

## Divided city: the crisis of London

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28 October 2004

*The contemporary city, London especially, was supposed to be the model for the workable, cosmopolitan multicultural future. But neo-liberal globalisation and its disastrous consequences are reproducing in the city the growing inequalities of the world, argues the foremost analyst of multicultural.*

In an article written in 2000 I posed what I called 'the Multicultural question'. It runs something like this: What are the chances that we can construct in our cities shared, diverse, just, and egalitarian forms of common life, guaranteeing the full rights of democratic citizenship and participation to all on the basis of equality, whilst respecting the differences which inevitably come about when peoples of different religions, cultures, histories, languages, and traditions are obliged to live together in the same shared space?

At the time, despite the many evident tensions of modern city life, it was plausible to believe that the contemporary metropolitan city – cities like my own home, London – might be able to offer the model of a workable form of ethnic inter-culture, predicated on a practical cosmopolitanism. The outlook now, four years and a 'war on terror' later, is much less optimistic. The promise of the city, which David Theo Goldberg argues for in his contribution to this debate, is increasingly looking a broken one, and it is time to name the forces which are articulated together in a process which is sub-dividing shared space into discrete, differentiated warring enclaves, before it is

too late. My argument, though it applies to many cities across across the world, will be focussed largely on the city I know best, London.

### [A tale of many cities](#)

Cities are the product of their times. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the great English cities were motors of industrial production and centres of world trade, commerce, and finance. Some – Bristol, Liverpool, London – were also integrated into the networks of imperial power and colonial trade: monuments to the imperial life of the nation. Later, cities became the sites for a modernist aesthetics of corporate power, a development more evident in New York's skyscraper skyline and elsewhere in the US than in Europe, as the axis of world power shifted westwards. Western cities are no longer like this.

The social and spatial configurations of London and other metropolitan cities have been significantly re-shaped in recent years by three forces above all – post-industrialisation, globalization and migration. The first is the uneven transition from an industrial to a post-industrial economy. Cities today not only embody this

shift towards the service and information economy, but vividly represent the dislocations which have inevitably accompanied this process.

The second is globalization. Of course, a kind of globalization has been in progress since Europe broke out of its confines towards the end of the fifteenth century, and began to construct the beginnings of a world market and to explore, conquer, subdue by trade and naval power, and ultimately to colonize much of the rest of the globe. But the globalization I have in mind here is that represented by the new forms of the 'global' economy, based on the multi-national capitalist corporation and augmented financial flows, which began to emerge in the mid-1970s.

The third factor is migration, which is a consequence of the other two. What concerns me especially is how the ethnic, social, and cultural diversity that results necessarily from migration is changing the face of the modern urban landscape and reconfiguring the social divisions and conflicts characteristic of so-called 'global' cities.

These issues have to be addressed now in terms of what cities are becoming. Cities have always been divided. They are divided by class and wealth, by rights to and over property, by occupation and use, by life-style and culture, by race and nationality, ethnicity and religion, and by gender and sexuality. The template of these social divisions can be read into the differentiated zones of the city's cartography. The boundaries between these spaces, however, have never been absolute. Enclaves merge and overlap at their invisible borders, shift and change across time. The various zones, however distinctive to those who know how to 'read' them, are never uniform in look or homogeneous in social composition. Differences edge, slide, and blur into one another. The city, as Walter Benjamin reminds us, is 'porous'.

Intangible as these boundaries often are and maintained as they are by complex cultural and social codes, they tend nevertheless to divide the city into distinct clusters. On the other hand, cities also bring elements together and establish relations of interchange and exchange. They function as spatial magnets for different, converging streams of human activity. This is the basis of their often unplanned 'cosmopolitanism'. The points of convergence, as well as the routes and passages through and across them, are as significant as the spatially defined and socially maintained differences. Cities both divide and connect.

### The new multicultural city

The question is *how* the cartography of the contemporary city is being re-configured under the impact of globalization and migration. In significant ways, the old, hierarchical ordering of urban space seems to have disappeared for good. As Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson put it, in their essay 'City Economies': "Global cities are a result of transactions that fragment space, such that we can no longer talk about global cities as whole cities – instead, what we have [are] bits of cities that are highly globalized – and bits juxtaposed that are completely cut out [from the globalizing process]."

The major forces driving these changes are the result of the new forms of globalization. They reflect the new division of labour, a result of the general decline of manufacturing in the developed west and its transnationalization to other, less developed parts of the globe, with which corporate and financial centres in the west can remain connected through 'space-time condensations' which the new technologies of finance and communication make possible.

These forces for change are associated with the dominance of the trans-national corporation, the renewed power of finance capital, the pace of global investment flows, currency switching, and the spread of a global consumer culture and media. These are the engines of the now hegemonic deregulating, free-market, privatising, neo-liberal economic regime known in another context as 'the Washington Consensus' (to which New Labour in the UK is a paid-up, loyal, junior signatory). These forces constitute and define the true, substantial meaning and content of that deceptive term 'the global' (which implies a parity it is designed not to deliver).

This is now the governing world system, rooted economically in the free play of deregulated market forces, global capitalist penetration, the privatization of public goods, the monopoly of scarce or valuable resources, the dismantling of welfare and health programmes, and the lure of 'free trade' between profoundly unequal partners on a fundamentally skewed playing field.

All this has severe consequences for global / multi-cultural cities, which are linked to this new world-system of power through corporate global economic networks, rather than in their earlier function as the city bases of giant industrial firms, as centres of imperial investment, national greatness, and colonial

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rule. Their characteristic new skyline is now increasingly dominated by the corporate headquarters of globally-dispersed transnational companies, surrounded by their ancillary and supportive out-sourced dependencies in financial services, marketing, banking, investment, advertising, design, and information technologies. The urban architecture which mirrors this shift is most paradigmatically to be found in London's Canary Wharf: corporate 'towers' of glass and steel, functionally-exposed transparent cubes or architect-inspired cucumber shaped pods now dominating financial centres and urban skylines around the globe.

Meanwhile, the promises designed to make the poor complicit with their global fate – rising living standards, a more equal distribution of goods and life chances, an opportunity to compete on equal terms with the developed world, a fairer share of the world's wealth – have comprehensively failed to be delivered.

The rapidly growing disparities between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots', which is glaringly obvious at the global level (The UN-Habitat Report recently reported that the global urban population increased by 36% in the 1990s and that there are 550 million urban slum dwellers in Asia, 187 million in Africa, and 128 million in Latin America and the Caribbean), are being reproduced within the richest societies of the developed world. Following the long period of levelling incomes and wealth after World War Two – the era of re-distributive welfare states – these inequalities rose exponentially after 1980. The gap between rich and poor in the UK is wider now than when New Labour took power in 1997.

Reliance on market forces as the sole driver of global economic and social development has brought in its train insuperable problems: ecological and environmental disaster, the disruption of the fragile balance of indigenous economies, the destruction of peasant farming and of subsistence agriculture, and the collapse of world commodity prices. The result has been rapid and unsustainable urbanisation and – coupled with collapsing post-colonial state regimes, civil unrest, and the militarization of ethnic conflict – the phenomenon of mass migration. These global disasters and the mass migrations they trigger are the invisible forces behind the only too visible crisis of the metropolitan city.

In earlier phases, the problems of religious, social, and cultural difference were largely kept at a safe distance from the metropolitan homelands of imperial systems. Today, the new kinds of differences whose deep, underlying causes we have sketched, intrude directly into the heart of the western metropolitan city, disturb,

challenge and subvert the social and political space of its urban centres, disrupt its long-settled class equilibrium, and subvert its relatively homogenous cultural character. They project the vexed issue of global poverty, social and religious pluralism, and cultural difference into the largely settled mono-cultural spaces of the Western metropolis.

### New kinds of space

The global city has been significantly transformed by these forces. Manufacturing in Britain is now in general decline, and large-scale industrial production no longer dominates city centres, governs their economies or defines the character and tempo of their social life. These are now often urban areas of extensive social deprivation and economic dislocation, endemic unemployment, and environmental degradation as well as sites of a widespread social despair leading to the defensive mobilization of difference – and thus of ethnic tension, intra-class hostility, racial conflict, social alienation, and civil unrest.

We can identify two types of London neighbourhood as typical of these degraded urban spaces: The first are run down inner urban areas in which the conflict is between an old white working class lamenting the loss of a golden and ethnically homogenous past and non-white immigrants claiming a right of place, often against one another. The second type consists of 'white flight' suburbs and estates dominated by an aspirant working class or inward-looking middle class repelled by what it sees as the replacement of a homely white nation by another land of 'foreign' people and cultures. [Quote from Ash Amin, *Ethnicity and the Multi-Cultural City*]

Both types of neighbourhood can be found in London. In between, there are many mixed neighbourhoods which seem relatively settled after years of patient negotiation, but which are nevertheless, in a subterranean and invisible way, 'riddled with prejudice and conflict between their varied ethnic groups' (Amin).

### The 'flashocracy', the creatives and the rest

No longer 'the workshops of the world', English cities have become the service centres, the financial and speculative investment engines and consumer retail hubs, of the global economy. The suited executives – those well-groomed, toned, and limousined corporate 'heroes' whose well-fleshed faces adorn the business pages of the quality newspapers and magazines – are either a new global entrepreneurial class or, alternatively, the remnants of an old stuffy one who

have undergone a make-over. They are equally 'at home' in New York, Los Angeles, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur or Tokyo as they are in London, or their country homes in Hampshire. Individually, their fortunes rise and fall but, as a class, they are installed as the permanent executive officers of the new global capitalism.

Many wealthier executives now live well outside the city or in its increasingly gated enclaves and pied-à-terres. They are 'cosmopolitan' in orientation. They travel constantly for work and pleasure. They remain in touch, through the circuits of instant communication, with mobile transnational elites elsewhere as they glide in comfort and style across the globe. They are 'at home' anywhere, and the more so since 'elsewhere' is increasingly like 'here', only more so. They are focussed on profit margins and share values, on restructuring core-businesses and absorbing other companies.

They are remorselessly attuned – and without a shadow of embarrassment – to salary settlements unrelated to any calculable performance achievements, guaranteeing the steady supply of staggering amounts of money for skiing holidays and private school fees. Their wives or servants are fully occupied ferrying the children in SUVs to select and selective private schools, those launch-pads to success. Fitzjohns Avenue in north-west London, where there must be twelve or fifteen private primary schools and nurseries within a half-mile stretch of traffic-crammed road, is notorious with taxi drivers. The 'school run' brings an army of jeeps, with their ranch-like bumpers, some parked in driveways, others perched on the bank-sides, others still blithely reversing into on-coming traffic.

This new global executive class are 'flash, fast, fun, feckless, and fantastically frivolous', as the editor of *Tatler*, Geordie Greig – who should know – describes the 'flashocracy'. Rapidly trading tweed for 'bling' (a multiculturalism of consumption only), they are experts in visualising for the rest new forms of urban style and status: not 'status' as an alternative to 'class', as in the old Marx vs. Weber dialogue, but status as the cultural signifier of new riches, as the materialization of social success. They are living their imprint on the global city.

The 'creatives' who service this corporate and celebrity world are very different in background and in attitudes to the older professional and managerial middle-

classes. They are more individualistic, consumer-oriented, culturally-savvy, life-style focussed, entrepreneurial, and hedonistic. More often they are on fast-track mobility or aspirational escalators from lower in the social order. Here, rather than higher up the urban pecking-order, the leading edge of the rising Asian and Afro-Caribbean new middle classes are beginning to carve out an elegant niche. The places they aspire to live in, the life-styles they covet, and the kinds of leisure pursuits and entertainment they invest in are very different to older, more puritan tastes.

They are the advance party of the new urban living – the agents of the 'gentrification' of older working-class residential areas and of industrial small-manufacturing dockland or storage areas of the city, whose abandoned warehouses, refashioned into loft-spaces and city-centre 'pads', they are rapidly colonising. Good food, art galleries, smart cafes, and health-clubs are the necessary accompaniments to this life-style. These are the pioneers of an intense, designer-shaped, global consumerism, the cultural happy few exquisitely attuned to every minor shift in global postmodern taste and design.

At the other end of the scale are the poor areas which surround this vibrant 'global' centre. As city centres are increasingly colonized for urban night-life and clubbing, their older inhabitants are pushed towards the 'outer ring'. In London, this means Harlesden, Cricklewood, Wembley, Southall, Tottenham, Haringey, and Tower Hamlets: *White Teeth* or *Brick Lane* territory. These are areas of mixed residency in which the new multi-culturalism is being stretched to breaking point in a myriad everyday encounters. Here the better housing is highly sought after by professionals harried by ferociously rising house prices and land values. But these are typically areas of high and multiple disadvantage, with poor schools, forbidding estates, run-down or boarded-up high streets, high crime and drug rates, and drab terraces. They are often dilapidated, poorly serviced, and grim in terms of the conditions of life they offer. Increasingly, these are the colonised areas of immigrant settlement, whether by the first (Afro-Caribbean), second (Asian sub-continent: Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi), third (West African, Turkish, and Greek Cypriot), fourth (North African: Somali, Sudanese, Moroccan, Algerian, etc.), fifth (Bosnian, Albanian, and Kosovan), sixth (Afghan, Iraqi, and Middle Eastern), or seventh (post-Soviet East European) migrant waves.

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In these areas, white residents – who feel threatened by change, abandoned by modernising and multi-cultural political agendas, and neglected because they lack the entrepreneurial and ‘creative’ skills which the new service economy demands – meet the ‘ethnic minority communities’, whether in their young posse, trapped–and–deprived, veiled and turbaned or in their aspirational, socially and occupationally mobile, manifestations. Corner grocery shops, greengrocers’, market stalls, record shops, newsagents, mini-cab firms, small under–the–bridge mechanics and car–repair yards, cafes and fast–food late–night outlets are the small ‘motors’ of the local high–street economy of these city enclaves.

### The fragile promise

Les Back, among others, has charted how, in some largely black areas of South London and elsewhere, a certain genuine cultural syncretism has emerged among young people in which music and urban street style are critical zones of interchange, not only cementing a ‘new ethnic’ urban life–style among black and Asian youth, but drawing in a section of white ‘wannabes’ – Estuary / patois fluent, garage or drum–and–bass music aficionados. In many ways, these longer–standing communities, which have negotiated a sort of truce with the dominant society that enables them to operate effectively whilst remaining in touch with community habits and values, are also part of an emerging transnational trend and belong to global urban formations. This is globalization from below.

The syncretic forms of Black and Asian urban culture, especially, are integrated into informal and largely invisible city–to–city global cultural ‘flows’ in music, fashion, and street–style as well as drugs, from Kingston to Brixton and Harlesden to Queens and Brooklyn in New York to Manchester to Atlanta, and on to the club scenes of Berlin, Stockholm, and Warsaw. But no secure political gain is guaranteed by these acts of ‘inter–ethnic’ exchange, they are vulnerable and often temporary

### The universalising tendency

It is clear that as we try, however roughly and impressionistically, to ‘map’ the connections between the changing social and spatial configurations of the city that divisions have become more intense and entrenched. The reality is and for a long time has been that multi–culturalism and racism proceed hand in hand. The ‘global’ city is one of an intricate network of differences, any of which can at any time be activated as a potentially explosive line of division.

What promise, then, do these new urban patterns and formations hold out for a just and progressive

resolution to the questions of social justice, equality, and diversity? The prospects are not optimistic. A kind of ‘cosmopolitanism’ does exist in the new elite spaces and formations of the city, because these spaces are now extensively connected with and orientated towards the wider world and its networks and agencies. However, this kind of cosmopolitan outlook has strict limits. Its principal effect is to reproduce within the city the divisions which globalization in its contemporary forms assumes in the wider world.

For a time, in London, a sort of ‘practical’ multi–culturalism seemed to offer a viable alternative. Cosmopolitan in any simple sense it was not, for it was rooted in the significance and persistence of differences which refused to be homogenised into a planetary cultural consumerism, Western style. But it seemed for a time as if these were genuine differences which safeguarded the historical routes, memories, trajectories, and traditions which had sustained people and their ways of life through the terrible vicissitudes and dislocations of migration. These differences needed not to be subscribed to in a rigid, essentialist, doctrinal or fundamentalist way and could, in the right circumstances, be ‘traded’ and translated into broader, more inclusive patterns. The hope was that this might eventually give rise to forms of everyday ‘vernacular cosmopolitanism’.

However, the more globalization is harnessed to global systems of economic, military, and geo–political power, the more it has become, in its dominant form, an integrated, expansionist, and missionary system. It obliges everyone to come into line with it and thus aims, by assimilation or forced conformity, to ‘universalise’ itself; it makes its claims to universality come ‘true’ by ensuring that it is universal (or ‘global’) in its operations and effects.

The multi–cultural city, London especially, is being spatially and socially reconfigured by these processes and forces and, at the same time, becoming one of the critical sites where these contradictory tendencies, conflicts, and trajectories are being worked through. The city cannot resolve the wider contradictions of the globalization that it reflects and embodies. Can we?

*This article is an edited extract from Stuart Hall's contribution to the volume Divided Cities: The 2003 Oxford Amnesty Lectures, edited by Richard Scholar, due to be published by Oxford University Press in 2005. Details of the Oxford Amnesty Lectures and publications are available at [www.oxford-amnesty-lectures.org](http://www.oxford-amnesty-lectures.org). openDemocracy would like to thank Richard Scholar and Oxford Amnesty Lectures for permission to publish. A much longer and more detailed version of the argument is to be found in the forthcoming book.*

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*Stuart Hall, the key figure in British cultural studies, was born in Kingston, Jamaica in 1932. In the 1950s he collaborated on the launch of two radical journals, The New Reasoner and the New Left Review. In 1964 he joined the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University, becoming the director of the Contemporary Cultural Studies unit in 1968. He is currently emeritus Professor of cultural studies at Goldsmiths College, London. His many books include Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse (1973), Policing the Crisis (1978), The Hard Road to Renewal (1988), Resistance Through Rituals (1989), Modernity and Its Future (1992), The Formation of Modernity (1992), Questions of Cultural Identity (1996) and Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices (1997).*

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