CONTESTED TERRAINS: Visualizing Glocalization in Global Cities

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Abstract
This essay employs a visual approach to explore some of the ways that spatial practices become markers of a globalising and glocalizing world. Images are offered that reflect some of the symbolic competition created by more and less recent migrants as they lay claim to 'contested terrains' by changing what they look like. Although often dismissed as mere "marking" of territory, such ordinary practices by migrants of symbolic home or community building are crucial to understanding global cities. One indicator of their importance is the, often hostile reactions by the dominant society to them. A brief review of some of the most important theoretical perspectives on these interrelated phenomena, such as those of Saskia Sassen, David Harvey, and Manuel Castells, isolates common expectations about the visibility of resulting competing spatial practices in shared multiethnic residential and commercial environments. It is argued that many of the contradictions created by the concentration of global capital can be seen in the neighborhood streetscapes of global cities. From Georg Simmel, through Henri Lefebvre, and Lyn H. Lofland, the visible, and the symbolic, have been central to urban analysis. Therefore, the ubiquitous aspects of what Jackson called 'vernacular landscapes,' such as commercial signs and graffiti in Berlin, Frankfurt am Main, London, New York, and Rome are addressed.

Keywords: Globalization, Glocalization, Migration, Vernacular Landscape, Visual Sociology.

INTRODUCTION

It is ironic that, for those who study cities, global forces have increased the need to understand the meanings of local streetscapes. The eyes of many researchers have refocused on the competition between migrant identities and how their spatial practices are indicators of globalized, or perhaps more accurately, 'glocalized' cities. How the everyday lives of city dwellers represented in the built environment has long been of interest to architects and planners who study vernacular landscapes. The indigenous practices of ordinary people who have been brought together by distant forces and processes are examples of that for which Roland Robertson coined the term 'glocalization' (1997). According to Juergen Osterhammel and Niels P. Petersson, 'Robertson recognized that homogenizing and universalizing forces of globalization do not obliterate the heterogeneity and particularity of local forces as much as their interaction creates varying degrees of hybrid culture.' (2005: 7)

Georg Simmel early on established the central role of the visible in theorizing about the complex and constantly changing metropolis. This continues as a tradition in all the urban sciences, if only as a powerful subtext. A century ago he wrote that 'Modern social life increases in ever growing degree the role of mere visual impression which always characterizes the preponderant part of all sense relationships between man and man, and must place social attitudes and feelings upon an entirely changed basis' ([1908] 1924: 360). My own synthesis of theories about visualizing spatial practices, applied in a number of different places, is simply that ordinary people change the meaning of spaces and places by changing their appearance. (Krase J. ,1993, 2002, and 2004a) For example, as I had also written about Italian neighborhoods in the United States, "Beyond the great public spaces and edifices lies a vast domain of little people and little structures which in fact comprise most of our material society and where ordinary people have created distinct landscapes and places. The designs of these neighborhoods are such in the way that space is socially constructed. Italians, like all migrants, carry designs or living from the original home environments and adapt them to the resources and opportunities in new locales.' (2004b: 27)

This work is also greatly informed by that of Lyn H. Lofland and the theoretical perspective of Symbolic Interactionism. Lofland had noted that Interactionists have contributed to urban studies by showing how people communicate through the built environment, for example, seeing settlement
as symbol. (2003: 938-39, see also 1985 and 1998) Individuals and groups interact with each other through visual images by effecting what it is that people see on the streets. The meanings of what they see however come from a different socialization source. Lofland also argued that 'the city, because of its size, is the locus of a peculiar social situation; the people found within its boundaries at any given moment know nothing personally about the vast majority of others with whom they share this space.' (1985, 1998) She adds that, 'city life was made possible by an "ordering" of the urban populace in terms of appearance and spatial location such that those within the city could know a great deal about one another by simply looking.' (1985: 22) This is especially true of the, increasingly transnational, home territories which modern migrants seek to create and modify.

GLOBAL CITIES

Global cities are excellent places to observe the visual and symbolic competition between migrants and those who preceded them, As noted by Saskia Sassen, they are sites for the contradictions of the globalization of capital. The powerful as well as the disadvantaged are concentrated therein and even marginalized migrants manage to claim "contested terrain." The global city also heightens the sense of diversity by concentrating migrants and immigrants. Sassen notes that although the dominant, corporate culture, "inscribes noncorporate cultures and identities with 'otherness', thereby devaluing them, they are present everywhere." Immigrant communities and their informal economies are common examples of this process. (Sassen 2001) Tarry Hum writing on the role of immigrant business in New York City notes that while its global stature relies on nostalgia about historic immigrant enclaves, today immigrants are transforming historic landscapes not only by forming new enclaves but also by the creation, and re-creation, of many multi-ethnic, multi-racial neighborhoods (Hum, 2004).

Kieran Bonner, closely examined Sassen’s (1998) ideas and noted that it is at the lower circuit of globalization that one sees the multicultural world produced and one can grasp that ‘...globalization is not just about the movement of capital by global corporations, but also about the movement of people who are often in contest with such economic developments.’ (2007: 277) John Brinkerhoff Jackson had also called us to look at what ‘...lies underneath below the symbols of permanent power expressed in the ‘Political Landscape’ (1984: 6) because what ordinary people such as migrants do in a particular physical territory and how they use objects therein are critical for understanding the space. Richard Sennett commenting on the management of difference in New York City noted that, 'What is characteristic of our city building is to wall off the differences between people, assuming that these differences are more likely to be mutually threatening than mutually stimulating..' (1990: xii. See also: Sorkin 1992)

The modern global city is also often referred to as 'post-modern,' and despite the fact that Postmodern urbanists tend to '...portray the contemporary city as fragmented, partitioned, and precarious, and as a result, less legible that its modernist precursor.' (Beauregard 2000: 23), Robert A. Beauregard and Anne Haila different kinds of segregation and different logics of location. Especially important is the uneven spatial competition that lower class immigrants face with more privileged members of society. Anthony King (1996) speaks of cities as 'text' to be read and vernacular landscapes are crucial to that reading. Sharon Zukin also noted that 'Visual artifacts of material culture and political economy thus reinforce - or comment on - social structure. By making social rules "legible" they represent the city.' (1996: 44)

Manuel Castells also looked at contested urban space and warned that as local identities lose meaning, place based societies and cultures, such as neighborhoods, also lose power. To reverse the trend he offered reconstruction of place-based meaning via social and spatial projects at cultural, economic, and political levels. In this vein, migrants can preserve their identities and build on their historical roots by the "symbolic marking of places", preservation of "symbols of recognition", and the "expression of collective memory in actual practices of communication."(1989 and 1996)

It must not be forgotten that the claims on neighborhood spaces made by migrants raise not only difficult theoretical issues, but practical ones as well. For example, in the Peoples Republic of China even Chinese nationals who migrate to cities have little right to ordinary public services. (Tyler, 1994) More tragically, in places as distant from each other as South Africa and Italy, foreign migrant enclaves have recently been the focus of attacks by native-born residents. (Howden and Evans, 2008 and Hooper, 2007)
In discussing Henri Lefebvre's "Spatial Practices" David Harvey noted that those who have the power to command and produce space are able to reproduce and enhance their own power. It is within the parameters outlined by these practices that the local lives of ordinary urban dwellers take place. For Harvey 'Different classes construct their sense of territory and community in radically different ways. This elemental fact is often overlooked by those theorists who presume a priori that there is some ideal-typical and universal tendency for all human beings to construct a human community of roughly similar sort, no matter what the political or economic circumstances' (1989: 265). Pierre Bourdieu notes that the production of such symbolic capital also serves ideological functions, because the mechanisms through which it contributes 'to the reproduction of the established order and to the perpetuation of domination remain hidden.'(1977: 188, see also King 1996: 112-136.) For a Visual Sociologist some of these 'hidden' reproductions are in 'plain view'. People show themselves to each other in the course of their everyday lives. Bourdieu's notion of the 'habitus' or practices that produce, in this case visible, regularities is also helpful in this regard. (1977: 72-95)

For Lefebvre the visual was central to the production and reproduction of social space of any scale: 'Thus space is undoubtedly produced even when the scale is not that of major highways, airports or public works. A further important aspect of spaces of this kind is their increasingly pronounced visual character. They are made with the visible in mind; the visibility of people and things, of spaces and of whatever is contained by them. The predominance of visualization (more important than "spectacularization", which is in any case subsumed by it) serves to conceal repetitiveness. People look, and take sight, take seeing, for life itself. We build on the basis of papers and plans. We buy on the basis of images, given meaning to urban spaces by effecting what those spaces look like. Although there are many other "global cities," here we will focus on the vernacular landscapes found in the complex streetscapes of Berlin, Frankfurt am Main, London, New York, and Rome. In these five cities, more or less recent migrants, consciously and unconsciously, claim various "contested terrains" via their spatial practices which have become common indications of globalized, or perhaps more accurately, "glocalized" urban status. At the glocal level the most often recognized competition takes place between migrants and those already in the neighbourhood but the rapidly changing environment creates other opportunities for competition such as that between different migrant groups.

**VISUAL SOCIOLOGY**

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London and its greater metropolitan area are well known for its neighbourhoods defined by class and ethnicity. One less known area undergoing simultaneous gentrification and ethnic influx is the central London district of Islington. In Figure 1 above we look at a business offering Servicio de Encomiendas, La Tranquera restaurant, and Halal Chicken on a section of Holloway Road which one local resident jokingly referred to as "Little Ecuador." Competing for clients along the thoroughfare are many other Latino food purveyors (El Rincon de don Pepe, Quiteno, Colombia Tienda Tropicale, Café La Paz, et al) along with eating establishments catering to Afro-Caribbean, South Asian, and other Londoners. Figure 2 shows that across the street from "Little Ecuador" in this changing neighbourhood, is a local chain store grocery that has responded to recent Polish migrants and workers with handwritten signs in Polish offering Polish medicine, bread, and other products. It must be noted that unless you can read Polish, the sign would have little value except to say that this store is trying to serve people who speak a language different from English.

Many Londoners think of Hammersmith's King Street as the commercial centre for the Polish community who have been settling there at least since the end of the First World War. The Polish eth-
nic claim to the territory is made in various ways along the busy commercial street but especially in the impressive Polish Social and Cultural Centre. Despite the historical dominance of the area by Polish residents and businesses, it has become in recent years a highly competitive multicultural environment, especially as property values rise in London’s inner suburbs. In the photos above, Polish casual workers await employment opportunities on the corner near the Polish Specialities food store (Figure 3), which is not very far away from the Thai Smile Supermarket Market which caters to Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Malaysian, Korean, etc… customers (Figure 4). As noted by Datta (2008) the exposure of Polish workers to this diversity is for many a very new experience and part of their socialization into cosmopolitanism. It should also be noted that the appearance of migrant casual workers in many global cities has often been greeted with hostility, and sometimes with violence.

In New York City, as in other global cities, immigrant and migrant ethnic groups are often attracted to the same localities. The Belmont section of the New York City borough of The Bronx has attracted immigrants for more than a century. Between 1920 and 1980 it had been dominated by Italians so much so that it was referred to as a “Little Italy.” Despite the fact that those in the area who claim Italian heritage are very few today, to attract customers local businessmen claim that they are still in the “Heart of Little Italy.” Despite the fact that those in the area who claim Italian heritage are very few today, to attract customers local businessmen claim that they are still in the “Heart of Little Italy.” For decades Italians had uneasily co-existed with Puerto Rican residents. As shown by the graffito in Figure 5, for Latinos at least, the hegemonic conflict today is between Mexicans and Puerto Ricans. To make the ethnic definition of the community even more problematic, on a building wall in the “Little Italy” municipal parking lot is a large Albanian memorial mural (Figure 6) correctly indicating the substantial pres-
ence in the area of immigrants from Albania as well as Kosovo.

For good and bad, Kreuzberg, is one of the best-known part of Berlin with nightlife, criminality, the drug scene, and immigrants. More recently it has attracted students, young professionals and young couples whose visual claims on the streetscapes in the eastern part of the borough compete with its almost "oriental" appearance. As an indicator of the competition between the alternative crowds and Turkish residents we see in Figure 7 a subway graffito-style "Brooklyn, N.Y." establishment next door to a genuinely Turkish Barber Shop. The large open-air flea market in Kreuzberg also offers to diverse vendors an even wider variety of shoppers representing the ethnic and class diversity of increasing cosmopolitan Kreuzberg as seen in Figure 8.

While Kreutzer thrives on its diverse cultures and is still an attractive area for the younger, alternative type of person, the district is also characterized by high levels of structural unemployment and income levels are among the poorest of Berlin.

In many cities in Europe one can find tran-
sient and settled immigrant areas near central train stations. Two of those which I have found to offer the greatest mix and visual competition can be found around the central train stations of the Europe Banking Center of Frankfurt am Main, and the Italian capital city of Rome. Even the briefest of strolls along the streets adjacent to these busy transportation hubs will bring pedestrians into visual contact with both non-European and European migrants who are seeking employment and other opportunities in their new home. This newspaper rack outside a small store on a quiet multi-ethnic residential square between the central station and the Main River offers Turkish, Italian, Albanian, Polish, and other non-German language newspapers in addition to a few “German” ones (Figure 9). In Figure 10 we can see in the same frame some of the most well-known markers of Turkishness and Islam in Germany; Doner (Turkish for “revolving”) and the less noticeable Moschee (German for “Mosque”) sign on the busiest immigrant shopping street near the Hauptbanhof in Frankfurt. Although, as indicated by the recent controversy over the building of a large mosque in Cologne (Landler, 2007), visible expressions of Islam are not popular sights in Germany, but Doner has become almost a ‘German’ food.

Above are two photographs taken in the Esquilino neighbourhood near the Stazione Centrale in Rome. As many other municipalities in Italy, local Roman authorities have not responded positively to the visible claims of immigrants to venerated central city spaces. For example in 2004 the mayor of Rome declared that ‘There cannot be a Chinatown in Rome,…’ (Williams, 2004) Despite the opposition, not only has the Chinatown not become invisible, but it has become enlivened by the addition of several other ethnic variations such as Bangladeshi and Middle Eastern jewelers. In Figure 11 above, we can see the juxtaposition of a more recent grocery offering Indian products and its adjacent Chinese-owned clothing shop, one of many for which L’Equilino is best known. Posters and flyers pasted on building walls is a common way for people to advertise (Figure 12). They can also be taken as indicators of who is challenging whom for control of the ‘contested’ neighbourhood.

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SUMMARY

As part of an interdisciplinary dialogue, this essay tried to demonstrate the usefulness of a visual perspective to understanding spatial forms and practices in our globalizing world. Spatialized notions of home and migration were addressed via images that reflect the symbolic competition created by more or less recent migrants as they lay claim to 'contested terrains' in five global cities. While it is true that while globalization has reduced the fixedness of 'home' it is no less important in today's cities. In the process of creating new, perhaps transnational, homes, migrants are changing the appearance and meaning of urban spaces. At the same time, their spatial practices are also challenging the dominant culture as to the definition of these contested terrains. It is important for public authorities as well as ordinary residents of global cities to recognize the "visual" contribution to these competitions and conflicts. Finally, it is hoped that this modest exercise reveals another, perhaps "hidden," dimension of the complex relationship between globalization and glocalization.

For support of the photographic research acknowledgement is made here to Rector's Committee for Scientific Research, and the Department of Sociology, University of Rome, La Sapienza, the PSC/CUNY Travel Fund, Brooklyn College Foundation, Murray Koppelman Travel Grant, and McCauley Honor's College Travel Fund.

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