This volume, within the Home of Geography publication series, assembles a selection of papers presented at an international seminar organised by the IUC Commission on Gender and Geography on "Gendered Cities: Identities, activities, networks. A life-course approach," held in Rome at the end of May 2003. The seminar addressed the gendered nature of activities, identities, and networks in cities, focusing on different stages of the life course. The programme presented a variety of themes within the field, including identities, activities, networks, and social relations of diverse groups: children, youth, adults, and the elderly, in different class, ethnic, and migrant groups in cities around the world.

The gendered character of urban life and urban structures and the heterogeneity of mix of people to be found in cities around the world have always fascinated feminist geographers. Today, the emphasis has shifted towards issues of identities and their expressions. Women are no longer primarily seen as "women," but are rather persons with multiple identities, in terms of ethnicity, nationality, age, social position, and activity. This emphasis has emerged partly as a result of globalisation and its various expressions of globalisation. The most important achievement of the seminar was the bringing of the boundaries between "first" and "third" world geography, between theory and empiricism, between identity and activity, and between qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

The papers in this volume highlight the problems, inequalities, and contradictions of women's life in cities. They clarify at the same time the improvements in the living conditions of women in many cities, in terms of visibility, identity, activity, safety, and network formation. Cities are highly gendered, but their gendered nature does not always imply subordination, exclusion, deprivation and suffering. Feminist, critical and human research have resulted in some improvements in urban structures, urban life and urban policy from a feminist perspective.

The cover illustration "Plantifero" by Pierre Desrliers, 1550.
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Chapter 14

The creation of intercultural places and relations in the urban context; the challenge of Swiss and foreign women in the agglomeration of Lausanne

Marina Marengo

Abstract

This contribution analyses the strategies adopted by local and foreign women in the agglomeration of Lausanne (Switzerland) to create places, intercultural relations and networks of relations. The necessity to fulfil personal and family needs stimulates women to use their acquired knowledge to establish associations and networks in which their individual know-how becomes collective. Their objectives can be summarised as: understanding the city and the needs of its inhabitants, perceiving social and cultural changes in progress, defining and achieving projects aimed at the maintenance and acquisition of a good level of material and immaterial wellbeing for its citizens.

Résumé

Création de lieux et de relations interculturelles dans les contextes urbains: le défi des femmes suisses et étrangères dans l’agglomération de Lausanne. Cette contribution analyse les stratégies mises en place par les femmes, autochtones et étrangères, visant la création de lieux, de relations interculturelles et de réseaux relationnels dans l’agglomération de Lausanne (Suisse). La nécessité de satisfaire les besoins individuels et de la famille permet aux femmes d’acquérir des “savoir-faire” qu’elles mettent au service de la collectivité, dans le but de créer des lieux associatifs et des réseaux relationnels. Leurs objectifs peuvent être résumés dans la compréhension de la ville et des besoins de ses habitants, la perception des transformations sociales et culturelles en cours, la définition et réalisation de projets visant au maintien ou l’acquisition d’un bon niveau de bien-être, matériel et immatériel, des citoyens.

Introduction

References to cultural diversity in urban populations and the implicit assertion that “problems” in cities have their origin in an “excess” of such diversity are sometimes
used as synonyms for the most disparate forms of urban deprivation and marginalisation. The increasingly complex nature of migratory movements and the growing difficulties involved in handling relations with the "other", stimulated a group of researchers and community workers to investigate the effects of these changes on urban contexts, and more specifically, on the agglomeration of Lausanne. The research was centred on the study of the daily affairs of a number of places chosen as meeting areas for associations in Lausanne, and on the ways in which these places emerge and form part of the local context (Cohen and Rogers, 1995; Laville and Sainsaulieu, 1997; Missey and Jess, 1995). The research team examined the history of these places and the discourse that reveals their significance for those that use them (Racine and Marengo, 1999). This interest in the sphere of associations, and in the dynamics responsible for changes within them, rose from the conviction that in this specific environment immi-gration increasingly favours the birth of cross cultures. These new cultures represent an essential mode in issues regarding the cohabitation and integration of the various urban populations (Marengo, 1999).

During the fieldwork, gender appeared to be an important factor. Although not originally included in the research, gender relations and the role of women in the creation and management of new relational spaces took on an increasingly important role and justified a number of specific analyses in the final stage of the research. The female component emerged in particular from those associations established to encourage the meeting and interaction between different cultures. Women either created or helped to create or manage these associations. Male domination was common in foreign associations (Italian and Spanish), which are traditionally created and run by men and aimed at satisfying their relational needs. The unforeseen emergence of the gender issue caused us to reflect on the role which women—both local and foreign—play in urban circles, in the building of cultural and social relations and in the creation of places which are able to respond to the new needs expressed by the society at large (Marengo, 2003). The role of women within social solidarity associations justified a follow-up research project centred more specifically on urban social sustainability.

The general aim of this paper is to demonstrate how the concept of interculturalism as applied to urban and gender issues can help a new reading of old and new urban phenomena which have become increasingly difficult to understand and manage in daily life in our cities. We are used to reading the latter on the basis of specific functional parameters which no longer allow us to understand or fully explain the changes which have taken place, and are still taking place, in cities (Marengo and Racine, 2000). The concept of interculturalism can constitute an appropriate instrument, although not the only one, since a solely cultural approach would be too restrictive and would not allow for an enquiry into and reflection on urban specificities taken as a whole—in studying a city from a point of view which would be slightly unusual for a geographer, that of urban cultural dynamics.

Based on the assumption that "gender is an analytical instrument which allows description and empiricism to be bypassed, and which spans all categories; an exacting way of seeing things in a different light and criticising the usual norms" (Perrot, 2000, p. 283), the primary aim of this paper is to understand how women in the agglomeration of Lausanne—irrespective of their ethnic origins—are able to create, or have already given life to, relational dynamics which may be described as "intercultural". It seems necessary at this point to define the term "intercultural", even if only provisionally and as a point of departure for research in the field which will allow us to identify this concept more specifically.

Theoretical and methodological frame of reference

Considerations regarding interculturality

The concerns and reflections of the research group were concentrated within the larger context of the economy of the "construction of the individual", of his/her education, personal competencies and material and immaterial well being. The consciousness of the existence of dual hermeneutics—of the researcher and the competent protagonist—and taking this subsequently into account allowed us to demonstrate an unexpected, and as yet only partially articulated, aspect of interculturality (Giddens, 1993; Kilani, 1994). Thus in this presentation we will endeavour to show that the mechanisms of interculturality function far beyond the scope of "everyday" relationships between the local and foreign populations.

I would like to emphasise that we have chosen to avoid narrowing definitions of concepts such as segregation, integration and interculturality. In addition, we consider that the categorisation of our study sites as "intercultural places" is not inherent to them, nor does it depend on the perspectives of or the theoretical choices made by the researchers involved in the project; it is instead the product of the protagonists themselves and of their actions. These actions constitute the place as it appears (Mondada, 1994). Therefore, instead of an approach which defines the concepts of interculturality a priori, we prefer to remove the question of the definition of interculturality from the domain of theoretical discourse and to place it in the domain of day-to-day practices through which the protagonists themselves identify, describe and characterise intercultural situations in their context (Marengo, 2002). The emergence of interculturality then is a phenomenon that needs to be studied in the field and not a predetermined theoretical construct. This position contrasts with a critical posture regarding interculturality that stems from a comparison made between different cultural systems and which then decides upon their relative compatibility or incompatibility (Mondada, 1997 and 2000). In contrast, we prefer an empirical examination of those forms and practices that are the concrete manifestations of intercultural relationships. In order to achieve this, it is essential to establish first an in situ observation of the ordinary practices of the protagonists, documented with recordings of their encounters and meetings.

Methodology issues: how the case studies are carried out in and about places

The methodological framework adopted in the two research projects was as follows: in the first phase of the studies we chose to use the ethnographic method centred on participant observation, the recording of conversations in the chosen places, and in-depth in-
In search of gendered places

The case studies show how important female immigrants and questions of gender are when examining the role of foreigners in local contexts and, more generally, in their relationships with the ‘Other’. Places for meeting and exchange in urban contexts are often demarcated and are still managed by immigrants (Marengo, 2003). Associations of foreigners often remain a male preserve. The need of women for reference points and meetings, however, means that the feminine element plays a central role in places which are less distinct ethically, where foreigners and locals cannot only live separately, but can also exchange their knowledge, desires and worries. The predominance of women in certain places can result in new interpersonal dynamics.

"There are times when people arrive here without telling us what they want, I don’t know if they don’t dare, but then they see our way of working, which is not that of normal librarians — [pause] — well you can see that after a time these people understand, relax and fall into place as if they were at home. That’s what I think is important and which comes from the fact, I think, that we are almost all women here (Supervisor Globilivre)."

The mistrust of others gradually subsides, thanks to the type of relations that favour typically female modes of interaction, such as requesting the address of a gynaecologist, or worrying about their children, or obtaining a recipe. The latter may be important and, moreover, does not diminish all the preceding ones. This depends on the particularities of these women, of their needs and concerns. At a given moment in their lives, knowing how to cook a certain dish may, for them, be more important than worries about their children, for example if they are entertaining Swiss guests at home for the first time:

"Well, when she got back there was nobody there. She didn’t dare to ask a man, or I don’t know. Well, I’ll tell you, she didn’t go to the Centre straight away, we became acquainted. We stayed about, I’ll tell you, a year and a half. I saw her outside the Centre and in the end she joined it and became an active member here. What’s more, she’s teaching here and other things. That’s the case of one of the women I’ve met" (user/Supervisor Islamic Centre).

All these women, in their own way and according to their individual possibilities, are contributing directly or indirectly to the development of new social relationships and to the places themselves. The women must be considered as agents of society in their own right. When they talk to you and trust you, their life experiences remain central to their choice of committing themselves to a place and for a place.

The individual pathways: the expression of a private complexity

In the course of the interviews with our field informants, we asked them to tell us how they came to commit themselves to the creation of a place of encounter, exchange, leisure or training.

Many of these narratives, often amounting to condensed life histories, enabled us to understand the existence of a commonality behind the choice of commitment to and for a place despite differences in origin, profession, education and social group. All our competent protagonists (Swiss or foreign) possess at least a double, and sometimes multiple, cultural affiliation and experience with ‘otherness’ and ‘others’ in their private or professional lives:

"My husband is a Muslim and so in my family we have to get on with different cultures and religions" (user/Voluntary teacher Francais en Jeu).

The necessity of mediating between different languages and cultural affiliations in order to manage family and professional relationships pushed our informants to go beyond the sphere of family and/or work and to exploit their individual capacities, either
in the creation of a place of cultural, social and/or linguistic mediation or by their active participation in an existing place.

In some cases our protagonists became conscious of the kinds of risks necessary to set up enterprises by sharing personal experiences and the availability of acquired capacities. These risks were often of an economic kind: 

"And so we started like that, with a few books which had been donated, some books that had been lent to us by the "Bibliothèque pour tous". Then it just got bigger, little by little. We paid for it all ourselves. To begin with we paid for everything ourselves" (founder Voluntary Globetrotters). The status of these multiple affiliations and acquired mediation capacities evolved from the private and/or professional sphere to social action (Sarasseen and Picone Steff, 1996). From individual richness/complexity — pride even in having known how to get by, in having understood how to transcend daily to-day difficulties — gradually evolved a "culture of sharing". The tools necessary to help others unravel the tangle of their different cultural backgrounds and of their family and professional lives, which were often as complicated, if not more complicated to manage than those of the founders of the places in question:

"Because of my personal situation, I think I'm able to get closer to the people that come here, perhaps I'm able somehow to share their anxieties, but to understand their needs too" (supervisor of intercultural activities François en Jeu). Or: "To begin with they felt pretty lost when they came here. But then they found a book in their own language. Not just on the level of reading" (supervisor Globetrotters).

This additional complexity arose because the cultural and geographical distances between the country of origin and the host country increased significantly with each successive migratory wave in Switzerland.

A vocation centred on praxis

The places attended by immigrant women and the relationships they form share the characteristics of a strong feminine presence, without necessarily being exclusively feminine. These places in which women can meet and talk form "areas of freedom" where local and foreign women can express themselves, exchange views, communicate and build up relationships. They often provide opportunities for discussion and training where introspection is always present in addition to the practical, concrete aspects of daily life.

In places such as these, the gender component plays a central role in conceiving and managing relationships with the 'Other', and in providing the conceptual and theoretical tools necessary for contact with the 'Other'. However, the theoretical reflection is never dissociated from a continued search for the tools necessary for concrete action: 

"I don't know if there is an element of gender in all that, but I see that men are different from women in their way of managing power. Sharing power must also be more equitable. Women function differently. They are better listeners; they show more subtlety and less aggression. Certainly there are women who attach a lot of importance to power, but there are many who do not" (supervisor ProFamília).

These practical tools cannot be ignored when promoting the necessary mechanisms for the creation of new social relationships:

"I have always fought for my ideas, my political ideas. But here it's not just ideas; we need solutions or need to propose solutions, concrete things that help people. Ideas are fine but in the end we must do something" (founder supervisor François en Jeu).

Over and above women's greater propensity for praxis, especially when compared to male volunteers, who operate in an essentially paternalistic culture, women show more flexibility, and are able to adapt to very different situations:

"Exactly, one of their roles is to see everybody in the same way. Everyone has his own mentality, each speaks his own language, or rather her own language because we are talking about women. Trying to put oneself at the level of the person, whether it is at the same intellectual or educational level. For example, there are certain points that I don't know, in certain traditions they attach importance to and in other countries they don't. So one has to take this into account. So every woman has her day and time that suits her, moments which are convenient. Knowing how to listen. It is at the Centre that I have learnt that. Because one has to learn how to talk to other people, that's it, I think" (supervisor Islamic Centre).

From acceptance to the appreciation of differences

Flexibility leads some of these women to give weight and an essential role to the management of differences. The management of these differences plays an essential role in their daily thoughts and actions. However, most of the interviewed women are not interested in the social status of the other women they meet and mix with:

"Yes, X is Lebanese, she is also a student. Y is Algerian, she is studying but she also gives religious classes. And there's one called Z, she's also Algerian and working. Who else is there? Lots of women in fact, like Swiss XX who is working, and YY who is not, she's got kids. Etcetera, there are lots of them" (user Islamic Centre).

The dynamics which flow from these places and networks derive from a richness based on the multiplicity of origins, experiences, aspirations, and individual skills:

"And you know, here in this section of city we are very different, but in fact the women, we, WE [she points to everyone present, all women] we have the same worries, the same problems, and our children, and safety in the neighbourhood and all, all the rest. It's easier to talk and act when there are only women" (user Globetrotters).

There are no hierarchies or hierarchies are unimportant for the women at this stage of creating and managing the networks of relationships.
The creation of intercultural places and relations in the urban context

From producers of social bonds to users of social service and that therefore we should be able to satisfy their requests" (voluntary/librarian Globillers).

Women, whether Swiss or foreigners, who increasingly form part of the community context in Lausanne find more and more often that they have to face problems, to reply to new questions and to satisfy new needs for which they cannot find the solutions: "I think I put in a lot of emotional effort. I gave a lot of myself at the beginning, it was really total artistic vagueness; I don't know somehow if there's less vagueness now, it's because it's really the special nature of this work, as I was saying, to have to invent all the time and not to know in what field to invent, and so it's really very destabilising" (supervisor/librarian Globillers).

The challenge is to define a participative process in which volunteers, women in particular, try to convert spontaneous movements into professional or professionalized responses to existing social needs. In some associations this conversion is quite evident: the volunteers see themselves no longer as inferior, but put the vertical relationships between volunteers and decision-makers in perspective in such a way as to view them as more or less equal:

"That is to say, there is no reason, voluntary work is all right, but only some time or another, that's why we are closely following the parliamentary debates on integration, and it's clear that if in the end the Article on integration goes through, there will be a request coming from the Association. And it's clear, it's no longer at all in my opinion just voluntary work. That is to say, it's a relevant choice because people want it, they have a passion for it, a desire, a desire to communicate, a desire to meet people. But then there are limits. What we see now is that we are giving more and more courses which are targeted, more intensive courses" (founder/supervisor Français en Jeu).

From places to networks: women in search of a new model of urban society

Consequently, this implies research and the creation of possible synergies between the different groups of social workers in the area, in order to speed up new processes and dynamics of building and operating the community network:

"As for me, I find that I take advantage of the fact that these people can do things exactly like we do, and it's true that I find that we have very fruitful exchanges. Sometimes there may be a few problems of cohabitation here at the beginning, but that's all been settled now" (supervisor/teacher France en Jeu).

"So you all agree, we are going to give 50% to X. And do you also agree that we cannot continue as voluntary helpers, that now it's professional work and no longer voluntary?" (committee meeting Globillers).

These dynamics seem to be independent of the institutional network. On the contrary, new dynamics in the community network may enable participants to create horizontal and vertical links from a different viewpoint and with a fresh outlook, freed from the
normal emphasis on relations between superior and subordinate (Ascher, 2000). The accounts and arguments given by women in Lausanne stimulated us to reflect on the whole range of social dynamics in our societies. Local institutions have more and more women in key positions. They begin to take account of feminine ways of identifying problems and needs, and to commit themselves in social issues and in local society in a simpler, more flexible, more open and more assertive way (Rancie, 1999). Their attitudes both to flexibility and to approaching the “other”, as demonstrated by some of the interviewed women, is more than a sign of women’s varied sensitivity to social problems. Could it be that this attitude may sometimes stem from unhappy personal experiences during periods when they in turn had to face difficulties or losses of their frames of reference? Some of the interviewed suggest: “Many foreigners whom I met in the street, I was always very sensitive to their problems, seeing them living in situations where they found it hard to express themselves, or they were not packing; also in the employment office where I went when I was out of work. Truly I was very sad to see some situations which they could not cope with” (voluntary teacher Francais en Eje).

Many of the interviewed women wished their work to progress from a voluntary activity to professional social work through practical experience, training and the acquisition of specific skills:

“It is the advancement achieved by voluntary workers, that is those people who began as voluntary workers, maybe since about 1991, and who now can have a paid job, and it’s not, it’s not the fact of giving a helping hand which interests them, but it is their experience as voluntary workers which is valued and genuinely recognised” (founder/Supervisor Francais en Eje).

The role of women in current urban contexts: “gathering up the threads”

What conclusions can we draw from our study? Both local and foreign women are deeply aware of the changes going on in our societies, especially in urban environments. The life experiences, education, needs and aspirations of themselves and their families have made them extremely sensitive to what is happening around them. Good observers and excellent listeners, women succeed in using their skills – or in acquiring new ones – primarily to meet personal and family needs and aspirations. The realisation that these needs, mainly social and cultural in nature, are widespread throughout the urban context, in which they live, pushes them to make projects and places and to weave relational networks in which these needs can be satisfied.

Pragmatic and practical, although at times inexperienced, women manage to clearly define the objectives they wish to reach. Thanks to their capacity for interaction with others – woman, man, child, foreigner or local – they are better than men (Racine and Marengo, 1999) at understanding the city and the needs of its inhabitants, at perceiving the social and cultural transformations in progress, and at defining and achieving projects centred on the maintenance or acquisition of a good standard of material and immaterial wellbeing of its citizens.

We can sum up the path taken by these women who have advanced in the community network in Lausanne, by quoting a slogan which they themselves use to describe their own progress: namely, the search for concrete solutions to their problems, without abandoning their ideology and without letting their ideology take precedence over the search for new ways in social life.

Notes

1. This research project, entitled Les liens d’interculturalité. Le cas de l’agglomération lausanne-noisette, was carried out between 1996 and 1999 and directed by Jean-Bernard Racine and Marina Marengo. FNR.S. PNR 39 Migrations et relations interculturelles, with the field collaboration (participant observation, interviews, transcripts) of Nadi Labram, Florence Rappaz, Lilamami de Soyza, Digby Thomas, Oscar Tosato. The fieldwork in seven associations and meeting places lasted from spring 1997 to spring 1999.

2. The research project in question is entitled "Des villes pour vivre durablement ensemble. Le cas de Lausanne", led again by Jean-Bernard Racine and Marina Marengo, with the assistance of Claude-Alain Blon for the initial quantitative survey concerned on the computer archives of Lausanne’s city council. This project was financed by the Fondation BCV (Banche Cantonale Vaudoise) and the city council of Lausanne. As part of the project, Marina Marengo carried out between 2000 and 2003 an initial survey of the paper archives of Lausanne’s city council and a second survey on site in 10 associations of different kinds (not foreign associations), local centres, foundations and "institutional" places.

3. By the term “competent protagonist” we refer to all those individuals who contribute in some way to the construction of the places in question. However, the different levels of their respective knowledge of the places in question and the nature of the specific competences - professional or otherwise - that each of them brings to bear in the field have caused us to distinguish between these protagonists in relation to their level of competence. To mention but one example, the persons responsible for the management of these places, for instance, exercise their influence over them in a completely different way than the users of the places do. It will be our business to ascertain how and to what extent the different levels of competence contribute to the construction of these places chosen as objects of in-depth analysis (Marengo and Racine, 2000, pp. 253-268).

References


Chapter 15

Similarities and differences in demographic structures and social networks among Filipino immigrant women in Rome and Toronto

Flavia Cristaldi and Joe T. Darden

Abstract

Unlike many immigrants in the global migration pool, Filipino global migration has been led by women. This paper examines how immigration policy and practice shaped Filipino immigration to Rome and Toronto. It reveals evidence of similarities and differences in the demographic structures resulting from immigration policies in the two metropolitan areas. The paper also identifies social networks and organizations that assist Filipino women immigrants. Data was obtained from government policy documents and census reports. The findings show how the choice of destination can influence the opportunities for advancement of Filipino immigrant women.

Résumé


Introduction

International migration in search of employment opportunities or higher wages increased after 1945 (King, 1995, p. 18). Due in large part to globalization, it has been es-