



## THE GLOBAL UNIVERSITY, AREA STUDIES, AND THE WORLD CITIZEN: Neoliberal Geography's Redistribution of the "World"

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There was a certain honesty in area studies when it first emerged, or at least a clarity as to what area studies was. Arising during the cold war, typically with funding from the defense department, knowledge within area studies was ultimately knowledge in service of the state, and an area was an area that had national considerations attached to it. This institutionalization of an "area," and of the subjects of area knowledge, may have been concretized by postwar area studies, but it was already coming into being in the prewar era, including within disciplines like anthropology. And even after the cold war (and despite the supposed neutrality of area studies that then arose), as anthropology and area studies have turned more fully toward the study of larger scale societies, this institutional order has only been reinforced. China, for example, can almost unquestioningly be understood as a national site of culture, even if it holds ethnic variations within it, and the analyst too would almost inevitably still be thought of in terms of either studying China as a (national) native, or as one coming from another nation, "abroad."

But this is an aggregation of ideas about "area"—and an order of universities as sites that bind these ideas about area together—that may no longer be holding. And this is not just because of vaguely "transnational" forces, of corporations and culture industries successfully organizing global flows across national borders; it has as much to do with the crisis in these very flows, and the kinds of reactions to economic crisis that have arisen. Certainly the global recession of the past few years has directly affected most university systems. At the same time that fewer

families have adequate resources for private school tuition, the global tendency toward neoliberal policies (displacing public funding with private responsibility) has left public universities with inadequate financial resources for even basic system maintenance.

Yet it is precisely these conditions of crisis that some U.S. universities see as the grounds of new potential, and even of new academic and human “freedom” and autonomy. The vision, and the arguments for restructuring, are large. In the view of John Sexton, President of New York University (NYU) and one of the most articulate voices in this discussion, we are now at a juncture at which the essential nature of the university must be rethought. We are, he says, at an “inflection point,” that is truly historical—it is a critical threshold of humanity, and “as humankind approaches this critical threshold, so do its universities.” Still more, (e.g., Ewert Cousins and Karl Jaspers in Sexton 2010), we are now at the beginning of a “Second Axial Period.” The first Axial Age (800 B.C.E.–200 B.C.E—in other words, roughly the Greek originary era of modernity) was radical enough that it affected “all aspects of culture,” and “transformed consciousness itself” (Sexton 2010:3). The implication is that we are again amid a basic redistribution of human life, and universities are a part of this.

The heart of this restructuring process for universities is the literal construction of new sites around the globe (I consider a few of the most recent, currently under construction). These are for the most part full, degree-granting campuses, rather than study abroad sites. They are also being built in a very particular kind of site—they are helping to define a new kind of site. Furthermore, to use one of their increasingly common neologisms, they are designed to produce a “world citizen.” The first question that arises, then, is, what is a “world” under these conditions, of which one might be a citizen? Also, what becomes of the “area” that underlies area studies? And—especially if these are policies meant to embrace the potential within neoliberal economic practices—what might it mean to locate new promise for freedom in these sites or areas?

To be clear, this is at least in part a process driven by the contemporary status of capital. But it’s not quite so simple as to lament that, in reaction to current economic constraints, traditional universities are taking on the instrumental logic of corporate profit seeking. That may be happening too—one example might be the advocacy by Michael M. Crow, President of Arizona State University, for thinking of U.S. universities as “Comprehensive Knowledge Enterprises” (steering “‘pure’ research toward socially useful outcomes”; producing “human capital” for “broader social and economic outcomes”; see Crow 2009:2).<sup>1</sup> The new campuses, however,

are elements within a systematic economy that has quite specific traits, not limited to profit motive, and including practices and dispositions that are driving and redefining “global” structure. So, among other things, these new campuses being built are further evidence that capital has really been tied to the nation-state for only a brief time, and is now aggregating into quite different configurations.

Neoliberalism has become one of the generic names for these prevailing trends within global capital.<sup>2</sup> As generic, it is an overused label that covers for a wide variety of quite differing practices and contexts. But there are nonetheless some underlying characteristics, or even principles, of neoliberalism that are worth considering as widely operative in contemporary life. Most importantly, in its most basic and generic form, neoliberalism implies freedom from responsibility; especially, it implies freedom from responsibility to any kind of alterity, in favor of responsibility only to one’s self. Logically, carried out as a principle, the result would be a kind of pure self-identity, free of relation to others. This might already sound like a possible vision of both freedom and autonomy, but as a model for either community, or for individual identity, it is at very least strange; what would it mean to have a self that finds identity without relation to any other? I will return to this, but for the moment I’ll simply note that if this were the organizing principle for the construction of a new place, or a new community, one would have to wonder what kind of place that would be. Or to return to the questions raised above, what would an “area” be under these conditions (if the ideal is freedom from responsibility to an outside), and whom (or what) would area studies knowledge serve?

For a more practical example, indicating some of the dynamics driving these places in which new global campuses are being built, one might look to the contemporary social role of cities. It is clear that certain of the world’s cities have become central enough, with high concentrations of corporate capital, advanced technology, literate consumers and skilled workers, that these cities now can play almost larger roles in the global economy than states do, and they have become increasingly independent actors; hence the category of “global cities.” Although the idea of global cities has received quite a bit of attention, the same forces pushing for municipal autonomy are evident elsewhere too, in places around the globe and in areas sometimes quite small.

As cities gain new importance in the space of globalization, they are also increasingly suffering in their relation to the state. Nations, financially constrained by lowered tax rates, download responsibility onto individual states or provinces, which in turn transfer responsibility onto the cities (it’s social welfare responsibility

in particular that is being handed down, but financial responsibility in general). Yet the increased financial burden is not accompanied by additional revenue, so cities are pushed toward “entrepreneurial” governance (Hackworth 2007:25), and increased use of capital markets, with reliance on bonds in particular. This allows a degree of freedom from relation to the federal government, but it means increased reliance on debt (usu. in the form of bonds), and increased competition between city localities for more investment in their bonds. That, in turn, makes bond ratings more important (better bond ratings will likely draw more investment capital), and this creates competition between cities and localities for those bond ratings, and bond rating agencies gain new importance and influence as arbiters. Thus, the practices that allow cities to gain some degree of autonomy from federal governments leave cities instead caught in a new set of competitive relations between each other, governed in part by the bond rating agencies.

It is not surprising, then, that under these conditions a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) would be an attractive alternative. There are many variants of SEZs (tax-free zones, free-trade zones, free ports, etc.), but the general idea is that these are exceptional areas allowing for less regulation of capital, often without taxation, and at times allowing for some suspension of local laws. The goal and benefit is to attract new direct foreign capital investment (the “foreign” capital really being that of global corporations). States, provinces, and even cities have thus been motivated to set up SEZs, and where new cities are being built, the cities themselves are starting to look wholly like SEZs. This, in a real practical way, does provide freedom for these localities: they are free from relation to either federal governments, or from the competition with other city locales set up by bond rating agencies.

In this sense, SEZs can be thought of similarly to global cities. Both depend on the ability to attract corporate capital, and for both, corporate capital allows for a new freedom for a local area from relation to an outside. In the case of democracies like Japan (e.g., the Okinawa Special Free Trade Zone), one can see how these districts allow a freeing of relation from a national government. The same process, though, is happening in quite different contexts, as, significantly, in China. Shenzhen is the classic example. Initiated in 2007 and expanded in 2010, this is the largest SEZ anywhere, essentially creating an entirely new city out of a village, which has reached near province-level dimensions. Unlike some of the smaller ventures started by cities elsewhere, Shenzhen was initiated by the central government of China as the first of four planned SEZs. Early plans were simply for a walled industrial park for daytime factory work, but this was quickly revised to

allow for freedom of experimentation with all levels of industry, as well as with political and cultural life—a space of freedom from Chinese political and cultural life in general.<sup>3</sup> One might therefore even say that in China, the central government is creating a space of autonomy from itself, or from what it has been. It would be only slightly simplistic to argue that as China transforms itself, the new China and the break with its past is being founded on the SEZ.

Thus, in the dynamics motivating the creation of SEZs around the world, one can see the basis of a new territory—one that is involved with the state, perhaps, but is nonetheless promising freedom from the state, and from state sovereignty. Insofar as these zones are exempted from local law, or are even just tax-free zones, they are structurally absolved from responsibility to their surroundings. Hence we face some of the same kinds of questions already raised, now at this more practical level: if there is any responsibility at all for these spaces, to what would they be responsible? If there is any sovereignty at all in these new areas (one could argue that there is not), what would that sovereignty be? Or, as in the case of some cities in China, in which SEZs are increasingly being viewed as the financial centers of a city (or city “anchor,” as has been said of the Pudong district of Shanghai), what would it mean to have one of these areas serve as a city’s center, or anchor? What kind of area would a nonresponsible entity anchor? What kind of identity can that area have, and what would it mean to be a “citizen” of this territory?

### **IDEA CAPITALS**

These are the territories and places that the new global university is helping to construct. Three obvious examples that I’ll draw from are Abu Dhabi, Pudong, and New Songdo City (just outside of Seoul), although there are others. NYU is building full, degree-granting campuses in Abu Dhabi and Pudong, and Yonsei University is playing a similar role in Songdo. Each of these locations is unique, but they are nonetheless in many ways comparable kinds of sites. Each started out as a community built almost out of nothing; Songdo and Pudong were in fact built on reclaimed land (construction of the NYU Pudong campus has not yet begun). All were built as islands, both literally and because they are places of cultural, political and economic exception within their own regions. All were financed to some degree by global capital, and all began as tax-free economic zones. Despite their varied locales, all campuses on these islands are to be English speaking (the entire city of Songdo was originally designed to be English speaking, but that idea now appears to have been scrapped). The same, often New York-based architects have been principal designers for much of the architecture in all of these areas

(Kohn Pederson Fox, along with Gale International, for example, has played a large role in the overall planning of Songdo City, Pudong, and to a lesser extent Abu Dhabi). Students who go to these campuses, and corporate executives who go to live in these districts, are assured that the island-like nature of the district will for the most part allow freedom from the hindrances of local custom. We can already say, then, that these are culture-free zones. Free economic zones tend to produce culture-free zones.

The economic models underlying the startup of each of the campuses is a little more diverse: NYU Abu Dhabi has been quite generously funded by the United Arab Emirates (UAE), with gifts of both land and money; Yonsei was encouraged to move part of its campus to Songdo in part through government directive, government funding, and early allocation of land prices well below market value; and the NYU campus in Pudong was provided land by Shanghai, but will otherwise likely operate on a more traditional economic model. But the motivations and aims remain the same for all. These are fitting directly into the dynamics of SEZs, and SEZs are the new vanguard of the historical trend away from traditional industrialism. Cities and regions that wish to survive, and even more to act in leadership roles, have long turned to services as the basis for a new economy, and all three of these areas are defined by this desire. Abu Dhabi hopes to be at the center of a new global hub in the Middle East, and the NYU campus will be part of the capital city; Songdo City is meant to be part of a new global hub in East Asia, and Pudong has been designed with the aim of helping Shanghai act as the financial center of China and an East Asian global hub as well (Zhang 2009:178).

Assuming that the goal is not simply to attract foreign investment but, rather, to more truly found a new economy, merely offering tax breaks or even simply encouraging “entrepreneurial spirit” would not be sufficient. Universities are seen as key elements in a much more substantial undertaking. In part, this is simply a matter of developing ideas that could have corporate use, and more generally, of a conception of universities as tied into the production of skills, technologies and institutions in a way that implies a merging of the university and the service sector.<sup>4</sup> Somewhat more vaguely, it is also driven by a view that “knowledge” itself is defined by, and will generate, a services-defined social life in general.<sup>5</sup> According to NYU’s Sexton, the coming century will be a “knowledge century,” and so to lead in this world, places like Abu Dhabi will be “idea capitals” (Sexton 2010:6).<sup>6</sup> Ideas, in other words, will be the basis of social as well as economic value, and these sites will be privileged centers for the production of and involvement with ideas. Fundamentally different from the area studies schemes that characterized the

old creation of study abroad sites, these are at once economic and social projects. Sexton (drawing on Richard Florida) is clear on the social hierarchy that this may yield: “globalization is not leveling the playing field, it is redrawing it. The future will reside in the idea capitals, those places that attract a disproportionate percentage of the world’s intellectual capacity” (2010:6). One begins to see in this the beginnings of a unique class, or being, of people who will attach to these sites, who are both literate producers of ideas and literate consumers, generating taste as much as “knowledge”—this is now what a “creative class” is, and what drives value production. Part of the structure of an “idea capital” thus seems to include not only a service economy notion of value but also a social group almost wholly defined as the producers of this order of value. The idea capital, further, involves a kind of focusing of the essence of this value (both socially and geographically) and it is this essence of value production that is now being structured as an independent community or city, with the global university as an anchor.

The centrality of creativity and cultural participation within this mix is typically quite clear. Although finance, insurance and real estate will continue as components of the service economy, Sexton sees the new centers as mixes of “intellectual, cultural, and educational activity (ICE)” (Sexton 2010:6). Saadiyat Island, where the new NYU Abu Dhabi campus is being built, would seem to provide nearly the ideal constellation of this service economy.<sup>7</sup> When completed it will have its own Central Business District, high-end real estate developments already open for investment, beach and entertainment areas (incl. boutiques, media centers, and luxury housing), a cultural district (incl. NYU, as well as branches of the Louvre, the Guggenheim, and other museums, and a biennial international arts festival), and even a nature reserve district.<sup>8</sup> One of the ways in which Sexton, quoting David Levering Lewis, sums this up is “why not envision Saadiyat Island as the new Toledo . . . functioning as a permanent festival of culture and art?” (2010:15).<sup>9</sup> By these terms, rather than a culture-free zone, this is instead a zone of pure culture.<sup>10</sup> “Culture,” or cultural value, though, is now wholly merged with economic value; there is no differential between the two.

Within the new campuses themselves, it is one of the ironies that despite all the rhetoric of the global, area studies is not part of the curriculum. It is too early at this point to know what the more completed curriculum will include, but area studies has evidently not been one of the principal aims, and these campuses are not being built to provide access to understanding a region. In Songdo, Yonsei’s Underwood International College (UIC, their stand-alone, English-speaking campus, opened in 2006) provides a Korean studies minor, but thus far only that (Mo 2009). UIC has

a high percentage of foreign faculty, but they teach courses on “World Literature” and “World History” rather than topics specific to their own areas of expertise. NYU Abu Dhabi does underscore that it is a liberal arts institution, but in place of, say, Middle Eastern literature, the university offers a course on “Pathways of World Literature.” The only foreign languages offered are clearly instrumental: Arabic (keeping in mind that students there otherwise work in English) and Chinese. Chinese and English in effect seem to be the assumed “world” languages now, and there is no linguistic provision at NYU Abu Dhabi for languages of other areas. As in the case of the World Literature course, students will be provided a real liberal arts education, but it appears this will be in the neutrally universal framework of “world” conditions. This will have the added benefit of being non–area specific for each of the NYU campuses, creating a generic consistency of curriculum across the campuses that will allow students to easily transfer across them.<sup>11</sup> Thus, in terms of curriculum, the structure of these campuses tends toward a non–area specific location, and a world that can be studied from anywhere (and therefore from nowhere in particular). There is multiplicity of positions in this world, and campus locales, but it is multiplicity without real difference. Language fits in only at this level, too: rather than a ground and object of cultural difference, it serves more as a code—an instrument for operating within a generic world (and English and Chinese will do, really, for anywhere). It’s worth noting that NYU in particular has been very clear that, regardless of location, their new campuses will respect the 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure of the American Association of University Professors, and will allow free thought in these campuses as academic “free zones” (Krieger 2008:6ff; NYU 2010). But this neutrality of an academic-free zone, or free thought, should now be understood as part of the “neutrality” of area itself.

Given these conditions, from a student’s perspective, why fly off to one of these campuses? Why fly off to Songdo, or Pudong, or Abu Dhabi, if that is not already home? One of the goals of these campuses may be to capture higher enrollment from local regions, but it is also clear that they are premised on the idea of a more cosmopolitan enrollment. Yonsei’s UIC is designed to have at least 50 percent of its student body (initial plans were for a still higher percentage), and its faculty, be international (Mo 2009: 16). But still, why would a student go? For the moment, the answer generally seems to be money (either scholarship inducements as at Abu Dhabi or cheaper tuition relative to the costs of private universities in the United States as at a place like Yonsei’s UIC), and the promise of real, if nonetheless generic, excellence. And perhaps still some interest in a local area. UIC may attract

students from Japan, for instance, who are going because they have some genuine interest in Korea. But at a site like Saadiyat Island, where nothing existed before, there is nothing culturally identifiable to draw a student to the site. Students, therefore, have had to be recruited. The Abu Dhabi campus, for instance, hired the Institute of International Education (which administers Fulbright scholarships and so has a vast talent pool) to “scour the world for candidates” (Daley 2011:5). These are institutions built, in other words, before there is a clear constituency or a clear consumer demand—or, rather, consumer demand is being rechanneled. Furthermore, while these new campuses are of course educational institutions, their origin lies with university administrators, rather than faculty; there is no a priori academic project driving them. Instead, faculty have in many cases stiffly opposed the projects (Krieger 2008:2; Kwon 2010). These are therefore educational projects driven neither by a prior intellectual desire, nor any clear tie of an intellectual aim with a particular area, and without a clear constituency. It should not really be surprising that the curricular content of these universities remains unclear and still under discussion, in some cases even after they are built and running. The motivating agency really is capital itself (the neoliberal capital of the SEZ in particular), pushing not only places but also people, and at once creating a new empty space, and then filling it.

Predictably, digital technologies are part of the structuring of life within these developments. At Songdo City, a completely networked urban grid was originally planned through a partnership with the LG Corporation. Called “U-Life,” the aim was to allow for integration of the network into nearly all aspects of daily life. A bottle plunked into your recycling bin at home would be electronically sensed, and your bank account credited with the bottle deposit; if you wanted ideas for a new hairstyle, U-Beauty could splice your face onto a generic head and recommend one. As Songdo’s website put it, the information gained from these connections would allow for an “ethnography,” providing the corporations with information to better understand and work with your everyday habits. Thus, not only is area studies excised from these worlds but also “ethnography” now works wholly for the corporation, and the weaving of life into that.<sup>12</sup>

If these are forces pushing the reorganization or rechanneling of both area and life, there are glimmers that the same processes are working to define the fuller biography of an individual, with education helping to construct a flow into this order of things from the start. One of the best examples of this might be the new pre-K–12 school called “Avenues, the World School,” headquartered in New York. The explicit aim is to produce a “competitive” student who can track

into the global universities. A high finance private school project, it mirrors the format of the new global universities both in terms of planned geography and the curriculum, is closely tied to higher education, and has an impressive array of education administrators.<sup>13</sup>

Although not in an SEZ, the school's location is advertised according to the services-economy logic described earlier: in the Chelsea arts district, it's near Wall Street, will work with the Whitney art museum scheduled for completion nearby and use the newly built and fashionable High Line park, making "a strong destination for artistically-oriented families and students" (Avenues the World School 2010, sec. 1:31, sec. 6:2, 4).

The idea is to have 20 interchangeable campuses around the world, with the same principles organizing the global university. Plans show a similar freedom of responsibility from anything local.<sup>14</sup> All sites will be English speaking, like the global universities, and the curriculum will be "completely consistent" from campus to campus, so that global children will have "no need to miss a beat."<sup>15</sup>

As with the global universities, Avenues' curriculum is founded on classes like the "World Course," a strand that goes through every grade and every campus (Anderson 2011:6). History, as with other humanities courses and disciplines, is now formulated *only* as world history (as literature is becoming "world literature"), unified in perspective and presented "as the great interconnected story that it is" (Avenues the World School 2010, sec. 1:13).

Finally, here too the primary method of preparing students for area-specific knowledge is language alone (as an instrumental tool for access). So within the curriculum of these kinds of schools language, in a sense, is all that is left of area studies. Area studies, which once held the promise of being a nondisciplinary terrain in precisely a way that might actually bring other, more bounded disciplines (such as anthropology, economics, or history—disciplines with their own sets of questions and their own perspectives) into dialogue, is now being emptied of those relations in favor of a more simply nondisciplinary terrain, with a single and unified perspective.

It is worth noting that world schools are both acknowledging that this is a new order of things, and arguing that it is part of the trajectory of schooling and of world history more generally. Avenues' catalog, for example, begins with a description of three historical stages of the best schools, in which city-based local schools are the first step (in a world apparently not entirely nationalized), boarding schools that serve national communities are second, and the third step is the "new breed,"

the “World School” (Sexton uses similar language for NYU, saying that it must move from the founding paradigm of a “university in and of the city,” to become one “in and of the world” *Avenues the World School* 2010, sec. 1:24; see Daley 2011:1). The “world,” though, also now encompassing the pre-K–12 child, comprises its own very delimited and integrated space, with the same groups of people transiting up through life from places like Chelsea to places like Pudong Shanghai, or Abu Dhabi. NYU even describes it as a “circulatory system,” through which “faculty and students circulate,” developing “habits and modes of cooperation” specific to the system. (Sexton 2010:12).<sup>16</sup> The schools are thus openly viewing this as a reorganization of space and of life.

### INDIFFERENCE

To return to the more abstracted language of generalized “neoliberal” conditions, what this all adds up to is a tendency toward indifference as an organizing principle. Economically, the SEZ-like territories being constructed promise “freedom” from surrounding city and state contexts; a socioeconomic indifference to locale. The schools’ curriculum, the use of English as the universal language, and the islandlike status of the zones themselves—all this implies freedom from, and indifference to, culture. And because they are built in entirely new, undeveloped land areas (typically reclaimed land), in the *tabula rasa* philosophy that is so commonly cited, they are zones without their own history, and of indifferent relation to any specific history (other than their own, newly formed). Similarly, within the curriculum, as the humanities and social sciences lose fields like area studies that have served to bring the disciplines into conversation with each other, the disciplines risk becoming increasingly generic, self-identified, and indifferent to each other.

This has effects on what might (still vaguely) be thought of as the “social,” or the grounding principles of sociopolitical organization. Perhaps the most condensed geographic expression of this is Dubai. Dubai started as a tax-free zone, and like Abu Dhabi never really did attain the status of a nation-state; Dubai and Abu Dhabi are closer to autonomous city-states. This city-state itself is then really an entity made up of a set of autonomous districts, or “clusters.” There is, for example, an “education city” in Dubai,<sup>17</sup> a “media city,” a “healthcare village,” a “business city,” even a “chess city” (designed as a huge chessboard; Davis 2006:9). Each of these cities, or clusters, is populated by appropriate corporate groups (e.g., the media city includes subsidiaries of Dell, Microsoft, and Hewlett-Packard), and because the corporations are allowed to operate to some extent according to “regulatory

and legal bubble-domes tailored to the specific needs of foreign capital and expat professionals” (Davis 2006:9), they too are independent of one another.

These clusters or cities within the city-state are in effect literal spaces of indifference, to each other and even to their immediate city-state. What can it mean, for example, to have a “city” that is only “education,” without “healthcare”? Or in which media has no overlap with environment? Social categories are being separated out as unintegrated, unrelated realms and spaces, that now seem to operate according to their own independent laws (they in fact do, as the idea of independently varying corporate “regulatory bubble domes” indicates). The same tendencies that are playing out in the university thus are playing out in and as state geography. Just as the field of area studies no longer effectively serves as a mediating ground for other disciplines, these are territories in which a common mediating basis for the social is dissipating.<sup>18</sup> Governance and sociality based on the social contract is being replaced by the law of corporate management, and this is the result. The movement is toward a community of autonomous realms, or identities, without the mediating basis to allow for social relation as we have had it.

### SOVEREIGN SPACES AND NON-NATION-STATES

A common reading of modern political history is that sovereignty tends to disperse under the force of globalization and the shift from sovereign governance to biopolitical control of everyday life practices.<sup>19</sup> It would be easy to see some of these neoliberal forces in this light: the progression of SEZ-type areas, with their own rules, is part of a disaggregation of the nation, and this in turn is really just part of the ongoing dispersal of sovereignty itself. Because these are networked territories, too, they might simply be thought of as part of the ongoing flow of the global, in ways that encourage placelessness and the dissolving importance of state boundaries. This would fit into a now fairly common picture of globalization defined by a transnationally borderless and flexible flow of culture and capital. But the spaces described here are not “non-places” (Augé 1995). They are located, consistent, and defined territories with their own borders and relations of inside and outside.

Despite the common rhetoric that neoliberal policies imply flexible and transitory conditions of life, labor, and governance, in fact the indications here are that neoliberal capital seems to reassemble into a definitive, if new, space. This is a real geography, with its own sense of an area, and with at least some qualities definitive of sovereignty. In some cases these territories may start out as spaces of exception

within nation-states (Ong 2006),<sup>20</sup> but this does not seem to be their ideal form. Generally island-like, and close to city-states in their more developed guise, these are spaces that increasingly do act like states;<sup>21</sup> so the impetus is toward a return to the state as well, just not the nation-state.

Sovereignty, as I am using the term, implies more than just the centralized ability of a state to impose control, militarily or via governance. And while sovereignty might appear to be a contingent outcome of a variety of state strategies (Ong 2006:100), my interest is more in the ways in which a specific set of forces might exercise sovereign control in a relatively consistent way, distinct from other modes of sovereignty—in this case, how a set of forces tend to pull away from national sovereignty, rather than working with the nation-state. To define in brief, as I mean it, “sovereignty” includes: the claim to supremacy of power (there is none higher); the absolute right to decide (without submission to any law); and specified territoriality or jurisdiction (Brown 2010:22).<sup>22</sup>

The territoriality of these new spaces is clear. The claim to jurisdiction within the spaces is already built into the idea that an SEZ will allow corporations to abide by their own rules within the zone. And while these may in some cases begin as exceptional spaces, recent developments show movement toward independence. Singapore might be thought of as a historical antecedent. It too is an island city-state, with a society and economy based on finance and services, soon to be bolstered with another global university campus (built by National University of Singapore and Yale). But while the sovereignty of Singapore is unquestionable, its reasons for statehood and claim to independence were somewhat different (more based on political than economic grounds) from the global territories now developing. Instead, in that region the Iskandar project is closer to the new global model. Iskandar is yet another metropolis being constructed out of nothing, in this case by Malaysia. It is planned to cover roughly three times the territory of Singapore, the purpose is to draw global investment through tax breaks, and it is designed with the same goal of fostering a community based on a global creative class of knowledge and taste workers described above (it will also have an Education City to help build this). The Malaysian government’s larger goal in supporting the project is not just to have their own Singapore as a special zone but, rather, to use this as the basis of a redefined and more “fully developed” state. In other words, in this case the aim is more to use this as the transformative anchor of the state, rather than an exceptional territory within it. But regardless of the actual parameters of these global spaces, it should first be evident that they are territorial, and dependent on boundaries within which their own laws apply.

Especially for those SEZ-like areas that do become more like states, even where jurisdiction and the right to decide remains within the hands of traditional political institutions, the motivation is toward a transfer of sovereign decision-making power into other hands. To look again at Abu Dhabi, in the construction of Saadiyat Island as elsewhere in the UAE the abuse of foreign workers received some media attention. To its credit the Abu Dhabi government sought to redress some of these conditions. Their means of doing so was to create yet another “city”: the “Workers’ City,” which would be planned and built by the Higher Corporation for Specialized Economic Zones (ZonesCorp). A city with two shopping malls, recreational facilities, mosques, laundry, etc., was constructed, with ethical standards set by the government (such as a requirement that no more than eight men could be housed in a room). But the city is meant to be leased out to corporate management, and so as one of the general managers put it, “At the end of the day we are renting the city out, so . . . if the room can fit ten people and the contractor wants to put ten people in it, there is nothing we can do to prevent them from doing that” (Billing 2009:1). There is a “right to decide” in this example, but one can see here the ceding of social and governmental decision making to the corporation. In practical terms, sovereignty thus more effectively lies with the corporation, and in abstract terms, ultimately this is another example of the movement toward a space of the sovereignty of capital itself.

Last, along with a claim to territory, and to jurisdiction within these territories, there is also a claim to absolute sovereign supremacy—to “decisionism” (Brown 2010:22), or the idea that there is no higher power or law to which these entities would have to submit. This seems to be part of the logic and desire to start in truly new places. As one description for Abu Dhabi puts it, “[the] task is not to insert NYU into an existing foreign city,” it is to build where nothing yet exists. “It’s an amazing opportunity for the university to seed the urban fabric the way we would like it. . . . Where else would you basically get to operate on a *tabula rasa*?” (Krieger 2008:3). Under these conditions, not only are the territories free of responsibility to local governments but also are still more basically free to define their own worlds, by themselves. The desire (or fantasy) is to be truly a truly autonomous entity. More specifically, in technical terms the desire is to be autarchic—not in the sense of having an autocratic system of rule (although that may be part of the picture, as in Singapore and Abu Dhabi) but, rather, in the idea of a state in which everyone rules only themselves, and no one else. That is part of the logic of an SEZ in its relation to its context, it is part of the way a city-state like Dubai or Abu Dhabi relates to other city-states, and it describes

the way clusters or “cities” within Dubai relate to each other. This makes for a complicated picture of sovereignty. On the one hand, it means that sovereignty might be broken up into individualized and independently acting entities, like the clusters within Dubai or like the city-states at a higher level. Especially insofar as these claim self-sufficiency with no responsibility to one another, in its essence the result is a mode of autonomy already described, emphasizing identity without social relation. On the other hand, insofar as all of these territories are abiding by rules of neoliberal capital, then capital is providing the larger ground of relation, and all of these territories are collectively playing out the larger sovereignty of capital.

### **CITIZENSHIP**

So one can begin to trace new sociopolitical worlds emerging, and it probably is appropriate to speak in terms of a world “citizen,” in ways that are more meaningful than mere reference to a vaguely cosmopolitan person who is at home across the globe. Although the fragmenting of the nation-state may also mean a break in the relation between sovereignty and citizenship, it does appear that these terms, too, are now recombining. Certainly it is significant that the vocabulary of “citizenship” is returning in these contexts.

As used here, citizenship entails both rights, and a mode of relation or a mode of belonging and participation to a community or state; for the most part, in nation-states this mode of belonging has included both social components (as in taxes paid, for the social and political good), and political (as in the obligation to vote, with rights that are bestowed). It may be clear, however, that these terms would apply only awkwardly to the “world citizen” of the new global university territories. Given that those people who most fully participate in these spaces are the ones who are attracted there by the tax-free promise, along with the fact that they move so constantly from one site to another, it is hard to see any of the traditional conditions of social belonging or participation at work in this mode of citizenship. Instead, what clearly provides something like citizenship status is the ability to contribute to value creation, in the more strictly economic sense described above. That is what helps to define a valued “citizen of the world,” who would be able then to send their children to the world schools, and continue to enjoy the ostensibly well-balanced society that these sites promise.<sup>23</sup> The result is a differential hierarchy of participation in citizenship. A lower level worker might be contracted to live in the more delimited workers’ cities, thus enjoying the benefits in only a limited way, and temporarily. The hierarchy of participation is thus both

spatial (workers' cities are bounded off from idea capitals) and temporal (workers have to leave once the contract is complete).

Politics has perhaps still less to do with any of this. "Citizens" rather are strictly workers or managers, or the value producers of "idea capitals." Political citizenship tends to be resolved into economic being (or, politics is being banished to the outside of citizenship), as in the case of the workers' city in Saadiyat Island, where decisions about living conditions are principally a matter of corporate management. It is in keeping with this attitude that the universities involved with these projects have repeatedly said that they can and should remain neutral to complaints about local politics, or even disputes about working conditions for the people building their new campuses. The neutrality of a world citizen thus seems to tie in with the notion of a politics-free citizenship.

### THE AREA OF AREA STUDIES

As areas that are thus unmarked by history, culture, or locality, and free of political import, it is clear that the new global universities are no longer part of the realm or logic of the old exchange programs.<sup>24</sup> In fact, as at NYU Abu Dhabi, one can decide to do an exchange program *from* the global campus; the Abu Dhabi campus thus pulls in students from around the world, not as a site "abroad" or away from anything, or local to anything—students who want to go abroad, or to the local, will then do so from Abu Dhabi (or Shanghai, or Singapore, and so on). Thus, the exchange and study abroad systems still continue, as do international programs, but one now goes to study "abroad" from these nowhere-in-particular locations.

Both in terms of the way the global universities are organizing knowledge and disciplines, and the ways in which they are helping to found new geographies, what is being built is really two systems, or two worlds: the world of exchange programs and study abroad, on the one hand, and a "world" more indifferent to its outside, on the other hand. At the moment, the latter world is being viewed as the space of real freedom of action, value production, development, and change, while the more classic realm of nations is caught in stasis.

The relation between the two areas is not quite the same thing as what has typically been described as a relation of the global to the local, or universal to particular. The ideal of the neoliberal geography is instead to create a world in which the outside doesn't matter. If this is the new geography of the global, it no longer easily configures a "locality" of any particular type; the aspiration is more to escape configuration altogether. Within these global territories there is

differentiation (certain locales might focus on health technologies, others on film production, etc.), but it is differentiation without real difference. The same logic underlies the organization of area knowledge within the world school curriculum, with “world” history or literature classes examining the differentiation of historical and literary production, but all from within the same increasingly globalized “liberal arts” perspective. Outside this geography of the world school, there may be real difference, including the difference of nations, but because this is a difference that no longer matters and no longer is part of the dynamic of world growth and development, the risk is that it becomes fixed. Thus, to push the implications the logic just a little, either way the tendency is toward essentialization of identity. Either, as for the world schools, identity is part of a single and universally agreed-on perspective (Chineseness is Chineseness, no matter from where you look at it), or, because the world of difference as we have known it lies outside the neoliberal geography of value production, and is in an indifferent relation to the neoliberal geography, those very differences of identity appear to be fixed. Thus, from the position of the world schools, where area studies does still exist at all the risk could be a turn within area studies to essentialism, and to neonativism.

The key, defining terms of these processes may sound bleak. As neoliberal capital pulls away from the nation, it appears to be reagggregating its own indifference into and as an “area.” This is becoming a new geography—one in which the global university has complicity—that is helping to construct a whole biography of an individual from pre-K through to managerial “citizenship,” and an exclusivist sociality-without-responsibility that defines whole cities as well as individuals. For area studies, as for the social sciences, these are trends worthy of attention and critique.

At the same time, while these sites are symptomatic of the tendencies of neoliberal capital, it is important to remember that they are also just expressions of the utopic trajectory of a particular kind of capital, that is only partially effective as an organizing force in the world at large; this is one tendency among others. In practical terms, the idea of a space of pure indifference, unmarked by history or culture, is probably impossible. Still more importantly, these sites are also interesting precisely to the extent that they *are* areas of indifference, especially in their relation to the ongoing national order of things that has defined much of modern culture. That is to say, on the one hand, we continue to think of the subject of culture (modern culture, at least) as a national category. Area studies in particular continues to function on this basis. But, on the other hand, as corporate capital pushes for the reorganization of state spaces and the redistribution of social

life, there is an indifference opened up between the national subject, and the area of which the new “citizen” is a part. Another way to put this is to say that there is a gap, or indifference, between the subject (of citizenship, or culture) and its predicate (the framework of the state, or more generally the area, to which we belong). By these terms, indifference is not only the defining condition of a neoliberal sociality but also a real, historical condition of uncertainty and potentiality—both an opening into new possible social forms, and an ideal site for social debate and critique. It is therefore in this historical gap or uncertainty within the grounds of culture, citizenship, and area that area studies might find a return to its own usefulness and its own responsibility (now perhaps to corporate as much as to national values). The global university might in fact thus be one site in which to see this happen.

### ABSTRACT

*In the middle of both recessionary financial constraints and new developments in what are often called “neoliberal” global economics, a number of high-profile North American universities are creating new campuses in locations around the world. Conceptually different than an older model of study abroad sites, they are also helping to create a new geography of “area,” that includes shifting conceptions of citizenship, sovereignty, and cultural difference. The claims being made about them are large: they are being described as central components within a historical “inflection point” in the very nature of humanity; the reorganization of the university is thus at once part of the reorganization of human geography, and of the categories by which we conceive of social life. This article examines both the new kinds of global social space that these universities are helping to define, and the restructuring of the “global university” itself; both are placed within the context of the neoliberal principles that are motivating the construction of these new world spaces. Indifference is a key element of these principles; this article considers the varied implications of neoliberal indifference. [area studies, neoliberalism, globalization, cities, difference, citizenship and sovereignty, social form]*

### NOTES

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1. See also Andrew Delbanco’s discussion of this idea (Delbanco 2007).
2. As part of this definition I would include the social, political, and economic tendency to download social life responsibilities onto increasingly privatized individuals—whether this means the transferring of federal level governmental responsibilities onto state (province, etc.) and lower level governments, or the downloading of community levels of welfare onto the individual person.
3. For a government-perspective account, see Li 2009.
4. Accordingly, the “Plan Abu Dhabi 2030” project vision statement for the capital city includes statements to the effect that “The Capital District will . . . become an educational hub becoming the home of international think tanks and leading universities and schools. . . . It will become the

- 'city's brain.' . . . It will be home to new universities . . . offering great potential for synergies with the private sector" (Abu Dhabi Urban Planning Council 2011:1).
5. "It is undeniable that the great economies of the future will be driven less by production and more by ideas and creativity" (Sexton 2010:6).
  6. Development statements for Songdo City are more direct, and focused immediately on the trajectory toward business. Yonsei's Underwood International College is being placed within the larger "Global Academic Village" of Songdo, which will also include branch campuses from other international universities. As one description puts it, "The Global Academic Village will provide a foundation for Incheon-Songdo International City's plans for development into an international business center" (Skyscraper City 2002:6).
  7. Saadiyat is not a man-made island in the way that Songdo and Pudong were, but it had been entirely undeveloped and so is similarly being built out of nothing, according to a masterplan. It is scheduled to be fully completed and opened in 2014.
  8. Fittingly, the entire development is being run by the Tourism Development and Investment Company (TDIC), and according to the TDIC, "Saadiyat is positioned to become an international destination of desire, a flagship for Abu Dhabi, a treasure for the world" (TDIC 2011:1).
  9. Songdo is comparable in the bringing together of "services" as both financial and cultural. It is masterplanned as a city unto itself, that along with the university will include real estate, shopping, art museums, and entertainment districts. In Shanghai, Pudong is different insofar as the emphasis has been on constructing a financial center. The relation to the arts thus remains more complicated in Shanghai, and in China in general.
  10. Toledo had been a capital of cosmopolitanism, as under the period known as *La Convivencia* (the Coexistence, C.E. 711–1492), when Jewish, Muslim, and Catholic cultures productively mingled within the Spanish capital. The cosmopolitanism of these new global sites, however, is without any real mingling of difference at all.
  11. If one were to draw a genealogy from the study abroad site to these new campuses, it might include a trend from the real, directed engagement with individual areas that study abroad sites were designed for, to branch campuses that are meant to attract students from around the world by focusing on non-area specific, globalizing fields such as business and engineering (e.g., this kind of branch campus is also being constructed in Songdo), to the new "global" campus under discussion here—which makes some claim to an area, and to comprehensive liberal arts, but in a new way.
  12. A visit to Songdo City in 2009 indicated that at least some of the wired grid was unlikely to happen. The LG Corporation has since been replaced by a partnership with Cisco. Cisco too is working to create a full city network grid, but now one geared more as a master utility, that will earn a small amount by governing all other utility transactions. Analysts are skeptical that even this comprehensive system can really work, but the intent behind these projects is what matters here.
  13. Including a former President of Yale University, and former heads of some of New York's most elite private schools (incl. Dalton, Exeter, and Hoatchkiss).
  14. One might point to the possibility raised by the school that their very expensive courses might be made available on a limited basis via the internet to local public school students in India for a lesser fee, or for free. But even this would mean only a gesture of responsibility, and the effect reinforces the limit on participation in this educational world for locals.
  15. "Imagine that a career opportunity requires a family to move from New York to Hong Kong or London for two to four years. . . . No need to 'miss a beat' because the educational design is completely consistent from campus to campus" (Avenues the World School 2010, sec. 1:9).
  16. Avenues, too, underscores the unity of the system, with statements such as, "What is a global or world school? Think of Avenues as one school with 20 or more campuses, connected and supported by a common vision and shared curriculum" (Avenues the World School 2010, sec. 1:10).
  17. The education city in Qatar is a similar and perhaps better-known example, and is a model for the Global Academic Village at Songdo City (McNeill 2009:2).

18. One might say that there is no civil society in an area like this, but I would prefer to think of it more generally as the loss of the social.
19. Along with work by Foucault, for a short statement on this view, see Negri 2010.
20. I am in agreement with much of what Ong writes, and among other things, she hints at the very interesting possibility that nation-states might tactically use neoliberal policies to fight the broader effects of neoliberalism (2006:99). But the focus here is on the ways in which these dynamics now exceed the nation-state, rather than being encompassed by it.
21. And do statelike things like forming armies, even though these (fittingly) may be private armies (as Abu Dhabi has done, using the Blackwater Corporation).
22. Although I am not entirely following Brown's model, her work offers a truly insightful view of the ways in which state walls now mediate between the sovereignty of nations, and the dispersal of this sovereignty.
23. Iskandar claims that its aim is to deliver a "holistic environment," and its motto is to be a "choice destination for global citizens to 'invest, work, live and play'" (Iskandar Regional Development Authority 2011:18)
24. "This is not just study abroad on steroids," says NYU professor of globalization and education Marcelo Suárez-Orozco; "It will be a complete game-changer for higher education as we know it" (Krieger 2008:1).

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