusions -- Speculations.” *The American Review*, II (October), 341-357, reprinted in Charles N. Glaab, ed. (1963). *The American City: A Documentary History*. Homewood, IL: The Dorsey Press, 147-159.

<sup>43</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville (1958). *Journeys to England and Ireland*. Edited by J.P. Mayer. London: Faber & Faber, p. 104, cited in Peter Hall (1998). *Cities in Civilization*. New York: Pantheon, p. 310.

<sup>44</sup> Roy, “Postcolonial Urbanism,” p. 319.

<sup>45</sup> Cited in Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin (1975). *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying. A Study in Urban Revolution*. New York: St. Martin’s Press.

<sup>46</sup> Roy, “Postcolonial Urbanism,” p. 330.

East/West framework that Jim Blaut has called “The Colonizer’s Model of the World.”<sup>47</sup> We’re seeing something new yet familiar -- a hybrid West/Rest urbanism.

### **Emerging Cities of the Third Wave**

All of these trends suggest a growing interdependency between urban change and the broader outlines of global economic and political change. If there have been multiple industrial revolutions, the urbanist Allen J. Scott suggests that three of the most recent ones have been decisive. Scott identifies three waves:

1. A first wave dominated by the system of factories and workshops that made Great Britain the world’s first urbanized society in the nineteenth century. The first wave had “its most advanced urban expression” in “the burgeoning manufacturing towns of Britain at that time.”<sup>48</sup>

*The urbanist Allen J. Scott identifies three waves of global capitalist urbanization:*

*1. Britain’s factory and workshop urbanization of the 19th century.*

*2. The mid-twentieth assembly-line manufacturing cities of Fordism.*

*3. The new urban economy of “cognitive-cultural capitalism.”*

2. A second wave of urbanization driven by the growth of large companies that used scientific management practices and complex assembly lines in vast mass-production enterprises. The most dramatic advances in these techniques were achieved by Henry Ford’s automobile manufacturing enterprises in the early twentieth century -- and so the era of mass production, assembly lines, and steadily growing productivity and prosperity in the middle decades of the twentieth century is often simply referred to as Fordism. “Over much of the 20th century fordist machinofacture ... contributed greatly to economic growth,” Scott observes, “especially in the great manufacturing belts of North America and Western Europe.”<sup>49</sup> But this era also brought about locational dispersal, which has continued as manufacturing has declined in the Global North while expanding across low-cost locations in the Global South.

3. A third wave that is now emerging to replace Fordism, which went into a period of serious crisis beginning in the 1970s. Initially, this new wave was labeled “post-Fordism,” since it seemed to involve a sudden reversal of all of the trends that had been so prominent in the middle years of the twentieth century. There was a relative and absolute decline in manufacturing employment, as the production of manufactured goods was automated to achieve

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<sup>47</sup> James M. Blaut (1993). *The Colonizer’s Model of the World*. New York: Guilford.

<sup>48</sup> Allen J. Scott, with images and captions by Elvin Wyly (2011). “Emerging Cities of the Third Wave.” *City* 15(3/4), 289-321, quote from p. 290.

<sup>49</sup> Scott, “Emerging Cities,” p. 300.

efficiencies and save on labor costs. Service industries expanded, although the new service jobs seemed to be more unstable -- and with greater inequalities in pay, working conditions, and job security -- compared with the more standardized forms of employment typical in the Fordist city. More recently, this third wave has been described as the “new economy,” the “knowledge economy,” or the “creative economy.”

*In the era of “cognitive-cultural capitalism,” cities are being remade by*

*1. The expansion of digital calculation and communication.*

*2. Sharper social and occupational divisions between well-paid, highly-educated ‘cognitive-cultural’ workers and a “new servile class” of janitors, waiters and waitresses, child-care workers, etc.*

*3. An accelerating consumer society, where households spend more and more on a fast-changing mix of “experiential” goods and services.*

Scott prefers a different label: cognitive-cultural capitalism. Three features distinguish this new wave. First, “while classical fordism was founded on large-scale electro-mechanical technologies, capitalism today has forged ahead on the basis of digital methods of calculation, communication and information storage, with profound repercussions on the organization of production and work.”<sup>50</sup> Second, the comparatively simple division of fordism -- between white-collar office workers and blue-collar assembly-line workers -- is being replaced by new social and occupational divisions within the service industries. There is an upper echelon of highly-educated and well-paid knowledge workers -- Scott calls them ‘cognitive-cultural workers’ -- who enjoy considerable wealth and autonomy as they pursue various forms of creative work. This autonomy, however, comes at the price of steep responsibility, individual risk, and intense competition to respond to rapid shifts in consumer demands and tastes. At the other extreme is a lower echelon, a ‘new servile class’ in “low-wage service-oriented functions. ... in spite of their marginal social and economic status, the members of the lower echelon are far from being devoid of formal qualifications. Rather, much of their work -- from child-minding through janitorial work to waiting on tables and taxi driving -- involves considerable amounts of discretionary decision-making and many informal skills.”<sup>51</sup> Third, consumption practices are evolving. The fordist era delivered a broadly-shared prosperity, while mass production emphasized considerable uniformity and standardization in products and consumer tastes. This is what Scott describes as “consumer society Mark I.” But today, “we are moving into ‘consumer society Mark II’ in which households expend more and more of their budgets not only on material products, but also on a large and constantly varying palette of goods and services that, for better or worse, have potent experiential significance.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Scott, “Emerging Cities,” p. 297.

<sup>51</sup> Scott, “Emerging Cities,” p. 298.

<sup>52</sup> Scott, “Emerging Cities,” p. 298.

Each of these developments has begun to reshape urbanism in profound ways. Standardized, large mass-production forms of innovation have been replaced by small, nimble hotbeds of “hyper-innovation” in key districts in cities. These districts are by no means confined to the wealthy industrialized countries of Western Europe, North America, or Japan -- the old centers of innovation in the fordist era. Cognitive-cultural development can be observed in many of the dynamic cities of the Global South, and innovation is drawing on a variety of

“local idiosyncrasies, such as skills, know-how, traditions, design ideologies, historical circumstances, and so on, that generally adhere to particular places. Many attempts by cities to brand themselves capitalize on the same idiosyncrasies. Thus, in addition to the Silicon Valleys, Alleys, Gulches, Glens, Casbahs, and Wadis that have sprung up over the last few decades, Singapore, once the electronics subcontracting capital of the world, now refers to itself as the ‘global city of the arts’, Bangkok is seeking to formulate policies that will turn it into a ‘global creative city’, and Seoul has branded itself as the ‘city of design’.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Scott, “Emerging Cities,” p. 299.



**The Deindustrialized Fordist City:** Detroit, Michigan, July 2010 (Elvin Wyly). The Michigan Central Station was built in 1913, but for the last quarter-century it has stood empty.

*(Next page)* **Factory Shopping Love.** Shenzhen, China, March 2010 (Elvin Wyly). Shenzhen has the highest per capita income of China's major cities, and its vast export-assembly complexes have earned it the global reputation as "the factory of the world." But it has its consumption and shopping spaces as well, to serve not only locals but also a growing number of tourists.



## Conclusions

The common element in all of these disparate examples is that global city-systems cannot be characterized as simple top-down hierarchies of economic power; but they are also not simple bottom-up aggregations of individual choices and decisions. Rather, every city is the product of intersecting and cross-cutting networks: in some places these networks bind together a local urban neighborhood with a wide range of far-away places, while elsewhere the linkages are shorter, or else limited to a few long-distance connections. Understanding contemporary global city-systems, then, is both important and daunting, because we must pay careful attention to the nature and extent of networks in a variety of domains (economy, culture, political power, migration, etc.), and we must study these networks as they operate in local context, in a particular city, *as well as the distant places to which that city is tied*. This means we have a lot of work to do as we try to understand contemporary urbanization; but the work is quite urgent, because in contrast to the early wave of urbanized industrialization in the nineteenth century, today's urbanization is moving fastest in those parts of the world with the fewest economic resources to deal with the consequences of large cities.

*Today, the world's fastest urbanization is happening in the Global South.*

*The experience of the Global North may not predict the future of the Global South.*

*Dramatic changes in world urbanism are remaking theory and practice in urban studies.*