Viewpoint

Global Cities in the South: Deepening social and spatial polarisation in Cape Town

Charlotte Lemanski *

*Department of Geography, University College London,
Pearson Building, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT, United Kingdom*

Global Cities are characterised by their dominance in world affairs, linked to population size and political, economic, social and cultural infrastructure. As urban centres expand, particularly in the developing regions of the South, a new generation of Global Cities seems likely to emerge. Indeed, non-Western Global Cities have already emerged in some Asian (e.g. Hong Kong, Singapore) and Latin American (e.g. Mexico City, São Paulo) contexts. However, Global Cities remain rare in Africa, although Johannesburg has emerged as the region's dominant metropolis, followed by Cape Town, Lagos and Nairobi. This paper considers firstly, the development of Global Cities in the South, and secondly, the implications of this drive for global competitiveness on social and spatial division in cities of the South, with a particular emphasis on Cape Town. Given arguments that Global Cities demonstrate increased social and spatial polarisation, aspirations for global competitiveness are problematic for cities in the developing world, where poverty is widespread and resources are limited. This is particularly the case in South Africa where apartheid legacies already provide a strong infrastructure of inequality. This paper uses the case study of Cape Town to consider whether it is possible for a city to be both globally competitive *and* address domestic socio-economic redistribution. Given evidence elsewhere that the former can inhibit, or at least dilute, the latter, the wider question of whether cities in South Africa (and more broadly, cities of the South) should perhaps be avoiding the drive for globalised status is considered. But if so, what other choice exists in the global milieu?
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Introduction

Global Cities are characterised by their dominance in world affairs, linked to population size and political, economic, social and cultural infra-structure. The notion of 'Global Cities' as an academic discourse was popularised in the late-1980s and early-1990s by writers such as Friedmann (1986), Castells (1989) and Sassen (1991, 1994). The emphasis was on cities that functioned as essential 'nodes' in the global economy, with London, New York and Tokyo cited as prime examples. Their dominance of the global city agenda is a consequence of the strength of their financial institutions, corporate headquarters and service-related industries, with obvious implications for their population size and property market. Global Cities require strong infrastructure, particularly telecommunications and transport, as well as a stable socio-economic and political

* Tel.: +44-(0)20-7679-5511; fax: +44-(0)20-7679-7565; e-mail: c.lemanski@ucl.ac.uk.

system in which to thrive as economic 'hubs'. Indeed, Derudder's (2006) summary of the Global Cities literature lists corporate organisation and infrastructure as the two key empirical criteria for Global City status. This status is also reliant on networks, through which goods, information, people and money flow between different Global Cities, and in doing so, ultimately determine the nature of the world economy (Beaverstock et al., 1999; Sassen, 1994; Short and Kim, 1999; Taylor, 2001). Thus, entry onto the Global City stage provides access to significant prestige and resources for both the city and its national economy.

The dominance of achieving Global City status as the overarching criteria for urban (and national) success is criticised for its emphasis on economic measurements (Smith, 1998) alongside its Anglo-American ethnocentrism (Robinson, 2002). Global City theories and discourses are predominantly drawn from Western approaches and use Western economic criteria for success. Thus, the concept itself is situated in a specific economic and geographical realm rather than an international model of urban achievement. Indeed, Robinson (2002, p. 539) indicates that a map of Global Cities would appear very different if, for example, Islamic nodes of global socio-economic activity were seen as a principal criterion. Robinson (2002, 2006) further develops this idea to highlight the inadequacies of distinguishing between cities of the South (or 'Third World' cities) as a 'Development Studies' problem, while cities of the North (or 'Western' cities) exclusively dominate the 'Urban Studies' agenda.[1] Although empirical research on Global Cities theoretically enables a fusion of cities of the North *and* South under the same banner, in fact, rather than recognising their relative achievements within the Global

Cities standard, the former are seen as the model to which the latter are striving. Thus the division between North and South continues through the Global City categorisation, in which the former remains dominant.

This paper considers firstly, the development of Global Cities in the South; and secondly, the implications of this drive for global competitiveness on social and spatial segregation and polarisation in cities of the South, with a particular emphasis on the city of Cape Town, South Africa. The case study of Cape Town is used to consider whether it is possible for a city to be both globally competitive *and* address domestic socio-economic redistribution. In addition, this paper ultimately considers the validity of the Global City label for cities in the South, using the example of Cape Town to highlight the problems of implementing such Western constructs and agendas in non-Western settings.

Global Cities in the South

Despite the dominance of Global City criteria as principally Anglo-American, Global Cities have emerged in some Asian (e.g. Hong Kong, Singapore) and Latin American (e.g. Mexico City, São Paulo) contexts. Although Global Cities are absent in sub-Saharan Africa, Johannesburg has emerged as the region's dominant metropolis, closely followed by Cape Town, Lagos and Nairobi (Van der Merwe, 2004), representing a new generation of African cities serving as financial, political and infrastructural 'nuclei' for their region (albeit not the globe). However, the criteria for success in these Asian, Latin American and African cities are predominantly based on Western measures, such as the need for their economies to be integrated into (Anglo-American) economic networks and capital flows. Indeed, Mexico City is considered a Global City largely because of its economic links with the United States and European Union (Parnreiter et al., 2004). Furthermore, the common measurement of Global Cities according to the size and number of international producer service firms produces a very Western map dominated by London and New York

(Taylor, 2004), while a focus on less Anglo-American criterion, for example, the location of NGOs, places Nairobi at the top of the list (Taylor, 2004; Robinson, 2005). As Robinson highlights (2002), while countless cities in the South are rendered ''off the map'' by Anglo-American criteria, in fact many of these poorer cities are crucial to the world economy, but because they do not house the world's leading economic firms are considered 'failures'. This highlights the irrelevance of Global City criteria and labels for many cities in Latin America, Africa and the Middle East (Gilbert, 1998), indicating the need for new models and theories based on the experiences of cities in the South. However, while more South-centric understandings of urban success are arguably necessary, the international hierarchy of Global City dominance ensures that city leaders in these regions continue to strive towards this Anglo-American standard, often to the detriment of vast sectors of their population. Thus, this paper recognises the inadequacies of the Global City label for non-Western contexts, and analyses the consequences of the *drive* for global competitiveness in cities of the South (while recognising that most, including Cape Town, are not Global Cities according to the dominant criteria). Although the mimicking of richer countries by smaller/poorer states is nothing new, the problems of this are considered within the Global City context.

'Third World' cities are traditionally perceived as places with a strong informal sector, weak economic growth, rapid population growth and crumbling infrastructure, quite different to the formal, regulated and sanitised spaces of cities in the North. In order to 'upgrade' these cities, to match the acclaimed Global City experience of places such as London and New York, poor cities have prioritised spending scarce resources on projects focused exclusively on promoting their city in the global economy, often at the expense of domestic needs. This homogenising endeavour, to achieve an externally-determined standard, fails to value the differences that diverse cities bring

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[1] In academic discourse, the terms 'North/South' have replaced 'Western/Third World', although both terms are used throughout this paper. While neither set of terms fully encompasses the variety of different countries and experiences in each group, they serve as a functional shorthand.