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New York, Chicago, Los Angeles: America's Global Cities
(review)

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Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

Janet L. Abu Lughod, *New York, Chicago, Los Angeles: America's Global Cities*. Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, 580 pp.

Janet Abu Lughod is a "hall of famer" in American urban sociology. In the late 1960s, she became well known for her application of social area analysis to the ecology of Cairo. Since then, she has published a case study of urban apartheid in Morocco; an historical analysis of the world system in the 13th century and an edited volume on the battle for control of New York's Lower East Side in the 1980s. Now, Abu Lughod has written what is described on the back cover as "the first book to compare these cities (New York, Chicago, Los Angeles) in an ambitious in-depth study that takes into account each city's unique history, following their development from their earliest days to their current status as players on the global stage." Ambitious it certainly is! The study spans four centuries and comes with 126 pages of footnotes. *New York, Chicago, Los Angeles* turns out to be both a triumph and a disappointment.

Where the book shines is as a carefully documented overview of the differing urbanization paths taken by America's three premier cities. Abu Lughod is keenly interested in the demography and politics of race, class and immigration and it is here that her analysis is strongest. Each city has followed a different path. Chicago has long been divided by "bipolar racial animosities" between whites and blacks. This has allowed the white-dominated Democratic machine established by the legendary "Boss" Daley to continue to flourish, even as the flight of the white population to the outer suburban rings has continued apace. Since the 1960s, Chicago has been in the economic doldrums, having lost the powerful industrial lead it had enjoyed from the late nineteenth century. With immigrants today preferring to settle along either coast and high tech industry doing the same, Chicago has struggled. Los Angeles too has displayed a bipolar pattern, in this case, between Anglos and Latinos. Minority voices have long been systematically excluded from local government, reflecting the continuing influence of a political structure dating back to the Progressive Reform era. Economically, however, Los Angeles has flourished, smoothly making the transition from agriculture, to the aerospace economy to a more recent engagement with the microchip and communications industries. If Abu Lughod favours any of the three, it is probably New York. While not tension-free, the "Big Apple" has been more successful than Chicago and Los Angeles

at incorporating newcomers into the political process. The author characterizes the situation here as an “ethnic poker game” in which no single group commands most of the chips and where there have been a series of “ethnic successions” in the boroughs and city halls. New York’s immigration pattern is far more diversified than the other two cities in terms of countries of origin and levels of human capital (p. 416). While its manufacturing base has declined significantly (44 per cent between 1969 and 1990), the city has more than made up for this with new jobs in other sectors — media, finance, producer services, international tourism.

Where *New York, Chicago, Los Angeles* falters is as an attempt to chart and explain the forces of globalization. In the introductory chapter, the author says that explaining the differential impact of the “post-Fordist” globalized economy on each of these three urban regions “constitutes the ultimate goal of this book” and that this must be done in the context of their heritage and historical experience. Yet, the key defining elements identified by Abu Lughod are almost all local in nature. For example, in comparing post-World War II residential development in Chicago and New York, Abu Lughod concludes that the former was free to “empty-out” its center core of white, middle-class residents, who flocked to new housing in the suburbs, while the latter was inhibited by rent controls that made the option of moving less attractive.

In the final chapter, Abu-Lughod grasps the nettle and ponders the effects of globalization on the present fates of the urbanized regions of New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. In doing so she employs several empirical measures: raw tonnage of freight passing through airports and maritime ports; the magnitude of foreign direct investment; the location of corporate headquarters; and the presence of international investment, commodity and financial markets. None of these proves very satisfactory. With shipping and air-freight, the author acknowledges that the measure she used is “crude” and reveals multiple anomalies. The foreign investment figures are no more discerning since they refer only to the state rather than the municipal level. In a revealing footnote (p. 552), Abu Lughod recalls being asked during a presentation to Peter Marcuse’s course on global cities what proportion of the variance in cities she thought could be attributed directly to international forces. Her best guess is “about 10 per cent at most,” depending on how you distinguish “direct” from “indirect” effects.

A further difficulty is that she relies exclusively on economic measures of globalization while ignoring cultural indicators, even while acknowledging that New York and Los Angeles have been powerfully impacted by changes directly attributable to “the increased internationalization of ... cultural production and consumption, and the communications revolution itself.” (p. 406). Inexplicably, there is little here about the impact of the “global entertainment economy” on

the contemporary metropolis, as evidenced by the recent development of such major leisure destinations as the “new” Times Square (New York), Hollywood & Highland (Los Angeles) and Navy Pier (Chicago). Despite spending 10 months in residence at the UCLA Planning Program, Abu Lughod all but ignores the work of the “LA School” of urban theory, although she confesses (p. 363) to sharing geographer Allen Scott’s view of what constitutes the “new economy.” It says something, perhaps, that after over 400 pages of disciplined socio-historical analysis, the author concludes by relating her impressions of life in each of the three cities (she seems to prefer the “spectacle of the streets” in New York City). For me, this personal reflection constitutes the highlight of the book.

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Toni M. Calasanti and Kathleen F. Slevin, *Gender, Social Inequalities, and Aging*. N.Y.: AltaMira Press, 2001, 235 pp.

The aim of this book, as expressed by the authors, is to bring a feminist framework to gerontology, exploring old age as it intersects with gender as well as other systems of inequality including race and ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation. The book begins with emphases on both the body as a key site for judgments about age, and ageism within society. The body receives fuller attention in Chapter 3 with a discussion of the conflict between our aging bodies and our forever youthful spirits, and the marketing of forever youthful bodies. Chapter 2 argues for the inadvertent perpetuation of ageism by gerontology itself. Chapter 4 moves onto a discussion of sex, sexuality and old age, exposing the myths that elderly persons have no interest in sex, and the male domination that pervades our notions of sex. Chapter 5 and 6 discuss gender, social inequalities and retirement, focusing on the greater earning power of men, the two jobs occupying many women’s lives, and the male bias within pensions schemes. Chapter 7, on gender, care work, and family in old age, examines gender differences when men and women provide care, some ethnic variation, and concern with the care recipient as well as the carer. The final chapter argues that the women’s movement also ignores age relations; and, citing Rose and Bruce (1995:115) “feminism, unaware of its own ‘race,’ able bodiedness and age, had in its desire to cease to be the Other constructed Other Others.”

This book is a welcome addition to the still small but growing body of literature on old age from a feminist perspective. Students new to gerontology and/or feminism could benefit from this book. It succeeds in explaining what each of the perspectives has to offer and in arguing the relevance of each for the