

**Power in Place:  
Rethorizing the Local and the Global  
In Urban Studies**

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Two dominant themes have informed the construction of the “local” in the discourse on the global-local interplay in urban studies. The local has been frequently represented as the cultural space of embedded communities and, inversely, as a political space of collective resistance to disruptive processes of globalization. In writings ranging from classical urban sociology to contemporary discourses on globalization and place, the “locality” has been used to signify an embedded community. “Community” in turn is represented as a static, bounded, cultural space of being where personal meanings are produced, cultural values are articulated, and traditional ways of life are enunciated and lived. In classical urban sociological thought the “urban” served as a surrogate for the rational instrumentalism of the capitalist market and the bureaucratization of the life-world -- the transformation of *Gemeinschaft*-like social relations into the mediated impersonal ties of a *Gesellschaft*-like urban society. In the contemporary period the “urban” has been replaced by the “global” as a metaphor for the central “outside” threat to the primary social ties binding local communities. “Globalization” has been represented as a new form of capitalist (post)modernity, a process inherently antagonistic to the sustainability of local forms of social organization and meaning making.

I begin this talk by arguing that the schemata used by structuralist urban theorists such as David Harvey and Manuel Castells to conceptualize the global-local connection reifies the theoretical terms in this dialectic, privileging (while marginalizing) the local as the place of culture or “community,” while marking the global as the dynamic economic space of capital and information flows. I go on to argue that, ironically, key

conceptualizations informing research practice in postmodern cultural studies and even the conceptualization of "everyday resistance" informing the politics of everyday life problematic in urban studies also rely upon a binary dichotomization of the global vs. the local.

In the remainder of this talk I further disrupt this binary by showing the myriad ways in social networks and practices that are transnational in scope and scale are constituted by their interrelations with, and thus their groundedness *inside* the local. I then ask what constraints have been placed on urban theory, research, and practice by the persistence of this dichotomous way of thinking and what can be done, both epistemologically and methodologically, to overcome these constraints. The aim is to frame a more dynamic conception of locality, one more likely to capture the connections linking people and places to the complex and spatially dispersed communication circuits now intimately affecting the ways in which everyday urban life is experienced and lived. Starting from a social constructionist standpoint, I recommend that the sociological and geographical imagination be enriched by an engagement with a multi-sited mode of qualitative research that is historically contextualized and recognizes the importance of everyday practices without romanticizing the local or losing sight of the structures of power/knowledge created by human practice.

The representation of the local as a once firmly situated cultural space of community-based social organization now rendered unstable by the global dynamism of capitalist (post)modernity is well captured in the following excerpt from David Harvey's The Condition of Postmodernity (1989: 238-239, emphasis added):

“Movements of opposition to the disruptions of home, community, territory, and nation by the restless flow of capital are legion.... Yet all such movements, no matter how well articulated their aims, run up against a seemingly immovable paradox. ...[T]he movements have to confront the question of value and its expression as well as the necessary organization of space and time appropriate to their own reproduction. In so doing, they

necessarily open themselves to the dissolving power of money as well as to the shifting definitions of space and time arrived at through the dynamics of capital circulation. Capital, in short, continues to dominate, and it does so in part through superior command over space and time.

In this narration of the waning power of local cultural formations in the face of capitalist globalization the author of social change is never in doubt. Capital's superior global command over resources to reorganize time and space is opposed to the disorientation of defensive "local" social movements representing the interests of home, community, place, region, and even nation. The latter are represented as static forms of social organization, efforts to organize social life around "being" rather than "becoming." Defensive place-based movements are represented as cultural totalities expressing entirely place-bound identities in a world in which the dynamic flows of globalization exist entirely outside their purview. Oppositional movements representing "locality" may win some battles in what Harvey terms "postmodern politics." But they confront a restless adversary, whose processes of accumulation thrive on constantly disrupting the spatial and temporal arrangements upon which stable forms of local social organization might be constructed. Thus, in this grand narrative, in the final analysis, "capital" is the only agent of social change. Capitalist economic dynamics continue to dominate localities whose specific histories are relegated to the dustbin, rendering them fit only for periodic bouts of reactionary politics. As for the role of people in this grand narrative, we never know who lives, works, acts, and dies in Harvey's urban spaces since people are seldom represented as anything other than nostalgic romantics or cultural dupes.

Manuel Castells is another urban theorist who has represented the local as a political space of social movements defending threatened cultural and political meanings placed under siege by global economic and technological restructuring. At first glance his view of locality appears to be different from Harvey's theorization. In Castells work, late-modernity is represented as an informational mode of development, a "space of flows" which accelerates global financial and informational linkages, converts places into spaces,

and threatens to dominate local processes of cultural meaning. While the space of flows is a global space of economic and technological power, the space of cultural meaning and experience remains local (Castells, 1984). The global networks of wealth and power accumulate and exchange information instantaneously as a central source of institutional power. This boundary-penetrating process disrupts the sovereignty of the nation-state and threatens to marginalize the life-worlds of local cultural “tribes.”

Following from this logic is a structuralist dialectic of domination and resistance. Global domination produces local resistance. Resistance to globalization is tied not to the agency of specific actors confronting unique historical conjunctures but to the very structural dynamic of the technological revolution which threatens to render the local “tribes” irrelevant to the new informational world that has come into being. It is the structural connection of vastly different cultural formations as “bypassed” cultural spaces, forged in the context of disintegrating national civil societies, that allows Castells (1997) to lump together social movements as diverse as the Zapatistas in Mexico, the militia and patriot movements in the USA, and the Aum Shinrikyo cult in Japan, treating them as functionally equivalent “social movements against the new global order,” despite their historical differences in goals, ideologies, national and local contexts, and specific histories.

Castells’ analysis leaves little room for localized processes of identity formation, which might emerge out of social practices not only of resistance but also of appropriation or accommodation to, or even modification, and reconstitution of various aspects of transnational interconnectivity. Nor does he consider the possibility that a multiplicity of local identities might be selectively internalized by variously positioned local social actors operating in the context of historically variable local and national civil societies experiencing processes of globalization or transnationalism. Instead, he inscribes the “local” dimension of urban social movements as precisely something that produces meaning entirely against the dynamics of global processes.

Castells' analysis of locality is different in tone from that of David Harvey. Yet in one key respect Harvey and Castells converge-- namely, both represent the local as a cultural space of communal understandings, a space where meaning is produced entirely outside the global flows of money, power, and information. People in these narrow social worlds make sense of their world and form their political identities in a culturally bounded microterritory, the locality. These local cultural meanings, in turn, are represented as generating identities inherently oppositional to the global restructuring of society and space. For both, then, "place" is understood as a site of cohesive community formations existing outside the logic of globalization. While Harvey and Castells differ in their assessments of whether globalization will annihilate or defensively energize these community formations, they both maintain a systemic disjunction between local and global social processes.

In seeking to displace the reliance of social theory on grand narratives of macro-social development, such as these, some social theorists embracing the label "postmodern" have turned to what Foucault (1977) has termed the "essentially local character of criticism." In my view, despite rhetorical gestures in the direction of the desirability of grounded field work, some proponents of this turn to, or better still, this representation of, "the local" have posited an equally grand theory of local knowledge which privileges the ethnographic conversation as the only reliable route to personal knowledge, and personal knowledge as the only reliable measure of the "partial truths" about the workings of the world. This is the case for instance when postmodern anthropologist Stephen Tyler (1987: 171) asserts, with totalistic rhetorical flourish, that "discourse is the maker of this world, not its mirror."

The image which first comes to mind in this move is the "travel writing" found in colonial anthropology which relied upon the discourse of thick ethnographic "description" to fix, construct, and hence master colonized objects. It vividly detailed the habits, customs, speech acts, and bodily practices of conquered peoples in order to

comprehensively “know,” and hence implicitly control, the colonial subject. Ironically, however, the simple inversion of this hierarchy has often been the case in the postmodern cultural turn in urban ethnography in which the “thick description” of ethnographic narrative is relied upon to romanticize “the postcolonial subject” as embodied in the everyday practices of such socially constructed "communities" as urban taggers, street gangs, or various insurgent social movements.

When the discourse on postmodern ethnography first emerged in the late 1980's a variety of new ethnographic practices were valorized as ways of overcoming the white, Western male “colonial” positionality of ethnographic research and anthropological writing. Advocates of “postmodern” ethnography sought to develop experimental research methods that would create a narrative space for the “postcolonial” subject. Some working within this genre sought to develop more effective ways to directly involve the cultural subjects of ethnographic research in the process of signification and the production of meaning. The aim of this move was to give “voice” to the postcolonial subject's view of the world. Anthropologist Stephen Tyler (1986: 122-140), for example, termed postmodern ethnography a form of “cooperative story making,” a kind of “vision quest” on the part of the researcher to recover and evocatively communicate to the reader a “local narrative” about the life-world of the subject, a story produced by mutual dialogue rather than imposed by the authorial scripts of anthropologists and other “writers of culture.”

In these respects, the postmodern ethnographers tended to romanticize the process of “intersubjective dialogue.” The “penetrating” ethnographic encounter became a kind of grand narrative in its own right -- one which enshrined and mystified the ethnographic conversation as a “deep” discovery of partial truths through an inter-psyche process of “transference” and a transcendental process of “polyvocality” (see Tyler, 1987: chs. 5-7). This strain of postmodern ethnography thus tried to have it both ways -- while making no pretense to objective truth, indeed while denouncing such claims to scientificity as

pretentious, the approach nonetheless tended to consecrate the postcolonial subject, as adduced by the ethnographer, thereby making this subject's voice into the measure of all things. In so doing this strain of qualitative research practice displaced old master narratives of capitalism's structural logic that denied the agency of ordinary people with a new master narrative in which populist local voices "from below" were released from bondage by the skillful ethnographer and became decontextualized kings and queens of the world. In seeking to transcend the intellectual limits of structural-functional meta-narratives this move unduly romanticized the "local narrative" produced by sensitive field workers "on the ground" as a sure route to the partial truths of postcolonial subjectivity.

Must the ethnographic imagination be reduced to the pursuit of idiosyncratic *petit narratives*, which then become ventriloquated voices of postcolonial resistance? This is not necessarily the case. Another strain of postmodern ethnography first suggested by George Marcus and Michael Fischer (1986) sought to refocus qualitative field research amidst global socio-cultural, political, and economic restructuring upon what they called the *power-domination-accommodation-resistance motif*. This motif, by situating the constitution of subjectivity within the context of rapidly changing socio-spatial boundaries, provided an intelligible starting point for understanding the complex dynamics by which new subject positions can be seen to emerge in and through, for and against, such presumably "global" phenomena as urban socio-spatial restructuring, transnational migration and grassroots activism, new state formation, and the bubbling cauldron of ethnic and racial conflict currently being stirred up by symbolic politics in transnational cities throughout the world.

Marcus and Fischer thus early on provided urban theorists with a useful opening for moving beyond the limits of the binary categories of global versus local, structure versus agency, and modern versus post-modern historical epochs in the formation of consciousness and social practice. They called their project "anthropology as cultural

critique". In their characterization of contemporary "global conditions," they envisioned a world still full of cultural differences but in which most, if not all, "cultural worlds" had come into contact and communication "on the ground." They sought to unearth the hybrid or recombinant possibilities of contemporary life by studying the ways that in daily life people in various life situations accommodated to or resisted the cultural worlds colluding and colliding in their own time and place. They stressed various modes of "local" accommodation or resistance to "global conditions" as one strategy for mapping actual cultural change "from below" in a world that seemed to some an increasingly homogenized world of global modernity "from above." Apart from calling for a study of the hybridity emerging from intercultural contact and communication however, their specification of "global conditions" and "local responses" remained somewhat limited.

On the ground, however, there has been over a decade of richly textured transnational ethnographic story telling undertaken since Marcus and Fischer first issued their call for anthropology as cultural critique. Throughout the 1990's, numerous multi-locational practitioners of a transnational form of ethnographic fieldwork produced a body of research uniquely sensitive to the social construction of contextuality as well as identity (e.g., Rouse, 1991; Kearney, 1995; Schein, 1998). These new modes of ethnographic inquiry successfully asked quite big questions to little people and obtained very intriguing results. For example, by asking transnational migrants involved in circular bi-national migration networks to first construct their understanding of the opportunities and constraints they faced in the world(s) in which they lived, and then to talk about the ways in which they appropriated, accommodated to, or resisted the forms of power and domination, opportunity and constraint that they experienced as they traversed political and cultural borders, this mode of ethnographic practice opened up a discursive space for *contextually situated* ethnographic narratives that captured the emergent character of transnational social practices.

From the social constructionist perspective from which I speak, understanding the building blocks of localized social relations should not simply shift our attention from macropolitics to a micropolitics discernible by ethnographic transference, and then valorize the latter, as if the two were distinct and irreducible binary opposites. Nor are social relations of power and meaning deducible from purely macro-structural logics or mechanisms. Rather, we need to shift our attention to modes of inquiry capable of understanding and describing the material and discursive social practices whereby *networks of power and meaning* constructed at every point from the most “local” to the most “global” are formed, related to each other, and transformed. Since human agency operates at multiple spatial scales, and is not restricted to “local” territorial or socio-cultural formations, the very concept of the “urban” thus requires re-conceptualization as a social space that is a pregnant meeting ground for the interplay of diverse *localizing* practices of regional, national, transnational, and even global scale actors, as these wider networks of meaning, power, and social practice come into contact with more purely locally configured networks, practices, meanings, and identities.

This way of envisioning the process of *localization* thus locates globalization in the realm of social practice and situates the global-local interplay in historically specific milieus. It extends the meaning of the global-local nexus to encompass not just the social actions of “global capitalists” interacting with “local communities” but of the far more complex interplay of cultural, economic, political, and religious networks that operate at local, trans-local, and transnational social scales but which intersect in particular places at particular times. Closer study of this interplay will, in my view, enable urban researchers to explain the formation of new “subject positions” (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) and give due attention the multiple patterns of accommodation and resistance to dominant power relations and discursive spaces.

My view of culture as a fluid and dynamic set of understandings produced by discursive and material practices is not restricted to the understandings developed in

closed and self-contained local communities. The circuits of communication and everyday practice in which people are implicated are resources as well as limits. People's everyday lives are sites of criss-crossing communication circuits, many of which transcend the boundaries of local social and political life. They constitute sometimes separate, sometimes overlapping, and sometimes competing terrains for the contestation as well as the reproduction of cultural meanings, for resistance as well as accommodation to dominant modes of power and ideology. My emphasis upon the social construction of social relations through acts of accommodation and resistance to prevalent modes of domination has significant implications for urban research. We need a new way of conceptualizing the locality as the place where *localized* struggles, and alternative discourses on the meanings of “global conditions” are played out. This effort brings to the forefront of urban research the fact that “globalization” is a historical construct, not an inevitable economic force operating behind people’s backs independently of their actual material and discursive practices. It requires examining at close range but in rich contextual detail the specific historical and contemporary conditions by which “global conditions” are made meaningful in particular places at particular times. Cities thus may be usefully conceptualized as local sites of cultural appropriation, accommodation, and resistance to “global conditions” as experienced, interpreted, and understood in the everyday lives of ordinary people and mediated by the social networks in which they are implicated.

Urban researchers interested in the social production of the practices of everyday life have often conflated the local level of analysis with the politics of everyday life. In so doing, they follow in the footsteps of the leading French urban theorists of “everyday life” such as Henri Lefebvre (1971, 1991) and Michel de Certeau (1984), particularly the latter. In so doing they also provide yet another instantiation of theoretical process of legitimating local spaces of resistance to modernity in its various forms -- capitalism,

statism, and technological development. For Lefebvre and de Certeau, for example, ordinary people in their everyday life activities appropriate and use urban space in ways that challenge the abstract urban spaces constituted by capital and the state. Lefebvre (1971,1991) uses this motif in situationist fashion to legitimate a transformational politics of direct action to secure for all urban residents a “right to the city.” De Certeau’s (1984) imaginary uses the rhetoric of everyday life to paint a picture of the evasive child-like spatial practices by which people escape the synoptic gaze of urban planners an “inhabit the street” in ways that slip through the disciplinary boundaries of the urban spatial plans enacted by central planners. Despite their differences, these urban theorists of the everyday share with Castells the tendency to equate “the local” with an oppositional space of individual and collective resistance to more global structures of domination.

In The Practice of Everyday Life (1984) de Certeau identifies some of the myriad ways that social space is produced and maintained by discursive and material practices. In his view the very meaning of “the city” is intimately tied to the politics of representation. Discursive practices, accessible to ethnographic observation, construct alternative images and boundaries of urban space by weaving alternative tapestries out of any city’s “isolatable and interconnected properties.” (de Certeau, 1984:94) However, one of the foremost critical problems facing ethnographic accounts of "local" everyday life under today's circumstances of growing trans-local interconnectivity is that “everyday life” is not a fixed object of investigation, a readily discernible set of practices that can be easily located and subjected to empirical observation and cognitive mapping. In my view, at the current transnational moment “the politics of everyday life” needs to be opened up more widely as a social and political imaginary. The “everyday” needs to be freed from its association with purely local phenomena. In transnational cities people’s everyday urban experiences are affected by a wide variety of phenomena, practices, and criss-crossing networks which defy easy boundary setting. Multiple levels of analysis and social practice now inform the urban politics of everyday life throughout the world.

Consider the following example of emergent transnational urban practices and identities. Sociologists Martin Albrow, John Eade, Jorg Dürrschmidt, and Neil Washbourne (1997:20-36) have written insightfully on the social construction of the boundaries of imagined community in British Muslim neighborhoods in cities throughout the United Kingdom. Rather than viewing religious fundamentalism as a local expression of belonging and identity framed against economic globalization, as in the work of Barber (1995) and Castells (1997), these scholars connect the rhetorics of belonging found in various local British Muslim enclaves to a wider social construction of Islamic community (*umma*) transmitted by transnational religious and cultural networks. Everyday life in the Muslim neighborhoods is infused with knowledge and meanings produced in these transnational networks and encountered in the local neighborhoods on a daily basis. The social construction of belonging to a transnational Islamic community is produced and transmitted through a transnational network of social and technological linkages including religious ceremonies, telephone conversations, television and radio programs, newspaper accounts, videos, and music. As these scholars conclude, in everyday visits to relatives and friends, in interactions at work, and in other neighborhood forms of community involvement, local Muslims, employ this transnational network, which is physically absent but hardly spiritually distant, to socially construct their “locality.” In this construction Islam is viewed not as a purely local or “tribal” reaction to the globalization of capitalism but as a transnational cultural formation, as much involved in the transnationalization of information, cultural exchange, and network formation, as are the networks of financial transactions that comprise what we now regard as the globalization of capital.

In short, everyday life is neither a fixed spatial scale nor a guaranteed site of local resistance to more global modes of domination, whether capitalist or otherwise. Rather, in today's transnational times our everyday life-world is one in which "competing discourses and interpretations of reality are already folded into the reality we are seeking to grasp." (Campbell, 1996:23). Grasping this sort of reality now requires us to develop a transnational imaginary and to fashion perceptual tools capable of making sense of the new identities emerging from this politics of representation and boundary-setting.

As I have tried to show above, it is simplistic to assume that ethnography is a sure-footed, transparent empirical tool for mapping "preexisting cognitive and cultural materials" onto an otherwise abstract political-economic terrain. Cultural materials, like political-economic arrangements, are constantly being produced, reproduced, or transformed by human practice rather than standing outside the realm of practical life as pre-given generators of meaning and social action. Accordingly, it is necessary to *historicize* both political economy and ethnography. Once this is accomplished the two approaches to urban studies can be used in tandem to enrich our sociological imaginations by help us to make sense of highly fluid social processes affecting particular places at particular times. This combination of historicized methods of social inquiry forces to our attention contingent questions of agency and meaning making. It can help us to sort out the trajectories of the criss-crossing networks of spatially dispersed social relations of co-presence through which social action in a transnational context is now filtered and informed

Theoretically, Doreen Massey has usefully depicted localities as acquiring their particularity not from some long internalized history or sedimented character but from the specific interactions and articulations of contemporary "social relations, social processes, experiences, and understandings" that come together in situations of co-presence, "but where a large portion of those relations.... are constructed on a far larger scale than what

we happen to define for that moment as the place itself...” (1993:66) When understood as articulated moments among criss-crossing networks of social relations and understandings, (1993:67) places do not possess singular but multiple and contested identities. Place-making is shaped by conflict, difference, and social negotiation among differently situated, and at times antagonistically related social actors, some of whose networks are locally-bound, others whose social relations and understandings span entire regions and transcend national boundaries. Massey, suggests that discerning researchers can observe transnational interconnectivity on the ground by tracing the trajectories of both residents and non-residents routes through a place as well as identifying “their favorite haunts within it, the connections they make (physically, or by phone or post, or in memory and imagination) between here and the rest of the world...” This is a good way to grasp the fluidity, diversity, and multiplicity of any place and the ways in which social relations affecting that place are stretched out over space and memory (i.e., time.) It is also a good way to avoid an essentialist construction of localities as closed communities, as ontological “insides,” constructed against a societal or global “outside” by tracing connections between the locality and what Arjun Appadurai (1991) has called the “global ethnoscape.”

Ahihil Gupta and James Ferguson (1997a, 1997b) have offered another clear-headed critique of the scholarly conflation of place and culture that is germane to my effort to contextualize emergent transnational social relations and to situate them in the field of urban studies. Gupta and Ferguson point out that representations of localities as cohesive community formations fail to recognize and deal with a variety of boundary penetrating social actors and process now very much a part of the transnational world in which we live. Left out of such localized communitarian narratives are the *border dwellers that* live along border zones separating localities, regions, and nation-states. These social actors engage with actors and networks based on the other side of juridical borders in processes of intercultural borrowing and lending which anthropologists now

call “transculturation.” (For useful studies of this process see Herzog, 1990; Martinez, 1994) The “locality as community” problematic is equally inattentive to the socio-cultural and political implications of the growing number of *border crossers* - - i.e., migrants, exiles, refugees, and diasporas -- who now orchestrate their lives by creating situations of co-presence that link social networks across vast geographical distances across the globe. Such border penetrating processes go a long way toward helping explain, though they by no means exhaust, the *difference-generating* relations of power that constitute cultural and political identity and difference within localities defined as both political jurisdictions and as socio-cultural spaces.

Viewing locality (like ethnicity and nationality) as a complex, contingent, and contested outcome of political and historical processes, rather than as a timeless essence also challenges the theoretical framing of “locality” as an inexorable space of resistance to globalization. Instead of opposing autonomous local cultures, be they tribes, militias, urban formations, or regions (a la Castells or Benjamin Barber, 1995) to the economic domination of global capital, the homogenizing movement of cultural globalization, or the hegemonizing seductions of global consumerism, we must pay close attention to the ways in which dominant global cultural forms may be appropriated and used or even significantly transformed “in the midst of the field of power relations that links localities to a wider world.” (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997b: 5)

Germane to this larger question, are several more particular ones: How are perceptions of locality and community discursively constructed in different time-space configurations? How are the understandings springing from these perceptions internalized and lived? What role in producing politically salient differences within localities is played by the cultural, political, and economic connections localities have with worlds “outside” their borders that configure their interdependence? What roles do the global and local mass media play in framing the understandings and practices within socially constructed communities and their constitutive fields of otherness?

It is precisely questions such as these that can move urban researchers interested in the social construction of locality beyond essentialist assumptions about the equivalence of locality and culture. For example, research on the politics of urban heritage has produced a spate of studies on “the making of place” by a wide variety of political actors including local neighborhood groups, government officials, and business interests as well as wider networks of social practice such as architectural activists, historic preservationists, and global developers. In particular places these actors collude and collide in contests over the cultural meanings of place (see for example Bird, 1993; Watson, 1991). Sociologically, historically, and ethnographically grounded case studies of this sort of “place-making” bring into focus the issue of the politics of representation thereby modifying a discourse on globalization and community that has been dominated by agency-less narratives of urban and regional change that tend to exclude non-capitalist actors and their representations of space and place from consideration.

Moreover, economic processes like investment, disinvestment, and reinvestment in “place” are unavoidably culturally coded. The cultural processes of representation take place in and change their material contexts, including the built environment of cities. We, as analysts, are thus unavoidably involved in interpretive reconstructions of who produces and who consumes particular images of place and space, and with what effects. The study of these processes from the vantage point of the politics of representation enables urban researchers to move beyond a reified and unitary view of “actors” like “capital” to a historicized analysis of precisely “whose past is being perceived, how it is being represented, and whose interests are being served by such unavoidably selective readings.”(Jackson, 1991:220; see also Jackson, 1992) In sum, any local community’s historical past is a historically contested rather than a timelessly embedded social phenomenon.

The contested politics of representation applies not only to any locality's historical past but also to the shaping of its present and the formation of its alternative future(s). This brings to the forefront the vexing question of just what makes a place a place like no other place. Phrased differently, what about a place persists and what changes over time? And this is precisely what power struggles over "place-making" are all about, namely, who changes what in alternative representations of any place's present and future and how do these changes selectively appropriate or reject particular elements of any place's historical past?

In this talk I have sought to move urban studies beyond naturalistic constructions of "locality" which view the local as an inherently defensive community formation. I have tried to show that even the most material elements of any locality are subject to diverse readings and given different symbolic significance by differently situated social groups and their corresponding discursive networks. The result is a highly politicized social space where representations of place are constructed and contested. I have argued that the prevailing structuralist schemata used to conceptualize the global-local connection by leading urban theorists have tended to reify the terms in this dialectic. In so doing they have reproduced a totalizing binary framework in which the global is equated with the abstract, universal, and dynamic (i.e., "capital"), while the local is invested with concreteness, particularity, and threatened stability (i.e., "community"). Such a discourse of capital versus community treats the global a priori as an oppressive social force while constructing localities in more positive, albeit more static if not anemic terms. (See Cvetkovic and Kellner, 1997)

Ironically, key conceptualizations informing ethnographic practice in postmodern cultural studies and even the conceptualization of "everyday resistance" informing the politics of everyday life problematic in urban studies also rely upon binary dichotomizations of global power versus local culture which overlook the ways in which transnational social networks and practices are constituted by their interrelations with,

and thus their groundedness inside the local. The theoretical frames of reference critiqued in this essay tend to ignore the considerable interplay of spatial scales and discursive practices to be found in any locality. They elide or underestimate the intricacy involved in sorting out the social interactions and processes at multiple spatial scales that constitute the complex politics of place making under contemporary conditions of transnational interconnectivity.

To overcome the conceptual confinement of the global local dichotomy and restimulate the sociological imagination, I recommend the further refinement of a multi-sited, trans-local mode of transnational ethnographic practice, inflected with the domination-accommodation-resistance motif, and combined with a historicized approach to political- economic and social relations. This recombinant method of social inquiry can be used to making sense of the power relations and meaning-making practices I have elsewhere termed "transnational urbanism" (Smith, 2001). The social spaces through which social actors move and within which they operate to give meaning to "place" are crucial and increasingly trans-local and multi-scaled, thus making trans-local ethnography and carefully historicized political-economic and social research both necessary and possible. A fusion of these heretofore distinct, if not opposed, approaches to urban studies is a good way to bring "the social" back into urban theory and research, where it belongs.

Author's Note: This keynote talk is based on revised and condensed materials drawn from my book *Transnational Urbanism: Locating Globalization*: (Blackwell, 2001).

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