London inside-out

Doreen Massey

Doreen Massey *argues that we need to be more aware of the role of London in producing corporate globalisation.*

In the numbed days after the first bombs went off on London's public transport in July 2005, Ken Livingstone said 'this city is the future'. 'This city' he said 'typifies what I believe is the future of the human race and a future where we grow together and we share and we learn from each other' (GLA press release, 8.7.05).

He set London in the wider context of the development of European cities generally, and of cities around the world:

> If you go back a couple of hundred years to when the European cities really started to grow and peasants left the land to seek their future in the cities there was a saying that 'city air makes you free' and the people who have come to London, all races, creeds and colours, have come for that. This is a city that you can be yourself as long as you don't harm anyone else. You can live your life as you choose to do rather than as somebody else tells you to do. It is a city in which you can achieve your potential. It is our strength and that is what the bombers seek to destroy …
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> This year for the first time in human history a majority of people live in cities. London continues to grow and I say to those who planned this dreadful attack whether they are still here in hiding or somewhere abroad, watch next week as we bury our dead and mourn them, but see also in those same days new people coming to this city to make it their home to call themselves Londoners and doing it because of that freedom to be themselves … (ibid).

Livingstone's passion sounded out in stark contrast to the manufactured sincerity of Tony Blair. Nor did Ken speak of good and evil, but of a real grounded politics. His commitment to diversity and hospitality rang a clear note after a general election, some months previously, in which dismally negative debates about immigration and asylum had been prominent.

Nor were these sentiments without a basis on the streets. Surveys show Londoners consistently valuing the city's cultural and ethnic mix and seeing that as central to London's identity.[1] The *Guardian*, earlier that year, had published a special supplement: 'London: the world in one city: a special celebration of the most cosmopolitan place on earth' (21.01.05). In the aftermath of the bombing the London *Evening Standard* ran a special edition with the title 'London United', and in *Time Out* ('London's weekly listings bible') the front cover said simply 'Our City'. At the gathering in Trafalgar Square Ben Okri read a poem he had re-titled 'A hymn to London': 'Here lives the great music of humanity' (*Evening Standard*, 15.7.05). The Olympic Bid had been built around claims of cultural and ethnic diversity; there is the Respect (now Rise) campaign against racism. Nor has this been only a simplistic version of multiculturalism, a claim to some happy harmony - Livingstone's stance since the bombing has been firm in its refusal to bow to pressures for exclusion and repression, and in its determination to continue with criticism where this is thought politically to be warranted. It recognises that this may be a conflictual negotiation of place.

There is evidently much more that could be said about this, and Ken personally has gone to great lengths in thinking through these issues. Indeed in the months after the bombing 'multiculturalism' became again a contested term. It is also important to register that such statements ('This city is the future'), in the singularity of the future to which they lay claim, could themselves be seen as an imperialising gesture - our future is the universal future. (It is in fact only one possible future, and even if it comes to pass for London and for other places, it may nonetheless exist in a world in which there are other futures too.) I would prefer to read such words, therefore, as a statement of political commitment. Not just as a description, nor as a claim to

1. See, for instance, MORI, 2004, *What is a Londoner?* 2 April 2004; Research for the Commission on London Governance.

be at the front of some posited singular historical queue, but as a statement that London stands for something, a particular *kind* of future, but carrying with it the possibility that this may be one future in a still varied and plural world. Maybe other places, other cities, will be different.

At the moment, however, I just want to draw out one point, which is that this positive attitude towards diversity is claimed to be central to London's identity; is something that a majority of Londoners seem to be quite proud of (and this without ignoring the evident racisms and intolerances which abound); and is to some extent embedded in policy and often drawn upon and celebrated in the arts. It is one of the ways (and in the period around the bombing the dominant way) in which London thinks of itself as a 'world city'. Moreover it is politically interesting - and heartening - because it is a claim to place that is open rather than bounded, hospitable rather than excluding, ever-changing rather than eternal. And nothing that follows is meant to gainsay that.

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What I should like to explore about this imagination of place held by so many Londoners, however, is how it might be broadened out.

First of all this is an internal, indeed internalised, view of the city. It is about hospitality, about those who come to 'us', about the strangers within the gate. It calls to Derrida's notion of *villes-franches*.[2] And that is excellent. However the geographies of places aren't only about what lies within them. A richer geography of place acknowledges also the connections that run out from 'here': the trade-routes, investments, political and cultural influences; power-relations of all sorts run out from here around the globe and link the fate of other places to what is done in London. This is the other geography - the 'external geography' of a place. It is a geography that attaches to any place, but it is especially important to a place like London.

In recent debates about identity we have moved away from notions of isolated individuals towards an understanding of identity as thoroughly relational, as constructed through rather than prior to our interactions with others. The same move has been made in relation to place-identity. And yet the way that this

2. J. Derrida, *On cosmopolitanism and forgiveness*, Routledge, London 2001.

insight has been developed has often been to concentrate on the implications for the internal constructions of identity: the internal multiplicities and fragmentations, and so forth. And so it has been with place-identity too: it is a commonplace now that every place is hybrid, that we must be critical of notions of coherent communities. This too is a positive move (except when it is repeated as a mantra without consideration of the real difficulties and complexities it implies). Yet there is another geography, that geography of external relations on which identities, including the identities of places, depend. How do we bring *that* into our attitude to, and our politics of, place?

This tendency to inwardlookingness becomes even clearer when we turn to my second reservation about the characterisation of London as multicultural future of the world. For London is not *only* multicultural. It is also - for instance - a heartland of the production, command and propagation of what we have come to call neoliberal globalisation. Indeed it was in London that many of its lineaments were first conceived. The City (capital C), and all the vast and intricate cultural and economic infrastructure that surrounds it, is crucial to neoliberalism. About 30 per cent of the daily global turnover of foreign exchange takes place in London; London has over 40 per cent of the global foreign equity market; 70 per cent of all eurobonds are traded in London … and so on. Meanwhile, the 2005 UN Report on Human Development produces 'the usual' statistics - the kind that are so bad it is difficult to know how to receive them. The world's richest 500 people own more wealth than the poorest 416 million. And it is not just a problem of the super-rich: Europeans spend more on perfume each year than the $7billion needed to provide 2.6 billion people with access to clean water. London is a crucial node in the production of an increasingly unequal world. When Ken Livingstone speaks of people coming to this city because of the freedom it offers 'to be themselves' he is right. But people find their way here for other reasons too. They come because of poverty and because their livelihoods have disappeared in the maelstrom of neoliberal globalisation (and millions more are left behind). And it has to be at least a question as to whether London is a seat of some of the causes of these things.

And that raises in turn the question of what is our responsibility for those wider geographies of place. Most formulations of the relation between 'local place' and globalisation imagine local places as *products* of globalisation ('the

global production of the local'). It is a formulation that easily slides into a conceptualisation of the local as *victim* of globalisation. Here globalisation figures as some sort of external agent that arrives to wreak havoc on local places. And often indeed it is so. The resulting politics in consequence often resolves into strategies for 'defending' local places against the global. Such strategies always tend to harbour a host of political ambiguities, but in the case of London (and of places like London - of which, to varying degrees, there are many) this simple story just cannot hold. For London is one of those places in which capitalist globalisation, with its deregulation, privatisation, 'liberalisation', is produced. Here we have also 'the local production of the global'.

And yet a celebration of multiculturalism and a politics of anti-racism exist alongside a persistent obliviousness on the part of the majority of Londoners to the external relations - the daily global raiding parties, the activities of London's financial sector and multinationals - upon which the very character and existence of London depend.

The current London Plan provides a case in point.[3] Here, in consideration specifically of the city's economy, London's identity as a world city is understood in terms of its financial power. Moreover this global financial muscle is presented as a simple achievement. It is not reflected-upon in its intimate relation to imperialism and colonialism.[4] The Plan presents no critical analysis of the global power-relations that sustain this world-citydom; it does not follow those relations out around the world and ask what they may be responsible for; it asks no questions about the connections between this economic power and the increasing inequalities around the world. Indeed, the Plan has as its central economic aim the expansion of London as a global financial power. It must be stressed that in this the London Plan is not at all unusual. *This is the norm.* Thinking about places, including plans for places, nearly always in this sense remains 'within the place'. It is part of the tension between a territorialised politics and a world structured also by flows. But what it means is that, in this city which is indeed in so many ways progressive and

3. Greater London Authority, *The London Plan: Spatial Development Strategy for Greater London*, Greater London Authority, London 2004.
4. A. King, *Global cities: post-imperialism and the internationalization of London*, Routledge, London 1990.

even radical, we have, we nurture, the production of the beast itself.

(And yet most of the local criticism of this Plan has focused - not wrongly but perhaps too narrowly - on the effects it will have within the city itself.)

Ken spoke, in his address on 8 July, of that now well-known fact that now 'for the first time in human history a majority of people live in cities'. In part that massive urbanisation is a product of the current form of globalisation; indeed cities are crucial in a host of ways to the neoliberal project. But they figure in very diverse ways within it. The biggest growth in the urban population has been in the global South, and in the 'planet of slums' that Mike Davis has documented with such power.[5] Such places are precipitates of the selfsame processes that have helped London to 'reinvent itself' (London Plan, p13) since the decline of the 1970s and 1980s. Is this, then, another side of London as 'the future of the world'? Does London also stand for this?

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How might a politics of place beyond place be imagined? What follows are just a few thoughts, but they do draw on many campaigns and arguments already under way. Indeed, it should be said at the start that the overwhelming prioritisation of the financial City and its attendant sectors that characterised the initial version of the London Plan has already been somewhat muted in response to criticism at the Scrutiny Committee (set up by the GLA to hear opinions on the Plan), from almost all parts of the political spectrum. The *reasons* for the criticism varied, from the dangers of becoming too reliant on one economic sector to the inequalities, both spatial and social, that such a unique prioritisation engenders within the metropolitan area itself. London is the most unequal place in the UK, but that internal inequality is intimately linked to its economic structure and its global role. As far as I know, however, there was no criticism of the priorities of the Plan that focused on the global effects of that global role. The concentration was on effects within the city itself.

There are, moreover, some ways in which the London Plan does exhibit both this outwardlooking perspective and a recognition that London is a cause

5. M. Davis, 'Planet of slums', *New Left Review*, No 26, 2004; UN-Habitat, *The challenge of the slums*, London 2003; UN-Habitat, *State of the world's cities 2004/2005*, World Urban Forum, Barcelona 2004.

of what happens in the wider world, as well as having to respond to its effects. This is the case in relation to climate change (and indeed environmental issues more generally): here it is stated that not only must policy manage the impacts of climate change on London but it must also work to reduce London's own contribution to the production of that problem. The Food Strategy, similarly, pays attention to the global effects of London's food consumption and argues explicitly that responsibility be taken for these impacts - in terms of resources, food miles, waste disposal and so forth - and for promoting a wider consciousness of, and respect for, all elements in the global food-chain. In these ways, London's emerging strategies indicate what might be done.

A strategy that acknowledges the global effects that emanate from London should not, anyway, be all down to the city government; rather, what is crucially at issue is how we conceive of, and respond to the responsibilities of, our identities as 'Londoners' (or as members of any other place). There are, for instance, campaigns around particular parts of the economy that are important to London, and around particular companies that have their headquarters in London, but with a focus on their global roles. Oil and gas for instance: they account in one way and another for about a quarter of London's stock exchange; Shell and BP have headquarters in London; London is utterly dependent on oil. And a number of campaigns have focused on these facts, taking them as a starting point for wider arguments. There is, for instance, the project 'Unravelling the Carbon Web' organised by PLATFORM.[6] This includes a range of different projects, and aims to examine the oil industry and the sectors that serve it from a host of different angles, but with a focus on the role of London. A linked project is 'Remember Saro-Wiwa: the Living Memorial'.[7] This is a public art initiative to mark the tenth anniversary of the execution of Saro-Wiwa and it was given a big launch in Spring 2005, in City Hall, with an opening speech from the Mayor. It is not a 'memorial' that looks backwards; rather it is about raising awareness of the global implications of this city's oil dependence and its position as the site of so much petroleum power. There are many such campaigns, and they are small,

6. www.carbonweb.org and www.platformlondon.org.
7. www.remembersarowiwa.com. Campaigns around oil extraction in Ogoniland led to the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight colleagues. See Ken Wiwa, 'The murder of Ken Saro-Wiwa', *Soundings* 2, 1996.

but part of their aim is to look beyond the local place, to trace its implications around the world. Some projects link up with ecological campaigns. Some link particular communities within London to other parts of the world - people from the Nigerian community linking to the Saro-Wiwa project, for example. A way of thinking multiculturalism outwards.

Or again, it might be possible for there to be, within the ambit of the London Social Forum perhaps, a specific emphasis on solidarity with struggles in other parts of the world whose battles link back to companies that are based in London. One obvious possibility, since London was the birthplace of so much in the way of ideas about deregulation, would be links with campaigns against the enforced privatisation of utilities in the global South.

Perhaps, too, the Mayor and/or the London Assembly could themselves support alternative globalisations, help challenge the nature of the trade and financial arrangements through which the current form of globalisation operates. There is, for instance, the possibility of joining that growing alliance of city and regional authorities that refuse simply to go along with GATS regulations. 'GATS-free zones' are mushrooming in other countries in Europe. Or there is the issue of Fair Trade. There is, for instance, a Fair Trade Town and City campaign (Bristol is a member). But London is significant not only for drinking coffee but also as a place where coffee is traded. It was the radical GLC of the 1980s that established Twin Trading, a wholesaling organisation that took the city's fair-trade politics beyond the politics of consumption.[8] That same GLC was also supportive in a number of ways of the 'counterglobalisation' of the trades-union movement, aiding contact between workers in different parts of the world.

One final example, which encapsulates a number of the arguments I am trying to make. In part precisely because of the current way in which London is a world city it finds it very difficult to reproduce itself. Public-sector workers and lower-paid private-sector workers can barely survive, and a whole range of schemes has had to be devised to enable adequate recruitment. One thing that this means is that London is massively dependent

8. Although the Fairtrade Cities initiative of the Fairtrade Foundation itself necessarily goes beyond individualised consumption (this indeed is one of the points of organising at the level of place): see, for one discussion, Jo Littler's interview with Clive Barnett and Kate Soper, 'Consumers: agents of change?' in *Soundings* 31, 2005.

on labour from abroad, including from the global South. It is dependent, for instance, on health workers from Africa and Asia. These countries can ill-afford to lose such workers, and they have paid for their training. So India, Sri Lanka, Ghana, South Africa are subsidising the reproduction of London. It is a perverse subsidy, flowing to the rich from the poor.[9] This is a difficult issue because it can so easily be turned around into a racist denial of immigration rights. The Medact Report - which was concerned with the UK as a whole (and is referenced in note 9) - suggests, in relation to health workers from Ghana, that the two health systems (Ghanaian and British), including their trades-unions, could be thought of as one system and that the UK could pay restitution to the Ghanaian system for the perverse subsidy that currently flows in the opposite direction.

There may be other approaches. But this one is interesting because it changes what otherwise might be thought of as *aid* to Ghana, with all its connotations of conditionality and charity and the power relations thereby implied, into a matter of the fulfilment of an *obligation*.[10] It expressly addresses the issue of unequal external geographies. It is also important because, through this, it forces a re-imagination of place: it looks from the inside out; it recognises not just the outside within but also the 'inside' that lies beyond.

At the moment, however, this is not even a live political debate amongst Londoners. It is not an issue that has registered as integral to the identity of this place. We may celebrate the arrival of Ghanaians in London as part of the great ethnic mix. But we do not follow those lines of connection out around the rest of the world and enquire about the effects there. We need to globalise in some way that local claim to multiculturalism. All of the examples described here are small but such things are needed to help promote an outwardlookingness, a consciousness of the wider geographies and responsibilities of place. Moreover, *within* the place, within London, once such issues start to be raised, all of them would be disputed - which could only enrich the internal politics of place, multiply the lines of debate around

9. K. Mensah, M. Mackintosh and L. Henry, 'The "skills drain" of health professionals from the developing world: a framework for policy formulation', Medact, London 2005, www.medact.org/content/Skills%20drain/Mensah%20et%20al.%202005.pdf.
10. M. Mackintosh, 'Aid, restitution and international fiscal redistribution in health care: reflections in the context of rising health professional migration', Paper presented at Development Studies Association annual conference 7-9 September 2005.

which 'place' must be negotiated. It would challenge the current exoneration of 'the local' within a critical global politics, and begin to develop a local politics of place beyond place.

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