

Migrants and Multicultural Cities: Problem or Possibility? UN-HABITAT Report celebrates multiculturalism

They come from Korea with college degrees, but work as greengrocers, or manicurists in New York. They come from China with expertise in manufacturing, but work in Vancouver as machinists or repairmen. They come from Vietnam but are processing fish in Cambodia. They come from Pakistan but are greengrocers in Rotterdam. They come from Rotterdam but are running flower-growing businesses in Nairobi. They flow through refugee camps, through airport passport controls, through porous borders risking life and limb. They come in search of a better life with better opportunities. They come; but what they find is often not what they expected.

According to the new UN-HABITAT Report: *The State of the World's Cities, 2004*, globalization has opened new markets around the world and cities are attracting more foreign people than ever before. According to the most recent data, the total number of international migrants in the world is approximately 175 million, which includes refugees but does not include undocumented migrants, who escape official accounting.

This burgeoning multiculturalism is enhancing the fabric of societies around the world, bringing colour and vibrancy to every city it touches. While there is still resistance to the integration of immigrants into the world's global cities, the UN-HABITAT Report nevertheless maintains that the enrichment and expansion of ideas and enhanced artistic appreciation that accompanies multiculturalism is an urban phenomenon not only to be accepted, but to be celebrated. Perhaps more importantly, multiculturalism needs to be supported by local governments, to combat xenophobic ideologies and anti-immigration policies. Cities cannot continue to take whatever a new-comer can give, and in return, offer little more than a room in a slum with a dim view of the future.

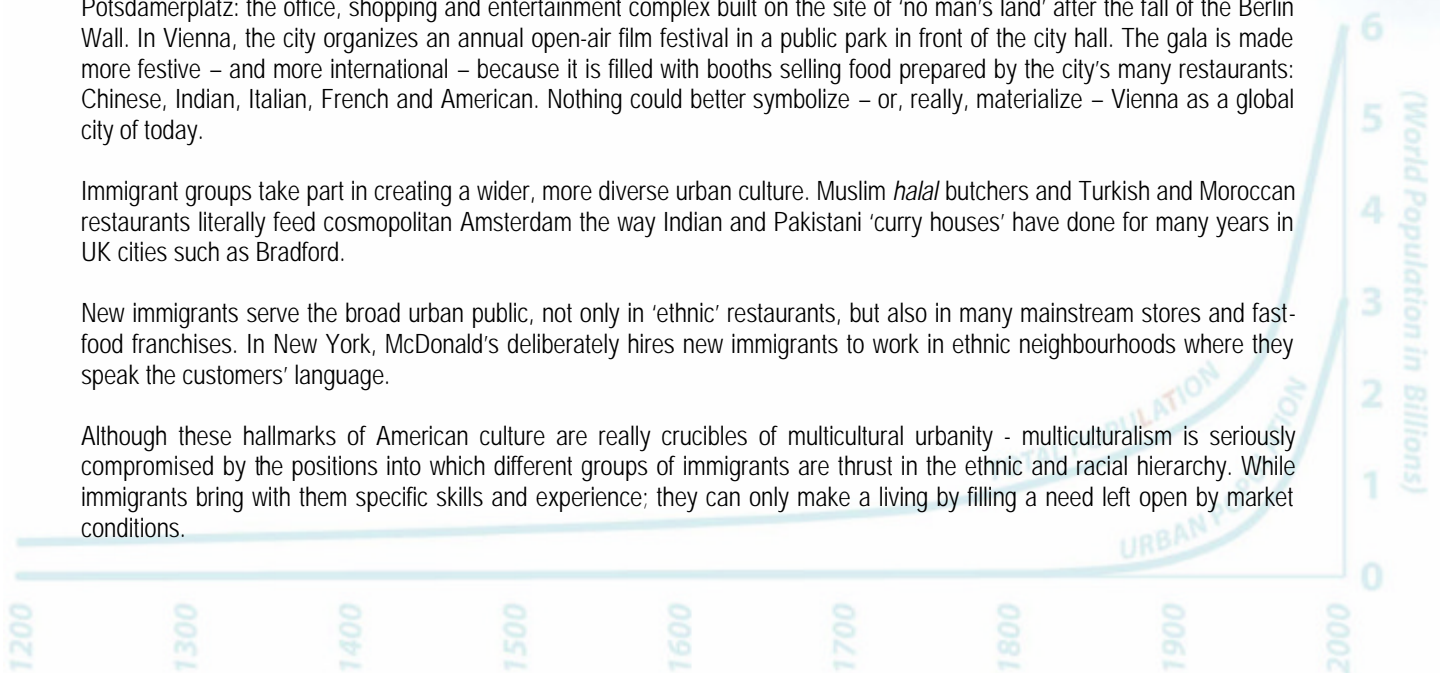
Vibrant Hues of Diversity

Integration no longer means blending in. Immigrants bring with them new ideas and strive to turn them into products of cultural consumption. This happens everywhere immigrants go. And cities exploit these products and the spaces in which they are sold, to promote their image as global metropolises. Berlin recently did this with the spectacular development of Potsdamerplatz: the office, shopping and entertainment complex built on the site of 'no man's land' after the fall of the Berlin Wall. In Vienna, the city organizes an annual open-air film festival in a public park in front of the city hall. The gala is made more festive – and more international – because it is filled with booths selling food prepared by the city's many restaurants: Chinese, Indian, Italian, French and American. Nothing could better symbolize – or, really, materialize – Vienna as a global city of today.

Immigrant groups take part in creating a wider, more diverse urban culture. Muslim *halal* butchers and Turkish and Moroccan restaurants literally feed cosmopolitan Amsterdam the way Indian and Pakistani 'curry houses' have done for many years in UK cities such as Bradford.

New immigrants serve the broad urban public, not only in 'ethnic' restaurants, but also in many mainstream stores and fast-food franchises. In New York, McDonald's deliberately hires new immigrants to work in ethnic neighbourhoods where they speak the customers' language.

Although these hallmarks of American culture are really crucibles of multicultural urbanity - multiculturalism is seriously compromised by the positions into which different groups of immigrants are thrust in the ethnic and racial hierarchy. While immigrants bring with them specific skills and experience; they can only make a living by filling a need left open by market conditions.



Searching for Acceptance

International migration has captured the attention both of policy-makers and the public. Globalization has put the spotlight on immigrants and refugees, making them unwitting participants in social dramas too often captured on the nightly news, as with the repetitive and disturbing video clips of asylum seekers from the former Sangatte Immigration Detention Centre in France and the Woomera Detention Centre in central Australia. Think of the boatloads of Indonesians or Cubans being repelled from the borders they have nearly died to reach. The European Union has taken strident measures to battle what has been pejoratively labelled "benefit shopping," in which, according to this view, immigrants try to gain entrance to the countries that offer them the best opportunities and services.

This vast international flow of people undoubtedly affects both states of origin and host states in their economic activities, especially in cities, and with respect to the very fabric of their societies. Migrants are more than simply workers in their host state: they interact with local populations and contribute in many ways to the 'flavour' of the communities in which they live. And the financial remittances made by migrants to their countries of origin are second only to oil in terms of international monetary flows.

Manifestations of Change

It is naïve to think that migrants can assimilate into a country without generating some change. You add a colour, the palette is different. For instance, as a result of migration from Arab countries, Islamic communities (mainly located in cities) are spreading in many European countries, making Islam now the second most significant religion in Europe: Germany and France have more than 3 million Islamic inhabitants each, the UK more than 2 million, and significant communities are reported in Spain, Italy and The Netherlands.

But the most significant aspect of this transformation is demographic. New York City now receives an estimated 200,000 immigrants each year. According to the Report, the city's population is becoming increasingly Hispanic and South Asian, with large numbers of immigrants from India, Pakistan and, more recently, Bangladesh. There are also major flows of immigrants coming to New York from the Dominican Republic and China. However, an estimated 300,000 people are leaving the city for other destinations within the country.

Unwelcoming Arms?

Some aspects of metropolitan diversity that contribute to the economic and cultural vitality of cities can also undermine social cohesion, economic productivity and eventually, social mobility and opportunity. Differences can easily become barriers, as ethnic enclaves become slums and slums become more visible.

Most migrants leave inhospitable situations only to find themselves facing new ones wherever they settle. They often end up living in poor urban areas, with few basic services, unhealthy living conditions, insecure tenure, overcrowding and social violence. Often slums form around an ethnic immigrant core. Harlem (in New York City) is the best known example, with a very high majority of black immigrants (strictly not international migrants, but from the southern states) or Puerto Ricans. Similar situations are reported in the main French cities with Algerian *banlieues*, or in the Brixton area, in London.

But spatial segregation is growing even in the developing countries as well: in Dharavi, in Mumbai, which is considered the world's largest slum, Tamil is spoken as the main language; in Bangkok, Burmese migrants primarily live in the slum of Klong Toey; many Palestinians still live in very poor conditions in the refugee camps of Amman; Hillbrow, a squatter settlement of Johannesburg, has a population largely consisting of Nigerian and French-speaking African immigrants; the people living in the informal settlements (*asentamientos nuevos*) of San José de Costa Rica generally come from Nicaragua.

Xenophobia and Segregation

Although most cities have been officially multicultural since the current era of transnational migration began during the 1980s, real ethnic integration has never been fully embraced. Despite their cosmopolitan façade, city dwellers often fear losing their historic cultural identity. They don't want strangers moving in, settling down and establishing roots. Type the word multiculturalism into Google. See what you get.

This xenophobia is hardly a new theme in urban culture. During the late 1800s, when Chinese sailors and workers came to New York and Vancouver, both cities demonized certain aspects of Chinese culture and restricted Chinese settlement to 'Chinatowns'. Urban residents often close ranks against the 'truant proximity' of strangers, especially those with different ethnic backgrounds. Thus, the very cultural diversity that contributes so much to the economic and cultural vitality of cities can also undermine social cohesion, economic productivity and, eventually, social mobility and opportunity.

While the fear and polarization associated with immigration is not new, globalization has intensified this dynamic by vastly extending the distances people travel and the diversity of cultural dissimilarities that are transplanted to new locations. And if one of the great strengths of cities is their ability to embrace the potential economic contributions of new arrivals, one of their great weaknesses is being slow to absorb them into the social and political fabric of everyday life. In fact, notes the UN-HABITAT Report, despite an air of tolerance and real social diversity, cities have always been flashpoints of ethnic hostility.

Overcoming Indifference

Addressing the growing presence of international migrants, and related issues of slums and poverty, requires a capacity for managing multiculturalism and diversity. In fact, it is not enough to address only the migrants' side; but also that of the recipients' in order to avoid intolerance. Public awareness campaigns on the more inflammatory issues of multiculturalism, explaining the social costs and opportunities of integration, but also the underlying rights and duties of both migrants and hosting communities, can be useful in advancing cultural acceptance.

To plan for pluralistic cities, rather than for some hypothetical uniform public interest, and to acknowledge and support the full diversity of *all* population groups, governments must develop a new, much more enlightened multicultural literacy. But this management of migration, says the report, should not be unilateral. It should include international, national and local bodies, all of which need to improve coordination and communication.

The Report cites the example of Stuttgart, where 24 per cent of the 565,000 inhabitants are foreigners and priority is given to inclusive policies. The participation of migrants in municipal affairs has a long tradition, and since 1983, the Aliens Committee of the Municipal Council (an institutional body of the Municipality of Stuttgart representing aliens) has put forth important proposals to promote understanding between various groups within the population. Another example of inclusive policy-making by city government is Birmingham, where, since 1990, foreign communities have relied on the Standing Consultative Forum, which enables them to be consulted and engaged as recognized city actors by the municipality.

Getting Beyond Mousaka and Chow Mien

Immigrants have been both welcomed and scorned in cities for centuries. As the pace of international immigration shows no sign of abating, emphasis must be placed on the acceptance of new cultures. By understanding the historical implications of immigration, by emphasising the positive elements of multiculturalism while rejecting intolerance, the cycle of poverty that seems to condemn newcomers to slums with no hope of upward mobility may be mitigated.

The positives of embracing multiculturalism are many – and are not limited to the introduction of souvlaki or chow mien. Embracing multiculturalism means that an immigrant and his or her culture become real and vivid in the eyes of the people with whom they hope to integrate. It means opening dialogues so that, having chatted over "a cuppa" with some recently immigrated Punjabis, one understands a little better the struggles of Indian people. From a Sudanese family one divines some small portion of the pain that some of their countrymen suffer during religious conflict and persecution.

But either way, accepted or not, the flow will not ebb. People will not stop seeking advancement in whatever countries can provide it. And issues of difference will not be solved by trying to stem the tide of humanity that is already on the move.

Some Extra Bullets

? New York's Arab-American immigrants of a century ago came as 'sojourners', Moustafa Bayoumi writes of Arab-Americans who came to New York as immigrants more than 100 years before 11 September 2001, sold foods and rugs imported from the Middle East, and fanned out across the US as pack peddlers. 'After establishing ourselves in New York, we launched out, men and women both, around the country... From the beginning, then, our lives here have been about being on the move.'

- ? Funkeiros in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: In Rio, in 1992, the mass arrest of young people who caused a disturbance on the beach resulted in a massive condemnation of funkeiros, youths from the northern and western slums who crowd into the city's dance clubs on weekends to enjoy funk music. They were labelled as poor, black and unruly - their music a symbol of resistance to authority. Funk, like rap or any other modern music, can, indeed, be a sign of resistance; but in Rio, it is a specific rejection of the dominant urban culture, symbolized by the prominence of the samba in the image construction of carnival for tourists and controlled by the non-black middle class of the southern zone of the city. Urban cultures are primarily cultures of proximity and fusion. But even in multicultural Brazil, they are also sites for fighting proxy wars of power and exclusion.

- ? Africans and Chinese in Dublin, Ireland: So many Africans have arrived since the 1990s that Moore Street, in Dublin, Ireland, is now called 'Little Africa' - although the street is sacred to the history of Irish independence because nationalist insurgents surrendered to the British army in a house there. The African grocery stores that are common on Moore Street are strange to Irish people because they look and smell different from the usual domestic shops. Their backrooms are set up for socializing rather than for commerce - they offer a place where Africans, in Dublin, can come together. But Little Africa is also the home of new Chinese immigrants - so many, that people estimate half of Ireland's Chinese population lives on Dublin's Northside. Like Spanish in Miami, Chinese has replaced Irish as the second language of the city.

- ? In Miami, struggles emerged over the use of Spanish. The practical necessity of establishing an official policy of 'bilingualism' aroused considerable political opposition, and only the entry of Latin American immigrants, especially Cubans, into business leadership and political office legitimized a true multicultural approach. But multiculturalism has had a good effect on the city. The Latinization of Miami's culture has drawn from, and responded to, a continuous flow of capital from Latin America. The city, and its surrounding metropolitan area, has become the Latin American cultural capital, with corporate headquarters and avant garde studios creating cutting-edge fashions, music and art, and new media programmes.

This is a UN-HABITAT Feature/Backgrounder, please feel free to publish or quote from this article provided UN-HABITAT Features is given credit. Suitable photographs are available on our website. For further information, please contact: Mr. Sharad Shankardass, Spokesperson, Ms. Zahra Hassan, Press & Media Liaison, Press & Media Relations Unit, Tel: 254 20 623153/623151/623136, Fax: 254 20 624060, E mail: habitat.press@unhabitat.org, Website: www.unhabitat.org

TABLE 4.1 Total population, international migrants, net migration and refugees: number and distribution, 2000

	Total population		International migrants			Refugees		Net migration (average annual) 1995–2000	
	Number (000)	Distribution (%)	Number (000)	Rate (%)	Distribution (%)	Number (000)	Distribution (%)	Number (000)	Rate per 1000
World	6,056,715	100.00	174,781	2.9	100.00	15,868	100.00		
Developing economies	4,791,393	79.11	64,643	1.3	36.99	12,469	78.58	–2001	–0.4
Asia and the Pacific	3,307,773	54.61	23,442	0.7	13.41	4786	30.16	–1218	–0.4
Latin America and the Caribbean	518,809	8.57	5944	1.1	3.40	38	0.24	–494	–1.0
Middle East and Northern Africa	345,334	5.70	20,926	6.1	11.97	4624	29.14	–105	–0.3
Sub-Saharan Africa	619,477	10.23	14,331	2.3	8.20	3021	19.04	–184	–0.3
Economies in transition	411,909	6.80	33,391	8.1	19.10	986	6.21	–186	–0.5
Central and Eastern Europe	338,021	5.58	27,372	8.1	15.66	598	3.77	130	0.4
Central and Western Asia	73,888	1.22	6019	8.1	3.44	388	2.44	–315	–4.3
Advanced economies	853,408	14.09	76,747	9.0	43.91	2414	15.21	2186	2.6
Asia and the Pacific	150,012	2.48	7175	4.8	4.11	66	0.42	159	1.1
Northern America	314,113	5.19	40,844	13.0	23.37	635	4.00	1394	4.6
Western Europe	389,283	6.43	28,728	7.4	16.44	1712	10.79	633	1.6

Source: United Nations Population Division, 2002a.

TABLE 4.2 Countries with highest remittances received, 2001

Country	Total remittances (\$ million)	GDP (\$ million)	Total population	Total remittances as percentage of GDP	Total remittances per capita
Lesotho	209.0	796.7	1,852,808	26.2	112.80
Vanuatu	53.3	212.8	192,910	25.0	276.14
Jordan	2011.0	8829.1	5,153,378	22.8	360.23
Bosnia and Herzegovina	860.1	4769.1	3,922,205	18.0	219.29
Albania	699.0	4113.7	3,510,494	17.0	189.12
Nicaragua	335.7	2067.8	4,918,393	16.2	68.25
Yemen	1436.9	9177.2	17,479,206	15.7	82.21
Republic of Moldova	223.1	1479.4	4,431,570	15.1	50.34
El Salvador	1925.2	13,738.9	5,237,982	14.0	308.84
Jamaica	1058.7	7784.1	2,665,636	13.6	397.17
Dominican Republic	1982.0	21,211.0	8,475,396	9.3	233.85
Philippines	6366.0	71,437.7	81,369,751	8.9	78.24
Uganda	483.0	5675.3	24,170,422	8.5	19.98
Honduras	541.0	6385.8	6,357,941	8.5	85.09
Ecuador	1420.0	17,982.4	13,183,978	7.9	107.71

Source: IMF, 2003.