Until the mid-twentieth century, conceptions of the city often treated a single form as the correct or ideal model. For example, in his book Medieval Cities (1925), Henry Pirenne argued that there were two fundamental features shaping the development of urban culture: a bourgeois or middle class reliant on commerce for both wealth and political independence from non-urban feudal powers; and a collective organization of urban citizens that created the municipal cohesion necessary to liberate the city from local feudal lords or religious authorities.

Although Pirenne's formulation was often taken as a general definition of the city and urban culture—leading to the widespread idea that cities should primarily serve commercial functions—his characterization was limited because it only considered the medieval European city and its bourgeois culture as the model of the "real" city.

Max Weber offered a different definition of the city in his book The City (1921), somewhat similar to Pirenne's, by distinguishing between "Western urbanism" and "Eastern urbanism." According to Weber, five characteristics define an urban society:

The presence of fortifications, A market, A legal system and a court of its own, An association of urban citizens that fosters a sense of municipal identity, Sufficient political autonomy to allow citizens to choose their city rulers.

Weber believed that Eastern cities rarely fulfilled these basic criteria because family, tribal, or sectarian identities prevented urban residents from forming a unified urban society capable of resisting government control.

Even for Western cities, Weber's definition excludes almost all pre-modern cities, as the urban autonomy he required was only present in Northern Europe and Italy—and even there, only briefly toward the late Middle Ages. This resulted in a very limited conception of urban cultures, making it difficult to generate a valid cross-cultural understanding.

In the 1940s, Robert Redfield, heavily influenced by Louis Wirth and the Chicago School of urban ecology, conceived of the urban environment as inherently impersonal, diverse, secular, and fragmented. In his article The Folk Society, Redfield contrasted the life of the city with that of the folk society, which he described as small, sacred, highly personal, and homogeneous.

He assumed that as individuals moved from folk society to the city, or as an entire society shifted toward a more urban culture, cultural traditions would break down. Individuals and urban communities thus experienced cultural disintegration.

In urban settings, the rate of social problems such as divorce, alcoholism, crime, and feelings of loneliness tends to increase.

Redfield's conception of the city was based on urban research conducted by sociologists in American industrial cities, particularly Chicago. He ethnically assumed that the findings of those studies could be generalized to all urban cultures. However, subsequent research showed that this conception was in many ways inaccurate even for the American industrial cities themselves. Although generally ethnocentric and insufficiently nuanced, especially regarding American cities, Redfield's conception still dominates much popular thinking, which views cities—across all cultures and times—as centers of bohemianism, social experimentation, opposition, social decay, crime, and similar phenomena—whether positive or negative—resulting from social breakdown.

Taking the next step towards a cross-cultural understanding of cities, **Gideon Sjoberg**, in his book *The Pre-Industrial City: Past and Present* (1960), challenged this narrow, culturally biased conception of urban culture. He divided global urban centers into two types: **pre-industrial cities** and **industrial cities**, distinguished primarily by the technological level of society.

According to Sjoberg, pre-industrial cities exist in societies lacking advanced technology, where human and animal labor form the basis of economic production. Industrial cities dominate modern states in Western Europe and America, where expanded energy sources—from fossil fuels to atomic energy—have vastly increased productive capacity.

For Sjoberg, the urban culture of pre-industrial cities is markedly different from that of industrial cities: neighborhoods in pre-industrial cities were tightly knit through personal ties of ethnicity and sectarianism; they maintained strong family bonds, exhibited low levels of social unrest, and churches or other sacred institutions dominated both the cityscape and the cultural beliefs of the urban space. The primary urban function was imperial administration rather than industrial production.

Although Sjoberg's conception of a pre-industrial urban pattern was a significant improvement over previous urban definitions, it too suffered from overgeneralization. He aggregated markedly different urban cultures into a uniform, undifferentiated pre-industrial urban type—for example, grouping ancient empire cities with modern Third World urban sites. Meanwhile, earlier urban cultures that did not easily fit Sjoberg's model, such as the self-governing cities of modern Europe, were overlooked.

Early self-governing cities were often considered temporary and uncommon variants of the pre-industrial type rather than important types of urban culture.

In their article *The Cultural Role of Cities*, Robert Redfield and Milton Singer sought to improve upon all previous conceptions of the city—including Redfield's own model of the folk-urban—by emphasizing the changing cultural roles cities play within societies. They identified two cultural roles that all urban places perform, though the intensity and detail of these roles vary.

Cities whose primary cultural role is to construct and symbolize a society's traditions perform **"orthogenic"** functions. In such urban cultures, intellectual elites interpret and rationalize the "great tradition" of culture for the entire society. The cultural message emanating from cities like Delhi, Paris, Washington, and other capitals of classical empires or modern states serves to explain and preserve cultural heritage.

Conversely, cities whose primary cultural role is **"heterogenic"**, as defined by Redfield and Singer, are centers of technological and economic change. They create and introduce new ideas, cosmologies, and social practices into society. In cities like London, Marseille, or New York, intellectuals challenge old ways, question entrenched traditions, and contribute to making these cities centers of cultural innovation.

Paul Wheatley continued this interest in the cultural role of cities within their societies in his book *The Pivot of the Four Quarters* (1971). He viewed the initial form of urban culture as a **ceremonial center** or **cultic hub** that organizes and controls its surrounding rural area through sacred practices and authority. According to Wheatley, this original cultural role of the city was later augmented by economic prominence and political power.

Following Redfield and Singer, Wheatley emphasized that any conception of urban culture must be based on the cultural role of cities within their societies. Research must address how this urban cultural role organizes beliefs and practices in the broader culture beyond city boundaries and how it entails specific lifestyles and social formations (cultural forms) within the city.

Starting in the 1970s, David Harvey (*Social Justice and the City*, 1973), Manuel Castells (*The Urban Question*, 1977), and other scholars influenced by Marxism brought a major shift in the understanding of urban cultural roles. Although their work primarily focused on cities within advanced capitalist cultures, their approach had wide applicability.

The new research moved beyond viewing the city solely as a cultural entity to considering it as the culmination of cultural roles emanating from the broader culture or even the global system. For example, David Harvey linked major changes in American urban lifestyles to the urban culture of advanced capitalism: for him, suburban development resulted from capitalism's promotion of new consumer patterns for profit. Manuel Castells viewed the city as a battlefield of social conflicts ultimately rooted in class divisions within capitalist society.

This Marxist research did not contradict previous emphases on the city as a source of cultural roles but rather complemented them. Studying the cultural roles of cities must include not only the beliefs and cultural practices emerging from cities but also the cultural forms that develop within cities as a result of urban culture's influence. In this way, scientific inquiry can offer a valid cross-cultural and historical understanding of cities, their cultural forms, and the urban cultures that shape them.

Types of Urban Cultures

The following classifications of urban cultures are based on the conception of cities as centers performing cultural roles that exist only in societies with state-level organization. These societies, unlike the non-urban cultures discussed earlier, are characterized by disparities in economic wealth and political power. Economic disparities typically manifest through class divisions, while political disparities are evident in specialized institutions of social control (such as ruling elites and government administrations). Because cities do not exist in societies lacking state organization, the terms "urban cultures" and "state-level societies" are closely linked— the former focusing on patterns of belief, and the latter on social organization.

State-level societies differ in the nature and extent of economic and political inequalities. These disparities explain the diversity of urban culture types and cultural roles that cities assume, as described below. The naming of urban culture types reflects the dominant cultural role cities play in that urban culture—for example, "ritual city" or "administrative city." It is clear that cities in any society combine some degree of ritual function with administrative functions. However, the logic behind these labels is that under particular combinations of inequalities, specific urban cultures emerge, characterized by distinct cultural roles for cities. For instance, the term **"administrative city"** denotes the primary—but not exclusive—cultural role played by cities in agrarian empires, whereas **"industrial cities"** represent the dominant urban cultural role in modern capitalist states.

The classification below draws a fundamental distinction between urban cultures that existed before the development of the global capitalist system in the sixteenth century and those that emerged afterward. Prior to the rise of the global capitalist system, state-level societies were not integrated into a single unequal economic relationship. The emergence of the global capitalist system created a specialized world economy in which some societies constituted the core, while others formed the economically—and often politically—dependent periphery. Before the global system, urban cultures varied primarily according to internal differences in political and economic inequality. After the global system appeared, urban cultures also differed according to their position in either the core or the periphery.

Urban Cultures Before the Global Capitalist System

The Ritual City

Ritual cities represent the oldest form of urban centers, where the city functioned as a site for performing rituals, orthogenic organization, and preserving societal traditions. Ritual was the principal cultural role of these cities. Through ritual performance in the urban space, surrounding rural areas were connected by shared beliefs and cultural practices.

The early forms of urbanization in ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia and America, which Wheatley referred to as **"centers of worship,"** correspond to the ritual city type. Other examples of ritual cities can be drawn from ethnographies of the urban cultures of the Swazi people in southeastern Africa, Dahomey in western Africa, and Bali before Dutch colonization. In most parts of the world, these urban cultures were quickly replaced by more complex types.

Ritual cities existed within urban cultures described as **"segmentary states"** or **"primitive states."** These states featured minimal social stratification and political repression. Although segmentary states had rulers, such as a

ruling dynasty or priesthood, control over land and other means of production remained largely in the hands of clans, lineages, or kinship groups beyond the rulers' authority. Thus, political power and economic wealth were widely distributed.

Limited political decentralization and economic coordination meant that the functions of ritual, status, and prestige of the state were highly prominent. The rulers of segmentary states represented symbolic manifestations of supernatural royal worship or sacred rituals. They—and their courts and temples—offered a model of legitimate political order and social hierarchy, which was upheld throughout the loosely connected segmentary state. Through the awe they inspired, they extracted tributes from rural populations to sustain their royal or priestly election.

The cultural forms of ritual cities centered on places of worship, temple complexes, or royal courts that dominated the physical space and defined their urban role. As the residences of rulers, the ritual city spatially embodied the role of sanctity and ritual in defining urban culture. The daily population of the city consisted of those connected to the court or temple through family ties, official duties, or ritual crafts and professions. During festive occasions, surrounding rural inhabitants temporarily flooded into the city, increasing the urban population and offering sacrifices, sacred ceremonies, feasts, funerals, and commissions that constituted city life, making it simultaneously sacred, communal, and personal.

The city as a ritual center helped strengthen solidarity between the countryside and the city. Since political power and wealth in the segmentary state were distributed and not concentrated in the city, there was no fundamental antagonism between rural and urban areas. Consequently, the orthogenic message of tradition and sanctity radiated by the city throughout the urban culture had a unifying influence, forming a strong bond between countryside and city.

The Administrative City

Like ritual cities, administrative cities were residences of state rulers. Their main cultural role was to serve as centers of state administration. Government offices and officials were present in these cities, exercising political control and economic exploitation over the surrounding rural areas in ways not found in ritual cities. Administrative cities are also characterized by a qualitatively different demographic and social complexity. They contain large, dense, and often ethnically diverse populations with heterogeneous occupations. These cities served as central hubs for communication and transportation, centers of trade, crafts, and other economic functions related to the surrounding countryside.

Administrative cities emerged within agrarian empires, which were state-level societies linked to the early civilizations of the Hindus and Muslims in India, China, Egypt, as well as in the Mamluk Middle East, Tokugawa Japan, Alexandrian Greece, and other extensive regional states prior to the rise of the global capitalist system. These rulers wielded considerable political power, which they used to maintain a high level of wealth disparity between the ruling elite and the primary producers—the peasants.

This type of urban culture depended on the effectiveness of the state's exploitative control over peasant agricultural productivity to sustain the elite. The administrative cultural role of the city was the main means for this purpose. The administrative city combined political, economic, transportation, and communication functions and institutions necessary for rural exploitation.

Just as the ruling elite exploited the peasants, the ornate architecture and grand public works of the administrative city were ultimately founded on the rice fields of the Japanese farmer or the wheat fields of the Indian peasant. Urban concentrations emerged in the city, transforming wealth extracted from the countryside into a lavish lifestyle for the ruling elite residing in the city, including artisans and artists of various renown.

This situation led to the emergence of an urban poor class, often accompanied by institutions aimed at governing and controlling them, such as municipal governments. Merchants were essential in converting the peasants' grain payments into cash. Administrative cities often sought to restrict the wealth of urban merchants out of fear that such wealth might translate into political power.

As the ties between the coercive state and the oppressed peasantry increased—that is, as the disparity between them grew—urban cultural practices of the elite became increasingly detached from those of the countryside. The city concentrated a high degree of development and elaboration in customs and ideology that distinguished it from the now-called rural countryside.

Alongside the luxury, monumental architecture, elite entertainment, and public cultural forms that differed from the countryside, there was also severe poverty in the artisan and servant quarters of the city.

The administrative city possessed several characteristics commonly attributed to cities: it was a place of cultural elaboration and monumental construction, a repository of great wealth but also widespread poverty, and a diverse place in terms of occupations and relative identities based on ethnicity, religion, sect, or race. However, it was not fragmented or impersonal. Family, guilds, and ethnic groups formed loyalties that constituted the basic unit of urban cultural practice: the neighborhood, which functioned with social cohesion for the non-elite classes Similar to those found in rural villages.

The Commercial City

Commercial cities emerged on geographical peripheries or during the decline of agrarian empires—for example, in Europe during the Middle Ages and early modern period, after the fully decentralized feudalism replaced the Roman Empire. This urban form is a variant that appeared under specific conditions within urban cultures that also included administrative cities. Unlike administrative cities, which were supportive of the broader culture, commercial cities had a more detached relationship with the wider society.

A class of powerful and wealthy merchants arose in these cities who were not fully subordinate to state rulers. Left unchecked, they were capable of effectively challenging state authorities.

This commercial class, and the commercial cities they occupied, derived their wealth and political autonomy from international trade profits, financial lending, or investment in export-oriented agriculture (such as vineyards and olive groves in the Mediterranean region). The city generated wealth and capital on its own, rather than merely extracting it from rural agriculture.

This form of wealth creation provided a path to political power independent of the revenues obtained from peasants. Consequently, there was often intense opposition between urban elites and holders of power in the state or rural nobility, as each side attempted to control or absorb the wealth and power of the other.

Commercial cities varied in the degree of legal, financial, and military autonomy they enjoyed. At their most developed stages, they corresponded to the "true city" definitions provided by Weber and Pirenne. They had independent municipal governments, urban fortifications, and could mobilize citizen armies to defeat major rural nobles.

In less developed commercial cities—usually older ones—urban autonomy was less pronounced. For example, urban commercial capitals often relied on marriages with powerful rural nobles or rural loans. Nonetheless, even in these cases, rural resources were deployed for new uses within the urban environment.

The cultural role of commercial cities arose from their independent economic productivity and political autonomy. They played a very strong **"heterogenic"** role. They were strongholds of the merchant class and other social strata based on acquired wealth, in opposition to the land-owning aristocracy of the agrarian empire. Because they were often under attack by the aristocracy, these cities became symbols of freedom and social mobility.

The social atmosphere of commercial cities was encapsulated in the saying: **"The air of the city makes one free."** Due to their contentious nature, commercial cities also became strongholds of cultural innovation. Urban cultural forms emphasized achievement, and urban politicians engaged in shifting factional alliances.

Because of the volatility of commercial operations, leading families rose and fell rapidly, and these cities were ruled by relatively fluid and liquid wealthy elite classes. Artisans, the poor, and small traders enjoyed more independence than in administrative cities and, through professional or sectarian associations—such as guilds— they demanded and obtained political concessions.

Although commercial cities were places of innovation, achievement, freedom, and mobility—traits they shared with industrial cities—they were not impersonal or secular. The extended family was the primary institution organizing commercial enterprises, political alliances, and many aspects of elite social life. Other collective institutions, such as guilds and religious associations, incorporated city inhabitants into highly organized personal and ritual groups, diminishing the importance of individualism and secularism in the city.

Given the challenging commercial conditions and class rivalries that shaped the cultural context of commercial cities, these cities proved fragile and transient, often reverting under state intervention to administrative cities, where wealthy merchants and their fortunes came under state rulers' control.

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Instructor: Prof. Dr. Nadia Sabah Mahmoud

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University of Mosul

College of Arts

Department: Sociology

Urban Cultures Since the Global Capitalist System

Starting in the fifteenth century, the Age of Discovery saw Europeans carry the burgeoning capitalist system from their homelands to distant regions, exploiting labor and productivity to benefit the European core in an unequal colonial relationship. The result was the **global capitalist system**, as termed by Immanuel Wallenstein in his book *The Modern World-System* (1974).

World regions experienced increasing specialization in economy and production, developing unequal exchange patterns between industrial goods from advanced European states (the core of the world system) and raw materials from Asia, Africa, and the New World (the periphery). By the eighteenth century, a global urban culture had emerged.

This culture took diverse forms of economic, political, and urban organization in both the colonial core and the colonized periphery. While the subsequent discussion treats urban cultures in the core and periphery separately, it is important to remember that they—and the urban cultural roles that characterize them—form an interactive unity.

The Industrial City

Industrial cities emerged following the full development of industrial capitalism in the core nation-states in the late eighteenth century. The urban cultural role of these cities was well-aligned with the capitalist economic system that came to dominate all other social institutions. Capital relied on the production of goods through wage labor for the accumulation of capital. The city became the center of these productive processes and the site of industrial factories where production typically took place. It was also home to the other "commodity" necessary for production: wage workers.

Supporting urban functions such as banks, wholesale and retail trade, transportation, and communications arose to facilitate factory production or to provide for the needs of the labor force.

The growth of the industrial city was characterized by rapid population increases due to internal migration. The most prominent forms of urban cultural patterns developed in neighborhoods that housed the new urban workers. The city attracted populations with highly diverse cultural characteristics, such as the Irish in central England or the multiethnic groups that formed the American urban melting pot.

Ethnic and racial ties often provided migration chains and helped new immigrants find jobs, housing, and friendship in unfamiliar environments. These ties frequently resulted in ethnically segregated urban neighborhoods within the working class.

This urban population cluster was marked by two contradictory patterns of organization and conflict. The first was dense working-class settlement in the industrial city. Residential clustering helped organize widespread labor protests aimed at improving working conditions and wages.

The second, contradictory pattern was ethnic or racial closure and competition within the working class. Residential segregation by ethnicity or race often formed the basis of competition among working-class members for jobs and urban locations near workplaces.

A typical characteristic was that one ethnic group in the industrial city guarded its neighborhood against incursions by another group—or, during periods of rapid economic growth and social mobility, **"ethnic succession"** occurred, where an ascending ethnic group moved into a neighborhood abandoned by its original residents.

Ethnic or racial identity was typically maintained or reinforced in industrial cities under these conditions.

The industrial city represents the endpoint of two conflicting processes rooted in the capitalist character of the broader society: capitalist investment in urban real estate aimed at profit, and class struggle. The first process results in subordinating the human and natural environment to the interests of capital accumulation; the second leads to the formation of urban neighborhood associations, ethnic associations, and other types of class alliances that organize local resistance to this profit-driven exploitation. Thus, the city becomes a battlefield for these opposing forces.

Manuel Castells studied, in his book *The City and the Grassroots* (1983), a range of social movements in contemporary American and European industrial cities that emerged in resistance to the capitalist rationalization of the urban environment. Resistance can take various forms but generally includes efforts to preserve public services or public spaces for their use-value against capitalist rationality seeking their privatization and commodification—that is, efforts aimed at holding municipalities, rather than private companies, responsible for providing good schools, recreational facilities, museums, and parks. Other forms of resistance involve attempts to maintain the cultural identity of neighborhoods and subcultures against displacement and efforts to develop urban decentralization whereby urban residents gain control over their living environments.

The Mass Communication City

In line with the rise and consolidation of capitalism in Western European and North American core states, the industrial city appears to be rapidly giving way to what is called the **"mass communication city"** in advanced industrial nations. Cities such as New York, London, Tokyo, and other major metropolises play a central cultural role as centers of administrative control, based on advanced mass communication and data processing technologies that govern widely dispersed manufacturing activities.

Older urban manufacturing centers at the heart of the capitalist system, such as Birmingham in England, Detroit, and Glasgow, have declined in importance with the reduction of their industrial production roles.

The shift toward the mass communication city is linked to changes in the urban culture of the core caused by transformations in the world system since the early twentieth century. This development is associated with what is called **"late capitalism,"** **"monopoly capitalism,"** or the **"welfare state,"** terms that denote reliance on capital investment from the core to generate industrial production in the periphery, typically through multinational corporations.

The cultural role of core cities is moving away from manufacturing, as they increasingly host communication media…

Advanced communication media and data processing are necessary to manage this global industrial production.

The mass communication city is no longer a primary site of employment for the industrial working class. Instead, those working primarily in industry, high technology, and services—the middle class—now shape urban cultural forms. For example, suburban expansion and urban renewal, two distinctive residential patterns associated with the middle class, have become important cultural forms in these cities. Both reflect the significance of the new social class and the provision of new urban spaces (suburbs) or the renewal of older ones (revitalized inner-city areas). Once again, these new urban locations represent the larger capitalist society as places of profit-making and arenas of class conflict.

David Harvey argues in *Consciousness and the Urban Experience* (1985) that the typical suburban expansion in American cities, especially after World War II, was driven by the need to support a new lifestyle of consumption to counteract problems caused by overproduction under capitalism. It also helped reduce class violence by dispersing populations away from the old, dense inner-city neighborhoods. However, these suburbs, once established to serve capitalist profit-making, can become sites of resistance against further rationalization of capitalist urban spaces and against the gradual encroachment of the welfare state into local decision-making.

As the cultural role of the mass communication city continues to evolve in advanced industrial societies and as industrial production is exported, any remaining urban manufacturing must face competition from imported goods. New methods have developed to use urban labor to make production more cost-effective. For example, manufacturing is often subcontracted to the lower classes of urban populations—whether undocumented immigrants such as Mexicans or Haitians in the U.S., marginalized native populations such as African Americans, or foreign workers such as Eastern Europeans or Turks in France who lack full citizenship rights.

Many products previously made in factories are now produced at home to reduce costs, especially to avoid government regulations and taxes. Due to working from home, undocumented status, or experiences of racial discrimination, these workers lack legal protections and social support. In this precarious condition, they rely on extensive networks of mutual aid, where the poor share the risks of poverty collectively. Their dire situation and attempts to secure safety reflect the practices of residents of poor neighborhoods in neoliberal cities, as will be discussed later.

Colonial and Neoliberal Urban Cultures

The Colonial City

Colonial cities emerged in societies under the control of Europe and North America during the early expansion of the global capitalist system. The colonial relationship necessitated transforming the productivity of the colonial society so that its wealth could be exported to the core countries, and colonial cities concentrated this function. Their primary cultural role was to house the institutions of this unequal relationship: the colonial political institutions—bureaucracies, police, and military—through which the core governed the colony, and the economic structure—banks, merchants, and lenders—that drained wealth from the colony to the core.

Bombay and Calcutta under British rule, European trading cities in China and West Africa, British urban centers in East Africa, and Dutch centers in East India for collecting agricultural produce—from the eighteenth century until the mid-twentieth century—exemplify this urban type. Core capitalist states planted colonial cities as new growths within pre-capitalist state societies existing in many parts of the world, simultaneously transforming these societies by making them unequal participants in the global capitalist system. The resulting urban culture formed a new hybrid of core and periphery, exhibiting characteristics absent in either original culture.

This new hybrid was most evident in the elite class of colonial city inhabitants and their cultural forms. For example, new classes and urban lifestyles emerged among the indigenous population. The cultural role of the colonial city often necessitated the creation of a native lower middle urban class composed of merchants, lenders, civil servants, and others educated to serve the colonial political and economic system.

For instance, Thomas Babington Macaulay, the British Indian official in the mid-nineteenth century, hoped to create an elite through Western-style education who would be "Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, opinion, morals, and intellect."

This was accomplished through new urban institutions such as schools, welfare associations, and sectarian or secular reform groups. After a generation, it transformed through these urban institutions, often became the leadership of anti-colonial nationalist movements. Thus, the colonial city, which began as a tool of colonial exploitation, became a means of anti-colonial protest through this lower middle class and the cultural institutions, schools, newspapers, and other urban cultural forms it established.

After World War II, many new nations in Asia and Africa gained independence. Although they were no longer direct political colonies of Western powers, these urban cultures and their cities remained in dependent economic relationships with advanced industrial countries.

The Neoliberal City

A new type of urban development in the peripheries of the global capitalist system, often referred to as the Third World, is the neoliberal city. This urban type arose in the context of the development of monopoly capitalism and the mass communication city in the core. Export capital from advanced industrial countries created industrial production clusters in Third World cities, leading to the replication of many cultural roles played by the industrial city in the core. Urban factories and wage labor reside within the city. There is a developed infrastructure of urban transportation and communications through which these goods and labor are distributed. There is also extensive migration to cities from surrounding rural areas.

However, the neoliberal city does not exactly replicate the cultural role of the industrial urban pattern due to its dependent relationship with the core. The key difference is that goods produced in neoliberal cities are usually intended for export rather than local consumption, except perhaps by a small local elite. The neoliberal city does not serve the indigenous countryside; rather, it serves the broader global economy. Surrounding rural areas are important only because they supply large and readily available labor pools.

The widespread urbanization in the neoliberal city differs from the urbanization that characterized the earlier industrial city. This urbanization leads to the emergence of what is known as the informal economy within these cities. The informal economy consists of urban services and products provided by the poorest residents of the neoliberal city, such as small vendors, shoe shiners, domestic workers, scrap collectors, and others who form a class of small producers and sellers of goods. The prevailing image of these people is highly negative; these individuals are considered marginal in the city, often unemployed, and frequently viewed as criminals, unmotivated, and unable to integrate into urban life. Their culture is characterized by a "culture of poverty" that simultaneously leads them to accept and remain in their dire condition. Their marginality is often said to manifest in slums, shantytowns, or informal settlements on the city's outskirts, which they are accused of disfiguring. This "myth of marginality," as termed by Janice Perlman (*The Myth of Marginality*, 1976), overlooks the importance of these residents in shaping the nature of the neoliberal city.

To successfully compete in the global market, manufactured goods from Third World cities must be priced lower than similar goods produced in the core economies. Wages in the industrial sector of these cities are significantly depressed because many of the small services and goods workers need are provided through the informal economy. As Larissa Lomnitz notes in *Networks and Marginality: Life in a Mexican Shantytown* (1977), new rural migrants and slum dwellers work as domestic servants, gardeners, and maintenance workers for industrial workers and the middle class at costs far below what these services would cost if provided by the formal sector (similar to domestic and childcare labor paid below minimum wage in core countries).

The informal urban economy offers no security, and residents of shantytowns in neoliberal cities have had to develop cultural means of survival in the face of frequent hardships. Rather than being places of social decay, these neighborhoods consist of tightly knit networks of relationships and mutual reliance based on family, ethnic, sectarian ties, or carefully nurtured friendship networks. These networks assist those temporarily short of money and provide some security for the economically unprotected, who lack job security or welfare institutions due to their informal sector employment.

These networks—actual adaptations to the demands of neoliberal cities—often appear as legacies of the rural or peasant backgrounds of slum residents. They are described as "urban peasants" more than true urbanites, a characterization that wrongly reinforces the idea of their marginality.

Tribal identity among new urban migrants in African cities is actually a case of "reterritorialization," or the strengthening and redefining of tribal identity to form networks among urban migrants for mutual aid.

Similarly, extended family networks do not disappear in the city; rather, they become broader and stronger among slum residents in Mexico, for example. New sectarian identities may play a similar role: Brian Roberts has shown that in his book *Peasant Cities* (1978), Brian Roberts argues that the growth of Pentecostal and other Protestant sects in Guatemala meets the needs of mutual support networks in poor neighborhoods and for those lacking family ties.

Although residents of informal economy slums suffer poverty and insecurity, their capacity to organize and struggle for improved urban living conditions—like the wage laborers in industrial cities—is uncertain. While some researchers argue that this class has revolutionary potential, others believe it does not constitute a proletariat and will not engage in revolutionary confrontation.

The fact that slum dwellers are "self-employed" and do not enter into wage labor relations with urban service providers appears to limit class contradictions. Furthermore, both the middle class and slum residents often perceive their true enemies as Western imperialist states or national governments believed to be complicit with international capital. This perception acknowledges that the suffering of all classes in the neoliberal city is more closely linked to external economic relations in the global economy than to exploitation by classes within the city itself.

Cities and Cultures

In the 1970s, anthropologists debated whether to focus on detailed studies of the poor or new migrants in the city—referred to as **"anthropology in the city"**—or on broader studies of the city as a whole—**"anthropology of the city."** Ten years later, the debate was resolved with a wave of studies that focused neither exclusively on the micro nor macro level, but rather on the links between them, that is, the networks of cultural, economic, and political relations connecting the slum, poor neighborhood, or residential district to the city, and even to the global economic system.

In urban cultures following the establishment of the global capitalist system, these networks consist of economic, political, and cultural threads linking the mass communication cities in the core with the neoliberal cities in the Third World, within a global system of unequal political and economic relations.

For pre-capitalist urban cultures, these networks were composed of disparities in power, wealth, and cultural dominance within the urban culture. These varied networks influence diverse urban cultural roles and different cultural forms.

In the 1970s, urban anthropologists were concerned about the contribution of their studies on urban cultures to the broader anthropological concept of culture. Oscar Lewis sparked a debate on the nature of culture when he introduced his concept of the "urban culture of poverty." He argued that the culture of poverty conditions the poor to political apathy, immediate gratification, family disintegration, and negative responses to their economic hardships, and he maintained that the poor could not escape this debilitating culture even if they ceased to be poor.

However, a comprehensive scientific review of the concept of the culture of poverty revealed the limitations of the traditional anthropological notion of culture on which it was based. This review emphasized that the marginalization of the poor is not the result of an internally coherent culture but rather a consequence of their poor material conditions imposed upon them within the global system (as seen in the aforementioned slum studies).

In response to this critique, the traditional idea of culture—as a fixed set of traditions that compel individuals to behave in certain ways—shifted towards a concept of culture as continuously produced (urban or non-urban) through ongoing human labor—both physical and mental—in response to the material conditions of daily life.