Cities for Nations? Examining the City–Nation-State Relation in Information Age Malaysia*

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Cities, not nation-states, are commonly understood as the key actors of the information society and economy (Castells, 1989; 1996). Cities often contain the complex physical infrastructure which supports information and communication technologies (ICTs) (Graham and Marvin, 1996; 2001; Graham, 2000) allowing the coordination and control of economic activities over large distances (Allen, 1999; Amin and Graham, 1999). Certain 'global cities' bring together the diverse expertise and knowledge which enable such activities to be performed (Sassen, 1991; 1994). It is in these cities that specialists and professionals can meet face to face, a seemingly necessary precondition for effective mediation of complex economic information (Thrift, 1996; Thrift and Olds, 1996). Cities, or rather 'city-regions', have become 'motors of the global economy' precisely on account of such spatially-concentrated human relationships which are considered essential for tacit learning, innovation and creativity (Scott *et al*., 2001: 15). In a rather different way, cities' role in innovation and entrepreneurship is considered to stem from their very 'ungovernability' as sites for individual spontaneity (Osbourne and Rose, 1999: 756). Compared to national governments, cities are thus understood as altogether 'more flexible in adapting to the changing conditions of markets, technology, and culture' in the so-called 'Information Age' (Castells and Hall, 1994: 7).

The comparison is a meaningful one since the rise to prominence of cities and urban regions in informational times has arguably been accompanied by a corresponding decline in the economic, political and social significance of nation-states (Ohmae, 2001). Theses on the inevitable decline of the nation-state have a much longer lineage, of course, associated with military rather than communications technologies.[1] However, more recently, the development and expansion of ICTs has been understood as bound up with processes undermining the nation-state as a territorial unit of both economic organization and collective cultural imagination. First, processes of economic globalization, propelled primarily by Transnational Corporations (TNCs) and facilitated in part by new modes of global communication, have undermined the 'old international division of labour' structured around discreet national territorial units (Soja, 2000: 204). The most successful

1 If the historical emergence of the nation-state owed much to the military defence of space for economic activity, this was negated by the development of intercontinental military capacities (McGrew, 1992).

contemporary economic activity appears to be transnational, not only the institutional networks of TNCs, but also various extended ethnic-based relations (Olds and Yeung, 1999).

Second, new forms of collective identity have challenged ideals of national citizenship and affiliation. New technologies have greatly expanded possibilities for transnational thought and action reflected by the emergence of 'virtual communities' (Rheingold, 1994) and deterritorialized identities (Morley and Robins, 1995). In addition, the 'flexible citizenship' (Ong, 1999) and 'bi-local affiliations' (Papastergiadis, 2000: 83) of economic migrants and diasporic communities in a world 'on the move' subvert the nation-state. Cities, as the primary destination for transnational migrants, are 'privileged sites' for current renegotiations of citizenship (Holston and Appadurai, 1999: 3; see also Isin, 2000). In this way, cities have been understood as 'replacing states in the construction of social identities' (Taylor, 1995a: 58).

This article problematizes theses positing the respective rise/demise of the city and the nation-state in the global information economy and society. The rationale here is two-fold. First, it is important to counter any simple zero-sum logic in treatments of the changing relative roles of cities and nation-states in a world of ICT. As Nigel Thrift (1996) has reminded us, writing about new technology has a propensity towards notions of rupture and 'revolutionary' understandings of social transformation. This is not to suggest that existing studies of cities and new technology have universally assumed a simplistic substitution of the 'city for the nation'. Clearly, many existing treatments of contemporary social, economic and political change offer far more nuanced approaches (see, for example, Robins, 1999; Taylor, 2000; Smith, 2001). The intention here is to build on these insights by (re)examining city–nation-state relations in a particular urban-national context.

The second motivation relates to a perception that these relations might — indeed are likely to — take diverse forms. Recent urban research has lamented the fact that particular cities 'are wheeled out as paradigmatic cases, alleged conveniently to encompass all urban trends everywhere' (Amin and Graham, 1997: 411). More specifically, these 'paradigmatic' cases are overwhelmingly located in North America and western Europe. To assume that such experiences and transformations are being, or will be, replicated in the non-West is to deny the possibility of alternative spatio-temporal engagements with, and experiences of, information society and economy.

The article explores alternative city–nation-state relations through a study of high-tech urbanism in Malaysia. The Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) is a 50 km long high-tech zone which stretches southwards from the federal capital, Kuala Lumpur (see Figure 1). MSC is one of a number of high-profile projects in what has been referred to as a broader 'Siliconization of Asia' (Jessop and Sum, 2000: 2308). At one level, urban-regional research in Asia provides something of a corrective to a literature which has frequently focused upon examples from 'the West'. Colonial experiences and national origins, for example, might be expected to have resulted in very different contemporary meanings of nationhood and identification as compared to those countries from which putatively paradigmatic conditions are derived. However, the intention is not one of countering a perceived western-bias in information urbanism by positing an equally generalizing Asian or 'non-western' model. The article seeks merely to unsettle prevailing conceptions of the city–nation-state relation through a specific urban study.

The remainder of the article consists of three sections. First, I draw upon the existing urban and regional studies literature to problematize a substitutional conception of city–nation-state relations in terms of both state reterritorialization and the national construction of information society and economy. Second, I introduce the Multimedia Super Corridor and elaborate its relation to existing patterns and politics of urban and regional development in post-colonial Malaysia. The third section of the article outlines three dimensions of reworked city–nation-state relations from an analysis of urban development in Malaysia's MSC.
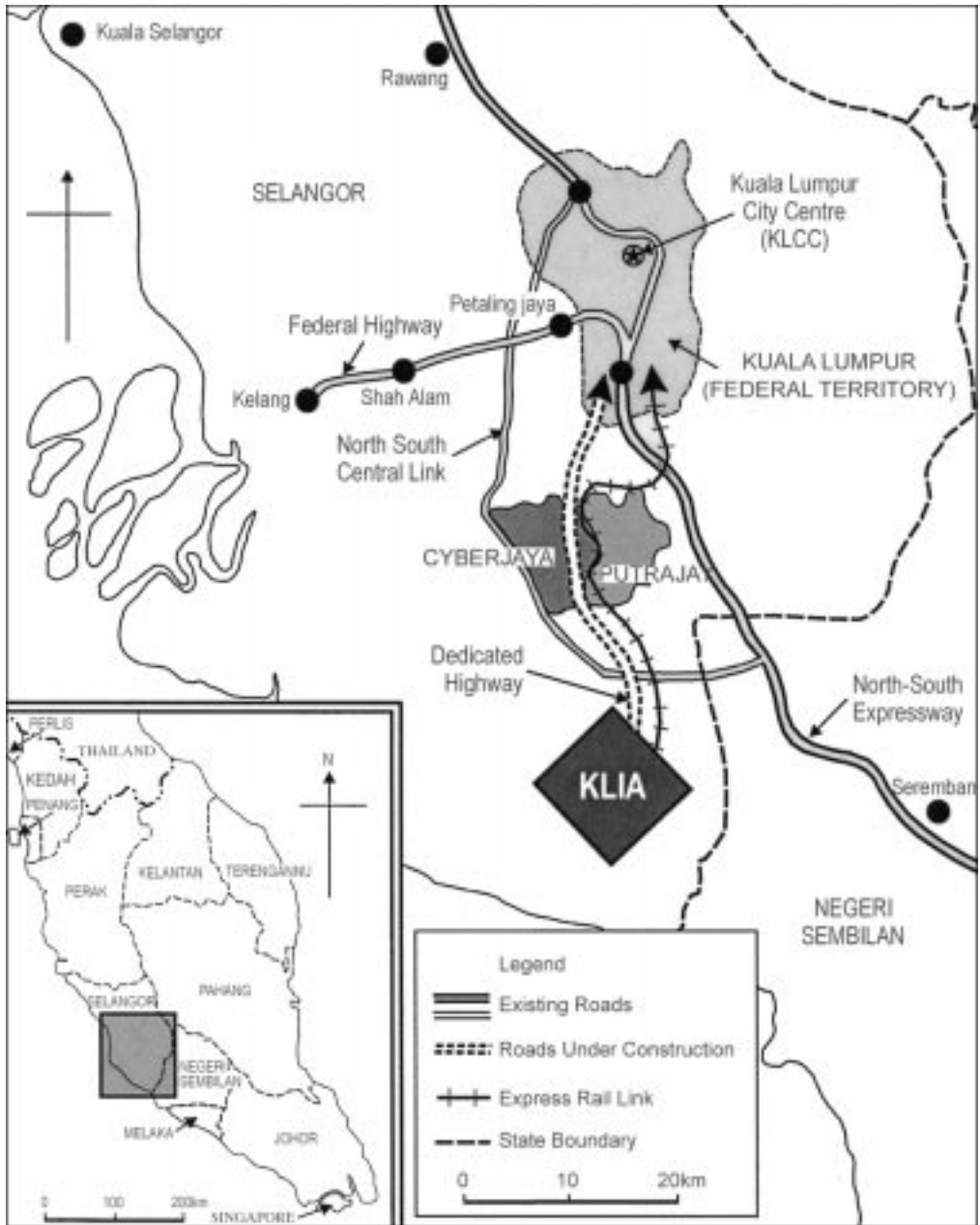
Figure 1   *The Multimedia Super Corridor*

Cities and nation-states in the global information society

The globalization of economic and social life associated with the development and expansion of information and communication technologies has had profound implications for nation-states and cities and for the interrelations between them. Writing in the mid-1990s, Peter Taylor (1995a: 60) argued that one of the consequences of the globalization of

social and economic relations was that 'we can no longer assume a general mutuality of interests between state and city'. Equally problematic, however, is the counter assumption of a simple substitution of 'cities for nations'. Thus, in a more recent article, Taylor (2000: 6) signalled a revision of his 'fall of mutuality thesis' in an attempt to 'scotch any notion that I see cities as simply replacing states as the key "spatial" institutional centre of modern life today or in the near future'. In this section, I seek to build upon such revision, highlighting the reworking of city–nation-state relations in informational times.

A key entry point to examining such reworking is the reconfiguration of capitalism under conditions of economic globalization. Far from becoming a non-territorial, borderless process, global capitalism remains dependent upon relatively fixed and immobile territorial infrastructures (Harvey, 1989). What has changed is the *scale* of this fixity which, until recently, was associated primarily with national territorial units. Capital has been 're-scaled' (Swyngedouw, 1996), both to the level of supranational organizations and to subnational levels such as cities and urban regions (Scott, 1998; Brenner, 2000; Bunnell and Coe, 2001). The latter has arguably contributed to the (re)valorization of cities, in turn propelling urban studies to its present 'powerful position within contemporary social and policy sciences' (Amin and Graham, 1997: 412).

Embracing this new position, however, carries a danger of neglecting the major role of state-level political processes in ongoing global transformations. As Neil Brenner (1999: 53) has argued, scale jumping does not necessarily effect a reduction in state power: 'States continue to operate as essential sites of territorialization for social, political, and economic relations, even if the political geography of this territorialization process no longer converges predominantly or exclusively upon any single, self-enclosed geographical scale'. In other words, while contemporary processes of globalization have undermined conceptions of the national scale as a 'container' of political and economic relations (Taylor, 1995b), the state now increasingly participates in the organization and coordination of economic processes at other scales.

At the subnational scale, 'entrepreneurial' government or 'governance' involving partnership with urban business interests (Hubbard and Hall, 1998) has been shown to strengthen the interests of the central state (Tickell and Peck, 1992). Urban-regional development need not be antithetical to state power. In many cases it is an expression of state power. Thus, as Brenner (1998: 476) puts it, 'currently unfolding re-scalings of state institutions signal not the decline or erosion of the state, but rather a specifically geographical accumulation strategy to promote and regulate industrial restructuring within major urban regions'. Key supranational policy documents, such as the World Bank's (1999) *Global urban and local government strategy*, encourage the devotion of greater national attention and resources to key city-regions.

Given the crucial role that 'networked' cities and urban regions, in particular, now play as 'staging posts' in the information society and economy (Graham, 2000: 114), it is scarcely surprising that the central state often comes to take a proactive role in their promotion. Indeed, Kevin Robins (1999: 42) has argued that 'for national governments, it has become imperative to "contain" such a metropolitan node'. Nation states may thus have abandoned aspirations of 'homogenizing spatial practices on a national scale' (Brenner, 1998: 476), but a 'global' or 'world' city is a national means of 'plugging in' to global political, economic and social networks. This has especially been the case in industrialized countries of the West, but is now also a noted strategy of industrializing countries, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region (Olds, 1995; Lo and Marcotullio, 2000).

According to Mike Douglass (1998: 111), the active intervention of Pacific Asian governments in urban restructuring is a response to the recognition that 'the status of their national economies will be increasingly determined by the positioning of their principal urban regions'. In part, such efforts have entailed the construction of high-profile megaprojects vying for attention on the global skyline (King, 1996). Yet practices of economic repositioning involve more than merely symbolic recognition. The develop-

ment of China's coastal cities as 'development catalysts', for example, was rationalized by their supposedly 'favorable position to import, digest, and transfer advanced technologies and modern scientific information for the country' (Yeung and Hu, 1992: 9). Such cities are thus understood as interfaces between global and national economies and so vast public resources are channelled into their discursive and material construction.

Yet a reworked city–nation-state mutuality is not confined to the economic domain. Globally oriented and networked urban development can also foment national social and cultural renewal. On the one hand, it might be suggested that cities support and symbolize social and cultural relations which are distinct from, and even threatening to, 'national culture': global cities, as migrant contact points, give rise to diverse cultures and affiliations differentiated from the remainder of the national territory (Isin, 2000); professional and technical elites in two such cities in different countries arguably have greater commonalties with one another than with other members of their respective national populations (Hannerz, 1996); and the key role of a hypermobile 'global intelligence corps' of consultants and design professionals in 'world city' strategies sustains transnational planning and architectural practices (Olds, 2001: 12).

On the other hand, however, cities continue to represent and effect ideals of specifically national progress. No less than world fairs and universal exhibitions, today's high-profile urban project is a 'technology of nationhood' (Harvey, 1996: 56). Certain cities, particularly national capitals, of course, have long been represented as standard bearers of national progress and identity (Vale, 1992). In informational times 'intelligent' cities become exemplary national spaces proffering new modes of national high-tech living and working. Cities are potentially sites where a global 'Information Age' is experienced and (re)constructed nationally.

Critical postcolonial analyses of 'the global' have pointed to the possibility and desirability of rewriting nation-centred narratives (Slater, 1998). However, it would be wrong to assume that post-colonial nations will be convinced by the 'rhetorical force of a post-industrial, anti-nationalist globalism' (Mee, 1998: 228) or else that they are simply yet to reach an immanent and inevitable 'post-national' stage following western trajectories of historical transformation (Dirlik, 1998). The most frequently studied cities are those in regions of the world where relatively high proportions of the population are able to participate in cosmopolitan (often electronically-mediated) 'global citizenship' and where its allure feeds in part from negative historical associations of nationalism.

This is not to valorize nationalism as 'resistance' to western universalism or to essentialize nations of the non-West. Yet the nation-state clearly remains a key social authority, mediating and negotiating global flows of knowledge and information. High-tech city spaces constitute privileged sites for such 'nationalization'. In addition, the ways in which these sites/sights are represented in authoritative discursive practices forms part of the broader contested process of 'imagining' the nation-state itself (*cf.* Anderson, 1991; Cubitt, 1998). The political and institutional will to imagine high-tech urban development in national terms is perhaps greatest in former colonial contexts. Colonial urban nodes have been key sites in postcolonial politics and 'crucibles of nationhood' (Yeoh, 2001: 401; see also Kusno, 2000). In the remainder of the article I examine high-tech city–nation-state relations in 'Siliconizing' postcolonial Malaysia.

The Multimedia Super Corridor and the politics of urban development in post-colonial Malaysia

Initiated in 1996, the Multimedia Super Corridor is a 50 by 15km zone for the use and development of information technology (see Figure 1). At the geographical and

imaginative core of the corridor are two new 'intelligent' cities: Putrajaya is the new federal administrative centre of Malaysia which makes use of sophisticated information technology for 'electronic government' (Putrajaya Corporation, 1997); and Cyberjaya is intended as a technopole seeking initially to attract foreign information technology companies, with the ultimate goal of nurturing local ones (Multimedia Development Corporation, 1997a). The two cities are frequently described as 'greenfield sites' in the marketing literature, yet MSC is perhaps most accurately understood as a southern extension of the mega-urban region of Kuala Lumpur-Klang Valley (Lee, 1995). The northern 'node' of the MSC is Kuala Lumpur City Centre (KLCC), a high-rise commercial park built on the site of the former city racecourse. At the other (southern) end is Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA), which opened in 1998.[2]

MSC's location as part of the main national metropolitan region may be said to contradict long-held state regional development goals. Attempts to promote a more 'balanced' regional development have formed part of a postcolonial politics of ethnic wealth distribution (Malaysia, 1971). The British colonial division of labour promoted a generalized spatial divide between Chinese urban versus Malay and Indian rural inhabitation (Sioh, 1998). Political economic strategies undertaken by the Malay-dominated state to close the wealth gap with the other communities — especially following the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1970 — were therefore intertwined with efforts to reduce national urban/rural and regional development disparities. After initially continuing colonial rural development in the period immediately following independence, these efforts eventually took 'urban' form. Malay participation in national urban life was promoted through the construction of new towns after 1970 (Lee, 1987). Post-1970 new town development, in the spirit of the NEP, sought to promote equality among ethnic groups precisely through greater uniformity of urban and regional development throughout the national territory.

Despite these efforts, urban development since 1970 has been skewed towards the so-called 'Western corridor' (Malaysia, 1985) of Peninsula Malaysia and around the national capital, Kuala Lumpur, in particular. There is a certain path dependency here in that industrialization, and especially export-oriented manufacturing, has been concentrated in those areas of the country with existing transport infrastructure and facilities for access to overseas markets (Lee, 1995). Apart from the industrial areas around Kuala Lumpur, Penang has been a major destination for foreign investment, notably in the electronics sector (Sussman, 1998). Indeed, prior to the development of MSC, Penang had been dubbed 'Malaysia's Silicon Valley' (Aroff, 1995: 254). However, the dominance of Kuala Lumpur has been extended with the expansion of the tertiary sector. Merchant banking and other producer services in Malaysia, for example, are overwhelmingly concentrated in the national capital (Lee, 1996; Morshidi, 1998; 2000). The dramatic transformation of the Kuala Lumpur skyline over the past decade is a direct consequence of the city's growing integration into regional and global financial circuits (Morshidi and Suriati, 1999).

However, it would be mistaken to interpret the MSC case as one in which state regional development goals have simply been subverted by irresistible forces of globalization. First and most simply, the state itself, at various levels, has actively participated in processes of globalization (Ong, 1999). Second, there is an important politics of urban development in Malaysia relating to a division of power between the central (federal) government on the one hand, and local (state) government on the other.

Since the Sultan of the state of Selangor handed over Kuala Lumpur to the federal government on 1 February 1974, authority over the city has undergone progressive centralization. In 1978 the mayor of the city was made responsible to a newly-created

2   For more details of these projects, see Bunnell (forthcoming).

Federal Territory Ministry. Nine years later, the authority of the Minister of the Federal Territory was shifted directly to the Prime Minister's Department on account of Dr Mahathir's 'personal interest in the development of Kuala Lumpur' (Phang *et al*., 1996: 136). At one level, this shift reflects a belief in the importance of Kuala Lumpur to national social and economic development. But the move has, in turn, enabled development concentrated in and around the national capital to proceed under the watchful eye of the federal government. The location of key projects within the Federal Territory has obvious appeal when compared to more distant and often disputatious parts of the national territory.[3]

Consideration of the historical politics of urban and regional development is clearly indispensable in any attempt to understand city–nation-state relations in Malaysia. I now turn to the reworking of such relations represented and effected by the Multimedia Super Corridor.

City–nation-state relations in 'Information Age' Malaysia: three dimensions

Three dimensions of reworked city–nation-state relations are considered in turn. The first concerns the capacity and power of the nation-state. The rise to prominence of the MSC city-region does not imply an erosion of nation-state authority. Rather, the development of high-tech urban space is shown to both reflect and to have facilitated a re-scaling of central (federal) state power. The second dimension considers MSC as a physical and symbolic urban 'node' for plugging the nation into an emerging global information society and economy. A pervasive discourse of producing 'intelligent' urban spaces to facilitate such global connectivity rationalizes the dense concentration of national infrastructure and resources in MSC. The third dimension elaborates MSC as an exemplary space in and through which global and national prerogatives are mediated. MSC cities are at once privileged national *sites* for global connectivity and exemplary *sights* making known globally-oriented national technological conduct.

Re-scaling: high-tech city spaces and central state power

The MSC case unsettles any association between the pervasive urban and regional studies metaphor of 'nodes in global networks' and a wholesale diminution of the power of the nation-state. Certainly, there are domains, such as macro-economic policy, where nation-state capacities have been in retreat. In pre-crisis Malaysia, privatization and liberalization were conventionally equated with a reduction of the developmental role of the state (Malaysia, 1991; Ong-Giger, 1997). Yet I argue that globally-oriented urban development is an expression and even an extension of central state power.

The progressive centralization of political authority over the Federal Territory referred to in the previous section has been rationalized by the presumed national importance of its development. In the case of the Kuala Lumpur City Centre project, a 'city-within-a-city' which has retrospectively come to form the northern end of MSC on account of its 'intelligent' features (*MSC.Comm*, 1999: 20), it was the perceived national importance of possessing a 'landmark' (Mahathir, 1992) urban development which legitimized the development of the former colonial racecourse site contrary to both the plans of Kuala Lumpur City Hall and the wishes of sections of the public (Bunnell,

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3 The states of Kelantan and Terengganu, for example, have been controlled by the opposition *Parti Islam Se-Malaysia* (PAS) since the general election of November 1999 (Zakaria, 2000). In purely socio-economic terms, these states would be expected to be beneficiaries of federal government attempts to reduce regional development disparities.

1999).[4] Ultimately a public proposal to preserve a 'quiet place' for city residents (Edwin, 1990: 9) was rejected in favour of an opportunity to proceed with a 'world class' development which would put both city and nation on 'the world map' (Mahathir, cited in KLCC Holdings, 1995: 1). Mahathir's personal involvement was thus imagined as necessary to ensure that city-scale objectives did not take precedence over the 'national interest'.

In addition to exercising control over the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, the central state has extended its direct political authority into the state of Selangor as Putrajaya has also been declared a Federal Territory. Perbadanan Putrajaya (Putrajaya Corporation) was incorporated on 1 March 1996 to administer the new electronic Federal Government Administrative Centre (Putrajaya Corporation, 1997). On 1 February 2001, control of the 4,581 hectare territory was handed over to the Federal government (Shahanaaz, 2001). While Putrajaya is elaborated in the marketing material as the 'nerve centre of the nation' (Putrajaya Holdings, 1997: 13), administering Malaysia through electronic government 'at a distance', the new Federal Territory also represents an extension of direct central state control into the 'southern corridor' of the nation's main urban region (Lee, 1995).

While work on the KLCC and Putrajaya projects commenced prior to the official launch of MSC, development of the wider project after 1996 has seen the emergence of new forms of urban-regional governance. These further extend the direct governmental powers of the federal state. An example concerns the Multimedia Development Corporation (MDC), the lead agency in the management of MSC. Registered under the Companies Act, MDC functions as a private-sector entity with all the efficiency and productivity gains that this is meant to imply. MDC is envisaged as a 'unique, performance-oriented, client-focused agency' (Multimedia Development Corporation, 1996: 8), a 'one-stop super shop' (Ariff and Chuan, 1998: 3) which negates the need for foreign companies to deal with multiple government agencies. As one marketing brochure put it: 'In working with companies setting up operations in the MSC, the MDC will serve as promoter and facilitator' (Multimedia Development Corporation, 1996: 8).

At one level, the strong role of the developmentalist Malaysian state would thus appear to have been diminished by these 'entrepreneurial' forms of government. In addition, the high-profile role of MSC's International Advisory Panel, comprised of 'the world leaders in IT and Multimedia' (Multimedia Development Corporation, 2001: n.p.), may be said to have further unmoored the development of this high-tech urban region from nation-state authority as appropriate aims and means of development are shaped directly by global corporate interests (Hutnyk, 1999).

However, rather than ceding authority to private-sector interests or more abstract 'global forces', these changes have served to strengthen the direct authority of a re-scaled central state. MDC is driven by the federal government. The proactive personal role of the Prime Minister, as Chairman of IAP, is repeatedly alluded to in marketing material. MDC is thus said to 'combine the efficiency and effectiveness of a private company having entrepreneurial flair, with the decision-making and authority of a high-powered government agency' (Multimedia Development Corporation, 2001: n.p.). In keeping with changes in urban governance elsewhere in the past decade, local — in this case, Selangor state — authority has been subjugated to that of the central state and the upper executives in particular.

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4 The 50-acre racecourse site on which KLCC was eventually built had been allocated as a 'park for the public' (Padman and Lim, 1989: 8). The KLCC project faced resistance from city residents who campaigned for a 'people's park' (Edwin, 1990: 9).

Plugging in: MSC as national urban node

It is the perceived strategic importance of the MSC high-tech urban region to the realization of broader national development objectives which has legitimized the re-scaling of central state political power. National policy in Malaysia began to prioritize the development of high and especially information technology from the late 1980s. This, in turn, came to form part of 'Vision 2020', a government objective of transforming Malaysia into a 'fully developed nation' by that year (Mahathir, 1991: n.p.). Given the high cost of the 'intelligent' infrastructure necessary to support high-tech milieus, these are necessarily concentrated in specific locations within the national territory. In addition, related financial, transportation and cultural demands determine that such concentrations largely occur in proximity to existing urban centres. In the context of a pervasive ideology of producing 'intelligent' urban spaces backed by a global diffusion of consultants, real estate interests and TNCs (Graham and Marvin, 1999), MSC is imagined as a valid national development strategy.

Combining conventional urban planning and design with state-of-the-art information and telecommunications technology, the MSC is intended to plug the nation into an emerging information society and economy. Apart from the tangible infrastructure which facilitates such connectivity,[5] discursive practices make MSC and Malaysia known as viable and attractive locations for high-tech living and working. The 'world class' of MSC's key projects is repeatedly alluded to in promotional marketing and political imaging. MSC is a symbolic as well as physical node for national entry to global technological and cultural-economic circuits. For Prime Minister Mahathir, MSC is intended as 'a pilot project for harmonising our entire country with the global forces shaping the Information Age' (Mahathir, 1998: 30).

There is, of course, a danger here of uncritically accepting a state discourse of MSC as 'national urban node'. Clearly, the 'harmonisation' that Mahathir proclaims is not synonymous with national territorial uniformity. The likelihood that MSC will serve to exacerbate regional development disparity in Malaysia was identified by participants in a national teleconferencing dialogue held in 1997, in which Prime Minister Mahathir was connected to sites and citizens across the nation. While the event itself was intended to demonstrate the potential for new technology to electronically integrate the national territory and population, participants outside the relatively advanced western corridor of Peninsula Malaysia asked what, if anything, they had to gain from MSC (Krishnamoorthy and Surin, 1997). The 'splintering' effects of high-tech urban development may be expected to create new exclusions even within the greater Kuala Lumpur metropolitan area (*cf.* Graham and Marvin, 2001). There are certainly grounds for a geographical critique of utopian state projections of universal social-spatial benefits of high-tech development in Malaysia (see Bunnell, 2002a).

Particular cities and regions, however, have always contributed a disproportionately large share of supposedly 'national' achievement (Oinas and Malecki, 1999). Such disparity may have been exacerbated as the growing competition between cities in the global economy further fractures subnational geographies. Yet high-tech urbanism and its national implications cannot simply be understood as effects of global logics, transnational networks or an Information Age. MSC is first and foremost a dense concentration of national resources for global urban connectivity.

5   The corridor is built upon a 2.5-10-gigabit digital optical fibre backbone which enables direct high-capacity links to Japan, USA and Europe (Multimedia Development Corporation, 1996).

Exemplary space: sites and sights of high-tech nationalism

There are clearly tensions between the globally-oriented political and technological privileging of MSC city-space, on the one hand, and the national imagining and integration on which state power depends, on the other. Apart from issues of socio-spatial disparity, MSC has been designed for the living and working requirements of an imagined global technological elite. Cyberjaya, in particular, seeks to attract mobile 'knowledge workers' and their families (Bunnell, 2002b). Mahathir's conception of MSC as a bounded 'test bed' was partly intended to allay fears of 'negative consequences' of resultant social and cultural formations (cited in Abdullah and Sapiee, 1997: 3). MSC is thus represented as a manifestation of 'global' social forces and processes whose national 'impacts' are minimized through containment. Such political imagining also turns the problematic of disparity on its head. 'Global' social and technological formations will be thoroughly experimented with before being applied across the national territory.[6]

Global-national tensions are also mediated architecturally. MSC urban design employs 'indigenous' references enabling the project to be imagined as an inclusive 'national project' rather than merely a discrete global city formation. There has now been two decades of state-sponsored attempts to foster and promote recognizably Malaysian architecture (Ngiom and Tay, 2000). MSC extends this to putatively 'intelligent' urban forms expressing a specifically high-tech architectural nationalism. According to Marc Boey (2002), the strong state role has served to ensure that the MSC is suitably 'national' in character. MSC is thus an 'architect of nationalism', injecting cultural and political symbolism into what would otherwise have been a global city enclave, stripped of its nationality. All of the megaprojects in MSC incorporate 'national' cultural references.[7] Islamic design patterns and symbolism are features of both the Petronas Twin Towers (Bunnell, 1999) and Putrajaya (Bunnell, forthcoming). KLIA, at the southern end of the MSC, includes a roof structure which is intended to evoke the housing style of the Malay *kampung* ('village') (Kurokawa, 1999). MSC iconography thus constructs the nation in architectural terms, imaginatively reunifying fractured geographies of global integration.

MSC also renders visible globally-oriented national conduct. Through high-profile representation in various media — on television, in advertisements and marketing material and at public exhibitions — MSC urban sights proffer modes of living and working for a global information economy. Nigel Thrift has suggested that the idealized Anglo-American subject of 'fast times' might be termed '*Homo Silicon Valleycus*' (Thrift, 2000: 688). Its Malaysian cousin is expected to evolve from the MSC national urban test-bed. *Orang korridor raya multimedia*, following Southern California's putative evolutionary lead, is to be innovative and creative. But s/he is also defined nationally by the absence of 'social ills', an umbrella term for various aspects of problematic national social conduct in Malaysia (Malaysia, 1996). *Lepak* (or 'loafing'), for example, is most frequently associated with youths wasting time or 'hanging around' in shopping malls. In response to this architecture of indolence, representations of MSC urbanity depict the channelling of youthful capacities into nationally-productive self-improvement and 'life-long learning'.[8]

6   Cyberjaya, in particular, is intended as a model for an eventual 12 planned intelligent cities (Multimedia Development Corporation, 1997b).
7   Scare marks here are intended to signal the constructed and contested nature of national identity. Shamsul (1996) usefully identifies numerous contesting 'nations-of-intent' in contemporary Malaysia. The dominant nation-of-intent associated with the ruling United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) upholds Malay special rights on account of that community's claim to territorial indigeneity. The 'national' cultural references found in MSC architecture reflect and imagine this Malay-centred conception of national identity.
8   In a series of advertisements for Putrajaya in the Malay and English language press in 1997, for example, a commitment to learning and acquisition of knowledge were central to conceptions of social health (Bunnell, forthcoming).

To the extent that authoritative ideals of national social and technological conduct are interiorized as part of the aspirations, actions and calculations of individual citizens, MSC cities play a governmental role in the (self)regulation of Malaysians throughout the national territory.

Yet technological nationalism is not reducible to the logics of a developmental state. Wendy Mee (2002) has argued that popular as well as state nationalistic enthusiasm for high-tech projects relates in part to specificities of the postcolonial Malaysian context. Colonialism instilled an association of technological mastery with broader conceptions of social progress. For the middle-class urban informants in Mee's study, this engendered a heightened anxiety at Malaysia's relative lack of scientific expertise. MSC thus responds to a stigma of national 'underdevelopment' promoting global recognition as well as connectivity. Popular support for MSC has certainly waned during the economic and political crises of 1997–8. Putrajaya, in particular, became symbolic of wasteful monumentalism (Sardar, 2000). Yet this should not be viewed as having diluted nationalist technological fervour. Rather, the MSC has become a symbolic urban space in and through which appropriate national constructions of the Information Age are contested.

Conclusion

This article has sought to problematize zero-sum understandings of changes in the relative roles of cities and nation-states in the information society and economy through a case study of the Multimedia Super Corridor in Malaysia. In part, this has entailed outlining the continued significance of national-scale processes to urban and regional studies. This should not be taken as a refutation of important work which 'denaturalizes' the ontological status of the nation-state (see, for example, Taylor 1996a; 1996b). As Peter Taylor has suggested, the globalization of economic and cultural life, in part facilitated by the development of ICTs, has been an important 'external influence' on social science allowing this demystification (1996a: 1923). While the nation-state is not a natural container for urban processes, however, the MSC case demonstrates the continued, if reworked, importance of the nation-state to high-tech urbanism in Malaysia. Analysis of this reworking here does not imply a return to state-centrism.

I have identified and sought to elucidate new interrelations between city and nation-state in Information Age Malaysia. Much of the analysis has centred upon the pervasive goal of producing 'intelligent' urban spaces for global connectivity. On the one hand, the Malaysian government, like governments elsewhere, appears convinced of the necessity of possessing a national urban 'node'. The federal government has given national priority to the construction of the MSC high-tech city-region. On the other hand, however, the sheer scale of such a project, spanning state boundaries, would arguably be impossible in the absence of federal government involvement. MSC both legitimates and necessitates a re-scaling of federal state power.

While the resultant dense concentration of national resources implies heightened (subnational) regional disparity, MSC urban development also provides powerful symbolic resources for the imaginative construction of national space. The communal and territorial commonalities on which nations are founded necessitate ongoing imagining and reconstruction (Anderson, 1991). MSC and its high-profile representation in the state-controlled Malaysian media is a technology of nationhood to bind heightened socio-spatial fractures. Peter Taylor has highlighted the tendency to imagine cities — both 'local communities and part of global economic network of flows' (1996a: 1923) — in strictly national terms as symptomatic of the 'nationalization' of social thought. Conversely, evidence from Siliconizing post-colonial Malaysia highlights the centrality of the MSC city-region to the naturalization of the nation-state. MSC urban development imagines Malaysia in architectural and socio-technological terms. Nationalization is, at

the very least, far more enduring than has often been presumed in 'Atlanticist' urban studies (Taylor, 1996b: 1985).

The intention here, however, has not been to define a generalized 'counter-Atlanticist', Asian or postcolonial Information Age city–nation-state relation. Rather, the broader theoretical import of this case study is precisely to emphasize the significance of specificity and context in urban and regional research. This runs against the grain or 'flow' of 'Information Age' conventionally conceptualized as it is in terms of a planetary-scale historical shift to a new 'techno-epoch' (Thrift, 1996: 1467). In this article, I have critically interrogated conceptions of the rise/demise of cities/nation-states as a generalized 'Information Age' condition. New interrelations between city and nation-state outlined here are derived from a specific urban-national case.

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