

# 1 Introduction

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Captives sustained the population of Babylon. Its towering walls limited escape. Athens was powerful because of seafaring prowess, not local abundance. Venice had a small population but was a major force in the Mediterranean. Hanseatic Lübeck was even smaller but dominated the Baltics, a security threat to large kingdoms. Amsterdam's influence accelerated on the backs of slaves, distant growing areas, and mineral extraction along an intricate network of towns.

Tenochtitlan used diplomacy and alliances to exploit territories, not direct authority. Ancient Rome was the core in a web of peripheral cities, a vacuum for foreign goods. Ptolemaic Alexandria brutally dominated its producing hinterlands in a veritable police state system of land management. These cities were not self-sufficient. Their leaders designed them to take control over resources from elsewhere, much as primary goods producers in the modern world's poorest regions routinely work for prices set by investors in New York, London or Chicago.

This book is about the politics of pre-modern city networks and the cities at the centers of them. It enters a sustained conversation about cities as drivers of globalization and shapers of social and geographic division. World cities studies – explained and critiqued in this chapter – helped put cities at the center of popular and scholarly discussion. We live in a seemingly terminal urban age, what Brenner and Schmid call planetary urbanization, with an expansion of cities at unprecedented physical scales and ecological impacts.<sup>1</sup> This book is for any reader looking to engage with historic precedents to this. On an elemental level, it is for anyone interested in the urban politics of expansionist states in as vivid and precise detail as possible. Hopefully it encourages world cities scholars to fully engage with important social histories. It spells out the case for more inclusive approaches to the study of urban networks.

<sup>1</sup> Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid, "Planetary Urbanization," in Mathew Gandy (ed.), *Urban Constellations* (Berlin: Jovis, 2012), 10–13, 11.

Ten empirical chapters form the heart of the book. Each is a case study of an important urban age. Chapter 2 explores networks in Mesopotamia, especially those of Uruk, Ur, and Babylon. Chapters 3 and 4 survey Classical and Hellenistic Greek cities, with substantial discussion of Athens and Alexandria. Chapter 5 connects the ancient city of Rome to its empire and hinterlands. Chapter 6 explores the modular walled ancient and medieval Chinese capital of Chang'an. Chapter 7 is about the Mesoamerican urban revolutions in Teotihuacan, Tikal, and Tenochtitlan. Chapter 8 explores Islamic city networks leading up to Baghdad's founding during the Abbasid period. Chapter 9 is about Italian communes, with an emphasis on Venice. Chapters 10 and 11 shift to the Baltics and Atlantic, scrutinizing the Hanseatic League of trading cities and the "hegemonic" Dutch Empire in turn.

These places leveraged architecture and planning to assume seminal roles in *intercity relations*, the formal and informal engagement between cities, including diplomacy and statecraft by city leaders. Except for Amsterdam, these cities are not literally "world cities" in the sense that they influenced every inhabited continent. In reality they had limited to no knowledge of whole zones of civilization, let alone the logistical reach to dominate them. Instead they occupied central places in their own worlds: the Fertile Crescent, the Yellow River Basin, the Mediterranean, Mesoamerica, the Baltics, and so on. The inhabitants of these cities knew of worlds beyond, frequently engaging them. The Silk Roads resoundingly expanded contacts, firing geographic imaginations across Eurasia in antiquity. Some urban spheres of influence were near universal in pre-modern notions of time and space. Baghdad resided at the center of *Dar al Islam*, the boundaries of Islamic territory. Rome was the microcosm of the *orbis terrarum*, the expanse of the world as the Romans understood it. Their architectural symbols spoke of their cities as seats of world dominion. Their respective worlds excluded India and China, from which luxury goods regularly arrived. Given constraints, the reach of these cities was nothing short of remarkable. Their exertions forged expansive networks that carried trade, diplomacy, radical notions, and assertions of power. They set the precedent for modern world cities – today's New Yorks, Londons, and Hong Kongs – whose impacts are planetary in scale.

Each chapter hinges on the following themes:

*Environmental preconditions for city networks.* The world cities under study did not project power on the basis of resource superiority over other places. In a recurrent theme throughout history, the leading centers of power suffered some form of environmental *scarcity* rather than any special abundance. This goes part way to explaining why the first cities emerged in the southern part of the Fertile Crescent rather than the north, where agriculture could be

rain fed, not necessitating massive irrigation systems. The leading power centers overcame enormous challenges, having to manage resources over longer distances than places of abundance. Remarkably, Mayans forged large cities in dense tropically forested areas. This challenge in turn required city builders to develop complex systems of administration and hierarchy, themselves a kind of power. However the leading cities did have decisive environmental advantages, most importantly riverine or oceanic sea routes that allowed them to establish linkages with other places.

*Population politics: Forced resettlement, expulsions, and childbirths.*

Pre-modern cities, without vaccines, without antibiotics and other basic public health measures, were population sinks with higher death rates than in rural or nomadic settings. Population was power. Maintaining it in cities required migration – frequently involuntary. Greek city founding entailed mergers of older cities, and Mesopotamian cities abducted populations in episodes including the Babylonian captivity (see Chapter 2). There was tremendous pressure on women to bear large numbers of children until their bodies gave out in their mid-twenties, as was the case in ancient Athens. Labor demands required forcibly stationary populations in and out of the city. City leaders locked gates at night, with architectural features in ancient and medieval cities serving the purposes of surveillance and control. An extreme case of this was in Ptolemaic Egypt, which met environmental challenges and labor shortages by erecting what must be considered one of the most totalitarian labor systems in history. This was central to the politics of the ancient world, where desertion was the most potent weapon of the lower orders. No less grotesque was the transatlantic slave trade run between Amsterdam and Dutch holdings in West Africa, the Caribbean, and the Americas. There too, desertion was the most potent resistance, as slaves and even terrified mercenaries fled and formed colonies. Their branding of slaves to aid recapture harkens back to severe regulatory measures in other eras.

*The domination of the hinterlands by cities.* Ptolemaic Egypt's repressive system of agriculture and hydrological construction is an extreme example, but in each of the cases under study, the power of cities over rural spaces expanded. Italian city-states called their spheres of influence *contados*, a concept widely in evidence elsewhere. In ages where nomadic existences were common, cities sought control over stationary populations outside their walls. Golden ages for cities tended to be disastrous for those living in

their hinterlands, as Rome's latifundia suggest. The latifundia were large slaveholding plantations owned by wealthy patricians from the cities who used them as retreats. They entail extensive land management from urban cores that used them as sources of income to support idle patrician lifestyles. Centralizing states denounced pastoralism and nomadism, movements outside administrative control. Cities also extracted massive surpluses from growing regions, leaving actual growers in destitution. The lack of automated technology meant that the only way to increase output was to work labor harder. Rome's fall may well have been a good thing for rural Italy.

*Menageries of state-types.* The city-state figures heavily in the history of city networks, but cities themselves have autonomous or semi-autonomous roles in establishing linkages under a variety of settings. City networks form the foundations of some territorial empires, as was the case with the Hellenistic satrapies left over in the wake of Alexander the Great's conquests. In other instances, city-states make for potent adversaries to large populous empires. Athens was swamped by Macedonian and then Roman power, while Venice retained independence for centuries. The history of city networks shows the indeterminacy of statecraft, spanning time periods in which city-states, territorial empires, nomadic societies, feudal orders, and religious authority all comingled. Today's codified nation-state system is an exception to civilized history. Moreover, urban ages have come and gone, interrupted by so-called dark ages where non-urban systems prevailed. In some cases the urban ages were the interruptions, as dark ages lasted considerably longer. "Dark age" is a subjective term, given that such periods arguably offered respite for peasantries otherwise dominated by cities. Scholars are challenging the pejorative phrase.<sup>2</sup> What we today call civil liberties, especially freedom of migration, may well have been greater in the absence of central states emanating from cities regulating population movements. These were by definition extended periods of deurbanization, usually with recessions in the knowledge production sustaining cities, such as written language. Ancient Mesopotamian history featured centuries-long dark ages, as did that of Ancient Greece and medieval Europe.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Matthew Gabriele and David M. Perry, *The Bright Ages: A New History of Medieval Europe* (New York: Harper Collins, 2021), 2.

*Urban experiences in city networks were distinctive.* As with today's world cities, everyday life in ancient, medieval, and pre-modern cities was shaped by extremes. Inequality tended to worsen in these places during their golden ages, evidenced in built environments, especially by increased differentiation in housing conditions. As global connectivity sustained larger populations, conditions consequentially deteriorated. The extreme case is Rome, in which housing conditions for the poor were so dire that many slept in graveyards or top floor units prone to collapse and tragic holocausts. City networks also homogenized experiences, creating proto-international styles that gave linked cities a sense of familiarity for mobile populations. This was in evidence far outside core cities, shaping life on the periphery as well. A traveler in the Hellenistic period arriving at a new city would know to visit the gymnasiums and agoras that were focal points of social activity. These elements are found as far afield as present day Afghanistan. Teotihuacan apartments housed a cosmopolitan cacophony of languages and customs. A traveler in the Roman Empire, from Palestine to Britain, would head straight for the baths. Architectural styles traveled alongside literature, political dissent, languages, news, manufactured goods, religions, and so on. Mesoamerican style horizons proliferated in art and architecture. City building in city networks was outward looking. Ports such as Rome's Ostia and Athens's Piraeus grew. The concept of inns evolved. Grand boulevards and showy architecture from Nebuchadnezzar II's Processional Way to the Athenian Acropolis projected power to visitors as well as restive populations. Baghdad's exotic markets, its Chinese junks at port, its litany of languages and religions helped establish the city as a preeminent cosmopolis of the early ninth century CE.

What all of these city networks have in common is that the management of labor, physical resources, and production is the reason for their existence. They were linked physically in terms of regional or global contacts, even if indirectly. They were linked metaphysically in the realms of ideas, aesthetics, and culture. From the step gabled houses in the Baltics, to Greek and Roman city planning and architecture, city networks tend toward stylistic homogenization or oft-bemoaned international styles of the times. Within these criteria is a great deal of variation. Population distributions and patterns differ widely. City networks existed across a number of economic systems and state types before capitalism and the sovereign state. The internet is the most important meta-physical linkage today, but ancient cities expressed soft power through

informational storage means of their own: cuneiform, linear A, linear B, tablature, and papyrus. Venice and Amsterdam were printing powerhouses. Bodies of water were the most important linkages between cities until the 1800s. Pre-modern networks saw growth in waterborne long distance trading in a diversity of goods as shipping became more efficient. Each city studied here asserted its own remarkable innovative and adaptive approach to city building. Some, like Venice and Tikal, were astonishing in their persistence and capacities for resurgence.

Fascinating and impactful on their own, these case selections derive from a search for analogies to the present-day world city network. Today's world cities are connected at a planetary scale. They are not places but "processes," by one definition, constantly reinventing themselves around financial flows in an age of capitalism.<sup>3</sup> The leading cities in earlier urban networks operated under different social logics than today but show striking similarities. They had dense concentrations in knowledge capital, administrative capability, long distance trade, financial mechanisms, and migration. They were heavily altered by their positions in world networks, building and rebuilding in response to far flung contacts. The negative byproducts of this are also in evidence. Cities became more crowded, expensive, and prone to steepening social hierarchies. Contexts may change dramatically, but these human experiences will be familiar. Survival in these cities was as daunting as any nonurban settings. We will nevertheless see a great deal of variance. Different things have moved from place to place via differing mechanisms, creating unique iterations of the world city across time.

A persistent assertion of this book is that the city as theorized by modern urbanists was realized long ago, starting with Uruk from the fourth millennium BCE.<sup>4</sup> Cities are not simply large settlements, which existed with populations in the thousands during the Neolithic period. All cities have large populations and contiguous built-up areas. These are prerequisite conditions. Cities are by definition not self-sufficient, relying on trade or a hinterland for resources. They entail the elaborate management of internal spaces, and of their essential supply zones. Unlike egalitarian Neolithic villages, cities established class categories, specialized labor, and property regimes that limited access to goods. Writing emerged to facilitate this differentiation. World cities are central to the most elaborate regional networks linking multiple urban areas.

Each chapter centers on a world city and its network with as much geographic and structural variation as possible while retaining explanatory depth.

<sup>3</sup> Manuel Castells, "The Space of Flows," in Ida Susser (ed.), *The Castells Reader on Cities and Social Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 314–366, 322.

<sup>4</sup> For an elaborate discussion on the definition of early cities in historic context, see Edward W. Soja, *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 19.

For example, Lübeck, a leader in the medieval Hanseatic League, had a population of 28,000, about one-seventieth the size of Tang Chang'an. The Hanse network required intense negotiation between relatively equal cities across boundaries. Chang'an and Rome existed in the context of unified territorial empires. Where Rome's urban network enabled a degree of local autonomy, its contemporary Han Chang'an went further with bureaucratic control. Some of our cases explore independent city-states such as classical Athens or medieval Venice. Others, like Lübeck, made decisions in the context of multiple layers of overarching imperial and ecclesiastical authority. Mesoamerica, China, and the Fertile Crescent were pristine sites of urbanization, where cities and their aesthetics emerged without prior knowledge of urbanisms elsewhere. Cities like Rome and Tenochtitlan were apotheoses of what came before, and what had been learned from elsewhere. None of this is to say that these are the only city networks that existed. Indeed, a key principle of this book is that the similarities across time and place are uncanny, right up to the present. Taylor recently referred to studies that traverse temporal boundaries as undertakings in "city generics."<sup>5</sup>

The network concept is subject to voluminous discussion by social scientists amidst globalization. These fields have often couched networks in terms of intercity business relations in order to map the world economy, though they are more varied than this.<sup>6</sup> Further, urban theorists have closely studied the role of instant communications technologies in fostering commercial relationships between cities. Networks can be defined as physical and metaphysical flows through places, aided by social contacts. As a leading scholar of world cities has asserted, urban populations are especially adept at organizing networks, and have been for a long time.<sup>7</sup>

Networks have flowed through cities throughout their six millennia of existence. The first cities were components of city networks, pushing the limits of time and space. Greg Woolf defines the ancient Mediterranean network simply as "a loose web across which people, goods, and ideas moved back and forth."<sup>8</sup> City networks were densest at their cores, imbricated within one another, as in Greece circa 500 BCE, Italy at the start of the Common Era and around 1300 CE, or the Netherlands at 1650. Vast territorial empires bound some urban networks, such as the Roman Empire and Abbasid Caliphate. Others, like the Hanseatic League, Venetian *Stato da Mar*, and the Dutch world network, relied

<sup>5</sup> Peter J. Taylor, "City Generics: External Urban Relations in Ancient Mesopotamian and Modern Global City Networks," *Urban Geography* 40, no. 8 (2019), 2010–2030.

<sup>6</sup> Peter J. Taylor, *Extraordinary Cities: Millennia of Moral Syndromes, World-Systems and City-State Relations* (Northampton: Edward Elgar, 2013), 21; Taylor, "City Generics."

<sup>7</sup> Taylor, *Extraordinary Cities*, 79.

<sup>8</sup> Greg Woolf, *The Life and Death of Ancient Cities: A Natural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 209.

on intricate social ties. The Hanse merchants elevated their informal network to an art form, a source of power designed to create in groups and out groups.<sup>9</sup> Networks were evidenced inside cities themselves, in the tightly regulated *emporia* of Greek city-states, the walled markets of Chang'an, in the canals plied by the merchants of Holland and Venice, and in the sequestered barracks of Hanse traders based in London, Bergen, and Bruges.

Larger populations over time thickened connectivity in these regions while innovations in seafaring accelerated human flows.<sup>10</sup> "People moved, things moved, ideas moved," as Woolf put it.<sup>11</sup> These physical and ideational flows included architectural knowledge and building materials, connecting visual cultures across long distances.<sup>12</sup> Travelers from Spain to Central Asia during the Hellenistic period would easily recognize the central components of Greek urbanism. Weary merchants journeying to any large Abbasid city would know there was a bathhouse waiting.

Just as only a fraction of the world population flies today, voluntary mobility was limited to an elite few (slaves and subaltern classes were often forced to migrate). For Woolf and other specialists, this was more than enough to create far ranging cultural singularity.<sup>13</sup> Even minor cities used their surpluses to barter along trading circuits. "The network connected many small worlds, in which power and authority was fundamentally based in small polities," according to Woolf's description of the ancient Mediterranean.<sup>14</sup> Elite travel required systems of transportation and hospitality. Variations on these themes were clear in non-Mediterranean regions as well. The *caravanserais* network stretched from North Africa, Arabia, Iraq, Iran, to Central Asia, providing lodging where travelers could rest and bathe during long journeys. This system overlapped with similar networks reaching China. Few individuals went the distance, making explorers such as Xuanzang, Marco Polo, and Ibn Battuta all the more important.

At the very outermost extension of city networks, goods rather than people made first contacts. Ancient cities did not exist in isolation, even across extreme distances. Luxury goods flowed between Chang'an and Rome, changing hands repeatedly along the Silk Roads. There was little if any proven direct human contact between the world's largest contemporary empires or many major cities between them. The points of origin of these traveling goods

<sup>9</sup> For examples of this extensive literature, see Andrea Caracausi and Christof Jeggle (eds.), *Commercial Networks and European Cities, 1400–1800* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2014); Ulf Christian Ewert and Stephan Selzer, *Institutions of Hanseatic Trade: Studies on the Political Economy of a Medieval Network Organization* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2016); Sunhild Kleingärtner and Gabriel Zeilinger (eds.), *Raubildung Durch Netzwerke?* (Bonn: Habelt, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Woolf, *The Life and Death of Ancient Cities*, 223.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 215. <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.



remained misunderstood at their Eurasian antipodes. Herodotus' *Histories*, written in the fifth century BCE, repeated stories claiming that giant ants harvested gold from India, which was collected by Indian merchants who barely escaped with their lives attempting to abscond with the valuable export.<sup>15</sup> Pliny the Elder mentions the same story nearly five centuries later.<sup>16</sup>

Historic analogy entails limits. These cities were not linked digitally, leaving a much different sense of time and space. They did not exist under an overarching nation-state system, making these cities by definition more "global" than "international." They didn't exist under dense global governance arrangements set by national leaders. Cities were often empowered to conduct their own diplomacy. These limitations are significant as history trends backward to an age when "mayors rule the world," as Benjamin Barber phrased it.<sup>17</sup> Eroding boundaries leave cities with greater decision-making latitude. If true, the nation-state era will be a blip in the long history of civilization, which looks more like it once did, with complicated varieties of authority.

### World Cities Studies in a New Age of Capital

Fernand Braudel, Peter Hall, and Immanuel Wallerstein explored city networks in detail from the early 1970s onward. They placed urban hierarchies at the heart of world economic systems across a litany of times and places.<sup>18</sup> World cities studies emerged only later, a research program deeply rooted in the neoliberal turn of the 1980s and 1990s. Though the history of city networks dates from 3200 BCE in Mesopotamia, world cities studies portray them as something uniquely modern in postindustrial capitalist times, or even futurist in orientation.<sup>19</sup> This is in marked contrast with the earlier studies of city networks, led by historians such as Braudel, and in big histories such as Wallerstein's *The Modern World System* trilogy.

The late city planner and philosopher John Friedmann directed the attention of urbanists toward a hypothesized network of what he called "world cities"

<sup>15</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 215.

<sup>16</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* (New York: Penguin, 1991), 296.

<sup>17</sup> Benjamin Barber, *If Mayors Ruled the World: Dysfunctional Nations, Rising Cities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

<sup>18</sup> Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean: And the Mediterranean World in the Age of Phillip II Volume II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 680; Fernand Braudel, *The Wheels of Commerce* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 104; Peter Hall, "The Metropolitan Explosion," in Neil Brenner and Roger Keil (eds.), *The Global Cities Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006), 23–24; Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 349.

<sup>19</sup> For example, even Greg Clark's 2016 *Global Cities: A Short History* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute), devotes roughly the same amount of space to speculating on the future of global cities as it does to explaining five millennia of their history.

that were ascending in a denationalizing world economy. World cities developed command functions in the globalizing economy as hierarchies formed between primary and secondary cities. These urban networks transcended boundaries, attracting immigration as well as financial capital.<sup>20</sup> His prescient research in the 1980s tried to make sense of conservative historic shifts that academia was just beginning to grapple with as economic inequality trended upward. As Friedmann later remembered in an autobiographical chapter in his book, *The Prospect of Cities*:

By the early 1980s, it was evident that a period of major upheavals was at hand. It would take decades to work through their full implications: the deindustrialization of the industrialized world, the rise of the global economy, the triumph of neoliberal ideology, the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the end of the Third World, the new information technologies – all these would require a rethinking of theoretical positions, my own along with everyone else’s. The lifeways to which all of us had become accustomed would never return. We were living at the beginning of a new age.<sup>21</sup>

Friedmann hypothesized that intercity relations were crucial to these trends as world production became definitively transnational. Friedmann’s landmark 1982 essay co-authored with a graduate student posited that newly unleashed multinational corporations had taken “control of economic space.”<sup>22</sup> This research was avowedly a product of a new era of market triumphalism. Communications technology allowed greater connectivity between cities, irrespective of national boundaries. Lax financial regulations empowered corporations to redirect investments almost at will.<sup>23</sup> This is the same problem analyzed by much world cities research today, making it a kind of dismal science. As public financing dried up amidst austerity, cities in fiscal crises competed for private capital, setting off an arms race of corporate appeasement.<sup>24</sup>

Though these themes inform Friedmann’s later work in urban planning and ethics, he left it to other scholars to systematically carry out his proposed agenda in the 1990s and 2000s.<sup>25</sup> It is Saskia Sassen whose name is most

<sup>20</sup> John Friedmann, “The World City Hypothesis,” *Development and Change* 17, no. 1 (1986), 69–83, 74.

<sup>21</sup> John Friedmann, *The Prospect of Cities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 144.

<sup>22</sup> John Friedmann and Goetz Wolff, “World City Formation: An Agenda for Research and Action,” *International Journal for Urban and Regional Research* 6, no. 3 (1982), 309–344, 310.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 315; also see Friedmann, “World City Hypothesis.”

<sup>24</sup> For elaboration on this idea, called “municipal mercantilism,” see Joshua K. Leon, “Global Cities at Any Cost: Resisting Municipal Mercantilism,” *City* 21, no. 1 (2017), 1–21.

<sup>25</sup> John Friedmann, *Planning in the Public Domain: From Knowledge to Action* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 382.

associated with the term “global city,” owing to her 1991 classic *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*. Sassen’s global city archetype is a variation on the world city concept. She resorted to the updated term to signify a break from previous eras, explaining the latest iteration of the world city. For Sassen, the economic system moved toward a fully realized era of global capitalism, with cities changing along with it. The global city produces the hard and soft infrastructure needed to manage post-national economies. Global cities produced the means to manage world resources, and rapidly expanded their financial sectors. They didn’t simply coordinate preexisting functions.<sup>26</sup>

Sassen’s voluminous explorations of “producer services” concentrating in New York, London, and Tokyo operationalized the global city.<sup>27</sup> These include finance, insurance, and real estate (“FIRE”) industries, and legal sectors to manage the thicket of complications surrounding global transactions. The more business networks grew in geographic complexity, the more they required central management.<sup>28</sup> As we will see in these chapters, cities throughout history expand by extracting and managing external resources. They become “global” as they exert power elsewhere. Global cities are, by Sassen’s definition, the places with the highest transnational connectivity via the circuitry of producer services with command functions.<sup>29</sup> They have the deepest agglomerations of firms capable of managing networks and navigating a thicket of international legal environments.<sup>30</sup> As capital mobility grew, Sassen predicted the city network to enlarge, form hierarchies, and establish specializations in a positive sum playing field.<sup>31</sup> These cities offer firms critical masses of high end, knowledge-oriented sectors.<sup>32</sup>

At the same time, this high wage labor force carries with it a yawning demand for low wage services.<sup>33</sup> This entails the undocumented kitchen workers in Manhattan’s glamorous restaurants, the cleaning staff at business hotels, textile homeworkers producing custom clothing, and so on.<sup>34</sup> As Sassen frames it, the major nodes in the world economy concentrate “top level transnational managers” alongside their “secretaries” and “the janitors

<sup>26</sup> Sassen takes pains to distinguish the global city from previous world cities concepts. See Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 349.

<sup>27</sup> Peter J. Taylor, *World City Network: A Global Urban Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2004), 33.

<sup>28</sup> Sassen, *Global City*, 127.

<sup>29</sup> Saskia Sassen, “Locating Cities on Global Circuits,” in Saskia Sassen (ed.), *Global Network, Linked Cities* (London: Routledge, 2002), 1–33, 3.

<sup>30</sup> Saskia Sassen, *Losing Control? Sovereignty in an Age of Globalization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 11.

<sup>31</sup> Sassen, *Global City*, 173. <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 32. <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 11, 227, 244.

<sup>34</sup> More than half of New York City’s dishwashers are undocumented. Fiscal Policy Institute, *Working for a Better Life: A Profile of Immigrants in the New York State Economy* (New York: Fiscal Policy Institute, 2007), 21.

cleaning the buildings where the new professional class works.”<sup>35</sup> Put bluntly, wealth thrives on poverty. This too is consistent with the history of global cities, not unique to the modern capitalist period.

Sassen identified these dystopian trends early, developing her analysis of them ever since. Her work is essential to understanding the global dimensions of displacement at the local level. Like Friedmann, she sees the rise of neoliberal capitalism as a critical juncture and historic dividing line. “The end of the Cold War launched one of the most brutal economic phases of the modern era,” she asserted in her 2014 book *Expulsions*, in a sense identifying the crystallization of the trends taking form at the time Friedmann took up the issue of intercity relations.<sup>36</sup> Methodologically she distinguishes these macro-global trends from national action.<sup>37</sup> The leading global cities gentrified, as Sassen predicted, reaching extreme levels of division, exclusion, and displacement through real estate inflation.<sup>38</sup> They attained through market manipulation what would otherwise require distasteful segregation laws, an irony implicit in *Expulsions*. Sassen’s research speaks, in various ways, to the human and capital flows linking cities in a digital age. If Sassen’s major work *Territory, Authority, Rights* is correct, we’re living in a pivotal juncture in state development, with national sovereignty eroding, its candle burning at both ends by unaccountable business networks and their antipodes in activism.<sup>39</sup> Though the nation-state is the primary form of social organization, “we are living through an epochal transformation,” she predicts.<sup>40</sup> Because her term global city has become so firmly associated with these components of modern capitalism, this book uses the longer-standing term “world city” to describe its premodern cases. The world city, as conceptualized here, also has command functions but operates according to precapitalistic logics in their own unique contexts.<sup>41</sup>

Sassen’s emphasis on the urban experiences in cities impacted by global forces has gone less discussed by the many overviews of her work. In the tradition of Dickens, Engels, and Mike Davis, Sassen is attuned to physical changes happening in cities in tandem with the global political forces she

<sup>35</sup> Saskia Sassen, *Cities in a World Economy* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2018), 2.

<sup>36</sup> Saskia Sassen, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 18.

<sup>37</sup> Saskia Sassen, “Deciphering the Global,” in Saskia Sassen (ed.), *Deciphering the Global: Its Scales, Spaces and Subjects* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 1–18, 7.

<sup>38</sup> Sassen, *Global City*, 190.

<sup>39</sup> Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 328, 330.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>41</sup> For the same reasons I use the term “world cities studies” to define the field, a change from my previous article that referred to this literature as “global cities studies.” The longer standing scholarly term is more appropriate for this book. I should add that the term “world city” remains in wide use, including by the GaWC, the leading think tank in this area. See Leon, “Global Cities at Any Cost.”

theorizes. Like those figures, she visits the dystopian spaces in global cities, a method that enables vivid analysis of the shifting lived experiences in these places.<sup>42</sup> This is an under-discussed strength of *The Global City*, which offers lucid accounts of social inequalities in New York, London, and Tokyo as they unfolded, connecting them to the theory.

As she recounts:

I spent many hours speaking with illegal immigrants in Tokyo and in Yokohama in an attempt to learn how and why they decided to migrate to Japan, given its reputation as a closed society. It is impossible to do justice to their answers here, but the main points were as follows: First, they were individuals who had, in one way or another, become mobilized into labor migrations before coming; second, Japan's growing role in their countries, together with the consequent availability of information about Japan, had created linkages and made Japan emerge in their minds as an option for emigration.<sup>43</sup>

With this, we can see the impacts of intercity relations in urban experiences. Migrants and their unseemly, unregulated workspaces formed the underbelly of a glamorizing economy of consumption, two sides of cities that are explicitly linked.<sup>44</sup> In London: "New, elegant shops and restaurants – and sharp increases in the prices of housing – manifest the new lifestyle."<sup>45</sup> Here she adds visual nuance to what would otherwise be distant bird's eye processes. In her words:

Walking though those streets [in working class Hackney] in the summer of 1987 offered what is probably one of the most stunning instances of how landlords will let row after row of what had once been elegant cream-colored facades fall into dark grey disrepair for decades, only to be quickly restored to their old splendor in a few months when the market calls.<sup>46</sup>

But for all this centralized control over resources, she sees a growth of ungovernable spaces. This includes digital space where power is now expressed.<sup>47</sup> It entails the proliferation of informal work and living spaces as a structural fact of post-Cold War capitalism. The global city is a zone of concentrated power where displacement is a constant threat, a force beyond individual control. The long history of world cities is, as we will see, also a history of expulsions. In fact some cities consisted almost entirely of displaced populations. In tandem with this, the world city has long struggled to control ungovernable spaces. The need to assert authority over digital space is the latest manifestation of a broader project to regulate human activity.

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<sup>42</sup> Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights*, 273. <sup>43</sup> Sassen, *The Global City*, 320.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 323. <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 273. <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Saskia Sassen, "Electronic Space and Power," in Saskia Sassen (ed.), *Globalization and Its Discontents: Essays on the New Mobility of People and Money* (New York: New Press, 1998), 177–194, 188.

The Geographer Peter J. Taylor is the scholar most responsible for the “relational turn” in global cities studies, which emphasizes quantitative data to understand the city network as a whole rather than relying on singular case studies, as Sassen does.<sup>48</sup> In 1998, he became the founding director of Loughborough University’s Globalization and World Cities Research Network (GaWC), a massive repository of research in intercity relations. Here, argues Taylor, lies the evidential crisis. Sassen, he notes, “makes a major contribution to comparative studies but says little on relations between these cities.”<sup>49</sup> Does a world city network exist at all? If so, how should the world city be defined and categorized? To address this, GaWC began as what he called a “taxonomic exercise,” he explained to me in an interview, growing into a substantial generative research program.<sup>50</sup> What GaWC is most famous for is its occasional indexes ranking the leading world cities on the basis of global business connections.<sup>51</sup> They have inspired a litany of imitators in the corporate and think tank worlds, kicking off the league table phenomenon Taylor himself lamented to me. GaWC is heavily influenced by Sassen’s earlier focus on producer services.<sup>52</sup> The field became, at its worst, a study of the game of capitalism that challenged none of its rules, encouraging the gentrified dystopias Sassen warned about.<sup>53</sup> Yet, of major global cities scholars, Taylor shows the greatest interest in situating the world city network in historic context.<sup>54</sup> His 2013 book *Extraordinary Cities* argues that networked cities played pivotal roles in shaping history during uncommon yet

<sup>48</sup> Allan Watson and Jonathan V. Beaverstock, “World City Network Research at a Theoretical Impasse: On the Need to Reestablish Qualitative Approaches to Understanding Agency in World City Networks,” *Tijdschrift Voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 105, no. 4 (2014), 412–426, 416.

<sup>49</sup> Taylor, *World City Network*, 33. <sup>50</sup> Peter J. Taylor, personal interview, June 20, 2016.

<sup>51</sup> Peter J. Taylor, “The GUCP/GaWC Project,” in Peter J. Taylor, Pengfei Ni, Ben Derudder, Michael Hoyler, Jin Huang, and Frank Witlox (eds.), *Global Urban Analysis: A Survey of Cities in Globalization* (London: Earthscan, 2011), 1–11, 2; Peter J. Taylor, “The Interlocking Network Model,” in Ben Derudder, Michael Hoyler, Peter J. Taylor, and Frank Witlox (eds.), *International Handbook of Globalization and World Cities* (Northampton: Edward Elgar, 2011), 51–62, 51; Peter J. Taylor, “Urbanization,” in Mark Juergensmeyer, Saskia Sassen, Manfred B. Steger, and Victor Faessel (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Global Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 513–527, 518.

<sup>52</sup> Peter J. Taylor, “Advanced Producer Service Centres in the World Economy,” in Peter J. Taylor, Pengfei Ni, Ben Derudder, Michael Hoyler, Jin Huang, and Frank Witlox (eds.), *Global Urban Analysis: A Survey of Cities in Globalization* (London: Earthscan, 2011), 22–55, 22.

<sup>53</sup> Leon, “Global Cities at Any Cost,” 1.

<sup>54</sup> P. J. Taylor, “Homo Geographicus: A Geohistorical Manifesto for Cities,” GaWC Research Bulletin 107 (October 18, 2014), available at [www.lboro.ac.uk/gawc/rb/rb107.html](http://www.lboro.ac.uk/gawc/rb/rb107.html), accessed January 27, 2020; Peter J. Taylor, “Problematizing City/State Relations: Towards a Geohistorical Understanding of Contemporary Globalization,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 32, no. 2 (2007), 133–150, 142; Taylor, “Urbanization,” 516.

sustained creative flourishes.<sup>55</sup> His oeuvre returns in fits and starts to premodern city networks such as the Hanseatic League, and the roles of Venice, Genoa, and Bruges as core cities.<sup>56</sup>

Influenced by Sassen, Manuel Castells' *The Rise of the Network Society* sees technological developments as provoking irreversible changes in intercity relations. Tectonic shifts in time and space bridging innovations are the most consequential of revolutions. The industrial revolution starting in Britain rapidly reconfigured the global economy, providing a precedent to the pace of change in the present-day.<sup>57</sup> The maturation of digital networking technology by the 1990s was no less transformative than nineteenth century industrialization.<sup>58</sup> Castells' much discussed "space of flows" linking cities are digitally facilitated exchanges in "crystallized time."<sup>59</sup> More than anyone, Castells framed the global city concept as part of a novel capitalist revolution unique to a reconfigured world economy. This is consistent with the broader intellectual commentary on capitalism's ascendance by the twenty-first century. But where Francis Fukuyama proffered a triumphalist "end of history," Friedmann, Sassen, and Castells clearly understood neoliberal capitalism's dystopian social consequences for cities.

Though largely ignored by global cities studies, the most thorough history of intercity relations to date consists of two edited volumes from the Copenhagen Polis Centre on thirty-six "city-state cultures." Their editor, Mogens Herman Hansen, argues that "urbanization and state formation go hand in hand."<sup>60</sup> Urbanization was a relational process involving regional interactions. This includes high periods of commerce, which is why city networks tend to overlap with so-called golden ages.<sup>61</sup> They share language, culture, aesthetics, and political ideas.<sup>62</sup> If core cities decline, city-state culture disintegrates with them.<sup>63</sup> In short, history is loaded with periods of

<sup>55</sup> Taylor, *Extraordinary Cities*, 4.

<sup>56</sup> For example, Taylor, *World City Network*, 11, 13; and Taylor, "Problematizing City/State Relations," 140, 142.

<sup>57</sup> Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 33; Also see Manuel Castells and Pekka Himanen, "Models of Development in the Global Information Age: Constructing an Analytical Framework," in Manuel Castells and Pekka Himanen (eds.), *Reconceptualizing Development in the Global Information Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 7–25, 11.

<sup>58</sup> Castells, *Rise of the Network Society*, 51. <sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 441.

<sup>60</sup> Mogens Herman Hansen, "The Concepts of City-State and City-State Culture," in Mogens Herman Hansen (ed.), *A Comparative Study of Thirty City-State Cultures* (Copenhagen: The Royal Danish Academy of Arts and Letters, 2000), 11–34, 15.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 17. <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*; Mogens Herman Hansen, "Introduction," in Mogens Herman Hansen (ed.), *A Comparative Study of Six City-State Cultures* (Copenhagen: The Royal Danish Academy of Arts and Letters, 2002), 7–21, 12.



dense intercity relations on all continents, foreshadowing urban interactions today.<sup>64</sup>

In rare two-way dialogue between global cities theorists and scholars of antiquity, Castells wrote the conclusion to the edited volume *Connectivity in Antiquity*, in which anthropologists and archeologists applied his theory in *The Rise of the Network Society* to ancient regional networks. The general consensus among the authors was that there were previous technological revolutions that transformed power relations irreversibly, establishing new class and labor hierarchies in punctuated equilibrium.<sup>65</sup> Then, as now, there was an ebb and flow to globalization, as guises of state authority assemble and disassemble to accommodate these fluctuations.<sup>66</sup> Serving as a respondent, Castells was apprehensive if not hostile to the enterprise of retroactively applying a self-consciously modern theory to the distant past.<sup>67</sup> Yet he concedes, as the volume argues, that networks were fundamental to political development, going as far back as the age of cities, and even to the Neolithic period, notions long held by antiquarians from a variety of disciplines.<sup>68</sup> He was struck by the many analogous political situations in light of archeological discoveries pointing toward distinctive associations between dense settlement, invention, and inequality:

[W]hen, in my own research, I limited the validity of my analysis of the social structure that I theorized as network society to our contemporary society, tentatively identified as the Information Age, I was wrong both empirically and theoretically. Empirically: networks seem to have always been at the heart of the social structure and social change, as the impressive body of archeological and historical evidence . . . seems to

<sup>64</sup> Mogens Herman Hansen, "The Impact of City-State Cultures in World History," in Mogens Herman Hansen (ed.), *A Comparative Study of Thirty City-State Cultures* (Copenhagen: The Royal Danish Academy of Arts and Letters, 2000), 597–623, 605.

<sup>65</sup> Thomas E. Levy, "Grand Narratives, Technological Revolutions and the Past: Deep Time Studies of Metallurgy and Social Evolution in the Eastern Mediterranean," in Øystein S. LaBianca and Arnold Scham (eds.), *Connectivity in Antiquity: Globalization as a Long-Term Historical Process* (London: Equinox, 2006), 10–25, 13.

<sup>66</sup> William R. Thompson, "Trade Pulsations, Collapse and Reorientation in the Ancient World," in Øystein S. LaBianca and Arnold Scham (eds.), *Connectivity in Antiquity: Globalization as a Long-Term Historical Process* (London: Equinox, 2006), 32–58, 34.

<sup>67</sup> Manuel Castells, "Nothing New under the Sun?" in Øystein S. LaBianca and Arnold Scham (eds.), *Connectivity in Antiquity: Globalization as a Long-Term Historical Process* (London: Equinox, 2006), 158–167, 159.

<sup>68</sup> Philip D. Curtin, *Cross Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 1, 61; A. G. Hopkins, "Globalization: An Agenda for Historians," in A. G. Hopkins (ed.), *Globalization in World History* (London: Pimlico, 2002), 1–10, 3; Peter N. Stearns, *Globalization in World History* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 4; Ad van der Woude, Jan de Vries, Akira Hayami, "The Hierarchies, Provisioning, and Demographic Patterns of Cities," in Ad van der Woude, Jan de Vries, and Akira Hayami (eds.), *Urbanization in History: A Process of Dynamic Interactions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 1–19, 2.



indicate. Networks did not have to wait for microelectronics to be a decisive tool in organizing production, trade, power and communication.<sup>69</sup>

Castells conceded there is “nothing new under the sun” in the annals of city networks, but reasserted that, as he saw it, information technology was a clear historic dividing line.<sup>70</sup> As with other technological revolutions, life in today’s network is changing in ways that are distinctive.<sup>71</sup> Technology is the critical variable, the context in which “people live, love, fight, and die.”<sup>72</sup>

### End of History, Start of Amnesia

There are problems with disconnecting from the past. The emphasis of global cities studies on late twentieth century developments gives the post-Cold War era a year zero feel. First, global cities studies risk omitting important links that left path-dependent legacies if they overemphasize digital ties between cities. The abundance of littoral cities in today’s urban archipelago is one, deriving from the extended period in which sea travel was the most important means of shipping and transport. There are also links whose analog forms were similar in principle to today’s digital networks, writing, printing, and mapping to name a few.

In fact a consciousness of world city hierarchies in the popular discourse has been evident since the early nineteenth century as railways reinforced land-based intercity linkage.<sup>73</sup> As Youssef Cassis frames it in his study of financial centers from the late 1700s onward:

The existence of a hierarchy of international financial centers was clearly in contemporaries’ minds. In Britain, in particular, there was a keen awareness from the turn of the century of the City’s newly acquired role as the centre of European and even world trade – less thought was given to finance as such.<sup>74</sup>

Against the backdrop of rapid twentieth-century urbanization, Max Weber’s 1921 study *The City* focused on ancient and medieval cities in the West in a seminal attempt at classification. There are references to networking between cities and their hinterlands.<sup>75</sup>

Second, missing from this dialogue is the *political* history of city networks – a gap in the global cities literature that this book addresses. Scholarly work that leaves out the myriad patterns of oppression and dissent related to intercity relations can create the false impression of apolitical times. In our age of

<sup>69</sup> Castells, “Nothing New under the Sun?,” 158.      <sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.      <sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> Youssef Cassis, *Capitals of Capital: A History of International Financial Centers, 1780–2005* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 63.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.      <sup>75</sup> Max Weber, *The City* (Toronto: Free Press, 1966), 66.

immigrant rights and anti-gentrification movements that are byproducts of intercity relations, it's increasingly important to explore previous high periods of globalization in politicized terms. Secular political ideology as we know it was largely absent for most of pre-modern times, especially in ancient cities. Politics as a response to human conditions was not. City walls were intended to prevent captive laborers from deserting their harsh stations in life, just as they kept invaders out. As in today's city network, the city was not just an empowering tool designed to foster human mobility. It was also designed to *regulate* mobility and monopolize resources.

Some global cities theorists may object to the application of the field's hypotheses on previous periods. For Castells and Sassen, the internet is a critical variable obviously not present in previous eras. Castells has noted that spaces of flows have existed in multitudes of historic contexts.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, it is important to note that world cities hypotheses are being applied in numerous questionable directions. The emphasis on digital technologies has directed the application of global cities research toward the potentially limiting study of new media trends.<sup>77</sup> Global cities theorists may also point out that the ethos of capitalism arguably did not exist in most of the cases under study in this book, and that world cities can only operate by capitalist logics. This line of argument is problematic and capable of leading the field astray. The emphasis on corporate capital and knowledge accumulation has led global cities studies away from its critical roots, toward apolitical, decontextualized business studies. Using global cities theorists as consultants, ethically questionable institutions borrow from the scholarly literature, including the work of the GaWC essentially to inform business location strategy.<sup>78</sup> *This book by contrast situates world cities in their latest guise as part of a long history of class struggle and survival.*

Others may object to engaging with history on methodological grounds. The field has taken a data-driven turn away from Sassen's vivid, multifaceted descriptive approaches.<sup>79</sup> Flows – the movement of people, information, and

<sup>76</sup> Castells, "Nothing New under the Sun?," 159.

<sup>77</sup> For an overview of the growing study of networks in politics, see Jennifer Nicholl Victor, Alexander H. Montgomery, and Mark Lubell, "The Emergence of the Study of Networks in Politics," in Jennifer Nicholl Victor, Alexander H. Montgomery, and Mark Lubell (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Networks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 3–58.

<sup>78</sup> Sponsors of such research include Z/Yen, the state of Qatar, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, Partnership for New York City (a business association), MasterCard, the Mori Foundation (named after the powerful developer), Citi, A. T. Kearney, and other organizations representing corporate, financial, and state interests. For more detail, see Leon, "Global Cities at Any Cost," 6.

<sup>79</sup> This turn in global cities studies is critiqued in Michiel van Meeteren, Ben Derudder, and David Bassens, "Can the Straw Man Speak? An Engagement with Postcolonial Critiques of 'Global Cities Research'," *Dialogues in Human Geography* 6, no. 3 (2016), 247–267; and Watson and Beaverstock, "World City Network Research at a Theoretical Impasse."

materials between cities – are hard to measure. This is particularly the case across city networks in history, occurring in varying contexts of space and time. Taylor laments the absence of firm data on trade and adds the problem of “no comprehensive information on the agents, people in the city, doing the inter-city networking.”<sup>80</sup> Looking into the past to analyze flows offers its own problems. Selective survival in built, artistic, and written records greatly compounds this problem when we try to make sense of city networks. There is inevitable approximation and guesswork, even as specialists across fields find new artifacts and develop more precise methods. For example, archeologists often estimate ancient urban population sizes based on the built footprints of as yet uncovered cities. Containers found in ancient shipwrecks are useful measures for trade, but some goods perish. In reality, trade in perishable goods is almost impossible to calculate, leading to an undercount of trade as a whole. This does not mean global cities studies should avoid times and places of profound importance.

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A consistent critique of global cities studies is that it does not apply broadly enough. By this argument, the research program restricts its focus to a few corporate clusters, leaving out other categories of cities that are important artifacts of globalization. Critics have argued that small population centers are omitted from this discussion.<sup>81</sup> More distressingly, many of the same critics argue that non-Western cities are systematically, disproportionately ignored by global cities studies.<sup>82</sup> For example, Lagos is only a “beta” city in the GaWC’s most recent index from 2020, ranked in the second tier below “alpha cities” with the most discernable global connectivity. That puts this vast metropolis teeming with concentrated interpersonal and global exchange well behind Brisbane, Boston, and Houston.<sup>83</sup> Global forces undoubtedly shape Lagos, Nairobi, and cities like them. They are also active influencers of global processes shaping other places, even if their strengths cannot be measured in terms of concentrated corporate capital.

<sup>80</sup> Peter J. Taylor, “Historical World City Networks,” in Ben Derudder, Michael Hoyler, Peter J. Taylor, and Frank Witlox eds., *International Handbook of Globalization and World Cities* (Northampton: Edward Elgar, 2011), 9–21, 12.

<sup>81</sup> David Bell and Mark Jayne, “Conceptualizing Small Cities,” in David Bell and Mark Jayne (eds.), *Small Cities: Urbanization beyond the Metropolis* (London: Routledge, 2006), 3–18, 5.

<sup>82</sup> Tim Edensor and Mark Jayne, “Urban Theory beyond the West,” in Tim Edensor and Mark Jayne (eds.), *Urban Theory beyond the West: A World of Cities* (London: Routledge, 2012), 1–27, 5.

<sup>83</sup> Globalization and World Cities Research Network, “The World According to GaWC” (November 13, 2018), available at [www.lboro.ac.uk/gawc/world2018t.html](http://www.lboro.ac.uk/gawc/world2018t.html), last accessed February 12, 2020.

Jennifer Robinson's *Ordinary Cities* galvanized much of this countermovement in academia, calling for a post-colonial turn in urban studies that places so-called Third World cities on the scholarly map.<sup>84</sup> Though they may not be central to the world economy in terms of power projection, poor cities are highly relevant to it as suppliers of raw goods and labor.<sup>85</sup> This recalls the core-periphery model to which the periphery is every bit as essential to the world economy as the core it enriches.<sup>86</sup> Engaging with history broadens the scope of cities that matter, not just *where* but *when*. Limiting the field to the neoliberal era leaves out five millennia of urban history. Implicit in this book is the notion that previous iterations of city networks warrant exploration in order to better understand the evolution of power relations. This entails the centers of power as well as their exploited populations and peripheries. Historic centers are in effect "ordinary cities." To leave them out of the discourse is to invite amnesia toward centuries of political precedent, to concede there was little relevant history before digitally aided capitalism.

Another central claim of global cities research, that the digitally infused capitalist age is fundamentally different than previous periods, also warrants reconsidering. The differences between the post-Cold War world and previous eras are startling at a glance. We see the expansion of global governance over a singular economy, most notably with the World Trade Organization culminating from the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations in 1995. Capital crosses borders at greater speeds and volumes than at any comparable time. This enabled increasingly complex transnational production while creating dense sets of rules locking in the privileges of the global core over the periphery.<sup>87</sup> This breathed new life into core capitals, especially New York and London, as centers of power in the world economy and managers of dispersed production.<sup>88</sup> In an ironic sense, these unprecedented changes cemented after the Cold War are keeping the North-South divide around for a little while longer. As Vijay Prashad shows thoroughly in *The Poorer Nations*, today's system of free trade capitalism is a revanchist movement. It is a pushback against decades of promising decolonization by the former colonial capitals that are now described as the leading global cities. Chapter 11 of this book explores the role of Dutch cities in engineering this divide, now centuries old. In historic

<sup>84</sup> Jennifer Robinson, *Ordinary Cities: Between Modernity and Development* (London: Routledge, 2006), 102.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.      <sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>87</sup> See John H. Barton, Judith L. Goldstein, Timothy E. Josling, and Richard E. Steinberg, *The Evolution of the Trade Regime: Politics, Law, and Economics of the GATT and WTO* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); and Robert Wade, "What Strategies Are Viable for Developing Countries Today? The World Trade Organization and the Shrinking of 'Development Space'," *Review of International Political Economy* 10, no. 4 (2003): 621-644.

<sup>88</sup> Vijay Prashad, *The Poorer Nations: A Possible History of the Global South* (London: Verso, 2013), 23.

light, the transition from colonialism to neocolonialism, on principles established in the 1600s, was evolutionary, not revolutionary. Absent Soviet opposition, the other imperial powers in Europe and North America retrenched. A real revolution would genuinely upend North–South power relations sculpted over time. That would make this period look less immutable in retrospect than it now seems to us.

Chapter 2 takes us to the Fertile Crescent, arguably the first core–periphery world system. How and why were cities invented?