

Technological metropolises and their Inhabitants.

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Abstract

Due to the increasing intensity of globalization, cities that are driven by technological industries are emerging all over the world. It is in these cities, which I have dubbed technological metropolises, that both the native inhabitants and knowledge migrants try to find their place. In this paper, I will describe how the respective identities of these people are affected by the interaction of their views regarding the world they live in, on the one hand, and by the transformation these technological metropolises go through, on the other. While these interactions tend to undermine the identity formation of natives, they reaffirm those of the knowledge migrants who have a more cosmopolitan world view.

Keywords: Identity, Knowledge Migrants, Technological metropolis, IT, Cosmopolitanism

Introduction

In today's world, there is no escaping the influences of globalization and technological advancement. These factors have led not only to a growing interconnectedness between people all over the world, but also to the development of technological hubs, which has led to the emergence of what I dub technological metropolises. These cities experience a form of migration that goes beyond the normal rural-to-urban migration, as people migrate to these cities from far away not simply because of the allure of urban life or the destitution of rural life but because of specific opportunities offered by the global and technological nature of the city. Two distinct groups of people reside within these cities: the knowledge migrants who decided to move to the city because of the opportunities it provides, and the native population who are living in a city that is rapidly leaving them behind in its development.

In order to understand how these cities affect the identity of their inhabitants, I will take an exploratory look at how the interaction of the attitudes and predispositions of the aforementioned groups toward the changes taking place within these cities affect their identity formation. In order to fully explore what these technological metropolises mean to their inhabitants, I will start by giving a brief description of the forces of globalization which have led to their development. I will follow this with an explanation of what a technological metropolis is and what makes these cities unique. Once I have established the context of the city in which the identities of its inhabitants are forged, I will use Roudometof's (2005) concept of the Cosmopolitan-Local Continuum to explore the attitudes and predispositions of both the

knowledge migrants who have a more cosmopolitan world view and the native inhabitants of the city, whose world view is more local. I will then look at how these attitudes and predispositions interact with certain aspects of the city to influence their identity formation. I will conclude this paper by suggesting some opportunities for further research.

The Effects of Globalization

Since technological metropolises came into being and continue to grow within the context of the present wave of globalization, it is important to first define what globalization is and how it has affected the world, before going into the specifics of technological metropolises. Kottak (2008) describes globalization as "the accelerating interdependence of nations in a world system linked economically and through mass media and modern transportation systems." According to this definition, globalization is an essentially modern phenomenon. Eriksen (2007) offers a different interpretation of globalization, stating that globalization is at least as old as the Roman and Aztec empires, and that transnational or even global systems have existed for centuries, if not millennia. However, Eriksen (2007) also states that contemporary globalization has reached a new level of intensity due to the spread of capitalism and recent developments in communication. Appadurai (2002) offers a view comparable to that of Eriksen, stating that the world has been a collection of large scale interactions for many centuries, but that in the current world there are interactions of a new order and intensity. In their view, Kottak's definition would apply to the latest

intensified wave of globalization that began in the 1980s.

An interesting aspect of Eriksen's (2007) view of globalization is his statement that globalization "entails both the intensification of transnational connectedness and the awareness of such an intensification." Thus, globalization not only has its effect on the world's population, but the awareness of this effect also plays a role in many people's daily lives. People who lean towards cosmopolitanism are more aware of the processes of globalization than others. I will return to this idea later on.

The technological metropolis

It is in this world of increasing interconnectedness that many metropolises have emerged and continue to emerge. The term "metropolis" originally referred to the "mother-city" of a country but it is now used to refer to any reasonably large city (Brunn, Hays-Mitchell & Zeigler, 2008) or metropolitan area. In this essay, I will focus on a very specific type of metropolis, which I dub, for a lack of an existing term, a technological metropolis. I define a technological metropolis as a metropolis that largely relies on either IT or some other technological sector to drive its growth and development. This usually means that these cities have many IT companies and often have universities with large departments devoted to instruction in the technological sciences. Many of these types of cities also acquire "trade recognition" as hubs in both their local and the global IT industry (Chacko, 2007). In many respects, these cities are the technological counterparts of what Saskia Sassen (2001) has dubbed "the Global City." These global cities tangibly influence global affairs in terms of politics, culture and socio-economics, and are "strategic sites for the management of the global economy and the production of the most advanced services and financial operations" (Sassen, 2001). Technological metropolises, on the other hand, influence global affairs in terms of technology, and are strategic sites in the management of technological development and production.

Where most if not all metropolises, including the technological ones, deal with the normal rural-urban migration patterns that are a part of the global tendency towards urbanization, there is also a particular form of migration towards these technological metropolises that is unique to

them. This is the migration of highly educated knowledge migrants (i.e., migrants coming to the city to become highly educated) in the technological field, who migrate to the city not because of "push factors" such as the shortages in their region of origin, which are the driving force for rural-urban migration (Eriksen, 2010), but due to "pull factors" arising from the specific opportunities these cities provide. This migration can be transnational, national, or even regional. The defining factor is not the distance people travel to migrate, but the motivation behind both the migration and the selection of their destination. It is these factors that make the migration to the technological metropolis unique, and which have a distinctive influence on the identity of its inhabitants. The archetype of a technical metropolis is Silicon Valley (Almeida and Kogut, 1999). A good example of national migration to a technological metropolis is the south-Indian cosmopolitan city of Bangalore (Brunn, Hays-Mitchell & Zeigler, 2008), where highly educated people from all over India migrate in search of opportunities in the technological sector, sometimes returning to India after a shorter or longer stay in the US or other countries in the West (Chacko, 2007). These knowledge migrants differ greatly from most migrants, not only in their motives for migration, but also in the economic resources available to them. This allows them to have a far greater impact on the cities they settle in than most migrants do. Due to these distinctive patterns of migration, such cities tend to develop along less local and more cosmopolitan and global lines. a dynamic that has very interesting effects on the identity of its inhabitants and that makes them a very compelling subject.

The other group that I will discuss are the native inhabitants of the city. This group comprises people who have lived in the city all their lives, and whose families have often been there for many generations. There is a third group that needs to be mentioned, which consists of the typical rural-to-urban migrants who seek to escape from the scarce resources of their former lives. Given the extensive literature (see Eriksen, 2007) regarding this latter group, and the fact that it does not fundamentally define technological metropolises, I will not be discussing it in this essay.

Cosmopolitans and Locals

As was mentioned in the introduction, the knowledge migrants can be seen as having a cosmopolitan way of identifying themselves in relation to the world, while the native inhabitants of the technical metropolis tend to identify themselves in more local terms. In an attempt to create a framework for empirical research into cosmopolitan-local issues, Roudometof (2005) proposes that cosmopolitan and local orientations should be viewed in terms of a continuum (i.e. on a cosmopolitan-local continuum), rather than as two discrete variables. Roudometof is of the opinion that although it is necessary for analytical purposes to conceptualize the cosmopolitan-local continuum as if locals and cosmopolitans were groups of people with opposite and conflicting visions, forming two “ideal types” which can be defined in terms of clusters of attitudes and predispositions, very few people actually display all of the characteristics of either “ideal type.” Thus, although the native inhabitants and knowledge migrants cannot simply be defined by their adoption of a purely local or cosmopolitan identification pattern, they differ from one another in the way they identify themselves in relation to the world, due to a difference in attitudes and predispositions.

Roudometof (2005) defines a number of visions and priorities regarding important aspects of social life, for which there is a clear difference in the views and attitudes of those that can be seen as close to the cosmopolitan and those close to the local ‘ideal type’, and then proceeds to operationalize the cosmopolitan-local continuum in terms of four dimensions in which locals and cosmopolitans might differ.

The first of these dimensions is the degree of attachment to a locality (neighbourhood or city), where cosmopolitans generally have a low degree of attachment to a locality while locals have a high degree of attachment. According to Roudometof (2005), it is important to note that while transnational migrants constitute the paradigmatic case of people experiencing the separation between their homeland and the place in which they reside, such an experience is not restricted to these migrants. Nor is it necessary to cross national borders to experience this type of rift. The second dimension is the degree of attachment to a state or country, where locals most likely value being a native of their country, holding its citizenship and

belonging to the dominant national group, while cosmopolitans typically do not value such attributes. This is a very important dimension, as it means that, for cosmopolitans, citizenship is decoupled from its traditional association with the nation-state. However, Roudometof (2005) emphasizes that this does not prevent cosmopolitans from having a national identity. The third dimension defined by Roudometof (2005) is the degree of attachment to and support for local culture. There are many regional differences in the attachment to local or national culture, including language and religion. Irrespective of these differences, locals are generally more ethnocentric than cosmopolitans. As with the second dimension, this difference can also not be reduced to a greater or lesser degree of nationalism, as the latter is far broader a term than ethnocentrism. The fourth and final dimension mentioned by Roudometof (2005) is the degree of economic, cultural and institutional protectionism. Locals and cosmopolitans have different attitudes towards issues such as their support for tariffs, prohibition of land ownership by foreigners, international intervention, and the willingness to move in order to obtain more favorable working or living conditions.

This distinction between cosmopolitans and locals gives us an opportunity to take a look at how the fact that knowledge migrants are more likely to find themselves close to the cosmopolitan end of the continuum while the native inhabitants of these cities are more likely to find themselves closer to the local end, influences the formation of their identities. One general way in which this fact affects individuals is that those who find themselves closer to the cosmopolitan end are likely to identify themselves as being a part of a far larger imagined community (Anderson, 2006) than those who are closer to the local end.

Identities within technical metropolises

However, there is more going on with respect to the identity of knowledge migrants and native inhabitants of technological metropolises than simply a difference in their position on the cosmopolitan-local continuum. While differences along this particular dimension can be found in most cities around the world and is therefore far from unique to technological metropolises, and although it is vital in the formation of identity, this variable is not in and of itself sufficient to provide a comprehensive analysis of the processes

underlying the identity formation of these two groups. Where being either cosmopolitan or local-minded is most often a matter of choice, there are also forces at work over which people have much less control. I will now focus on one such force: the direction and pace of the development of the technological metropolis they live in and the (often changing) position they occupy within their city. Two important factors have been mentioned regarding the way in which the city might influence the identity formation of people, the first being that people are becoming more and more aware of the effects of globalization, as described by Eriksen (2007), and that those individuals that are more cosmopolitan are even more likely to have such an awareness than locals. The second factor has to do with the varying levels of attachments people on different ends of the cosmopolitan-local continuum have to their physical location, citizenship and ethnicity. These two factors combined imply that local people are most likely going to be affected very differently by the development of the city than are the migrants who have a very different identification pattern.

Depending on which group they belong to, people will most likely experience the forces of the city in very different ways, and this will impact the formation of identity for people in these groups. With reference to the first dimension proposed by Roudometof (2005), the fact that locals, and therefore the native population, are more attached to their physical locality implies that the situation and development of the city they live in will have a far stronger effect on them than it does on knowledge migrants. This means people who adopt a local identification pattern have an identity which is much more dependent on their locality than is the case for people who are more cosmopolitan. What I propose is that, for those people native to a technological metropolis, the rapid transformation of the city on which they have based their identity could very well lead to an identity crisis of sorts, because the locality upon which they have based their identity has essentially disappeared. For example, when one looks at the case of Bangalore, a striking transformation has taken place: In a span of less than 25 years since Texas Instruments became the first international IT company to establish offices in Bangalore (Brunn, Hays-Mitchell & Zeigler, 2008), the city has taken on a completely new identity. While this new identity can be unnerving and bring about identity

confusion for native inhabitants, the situation is very different for the knowledge migrants. The city is actually transforming itself into a place that is virtually designed for them, giving them the communicative opportunities to maintain an identity that is separate from their physical location while at the same time providing an opportunity to live amongst people that share similar views—which further reaffirms their identity.

In terms of the second dimension of Roudometof (2005), a link can also be found between the transformation of the city and the attitude of natives and migrants. Although Roudometof talks about attachment to a *state* or *country* and the dominant *national* group, it is not unreasonable to assume that these same attachments also take place on a more local level. In a technological metropolis, it is often the migrants rather than the locals who gain a dominant position in the local discourse because of their economic and social power. This dynamic, combined with the changes in local culture brought about by these migrants, the majority of whom come from either a foreign nation or a different region or state within the same nation, can sometimes be so extreme that it leads to a change in the common language, with the local language becoming increasingly less spoken by the majority of the city's inhabitants. This is the case in Bangalore, where English has become the *lingua franca*, as only a minority still speaks the local language, Kannada. The latter change can be linked to the third dimension of Roudometof (2005). In terms of both the second and third dimension of the cosmopolitan-local continuum as described by Roudometof, technological metropolises are drifting away from those things locals are most strongly attached to. Just as the changing of the physical city they lived in could very well be perceived as a threat to the identity of the native inhabitants due to their attachment to their physical location, this transformation of the city's society may come to be perceived as a threat to their identity because of their attachment to a certain culture and membership of the dominant group.

Conclusion

Thus far, there has not been enough research conducted regarding the influence of those cities I have dubbed technical metropolises to allow us to fully understand the processes influencing the identity formation of its inhabitants. However,

some key factors have been uncovered which not only give a preliminary idea of these processes, but that also suggest directions for further research into the subject. The first of these key factors lies in the fact that, in general, native inhabitants have a more local view of the world—a view which conflicts with the path of development of the technological metropolis, which locals may see as a threat to their identity. Conversely, the development of these cities complements the more cosmopolitan world view of knowledge migrants and therefore allows them to strengthen their identity. However, detailed fieldwork is required in order to fully comprehend which form these interactions take in these cities and, most importantly, how they are perceived by the natives and knowledge migrants themselves.

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