

Global Soul

Concept: Global Soul

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Description The "global soul" is a concept coined by Pico Iyer in his bestselling book *The Global Soul: Jet Lag, Shopping Malls, and the Search for Home* (2000). The phrase describes a new kind of cosmopolitan who feels a new relation to place, beyond nationalism or local identifications with a particular place but also beyond the old cosmopolitan ideal of being at home in the world. Instead, Iyer adapts Freud's idea of the unhomely or uncanny to make it a general characteristic of contemporary life for people such as himself, who prefer an unrooted existence to one tied to place. Taking his own life as an example, Iyer describes a jet-setting lifestyle characterized by travel, including commuting between countries on a regular basis. An Indian born in England who moved to the United States and at the time of the book commuted between California and Japan, Iyer makes his life emblematic of the new spirit of globalization, characterized by constant cross-border movement sped up and enabled by technology and the sense that the world is a single market.

While he recognizes global inequities, the overall effect of the book is to naturalize globalization, making it seem inevitable, and to celebrate the new freedoms that it affords to the autonomous individual, no longer tied to a particular place or community. Feeling most himself in impersonal spaces, Iyer celebrates global movement as a way to escape the tyrannies of history, national belonging, and other forms of identity. His point is that the concept of home needs to be reconfigured beyond local loyalties to recognize new global realities and to meet the new needs that they create. While the book celebrates the freedom and movement afforded to some by a new global paradigm in which individual choice replaces inheritance for individuals, it also seeks places where new multicultural identities can be formed and lived out in peace. Iyer thinks that he finds such a place in Toronto, which to him becomes close to the ideal global city. Iyer's fascination with globalization stresses its potential for imagining (through literature) and creating (in life) a form of existence that is urban, diasporic, civil, and peaceful.

With the concept of the global soul, Iyer provides a concentrated and accessible image for a dynamic described in a less celebratory way by Zygmunt Bauman (1998), who believes that globalizing processes are dividing the world into two types of people, either "tourists" (like Iyer's global soul) or "vagabonds" (the dispossessed), and more neutrally by Manuel Castels (1996), who suggests that elites (like Iyer) are cosmopolitan, while non-elites remain local. While the lifestyle that Iyer describes is clearly elitist, he describes it in such a way as to make it seem

a personal choice, which in theory is available to all. In this sense, the book promotes the ideology that Engin Isin (2002) identifies with what he calls "Cosmopolis," which constructs the individual as an active agent free to choose from a range of possibilities. The global city is the preferred space for exercising such a view of human subjectivity. The global soul is perhaps especially to be found within the new "non-places" (Augé 1996) of the global city: airport lounges and shopping malls. In this way, Iyer's focus on the global city as a privileged centre within a network of flows of capital and labour seems a culturally-centred counterpart to the work of Saskia Sassen (1991) on the economics of the global city.

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