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Introduction

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Abstract: A number of economists, historians, and political scientists have begun to examine what happens when globalization unravels. From an urban point of view, this question seems at odds with current trends: the reaction to globalization has come about at a time where, paradoxically, international discussions around the future of cities and their contribution to global sustainability have galvanized international cooperation amongst multilateral, regional, private and local actors. Does this mean that we should rethink these trends? Taking this cue, we ask what happens when globalization unravels in a more focused urban way: what happens to the global city when the economic and political relationships behind the postwar international order, and in particular the post-1970 version of that order, begin to fray or come completely undone? What happens then if the globalization of the global city unravels when its core material and infrastructural conditions are now necessarily globalized? This special issue of *New Global Studies* seeks to open an interdisciplinary and critical debate about the real possibilities of de-globalization and the challenges, and the dangers, of an unraveling globalization in a more and more urbanized world.

Keywords: global cities, de-globalization, urban reform

As the United Kingdom continues its tortuous path to leave the European Union, calls have been issued from London for the city to stand on its own merits as a near city-state. By a significant margin the capital voted to "remain." Roughly 2.3 million people voted to stay in the EU, and the much-referenced BBC map of referendum results shows a clear "remain" block in London boroughs with just a few exceptions. Protests in Trafalgar square, a one-hundred and fifty thousand signatures "Londonpendence" petition to leave the UK, and a proposal by the Chamber of Commerce for a "London visa" seem to confirm a city-state sentiment. From the steps of City hall, Mayor Sadiq Khan openly opposes the Brexit position of the UK government on the opposite side of the Thames.

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This is of course not a British story alone. In the face of the Trump Administration's decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement on climate change, mayors in United States jointly committed to pursue the goals set in France in 2016 independently of the federal government's stance. While the White House explained its decision to withdraw from Paris, former President Barack Obama noted that cities were providing a "new face of leadership" on climate and other global challenges.[1] This "cities vs. states" rhetoric, with challenges to central governments from city halls – in Europe, North America and the Global South (South Africa and Brazil amongst others) – has been a common trend in recent years.[2]

Next to the many stories of "global city" autonomy, there are today a number of notable cases where states have reasserted influence in the urban space. In the Gulf, for instance, as the glitter and fame of the early-2000s faded against the backdrop of the 2008 global financial crisis (GFC), the globally-renown success of Dubai suffered a setback in January, 2010. The unveiling of the world's tallest building at the downtown heart of "new Dubai" went hand in hand with a clear gesture towards its affluent sister emirate Abu Dhabi, as the then Burj Dubai was renamed Burj Khalifa in homage to the wealthy neighbor's ruler amidst financial difficulties of the GFC. One of the early 2000s symbols of global city aspirations encountered a clear reality check on the perils of globalizing markets and the dangers of the city-state approach.

These stories speak not only to the meeting of national and local politics, but also to the intersection of the forces of globalization and urbanization. In the wake of the Brexit referendum in the UK and the presidential election in the US, a number of economists, historians, and political scientists have begun to examine a related question: what happens when globalization unravels?

From an "urban" point of view, this question seems at odds with current trends: the "push back" against globalization has come about at a time when, paradoxically, international discussions around the future of cities and their contribution to global sustainability have galvanized international cooperation amongst multilateral, regional, private and local actors. Does this mean that we should rethink these trends and recast the descriptions of the "global" city that throughout the 1990s and early 2000s spoke of interconnected urbanization processes around the world? Do the reactions to Brexit in London, to the Trump Administration in cities across the US, and to nationalist stances around the world present us with an even clearer statement in support of more and more globalized cities "versus" localized states?

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1 Michele Acuto, "Give Cities a Seat at the Top Table," *Nature* 537, no. 7622 (2016); Ian Klaus, "The Changing Shape of City Diplomacy in 2017," *CityLab* (December 29 2017).

2 Simon Curtis, *The Power of Cities in International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2014).

In academe some of these debates have emerged over the past few years in both urban studies and in international relations. On the one hand, discussions as to the validity and usefulness of the idea of the "global city" have occupied key voices in the field. For instance, some in recent geographical debates pointed alternatively at the unfair "straw man" treatment of the global city tradition, versus others noting it might be time to put the concept to a rest and move on.[3] On the other hand, several discussions of international politics have gravitated around the potential of globally-oriented local governments and the limits of this type of agency in the turbulent landscape of today's geopolitics.[4] This is a focus that has also emerged in urban studies writing as a reaction to Benjamin Barber's populist writing on mayors in world politics, with several critiques of the idea that mayors should "rule the world."[5]

Taking these cues and addressing these critical geopolitical questions, this special issue of *New Global Studies* asks what happens when globalization unravels in a more focused "urban" way: what happens to the global city when the economic and political relationships behind the post-World War II international order, and in particular the post-1970 version of that order, begin to fray or come completely undone?

De-Globalizing Pressures and Epochal Questions

At the municipal, national, and transnational levels, the global city is facing a set of de-globalizing pulls, some of which are isolationist, others of which are

3 See the exchange between 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): 247–67; and Jennifer Robinson, "Theorizing the Global Urban with 'Global and World Cities Research.' Beyond Cities and Synechdoche," *Dialogues in Human Geography* 6, no. 3 (2016): 268–72.

4 Noah Toly, "Brexit, Global Cities, and the Future of World Order," *Globalizations* 14, no. 1 (2017): 142–49; Simon Curtis, "Cities and Global Governance: State Failure or a New Global Order?" *Millennium* 44, no. 3 (2016): 455–77; and David Gordon and Michele Acuto, "If Cities Are the Solution, What are the Problems? The Promise and Perils of Urban Climate Leadership," in *The Urban Climate Challenge: Rethinking the Role of Cities in the Global Climate Regime*, eds. Craig Johnson, Noah Toly, and Heike Schroeder (London: Routledge, 2015), 63–81.

5 Benjamin R. Barber, *If Mayors Ruled the World: Dysfunctional Nations, Rising Cities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Stijn Oosterlynck, David Bassens, Luce Beeckmans, Ben Derudder, Luc Braeckmans and Barbara Segaert, eds., *The City as Global Political Actor* (London: Routledge, 2018).

indeed transnational in nature. Internally, increased inequality, housing shortages, and infrastructure challenges have already lead to new forms of politics, as for instance with the recent activism in Boyle Heights in East Los Angeles. What happens when the residents of global cities decide, not unlike their rural counterparts, that the economic and political models that have created tensions around inequality, housing, and climate change are no longer serving their interests? What happens when international and cosmopolitan promises for an inclusive "right to the city" fall off of diplomatic processes and meet the limits of national interests?

As a political unit within a nation-state, the city is also coming under other forms of pressure, as the challenges of Brexit illustrate in the UK. Cities are increasingly coming to resemble transnational/global enclaves within anti-global nation-states. Can this divergence persist? What happens when the technocrats who famously, in Saskia Sassen's phrase, "jumped the tracks" in the in 1970s to facilitate economic exchange more focused on global flows that national development, are purged of their positions or rendered irrelevant?[6]

Yet global cities are also political and economic units that, even more than states, are intertwined in increasingly trans-national infrastructural connections, as even the most mundane elements of local government (from waste to water, food and energy, but also mobility and culture) are embedded in global flows and extra-local forces. What happens then if the globalization of the global city unravels when its core material and infrastructural conditions are now necessarily globalized?

Finally, the increased activism of mayors on the international stage reflects a recognition on their part that global phenomenon – such as climate change or migration – directly affect the fate of their cities. Here mayors and city residents face a particular challenge: their "decision space" does not overlap with the policy concerns that are of direct concern to their respective cities. How far can city the burgeoning efforts of mayors and foundations to organize globally go? Does their network approach deliver?

Of course, these are enough questions to chart a research agenda on the geopolitical implications of the city-globalization nexus for years to come, and we do not pretend a special issue can offer an ultimate statement on all of them. Rather, the goal is to begin unpacking some often uncomfortable challenges posed to the global city model by contemporary political-economic conditions. Key in starting this exploration is, we believe, a collaborative spirit that crosses academic and practitioner boundaries.

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6 Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

A Collaborative Endeavor

This special issue of *New Global Studies* seeks to open an interdisciplinary and critical debate about the real possibilities of de-globalization and the challenges, where not the dangers, of an unraveling globalization in an increasingly urbanized world. In recognition that the kinds of questions we pose here a call for novel and collaborative forms of research, the issue is designed as a discussion of the "de-globalized city" theme both across disciplines, gathering for instance political scientists, historians, and curators, as well as between the academe and practice, with contributors from urban innovators from around the world. Academic articles are coupled with essays from practitioners, and while not written in direct conversation with each other, the overlaps in concern and content are clear.

In her article, Nancy Kwak examines how larger structural forces of gentrification have since the early 1980s met with localized resistance, and in particular how communities in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Diego, have rejected this process, instead arguing for the value of historically rich, rooted communities. The tactics deployed – including the use of local culture and arts, as well as social media and public relations – "constituted a direct challenge to the workings of the global city while also paradoxically feeding into a global movement to restore political power to the grassroots." Meanwhile, the historical forces at work in Kwak's article have had implications for small cities as well as large ones. In their article, Debra Lam and John Givens examine how smaller cities and town in the US state of Georgia are grappling with the "smart city" phenomenon. Using case studies from Indiana and Georgia, Lam and Givens detail what small and smart looks like, and argue that excluding smaller communities risks widening inequality and restraining innovation.

Jo Guldi's article situates recent urban developments in the longue durée. The global city, she argues, was a long time coming. Beginning in the nineteenth century, she identifies a series of turning points that have given shape to modern cities: the rise of democratic movements of 1848 and their gradual targeting of city governments; the rise of an expert-managed, urban reform state beginning in 1870; and the birth of neoliberal state, from 1974 to the present. Guldi closes with a question that Sascha Haselmayer picks up. How can cities and democratic movements access and best utilize data? For Guldi this is part of a longer historical question of ownership of the city and land; for Haselmayer, as his article forcefully argues, this is a very specific question around procurement. As both make clear, these are still early days in the big

data revolution and the stakes, including quality of democracy, transparency, and equity, are high.

The global city, Simon Curtis argues, is under threat from at least two directions. Globally, the liberal order that provided its framework is faltering, while locally cities have become divided and polarized in a way that the integrity of the urban fabric. Governance, economic and political practices, local and global, will have to be "repurposed" if the global city is to continue. In their article, Brad Henderson and Tony Banout examine the role of faith, and in particular interfaith, exchange might provide a framework for nurturing urban social fabric in a global city.

In one of the issue's two review essays, Thomas Wide examines "New York At Its Core," the permanent exhibition that accompanied the reopening of the City Museum of New York in late 2016. In an historical era of the global museum, the city museum, he argues, has a responsibility to help residents understand how they and their city fit into the wider world. This gesture towards a responsibility-infused and geopolitical "worlding" echoes in several of the pieces in the special issue, and more generally points us towards a number of learning points.[7]

Ultimately, this issue of *New Global Studies* speculates as to the place of the city, and the "global" city in particular, at a moment of shifting geopolitical tectonic plates. There are, as Tolstoy noted, multiple futures, and all the more so at moments of extreme uncertainty. Given the wide collection of disciplines and diverse professional expertise, we encourage readers to take what they need and pursue a research agenda in that direction. We seek no ultimate statement as to the fate of the global city, but rather a number of (in some cases opposing) provocations as to critical junctures in the future trajectories of the globalization-city nexus. As for cross-cutting conclusions, a number of points stand out to as a cautious agenda for further exploration.

First, are we overreacting? No. Whether offering scholarship and analysis, or observation and prescription, all the commentators noted the stress and urgency of the given moment. A return to status quo ante-2016 did not seem to demand consideration from most authors. This seems to us as much as to many of them a moment to regroup, take stock of the changed (or changing) geopolitical conditions, and consider pathways ahead. Whilst this can indeed be done with urgency or with more cautious steps, it seem to us and them that it is indeed time for bold(er) scholarly and practical experimentation.

Second, this moment was longer in coming than many think. While Guldi stretches the global city's formation – and with it the definition – back to the

7 Ananya Roy and Aihwa Ong, eds., *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global* (London: Wiley & Sons, 2011).

nineteenth century and Curtis dates it – consistent with the more technical Saskian sense of the term – back to the mid-1970s, both remind the reader that the answer to the question of what happened in 2016 cannot start in 2016, 2008, or 1989 for that matter. The importance of history (political, cultural, and more) in accounting for where we have gotten cannot be underplayed, and the centrality of the historical juncture we are at presently witnessing should not be a minor concern. Equally, this is by far and large no Western story and greater attention needs to be paid, amongst others, to post-Soviet dynamics, East Asian trajectories, global South-to-South pathways of development and the Arab world, much of which remains absent in the Anglophone academic and policy world. As Ian Klaus points out in the second of the issues review essays, and as some of our contributors note, it is time for a better rebalancing of the histories that are of reference to our daily frames of analysis, and of the historical trajectories that we use to account for the present (and future) geopolitical moment.

Third, if the chief actors in the formation of the global city sat in national capitals, finance ministries, and ultimately in offices providing financial services, the focus of many of the contributions in this issue would be instead on the practices for managing the strains of globalization and its unraveling. Could it be that de-globalization pulls will be managed not by bureaucrats and the private sector but rather communities and civic society actors, like religious groups? That is a step too far perhaps, some of our contributors (and editors) would argue. But the practices of local empowerment, and processes for those practices, are advancing parallel to ongoing global governance practices and rapidly emerging global autocratic practices.

Fourth, access to data and its appropriate usage remain gripping issues. As much recent scholarship has pointed out, this is by no means not an academic whim but rather a pressing global policy, development, and inequality issue.[8] This is no great surprise. The more particular questions as to what access to data means in both cosmopolitan cities of great inequality and massive budgets and smaller cities and towns in late globalization, however, does reveal striking conclusions about cities and data and "smart cities": the principles for deploying technology to improve governance have not developed; the expertise and skill sets needed to engage that data have not been developed equally, even in the Global North; and, finally, huge gaps remain about some of the most important democratic processes, like

8 Michele Acuto and Susan Parnell, "Leave No City Behind," *Science* 352, no. 6288 (2016): 873; Timon McPhearson, Susan Parnell, David Simon, Owen Gaffney, Thomas Elmqvist, Xuemei Bai, Debra Roberts, and Aromar Revi, "Scientists Must Have a Say in the Future of Cities," *Nature* 538, no. 7624 (2016): 165.

procurement. The answer to those questions will likely determine how cities operate in a de-globalized world.

This issue of *New Global Studies* is offered as a set of provocations to stimulate research agendas and policy debate so that we might better understand the dynamics of the city in a de-globalizing world.