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## “Cultural and Ethnic Diversity in Cities: Challenges and Chances”

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### Introduction

Since the end of the Second World War the world has seen the inexorable expansion of its urban population. Certain regions, such as W. Europe and North America were already highly urbanised but countries in S. Asia and the Pacific Rim, such as India and China, were still predominantly rural. However, the rate of urban expansion has accelerated so fast since 1945 that already half the world's population lives in urban areas, and the OECD has predicted that the 'proportion will grow, perhaps by 2.1% per year to 2030.<sup>1</sup> The major increases of the global urban population will take place outside the OECD countries – in S. Asia, Asia Pacific, Africa and Latin America – imposing massive strains on resources, including education, and the environment. Most of these increases will be generated by the rapid expansion of urban residents but, clearly, the influx of migrants will also play a significant part. The inexorable growth of urbanisation is intimately linked with globalisation, a process which is generally defined in terms of increasing connectivity between peoples and territories and closer economic, cultural and political ties between regions across the globe.<sup>2</sup> Cities play a prime role as magnets for these global flows of people, capital, goods and information and some have emerged as multi-million 'megacities'. As the OECD notes those 'over 10 million are legion –Tokyo, Seoul, Mexico City, Mumbai, Sao Paulo, New York, Lagos, etc.'<sup>3</sup>

### The European context: dynamic and declining areas

How does this shape the European region? To answer this question we need to look beyond the nation-state and national frontiers to consider the impact of the most dynamic area within the region – the European 'banana'. This extends in a north-western arc from the Po plain in northern Italy to the south-east of England. It includes major cities, such as Milan, Frankfurt, Brussels, Amsterdam and London, and their surrounding regions, as well as such highly urbanised areas as the *Ruhr-Gebiet*. Clearly, the European banana does not include some major cities as Paris, Madrid and Berlin and their surrounding regions but it does indicate the ways in which the European region contains a key dynamic area with considerable centrifugal power. The fortunes of urban centres – lying outside the European banana – are influenced by the banana's concentration of industrial and service sector resources and the power of its large, globalising cities. Some of these cities have relied on their position as national capitals. However, the growth of London and Brussels for example during the last fifty years has been driven crucially by transnational processes, demonstrating the limitations of nation-state models for understanding their changing role.

How does this concentration of resources within the European banana and city-regions such as Paris and Berlin affect other areas? The short answer is that they have to build links with these European

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.oecdobserver.org/news/fullstory.php/aid/2517/Better\\_building\\_blocks.html](http://www.oecdobserver.org/news/fullstory.php/aid/2517/Better_building_blocks.html)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

hotspots or face decline as firms and people move out, leaving behind declining urban centres with their associated socio-economic problems of high unemployment, social dislocation and diminishing resources. Politically, declining areas are prone to right-wing extremism, which is usually directed against immigrants and other scapegoats.

### **Transnational migration and urban cultural diversity**

The economic changes, which have occurred during the last sixty years, are a reflection of the global developments outlined at the beginning of this paper, especially rapid globalisation and urbanisation. Europe's hotspots have prospered through the growth of a global service sector, especially in business and financial services, advertising and media, the traditional professions (medicine, law and education), tourism and high technology. These post-industrial areas are typified by the growth of both highly paid, well educated and relatively secure elites and low paid, poorly educated and insecure workers, as well as an expanding white collar labour force in between. While many people employed in these dynamic areas are indigenes, substantial numbers come from migrant backgrounds and this is particularly obvious in the large, globalising cities such as London, Brussels, Amsterdam, Frankfurt and Milan.

It is important not to overstate the division between dynamic and declining areas and between the European banana and elsewhere. Globalising cities contain declining areas too or at least, localities which have experienced industrial decline, high rates of unemployment and poorly educated workers. However, the impact of deindustrialisation is more evident in Europe's declining urban centres and has particular consequences for cultural diversity, since they have also attracted migrant workers. Many came during the period of post-1945 industrial reconstruction but like the indigenes, they have been unable or unwilling to move as the industrial society built around wool and cotton manufacturing, steel foundries, engineering and light industry closed. As the first generation of post-Second World war migrants was followed by a second and a third generation, the impact of industrial decline has become increasingly visible over the last twenty years with disproportionately high rates of unemployment and low rates of educational achievement among the second and third generation. In declining areas with large numbers of Muslim residents these socio-economic deficits have been compounded by concerns about radicalisation of young people and Islamophobic hostility towards Muslims in general. A dangerous cocktail of class, racial and ethnic divisions in other words, which has been exacerbated by the decline of the welfare state.

### **Social mobility and the mobilisation of minority resources**

Social mobility and political engagement are two prime factors which have prevented some declining areas from generating the kinds of discontent and confrontation evident in other impoverished urban localities. Despite the sharp inequalities in globalising cities, for example, across the European banana, some of those from poor minority backgrounds have been able to move up the educational ladder and into white collar, middle class occupations. This upward mobility has usually involved a process of outward physical mobility into the more prosperous 'leafy suburbs'. This is a process which has long characterised mobility in American and British cities, for example, and which was first analysed sociologically by members of the renowned 'Chicago School' during the 1920s and 1930s. The danger of this outward and upward mobility is, of course, that deprived areas lose their talented residents and are sent into a downward spiral of 'ghettoisation', stigmatisation and repressive policing.<sup>4</sup>

Political intervention by particular nation-states through multicultural programme, the mobilisation of ethnic and racial minorities through identity politics and resources provided through European Union regional programmes have played a major role in encouraging the cultural dynamism of migrants and

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Loic Wacquant's comparison between American 'ghettos' and La Courneuve outside Paris in *Urban Outcasts* (2006).

their descendants. Their effect can be seen most clearly in the creative industry where the arts, media (radio and tv), advertising and technology have combined with the tourist sector to produce public multicultural events of varying size and complexity. A key feature of these events is their transnational character as they link with not only the migrants' countries of origin but also with diasporic communities around the world. Although these events have been criticised as superficial celebrations which conceal the deep socio-economic divisions of Europe's multicultural societies, they are related to more substantial educational programmes and the entry of talented young people from ethnic and racial minorities into the cultural mainstream. This process has also been underpinned by the engagement of established minorities in national and transnational political systems, as well as more repressive and intrusive action by the state and the weakening of welfare state provision.

## Challenges and opportunities: two case studies

### London

#### a) Its migrant history

I have provided so far a very general overview of the socio-economic changes taking place within the European region since 1945 and the important differences between European hotspots and areas in decline. However, given the many national and more local differences across Europe, it is crucial to place these changes into particular contexts. To help us understand the local context I will compare here two English cities – London and Bradford – and reflect at the end what the comparison can teach us about the challenges and opportunities associated with cultural diversity in urban centres.

London has a long history of immigration. It began as a Roman garrison town, it prospered through its trading links with the rest of the world, during the mediaeval period merchants and skilled workers settled from Continental Europe and from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century it received substantial numbers of refugees and migrant workers from France, Ireland and Czarist Russia. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century its role as a commercial centre was complemented by the expansion of middle class white collar occupations and an industrial working class, located particularly in the rapidly expanding 'East End'.

During the 1960s and 1970s the closure of its large port and the fading of its industries was offset by the expansion of its service sector. By the 1990s the city had become one of the most successful 'global cities', competing with Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Paris and Milan for the dominant share of markets associated with the finance and business sector, media services and the arts, advertising, fashion, tourism and information technology. This reinvention of the metropolis went hand in hand with its increasing multicultural character, which reflected four main waves of immigration – (a) settlers from the former empire mainly arriving between the 1950s and 1970s (India, Pakistan, Jamaica, Cyprus, Nigeria and Hong Kong, for example); (b) refugees and asylum seekers from areas not associated with empire, such as the Balkans, the Francophone countries in Africa, Iraq and Afghanistan, who arrived during the 1990s and early 2000s; (c) undocumented migrants from across the world, who have come in increasing numbers since the 1990s; and (d) those who came from former Communist countries after 2004. These waves of migrants had made London one of the most culturally diverse cities in Europe with over 300 languages being spoken across the metropolis.

The minorities created through these waves of migration have varied in terms of their ability to mobilise their cultural resources. Those from the former empire, widely known as black and minority ethnic (BME) groups, enjoy now the widest range of resources through a mixture of community mobilisation, private enterprise, political engagement with mainstream structures and transnational networks. Refugee and asylum seekers are in a far more vulnerable and liminal position, while undocumented migrants are clearly the most easily exploited.

### **b) Social mobility**

In terms of social mobility the most rapid rises have been evident among the BME groups, especially Hindu and Sikh settlers from India and East Africa. Other BME groups have been far less successful, however, such as Bangladeshi and Somali Muslims. There is little sign of upward mobility among refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented workers but the post-2004 migrants from central, eastern and Southeastern Europe present a more mixed picture. Many were predominantly young (between 20 and 35), came for a brief period, worked in low paid jobs and then returned. Their upward mobility has to be assessed in terms of the remittances and skills, which they have been able to transfer back to their countries of origin. They may also have encouraged on their return others to be aware of the wider European context and the cultural diversity of cities like London. However, it appears that at least half of the one million, who came after 2004, have stayed and are becoming like the BME communities as they enter the social and economic mainstream, while maintaining their distinctive cultural traditions.

### **c) Challenges and opportunities associated with urban cultural diversity**

In terms of opportunities, the issue of multicultural citizenship has mainly been pursued by the state through the mainstream educational system and its incorporation within the curriculum. This has involved the settled BME communities, in particular, through their engagement with the mainstream political and cultural institutions. Educational achievement has also encouraged BME citizens to contribute to the multicultural life of the metropolis but even in poor, deindustrialising localities groups, such as the Bangladeshi Muslims, have seen a degree of upward and outward mobility through the educational system and their community organisations and NGOs. They have also linked this engagement with transnational ties to their countries of origin.

At the same time a major challenge remains how to engage those among the third generation, especially in the poorest areas, who are not educationally successful and are unemployed. This issue has particularly concerned state agencies seeking to counter the radicalisation of young Muslims post-9/11 and developing intrusive forms of surveillance in the name of 'counter-terrorism'. It has also raised the issue of Islamophobia and the growing alienation of young white working people. In other words, the issue of multicultural citizenship does not just apply to minorities. Those who are least involved in multicultural citizenship as theory and practice are the far more vulnerable and insecure refugees and asylum seekers and the temporary migrants from former Communist countries. Those, who have remained, are beginning to follow the BME pattern through the education of their children in local schools and their involvement in the mainstream labour market.

It is noteworthy that despite sharp socio-economic differences across London and high concentrations of minorities in poor, inner city neighbourhoods, there has been little social unrest since the 1970s. When terrorist bombs went off on '7/7' (2005), there was little anti-Muslim hostility and the media helped to underline the fact that those killed reflected the cultural and social diversity of the global city. While London had seen 'race riots' in poor 'inner city' neighbourhoods with high levels of BME residents during 1958 and 1976 (Notting Hill), 1981 (Brixton), 1985 (Brixton and Tottenham) and 1995 (Brixton), there have been few signs of racialised conflicts since then. The disturbances involving the Notting Hill carnival in 2007 and the opposition to far right marches in Harrow during 2009 may be recent examples. These and other 'riots' often involved confrontation between citizens and the police around non-racial issues such as the disturbances over council tax impositions in 2001, football matches during 2008 and 2009 and the G20 meeting in 2009. The low level of racialised conflict over the last fifteen years can be explained not just in economic terms, i.e. the general prosperity which London has enjoyed, but also in the context of the political and cultural factors outlined above.

## Bradford

The city has a much shorter history. It was a rural backwater before the industrial revolution but it rapidly expanded during the 19<sup>th</sup> century on the back of wool manufacturing. Migrants from Germany in particular contributed to its economic success. After the Second World War workers also arrived from the Caribbean and Pakistan and the latter played a key role in helping to keep the factories going through long night shifts. Hindus and Sikhs from India also arrived at the same time, moving up into Bradford's middle class far more quickly and in greater numbers than their Pakistani Muslim counterparts – a process which was influenced by the 1970s recession and the eventual collapse of the wool industry. During the last thirty years some among the later waves of immigration found their way to Bradford such as Vietnamese refugees, undocumented workers and Polish migrants but once again the settled BME groups dominated access to multicultural programmes and political mobilisation around cultural issues.

Contemporary Bradford has suffered even more than poor 'inner city' neighbourhoods including London from economic decline.

The ONS Regional Trends report, published in June 2009, showed that most of Bradford suffers from the highest levels of deprivation in the country. Infant mortality stands at double the national average, and life expectancy is considerably lower than in other parts of the district. Bradford has one of the highest unemployment rates in England, with the rate of inactivity amongst Minority Ethnic groups standing at almost 60% (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bradford>).

These socio-economic factors reflect the city's marginal position in relation to Europe's blue banana which extended only up to London and its surrounding region. It also reflects the weaker involvement by BME groups in the political and cultural mainstream. Identity politics has been expressed far more dramatically through Islamic than secular issues – for example, the notorious burning of Salman Rushdie's book, *The Satanic Verses* in 1989 and subsequent opposition to the government's support for American global strategy and involvement in the Gulf and Afghanistan.

Social tensions between BME groups, white working class residents and police across Bradford also simmered in other poor, inner city localities across the deindustrialised areas of England's Midlands and North. In 2001, there were riots in Bradford and other northern towns, in the Midlands city of Birmingham in 2005 and 2009. Inquests into the root causes of the 2001 riots emphasised the ways in which racial and ethnic segregation undermined community cohesion in poor, working class neighbourhoods. Attempts to promote greater community cohesion were also supported by state campaigns designed to combat the radicalisation of young Muslims in these localities through a combination of 'hearts and minds' campaign and police anti-terrorism measures.

## Conclusion: Challenges and Opportunities

This paper has tried to answer the question about the challenges and opportunities raised by the ethnic and cultural diversity of Europe's cities by bringing together both socio-economic structural forces and political and cultural agency. Although the differences between dynamic and declining areas across Europe are shaped by the dynamic blue banana which extends across the western part of the continent, dynamism and decline is evident among cities within that banana. However, it is suggested that the lower levels of civil unrest in London – a highly multicultural, global city - since the mid-1990s was partly due to the long boom it enjoyed between 1995 and 2008. However, political and cultural factors also played a crucial role and involved minority groups, primarily the settled BME communities, as well as the state through its multicultural policies and practices.

In terms of multicultural citizenship the engagement between minorities and the state encouraged the process of social inclusion and community cohesion. Prosperity did not mean the lessening of socio-economic inequalities across London – if anything the reverse. However, educational engagement ensured that some, at least, among the BMEs living in the poorest areas of the metropolis were able to move up and out. At the same time other migrants – asylum seekers, refugee and those arriving recently from the former Communist bloc – were far less integrated within the mainstream, although there were signs that Polish and other recent arrivals were moving towards the BME model of settling and engaging, where they could draw on racial, ethnic and occupational stereotypes (hard working, white, Christian, European) to emphasise what they shared with the national majority.

If London presented a fairly optimistic picture of how these challenges and opportunities had worked out, Bradford and similar northern, deindustrialised urban centres provided a gloomier prospect. However, despite official reports on the high levels of segregation between white working class residents and BMEs and the danger of a radicalised Muslim youth, the political and cultural energy of BME groups must not be ignored. Furthermore, as was evident in London, these minorities looked beyond Britain to the wider world through their transnational networks and their involvement in political and cultural developments around the world, which encouraged them to challenge British state policies and practices.

How does the British example relate to Europe in general? Its history of multicultural citizenship is clearly different from that experienced in other nations – France provides an obvious contrast. There has been a widespread reaction against multiculturalism as state policy and practice where resources have been allocated according to communities on the basis of ethnic or racial identity. In former Communist bloc countries increasing cultural diversity has met with considerable opposition at both political and everyday levels. Given the national and transnational histories outlined in this paper, it will take a long time to develop a European model of multicultural citizenship. Any such model would have to acknowledge the complexities and differences shaped by the socio-economic, political and cultural developments outlined in the paper. The obvious lesson is that no one size fits all.