THE GLOBAL CITY: A STRUCTURAL HOLE IN THE NATIONAL TERRITORIAL TISSUE

An Interview with Saskia Sassen by Elitza Stanoeva*

Elitza Stanoeva: When you introduced the concept and the theory of the 'global city', it was the outcome of your research on the interplay between processes on the global scale such as post-Keynesian economic and labour restructuring, and changes on the local scale of the city, e.g. in migration trends and income distribution, as it unfolded in the 1980s. In the second edition of *The Global City* (2001) you took up the task of testing your research framework vis-à-vis the decade of the 1990s on the basis of updated empirical data. Later developments prompted you to further elaborate a typology of cities participating in the network of global circuits and to talk of global cities as well as cities that are not such, yet perform functions of global cities. How do economic competition and/or cooperation shape the network of global cities as well as their respective roles today? And if you were to start your research project on global cities today, which cities would you single out as emblematic places where 'the global hits the ground'?

Saskia Sassen: That is an interesting question to ask me… I would select two types of cities: a) those that have long been international in the inter-state system meaning but not global, where I would include cities as diverse as Zurich and Mumbai, and most of the Central and East European major cities, including Sofia; and b) cities that are not global nor international but that are the main cities in countries until now weakly linked to the traditional international system and the global economy that began in the 1980s (cities in the Asian republics of the former Soviet Union, many of the East European cities, and cities in Africa – though not Johannesburg and Cairo, which have long been articulated with both the international system and the new global economy).

* Taken in Sofia, Bulgaria, in July 2011.

And turning to the question of the global cities… As the global economy has evolved since the 1980s, the number of global cities has grown. The global system demands more and more global cities. This has led to a very common notion that cities compete harder and harder with each other. I find that this is not quite so. Why? Because the specialized differences of cities matter much more today – in the global economy that began to take shape in the 1980s – than in the earlier Keynesian era of the post-war decades, when cities were far more administrative centres than innovation centres. I find that this is generally not sufficiently recognized – partly probably because it goes against the common notion that economic globalization makes cities increasingly similar to each other.

I argue that this is based on confusion between the homogenizing of the state-of-the-art built environment of cities worldwide, on the one hand, and on the other, the actual economic activities that get done in those spaces. This does require a far more finely-grained analysis of the economies of global cities than the fact of specialized corporate services and headquarters. Once we recognize that what gives cities their strength can vary enormously, we can also see that global cities compete far less with each other than is commonly asserted. Finally, a focus on the specialized differences of cities allows us to capture the variable effects of economic globalization and of the current financial crisis on diverse types of global cities.

E.S.: Throughout *The Global City*, you are raising the question of the long-term sustainability of the global city with regard to the sustainability of the economic order produced by globalization. What is new about this economic order that makes it so precarious, as evident in the recent economic crisis?

S.S.: One challenge here is to differentiate those areas which are well-served by high finance and those which are better served by more traditional banking. At the same time, we must ensure that both are embedded in adequate regulatory regimes defined in terms of democratic accountability and limits to their destructive potential. The Keynesian era accomplished this task in part by erecting fairly solid walls between these two kinds of activities, and subjecting them to different regulatory structures. The financialization of recent decades was brought about in part by chipping away at this wall and re-embedding the financial sector in a basically profit-oriented and private regulatory structure which prioritized neither public accountability nor concern with social consequences. This is a process that took off in the 1980s, as I described in enormous detail in *The Global City*, both in the 1991 and 2001 editions; I also develop this in my 2008 book, *Territory, Authority, Rights*, especially in Chapter Five.

But we must be careful not to

reject finance wholesale. We all need debt, whether we are a firm, a household, or a country. But we need to ask whether we need this level of debt, or enormously complex instruments, to finance what are mostly rather basic needs for firms and households. Many of these needs can be met with traditional banking loans. We need finance because it 'makes' capital, and large-scale projects need vast amounts of capital: at this point, only finance can reach these orders of magnitude.

But what has been happening over the last decade is an abuse of the capabilities of finance. The problem is that finance has entered domains – such as consumer loans and home mortgages – where traditional banking would have been a safer option for consumers. Traditional banking could even go quite a way towards developing mortgages that allow low-income people to buy a house, or towards developing specific types of loans for small businesses. Further, we need to ensure that once financial capital reaches certain orders of magnitude we materialize it into public goods – a rapid transit system, a new clean water system, greening of our cities, clean-ups of the thousands of vast toxic stretches of land due to chemicals, etc. There must be regulations in place that keep finance from simply doing speculative moves to make more profits, as has been happening since the 1990s. We need to expand and strengthen regulated banking and make finance less invasive and aggressive. Most important, we need to rethink our criteria for what is good economic growth, what is prosperity that benefits all, what is environmentally sustainable.

E.S.: This question is especially acute today against the background of the financial crisis but also with regard to the urgency of the environmental question. What kind of social aggravation did the last financial crisis produce and how did it affect the social fabric of the city?

S.S.: The critical factor for the financial crisis of 2008 was not the millions of sub-prime mortgage foreclosures, as is often said – the idea that irresponsible middle-class families spent more money than they had. The cause of the crisis was something very different and far more complex. The overall value of foreclosures was relatively small for global financiers. The way the housing crisis affected finance was by not knowing what might next turn out to be a toxic asset given the impossibility of tracing the toxic component in complex investment instruments. This in turn led those who had bought credit-default swaps as a sort of insurance to want to cash in their swaps, which by 2007 had reached an aggregate value of USD 62 trillion. That is when the financial crisis exploded in September 2008 (as opposed to the homeowners' crisis which was about USD 300 billion, not much money for global

finance, and the resulting crisis of confidence of August 2007). Those who had sold the swaps had speculated that there was going to be no crisis, that all was going fine in the financial system overall and hence there was no risk that swap owners would want to cash in. So it became clear in September 2008 that the sellers of swaps did not have the money to pay for the cashed-in swaps. That was the financial crisis.

We cannot lose sight of the fact that in financializing the mortgage market, the negative effects on households, neighbourhoods, and cities, were not part of the equation. The sub-prime mortgage extended the domain of high finance but in a way that delinked the financial circuit from the actual material existence of houses, neighbourhoods, and borrowers. The long-term consequences of this are not yet fully clear.

The estimate of the Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission is that 13 million households will have been foreclosed within a few years. That is a lot of homes and even more people, maybe as much as 40 million. The whole population of my country, the Netherlands, is 15 million. What is clear already is the disproportionate impact of the fallout of this financialization on disadvantaged populations, and the presence of large amounts of vacant land in both cities and suburbs. Whether and how these communities will recover, and whether or how this rapidly growing expanse of vacant land will be reincorporated into global capital circuits, is not yet clear. At present, we can say that the incorporation of these neighbourhood and residential spaces into the spaces and circuits of global financial capitalism have come at the price of the expulsion of actual people from these spaces.

E.S.: In your lecture in Sofia (Sassen, 2011b), you were quite critical of the political rhetoric of 'rescuing national banks' and the argument that the bailouts could be perceived as a revival of the primacy of national economies and of the nation-state in general. Could you say something more about this?

S.S.: When the US government allocated taxpayers' money 'to rescue the major national banks', it was actually rescuing a global financial system. The facts have now been made public: the Federal Reserve (the US central bank) allocated well over USD 1 trillion of taxpayers' money to rescue the global financial system. There were 21 000 requests from corporations and banks for money from that fund from 2008 to 2010, including German, Swiss, and other banks. Even when money went to Citibank, this is hardly an American bank – it is largely owned by international investors! I see a similar trend in the 'rescue' of Greece, Portugal, etc. through EU taxpayers' money: that money is not going to the workers or the firms of those countries. It is going straight to pay the banks

that have made the loans. Nor were the EU citizens asked if this is how they wanted their taxes to be used: to go straight to the banks rather than, say, to stimulate the Greek economy, help small firms in Greece, Portugal, etc.

The current crisis contains features which signal that financialized capitalism has reached the limits of its own logic for the current phase. It has been extremely successful at extracting value from all economic sectors through their financialization; however, when everything has become financialized, finance can no longer extract value. Therefore, it needs non-financialized sectors to build on. In this context, one of the last frontiers for financial extraction are modest-income households, of which there are a billion or more worldwide, and bailouts through taxpayers' money – which is real, old-fashioned, not financialized money.[1]

E.S.: When you posed the sustainability question, it was very much related to the inner challenges and tensions of the new economic order. Yet, in the last ten years some of the gravest havocs the global cities have experienced were unleashed by external forces, such as the 9/11 attacks in New York. How would you position the global city in the context of the reality and the discourse of a 'war on terrorism'?

S.S.: Fear of terrorism is being used to justify widespread surveillance and persecution of immigrants who have nothing to do with terrorism. These are old tactics. All dictatorships have used them. We see this now in Syria, where the government keeps saying they are defending the people from armed gangs and enemies of Syria.

This dual process of urbanization of war and militarization of urban life unsettles the meaning of the urban. At the conference on 'Cities and the New Wars' I organized at Columbia University in 2009,[2] Peter Marcuse explained how 'the War on terrorism is leading to a continued downgrading of the quality of life in US cities, visible changes in urban form, the loss of public use of public space, restriction on free movement within and to cities, particularly for members of darker skinned groups, and the decline of open popular participation in the governmental planning and decision-making process.' Second, it questions the role of cities as welfare providers. The imperative of security means a shift in political priorities. It implies a cut or a relative decrease in budgets dedicated to social welfare, education, health, infrastructure development, economic regulation and planning. These two trends, in turn, challenge the very concept of citizenship, a subject I develop both in *The Global City* (chapters eight and nine) and also in my new book, *Territory, Authority, Rights* (Chapter Six).

E.S.: What are the effects of the new imperative of national security and the intensified securitization and policing inside major cities on

the social order?

S.S.: Let me first address the question of asymmetric war and cities, and then my argument on the social physics of cities. Today some particular trends are emerging. Some of what are usually understood as global governance challenges actually become particularly concrete and urgent in cities. These challenges range from environmental questions to the flight of war-refugees from and into cities. The major implication of this urbanizing is that cities also become a site for the making of new norms, a potentially significant possibility in a world where national states have had a quasi-monopoly over norm-making.

Today when national states go to war in the name of national security, nowadays major cities are likely to become a key frontline space. In older wars, large armies needed large open fields or oceans to meet and fight, and these were the frontline spaces. The search for national security is today a source for urban insecurity. We can see this with the so-called War on Terror, whereby the invasion of Iraq became an urban war theatre. But we also see the negative impacts of this War in the case of cities that are not even part of the immediate war theatre – the bombings in Madrid, London, Casablanca, Bali, Mumbai, Lahore, and so many others. The traditional security paradigm based on national state security fails to accommodate this triangulation. What may be good for the protection of the national state apparatus may go at a high (increasingly high) price to major cities and their people.

With asymmetric war, then, the pursuit of national security has become the making of urban insecurity. Asymmetric war – war between a conventional army and armed insurgents – has made cities one site in the map for warring. Cities worldwide are becoming a key theatre for asymmetric war, regardless of what side of the divide they are on – allies or enemies.

E.S.: Contrary or complementary to the notion of urbicide, you also examine how cities can resist war and military power.

S.S.: Yes! Cities have long been sites for conflicts, from war to racisms and religious hatreds. And yet, where national states have historically responded by militarizing conflict, cities have tended to triage conflict through commerce and civic activity. War is in the DNA of national states; it is not in the DNA of cities – except of course if they are military fortresses or city-states such as Genoa in the 1500s with its army of 40 000 soldiers.

I argue that cities can function as a type of weak regime: killing civilians in a city is a different type of horror from killing people – far more people – in the jungle and in villages. In that sense, the urbanizing of war points to the limits of power and, perhaps, the weight of weak orders such as the human rights regime. The countries with the most powerful conven-

tional armies today cannot afford to repeat Dresden with firebombs or Hiroshima with an atomic bomb – whether in Baghdad, Gaza or the Swat valley in Pakistan.[3] They can engage in all kinds of activities, including violations of the law: rendition, torture, assassinations of leaders they don't like, excessive bombing of civilian areas, and so on, in a history of brutality that can no longer be hidden and seems to have escalated the violence against civilian populations. But superior military powers stop on this side from pulverizing a city, even when they have the weapons to do so. The US could have pulverized Baghdad and Israel could have pulverized Gaza. But they didn't. It seems to me that the reason was not respect for life or the fact that killing is illegal according to international law – they do this all the time.

I would posit that pulverizing a city is a specific type of crime, one which causes a horror that people dying from malaria does not. The mix of people and buildings – in a way, the civic – has the capacity to temper destruction, not to stop it, but to temper it. We let millions die worldwide from diseases that can easily be cured at low cost. So it is not the death of human beings as such. It is people in the context of the city, and the fact of witnesses – a sticky web of constraints consisting of a mix of law, reciprocal agreements, and the informal global court of public opinion. It is, I think, also the collective making that is a city, especially in its civic components. It seems to me that the explosion in ontological insecurity around the world was far more acute with the bombings in New York, Mumbai, Madrid, London and other cities than with the death of millions from curable diseases. This might even be the case with the destruction of the Buddhist temples in Cambodia and the large Buddha sculptures in Afghanistan.

Over and over, history shows us the limits of power. It would seem that unilateral decisions by the greater power are not the only source of restraint: in an increasingly interdependent world, the most powerful countries find themselves restrained through multiple interdependencies. To this I add the city as a weak regime that can obstruct and temper the destructive capacity of the superior military power, yet another component for systemic survival in a world where several countries have the capacity to destroy the planet.

Under these conditions the city becomes both a technology for containing conventional military powers and a technology of resistance for armed insurgencies. The physical and human features of the city are an obstacle for conventional armies – an obstacle wired into urban space itself. Would Gaza have been completely, rather than partially, destroyed if it was not densely populated, if it was just occupied by Palestinian-owned factories and warehouses?

E.S.: In addition to the devastat-

ing effects of military conflicts, the sustainability question assumes an ever sharper ecological edge and the environmentalist discourse is gaining critical ground, especially in the last few years. The pressures we have brought onto nature are striking back and shaking the urban order, e.g. through scarcity of resources – not only fossil fuels but also drinking water, which is much more alarming. And there are also unforeseeable challenges like natural disasters such as the latest catastrophe in Japan. What is a sustainable city, particularly from the environmental perspective?

S.S.: Beyond the familiar issues, I think one critical framing for environmental sustainability is a better articulation/interaction – not just balance, as is the more common idea – between the biosphere's resources and the needs of cities. Balance can be illustrated with a very basic (this does not mean easy!) strategy: re-localize what we now import from all over the world. Over the last hundred years we have abused our use of the biosphere, and this has made cities unsustainable along current patterns. There is a very long list of items that illustrate this: we should not be importing from faraway countries basic goods (tables, iceboxes, most of the tools we need, etc.) that we can make at home. Countries generally should develop the capacities to make the basic goods. Secondly, it is urgent (and far healthier) that we localize the production of food as far as this can go. Why should we have all foods twelve months a year, which requires vast amounts of transport, and so on? At the heart of this broad effort is the attempt to connect the city much more deeply with its own and its regional resources. This cannot be 100%, but it can be much more than we have now.

I am right now researching the many different ways in which we can use the biosphere's capabilities for restoring our environment – rather than chemicals made in factories.[4] This is not about some sort of 'return to nature'. I do not believe this is an option. This is about combining scientific and technological capacities with the biosphere's capacities in order to accelerate and enhance the biosphere's capacities. I call this delegating back to the biosphere, rather than returning to the biosphere, because I see it as bringing the biosphere into domains where now we use chemicals, and asking the biosphere to please help us. For instance, we now know that to clean a deeply polluted and toxic water body the best is to use algae, and to activate their natural capacities with a bioreactor, so it augments the algae's capacities. We will have to help the biosphere because we have been so destructive that it cannot clean up our mess by itself. We used to think we can throw anything into the ocean because it is so vast that it can take care. Well no, there is a limit, and we passed that limit

about twenty years ago. She, the biosphere, is still willing to clean our water, earth and air with her diverse algae, bacteria, photosynthesis and other capabilities – it is probably in her DNA. But we have to work with her. She can no longer rescue us by herself.

E.S.: One of the striking features of the global city, as you define it, is that it is an extreme place of inequality. In your lecture in Sofia in May 2011, you said that New York City, being home to both the poorest and the richest counties in the US, is the real American edge today much more than the US-Mexico border. How would you describe these edge zones of the contemporary world?

S.S.: Insofar as my economic analysis of the global city recovers the broad array of jobs and work cultures that are part of the global economy though typically not marked as such, it allows me to examine the possibility of a new politics of traditionally disadvantaged actors operating in this transnational economic geography. This politics lies at the intersection of economic participation in the global economy and the politics of the disadvantaged, and in that sense retains an economic dimension, specifically through those who hold the less glamorous jobs in the global economy – whether factory workers in export processing zones in Asia, garment sweatshop workers in Los Angeles or janitors in Wall Street.

Their experiences alert us to a historic political rupture for low-wage workers. Traditionally, being a manual or generally low-wage worker in leading economic sectors was a platform for the formation of a labour aristocracy – a process long evident in western industrialized economies. This is no longer the case. Now, 'women and immigrants' emerge as the labour supply that facilitates the imposition of low-wages and powerlessness, even when they are in high demand and when their jobs are in high-growth sectors, including some of the most advanced sectors, where flexibility is at a premium and work is often undertaken informally. The gendering and racializing of these workers break the historic nexus that would have led to their empowerment and simultaneously legitimate this break culturally.

E.S.: Do global cities shape political subjectivity mainly through economic activities, or do they contribute to the formation of political identities in other ways as well?

S.S.: The particularity of global cities, of global urban space, is that the making of political subjects and practices cannot be reduced simply to the functional needs of the valorization of capital or the structure of the labour market. Most importantly, the co-presence in the global city of massive concentrations of corporate wealth and power and of massive concentrations of disadvantaged populations has made cities a contested terrain. The global city concentrates diver-

sity. Its spaces are inscribed not only with the dominant corporate culture but also with multiple other cultures and identities, notably through immigration. The slippage is evident: the dominant culture can encompass only part of the city. And while corporate power inscribes non-corporate cultures and identities with 'otherness', thereby devaluing them, they are nevertheless present everywhere. The immigrant communities and informal economy in cities such as New York and Los Angeles are just two instances.

E.S.: Could you comment further on how the intersections of the powerful and the powerless take place in daily life and how they shape political identities?

S.S.: Each, the powerful and the powerless, inhabits mostly specific places, though there are important points of intersection – think of the professionals in a leading firm and the janitors (cleaners) in the same office buildings; and, at home, the professional and the babysitter or cleaner. To a good extent, in their presence in the city each rests on particular 'localizations' of the global in these cities; for example, in the case of New York City, the localization of global finance is in Wall Street, and the localization of global migrations – in specific neighbourhoods of New York City. Here we can see how urban space itself produces particular political identities and practices. The same low-wage workers in another space, say a large commercial farm or plantation, have a different political identity from the one they have in a large mixed global city.

E.S.: Recently, within the EU we can observe a revival of the sovereignty discourse with the protection of national interests undermining the presumably common goals of a 'European identity'. That is evident both on the terrain of the EU financial system (in the reluctant support for defaulting national economies such as those of Greece, Portugal or Ireland) and on the terrain of border policies (in the Lampedusa case and the closing of borders within the Schengen area). How would you comment on these tendencies that unfold simultaneously with economic transnationalization?

S.S.: We have an 'immigration crisis' every time we have a crisis about no matter what – high unemployment due to the economic recession of 2008-2010, the uprisings to demand democracy in North Africa, the attack on the World Trade Center, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and on and on. Much of this is not related to immigration. But mostly we blame the immigrants for contributing to the crisis. It is axiomatic in the history of the US and that of the major European countries.

This raises several questions.

One is that we should know this by now and not need to scramble in response to the sudden influx of 25 000 refugees from North Africa as are the French and the Italians, or have the US government para-

lyzed on the matter of immigration reform, or Arizona's governor authorizing (unconstitutional) searches to establish the legal status of people stopped for matters not related to immigration. Our (still) rich and highly developed countries, with solid histories of electoral political systems, have simply not been able to address immigration in a reasonable and workable way.

A second question, raised by what seems to be a permanent link between immigration and whatever crisis affects us, is whether this axiom is a projection from our receiving societies or is capturing a reality. In either case it indicates we are not handling immigration adequately. If it is a projection, it is a sort of ideological exit from confronting the real world. It is mostly easier for politicians to believe that the cause of major crises is external – such as too many immigrants coming into one's country. It is easy to blame immigrants for everything. However, if it is a reality, we should roll up our sleeves and go to work on designing better policy.

Designing better policy to govern immigration means abandoning an array of cherished policies and beliefs about how the world works and what are desirable aims. Here I include such diverse policies as opening up largely traditional economies to foreign multinationals and financial services firms, and pushing these countries to take on loans they do not need and will only be able to repay by cutting government spending on health, education, and other people's development goals. Both of these policy goals have been the key frame that rich countries have imposed on poor countries. The result has been a large-scale destruction of labour-intensive economies that may have been 'inefficient' but were also a sticky web that incorporated vast numbers of people – where nobody was allowed to sink in complete hopelessness. Emigration became the only way to feed the family. This explains the beginning of whole new migrations from Africa's sub-Saharan countries. In short, we actively made the conditions that generated these new migrations into Europe.

Better policy will also mean addressing the fact that our current immigration politics rest on the unilateral power of national states and on a sort of carte blanche to violate the human rights of immigrants. This is unsustainable in the long run. These types of violations are a cancer at the heart of our liberal democracies that will only grow, and eventually hurt all of us, including the legal residents.

If my son, a graduate and prize-winning student, decides to write a great American novel, a new *The Grapes of Wrath* (Steinbeck, 1939), and spends time on a California farm working with undocumented immigrants, what will happen when mounted patrols raid the farm and pursue the fleeing workers? He will run with them. He will have no time to show his passport.

He will run and jump into the river and drown along with his undocumented fellow workers; incidents like this have happened in the US.

This is just an extreme example to illustrate that citizens, i.e. everyone, will eventually get caught up in raids against undocumented immigrants, just as it is happening right now in Arizona or in France, unless we roll up our sleeves and go to work on designing better policy.

E.S.: One of the major topics of your research and writing is indeed immigration. Among the problems you highlight in *The Global City* is how the casualization and informalization of labour make immigrants especially vulnerable to practices of exploitation, and simultaneously make those very practices not so visible for regulation and sanction. What are the political dimensions of immigrants' economic vulnerability which also produces a sort of deficiency of civic status?

S.S.: The centrality of place in a context of global processes has consequences. It engenders a transnational economic and political opening for the formation of new claims and hence in the making of possible, at its best, rights such as rights to place, and ultimately, in the making of new forms of 'citizenship' and a diversity of citizenship practices. Immigrants are in many ways informal citizens in global cities – they engage in the same practices as the locals in their same neighbourhood or social class. And they are denationalized citizens, at least partly – they are citizens, but of another country. In the global city they become denationalized citizens. The transnationalization of labour markets results in the formation of identities and loyalties among various population segments that explicitly reject the imagined community of the nation. With this come new solidarities and notions of membership.

The resulting denationalizing of urban space and the formation of new claims centred in transnational actors and involving contestation constitute the global city as a frontier zone for a new type of engagement. An important question is whether it is also a space for a new politics, one going beyond the politics of culture and identity, though at least partly embedded in these. Another important question could be how these transnational identities and geographies install themselves in the physical space of the city – for example, what difference does it make if people migrate to traditional urban enclaves or to the suburban ring?

E.S.: How do recent anti-immigration laws and practices affect the social integrity of the city?

S.S.: In my reading of urban histories, I find an interesting dialectic which contains a critical lesson for our times. Often the overcoming of urban conflicts became the source for an expanded civicness. One specific actor in this dialectic is the excluded: minoritized immigrants, citizens who had the 'wrong' religion, the physically impaired, the

psychologically impaired. When they (and those who worked with them) demanded inclusions and succeeded, the effect was that the rights of the included were also strengthened.

We, the included, saw our rights strengthened when the excluded succeeded in gaining some rights. This is in sharp contrast with how the larger society – whether in Italy or in the US, or in the rest of Europe – tends to see it. The more common view – rooted in fear and insecurity – is to see that whatever the immigrant or the 'other' gains, we the included lose. That is wrong: exclusion and discrimination are a cancer in the larger social system. It is interesting to note that surveys (such as those in the Pews Global Attitude Project) tend to find that citizens in many countries around the world who 'hate' immigrants, when asked about their neighbourhood immigrant residents tend to say – 'oh no, they are very nice.' There is something about getting to know the 'other' which can humanize 'us'.

E.S.: Why or how can cities facilitate this? And is the global city the stage where these contradictory attitudes towards the 'other' assume their most extreme form or the same twofold process takes place in smaller cities as well?

S.S.: Cities are spaces of intense proximities. The crowded city centre is a space with an invisible set of rules – no matter how often you bump into another in the massive crowds walking and rushing, and bumping into each other, there is no added meaning or offence… people walk on. Imagine this in a neighbourhood – that bump takes on the meaning of violence. Those invisible rules of the city centre are a critical glue for civicness. We need to mobilize it to make the city an open city.

One big challenge is the fact that much of the violence that happens today in cities around religion, ethnicity, terrorism, is so extreme that cities are at risk of losing this capacity for making the civic. They are becoming sites for a whole range of new types of conflicts, such as asymmetric war and ethnic and social cleansing.

Furthermore, the dense and conflictive spaces of cities overwhelmed by inequality and injustice can become the sites for a variety of secondary, more anomic types of conflicts, from drug wars to the major environmental disasters looming in our immediate futures. All of these challenge the traditional commercial and civic capacity that has allowed cities to avoid war when confronted with conflict, and to incorporate diversity of class, culture, religion, and ethnicity.

The unsettling of the urban order is part of a larger disassembling of existing organizational logics. This disassembling is also unsettling the logic that assembled territory, authority and rights into the dominant organizational format of our times – the nation-state, a subject I develop in my book *Territory, Authority, Rights*.

E.S.: Europe's historical notion about the good city posits it as a civic place symbolizing the democratic ideal, with beautifully built centres for multiple social, cultural, and political uses. How does this connect to notions of the civic and public space in today's larger world?

S.S.: The type of urban order that gave us the Open City in Europe, for instance, with its beautiful piazzas and public buildings is still there, but increasingly as mere visual order, and less so as social order.

Where do we go from here, then? Ironically, a key condition that can help us move on is the fact that this is also a moment of challenges (asymmetric war, environmental catastrophes, massive inequality) that are larger than our differences. At some point we will all (regardless of religion, income, race) feel these challenges and worry that 'life as usual' is becoming unsustainable. We now know that this acute sense of injustice and unsustainable lives is a major source for what we saw in Tunis and in Cairo and Alexandria, and then on in other cities: the courage to resist military power with only one's body and voice. And now we see it in Greece and in Spain, and it is beginning to happen in the UK and in some cities of the US.

It is the acuteness of injustice and unsustainability of the economic, political and environmental order which emerges as a potential for reinventing that capacity of cities to transform conflict into openness rather than war. But it will not be the familiar order of the Open City, and of the civic as we have come to represent it, especially in the European tradition. It will take foundational change, including a kind of denationalizing of one's sense of security and a denationalizing of citizenship.

E.S.: If we are to bring this in the political domain, the 'right to the city' comes to the fore as an important concept embraced by the new social movements.

S.S.: Around the world people/urban protest movements have used or have referred – and still do – to the idea of 'the right to the city' in their political struggles. In so many ways this claim to the city is justified by the massive displacements that are happening in cities as diverse as New York and Mumbai. We could see this coming way back in the late 1980s. I remember writing an article that I named 'Whose City Is It?' (1996) which dealt with these issues. Global cities, of which there are over a hundred today, are the most extreme version of this, but many cities are undergoing these changes, even if often in less brutal ways. We are seeing here a powerful systemic trend – there is a systemic worldwide demand for global cities. Do remember though that I said global cities also have a political function – so the two historic subjects I talked about earlier both find in the global city a strategic space for their projects. It is not only about

economics and about mainstream politics.

In the end, after all the struggles and continuing growth in inequality I am still left asking: Whose city is it? Consider, the 2010 census found that New York City, a very rich city, contains both the richest county (Manhattan) in the whole of the US, and the poorest! (Bronx)… In other words, we have powerful systemic forces that are making this extreme form of inequality.

E.S.: In your latest book, a winner of several distinguished awards, *Territory, Authority, Rights*, you speak of how the global gets mostly constituted inside the national. Is the global city an instance of this?

S.S.: One key argument there is that the global gets partly structured inside the national – and this process entails a denationalizing of what was historically constructed as national. This is mostly not part of the most widely accepted definitions of globalization – which focus on the growing interdependence of the world – with which I agree only partly. Why only partly? Because I think it leaves out those critical parts of the global that get constituted inside the national – and thereby leaves out the consequences of this for the state, for cities, for citizens, for norm-making, for the definition of what is 'national security', for what is membership in the 'nation'.

Conceiving of globalization not just in terms of interdependence and global institutions, but also as inhabiting and reshaping the national from the inside, opens up a vast agenda for research and politics. It means that research on globalization needs to include detailed studies, notably ethnographies, of multiple national conditions and dynamics that are likely to be engaged by the global and often are the global, but function inside the national. And it will take decoding: much of the global is still dressed in the clothes of the national.

In my new book I elaborate on this by arguing that when the global gets made inside the national, one effect is to create structural holes in the tissue, the fabric of the national: these become spaces that exit the construction of territory we call sovereign national territory, a complex category that contains within it logics of power but also the right to make claims on your government. In a way, the global city is a new type of assemblage of bits of national territory, authority, and rights which partly can be seen as a structural hole in the national territorial tissue. The space of the global city is neither fully national nor fully global. There is more and more of this, and it gives us very bad things and also some interesting possibilities along the vector of denationalizing politics and space, at least a bit.

E.S.: In your lecture in Sofia, you outlined as a paradox of globalization that the global is short of legal standing – with hardly any global binding laws and with no such legal persona as a 'global firm'. What

does this legal deficit mean for globality and globalization?

S.S.: What I find in my research is that the global – whether an institution, a process, a discursive practice, an imaginary – both transcends the exclusive framing of national states and also partly emerges and operates within that framing. Seen this way, globalization is more than its common representation as growing interdependence and formation of self-evidently global institutions. It includes sub-national spaces, processes, actors.[5]

E.S.: Now you are doing research on a very peculiar instance of 'commodification of land' – nation-states purchasing pieces of the territory of other states. Could you briefly describe this trend and its challenges for the notion of sovereignty?

S.S.: I am currently working on a new project I call 'Logics of Expulsion'. It builds on my book *Territory, Authority, Rights*.

My argument is that we have moved from a logic of incorporation to one of expulsion. In the Keynesian period (1940-1970s in much of the West), the logic of the system was to incorporate people as consumers. Incorporation was not about being nice to people, it was about needing people in an economy of mass production, mass consumption, mass building of suburban housing, etc. In the phase that begins in the 1980s, the logic of the system is to expel people. In the last two decades the numbers of the 'expelled' are larger than the newly 'incorporated' middle classes of countries such as India and China.

I use the term 'expulsion' to differentiate from social exclusion. Exclusion is a well developed and established concept. Social exclusion happens inside the system. I am focused on what is expelled from the system. I use 'expulsion' to describe a diversity of conditions: the growing numbers of the abjectly poor, of the displaced in poor countries who are warehoused in formal and informal refugee camps, of the minoritized and persecuted in rich countries who are warehoused in prisons, of workers whose bodies are destroyed on the job and rendered useless at far too young an age, able-bodied surplus populations warehoused in ghettoes and slums. I also include the fact that the sons and daughters of today's middle classes will have lower levels of education, lower incomes, and far lower chances of owning a home than their parents (the data in the US already show this). This is also an expulsion from a middle class project/promise that was born in those Keynesian decades.

My argument is that this massive expulsion is actually signaling a deep systemic transformation. It is being documented in bits and pieces by all kinds of experts working on some of these trends, even though they are just interested in studying that trend for reasons that may have nothing to do with

my questions. I need these multiple specialized studies, some focused on rich countries others on poor countries, on a wide range of issues. What we do not have, and what I am working on is detecting some overarching dynamics in all these diverse often micro expulsions – if this is taking us into a new phase of global capitalism.

E.S.: When you spoke of the new international professional class, you emphasized that what makes them global does not make them cosmopolitan. Today we can talk also of international or global academia. If we are embracing the ideal of cosmopolitanism, what are our responsibilities as academics in order to avoid joining the ranks of 'provincial globalism'?

S.S.: I think cosmopolitanism is overvalued, but at the same time I do think we must make distinctions so that traveling a lot is not the same as being cosmopolitan, and globalization is not the same as cosmopolitan. I am interested in subjectivities that can be global even if the actors are local and focused on very local issues. I think of this as a global subjectivity that gets shaped by a) the recurrence of these localized struggles, and b) given the imaginaries about the internet and connectivity and social media, even if you are not online you can be open to that imaginary and 'know' that there are many others just like you around the world fighting for local issues… That is a type of horizontal globality constituted through the thickness of local struggles and localized concerns. We do not want to leave this out of the picture. And cities are good for this type of global subjectivity of connection. Many academics who may not have many chances to travel can still have a global subjectivity – you strike me as such! It is crucial to develop the solidarities that can strengthen the position of such academics in what might be very narrow, often nationalistic, settings. The current epoch gives us, if we need it for our research, access to a global subjective space, where we can belong even if we are immobile.

NOTES

1 For more details on the financial issues, see Sassen (2011a), Chapter Eight.

2 On the topic of cities and the new wars, see Sassen (2010).

3 Although we need to recognize that even if the nuclear threat to cities has remained hypothetical since 1945, cities remain highly vulnerable to two kinds of very distinct threats. The first one is the specialized aerial attack of new computer-targeted weaponry, which has been employed 'selectively' in places like Baghdad or Belgrade. The second is terrorism, an old practice that precedes the current epoch.

4 See Sassen and Dotan (2011).

5 See Sassen (2008b).

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