

**ACRP SEOUL PEACE EDUCATION CENTER
INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP – ASIAN IMMIGRANTS and RELIGION**

**The INTEGRATION of IMMIGRANTS into COHESIVE CIVIL
SOCIETIES: The ROLE of RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES and their
LEADERS**

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Migration in Global Context

Across the world, people are on the move. They are on the move, carrying not only their heavy bags of their belongings but also their cultural and religious baggage in their heads and their aspirations to succeed in their new chosen country. According to the 2013 World Migration Report of the International Organization of Migration, 214 million people are living either permanently or for a temporary long-term basis usually longer than 6 – 12 months. The Report states, “Throughout the history of mankind, human beings have migrated in search of greater opportunities and a better life. While migration is driven by many complex factors, most migrants want to earn a better living, to live in a more agreeable environment or to join family or friends abroad. Many, however, do not move of their own free will but are forced to do so – refugees escaping persecution, for instance; people devastated by conflict or natural disasters; or victims of trafficking. But those who willingly choose to migrate are largely driven by the desire for greater happiness, prosperity and well-being” (International Organization of Migration 2013: 23).

Examples of these global mobilities are:

- In 2012, 3.4 million young students were studying in universities and colleges outside their own country.
- In 2010, China, increasingly attractive as a destination, had 685,775 migrants not just from poorer countries such as North Korea, Viet Nam, India, Sri Lanka, and Africa but from more developed countries such as South Korea, Japan and Taiwan.
- Over the past decades, South Korean migration to the Philippines has grown from 175,000 in 2000 to 925,000 in 2011 with 115,000 residing permanently. Many are students learning English.
- Many Asian retirees are moving to warmer climates and cheaper accommodation in such countries as Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines.
- In 2012 across the world, US\$529 billion was sent back to the source or home countries as financial remittances to their families

All these people movements have led to the formation of very fluid or “liquid” multicultural and multifaith countries, even in countries whose population profile has historically been very monocultural, but driven to it usually by low birthrates below the replacement level of about

2.2 children per fertile woman or the need for skilled and unskilled labour. Secondly, it has led to the creation of transnational or diasporic communities linked across the world and back to the home country by the new technologies and mass air transportation.

However, it must be recognized that migration is always a risk. Research suggests that in migrating to developed countries between 4 – 10 per cent do not achieve success. In all immigrant and refugee movements to developed countries, there is always a small group for whom the decision to migrate ends in disappointment, if not personal or family disaster. Expectations may not have been met. The support may not have been enough. Opportunities may not have been available. They may not have had the psychological resources or the key adaptability attributes to cope. The spectre of the defeated immigrant who has lost control of his or her life haunts all migration movements.

Global Migration Pathways

Migration experts usually distinguish between permanent and long-term temporary migration across international borders. The main permanent migration types are (1) economic and business migration (2) refugee migration (3) intermarriage migration and (4) retirement migration while the major examples of longterm temporary migration are (5) international contract worker migration (6) business executive migration (7) student migration (9) international agency and government migration and (8) non-government personnel migration.

Table One: Global Migration Pathways (in percentages, N = 214 million people)

Migration Pathway	World Bank Figures	UNDP Figures
1. North - North	17	15
2. South - South	35	41
3. South - North	45	41
4. North - South	3	3
TOTAL	100	100

The 2013 World Migration Report gives three sets of estimates as to the breakdown of the 214 million migrants but almost half are from the poorer countries of the South to the rich countries of the North, while well over a third are moving between countries of the poor South. Australia is, par excellence, the migration nation state as it becomes a Eurasian nation in the 21st century – almost a quarter of its population is born overseas, and close to half (45%) are either born overseas or have at least one parent born overseas. Its language profile after English is led by the Chinese languages, followed by Italian, Arabic, Greek, Vietnamese, Filipino (inc. Tagalog), Spanish, Hindi, German, Korean and Macedonian. Buddhism and Islam have about half a million followers with Hinduism fast catching up.

The financial situations of migrants in the North are worse than those of the native-born, but their situations improve with time as they achieve relative success and financial independence. Long-term North–North migrants, however, achieve the same levels of financial well-being as the native-born. South–South migrants are less well off financially than the native-born, and their expectations do not improve with time. For example, long-time South-South migrants are half as likely to say that their standard of living is getting better (32%) than the native-born (55 %). Compared with what their situations would have been like if they had remained in their country of origin, North–North migrants gain in terms of objective and subjective economic indicators. South–South migrants, by contrast, appear to lose out relative to matched stayers, with long-timers being less able to afford housing. North–North migrants are less likely than South–North migrants to be struggling to meet their basic needs. South–North migrants also experience less improvement, over time, than North–North migrants. While migrants in the South are better able to afford food after being in the

country more than five years, there is no such improvement with regard to shelter. In fact, they find it more difficult to afford shelter, compared with matched stayers in their home countries (International Organization of Migration 2013).

The Functions of Religion in a Migrant and Multicultural Society

In these migration and multicultural contexts, what is the role of religion, religious communities and their spiritual leaders? What is the role of religion in the welcoming and integration of migrants and in creating a culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse society? What then is the role of religious communities and their leaders in meeting the different spiritual, emotional, welfare and physical needs of immigrants arriving and recently arrived in a destination country and in helping to maintain a socially cohesive and interreligiously harmonious country?

It seems that religious communities and their leaders have seven functions in addressing the challenges and complexities of migration:

1. To serve the spiritual and pastoral needs of their co-religionists who have arrived as migrants

As the first priority, religious communities in the receiving countries need to provide the spiritual and community support for their migrant co-religionists in overcoming the very considerable stresses of the adaptation or adjustment process. Psychologists tell us that religion is about the four Bs of (i) believing (ii) bonding (iii) behaving and (iv) belonging. In the area of believing, religious traditions have the capability to interpret religiously the migration experience to the believing migrant and to provide the religious rituals of the particular tradition. For example, within the three Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, migration is at the very core of each tradition when Abram migrated from Ur of the Chaldees in modern Iraq to the promised land of Israel. In Christianity, the child Jesus and his family were both refugees and return refugees when they fled to the safety of Egypt. And the flight from Mecca to Medina is central to Islam.

As part of the bonding and belonging process, religious leaders in the host countries can establish special places of worship in mosques, churches, synagogues and temples specially for individual immigrant communities so as they can be spiritually ministered in their own languages. Then they can feel the sense of belonging to a transhistorical and transnational group that solidifies their collective self-esteem and identification with a group of compatriots undergoing the same stresses of adaptation and integration.

In the adjustment process there are very significant hurdles to be jumped in finding accommodation, finding furniture, finding employment and finding a suitable school for any children. There are the issues of becoming proficient in the language of the new country and overcoming the cross-cultural misunderstandings that inevitably occur. Religious communities can be very helpful during the first months and initial years of settlement in providing the emotional, social and financial support and helping to find things like a home, a job and so on.

2. To ensure that the spiritual and pastoral needs of their national co-religionists residing outside the home country are met

Religious leaders in the sending countries have a pastoral responsibility to care for their immigrant fellow nationals who have departed for a new country, whether permanently or temporarily, in co-operation with religious leaders in the receiving countries through their transnational links. Most religious groups have strong transnational links. The migrant needs the strength and consolation of the religious faith and its practices, preferably in his own

language, for his or her own spiritual and psychological well-being. In fact, this usually is done quite well. For example, the Turkish government sponsors at some considerable cost Muslim chaplains to work in the Turkish diaspora in countries such as Germany and Canada. The Catholic Church has a worldwide system of migrant chaplains caring for migrant communities. One good example are the Scalabrinian priests founded in the 1880s to care for the Italian migrants moving to USA and Latin America – a century later in 1982, they moved to the Philippines, trained Filipino priests who now work in many countries throughout the world such as Taiwan, Japan and Indonesia caring for the Filipino contract workers, male and female, as well as for the many Filipino brides across the world. In Australia, Buddhist monks are brought in from Viet Nam, Cambodia, China and Taiwan to serve their communities as well as specialist craftsmen to help build temples.

3. To work with governments in developing appropriate policies and programs for the settlement and integration of all migrants

Religious leaders and their communities have another very important role: advocacy in pressuring governments to develop appropriate policies and practical programs to assist. Critical to migrant success is proficiency in the language of the new country. The research in the developed countries is that the key to successful adaptation is finding a full-time, appropriately paid job, where the critical factors are level of education and proficiency in the new language. Second are the issues of housing and accommodation. Religious communities can work alongside government, if not pressure them, to provide language training programs – in Australia, refugees are entitled to 520 hours of free English language tuition. As well, there ought to be employment organizations to find suitable jobs for migrants, including, if necessary, finding appropriate education and training programs. One aspect of this is an agency for the recognition of overseas qualifications, a major issue for any migrant.

For the immigrant and refugee children, special schools need to be established for newly arriving children for the first six – twelve months where they learn the language of their new country before moving into mainstream schools where they need follow-up second language education programs. Many religious communities have their own full-time schools, and these will have to provide special programs for these children.

Such program initiatives need to be framed within a broader policy framework. What does a multicultural social and economic policy look like? Such a policy would be built within the framework of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights upon the two principles of (1) commitment to the newly adopted country and (2) equality of opportunity for all, and the three underpinning dimensions of (a) maintenance and development of one's cultural, linguistic and religious heritage (b) equal and equitable access to the nation's social and economic resources and (c) economic efficiency or productive diversity in utilizing the knowledge and skills of the new immigrants and refugees for the economic well-being of the nation.

4. To monitor and critique government actions or lack of action in meeting the many needs of immigrants

One aspect of religion is to be counter-cultural in the sense of challenging governments and societies to respect human rights, to ensure freedom of religion where the government treats all religious traditions equally and with positive neutrality and to implement good practice towards migrants and refugees. As we well know, governments may be slow or lazy in responding to the needs of immigrants, or it may not be in their political interests to show care. In Australia in the early 1960s, the Christian Churches joined together to sponsor and establish the Ecumenical Migration Centre in Melbourne as a resource centre and think tank to distribute information about immigrant communities and about policy and program initiatives.

An important aspect of this is data collection, particularly at census data. If not already happening, the census should collect data on (1) birthplace (2) parental birthplace (3) self-rated level of proficiency in the national language (4) mother tongue or first language (5) religious affiliation (6) citizenship status (7) employment status (8) type of job (9) length of residence in the country and (10) . Such data is not only necessary for good government planning but also for the identification of emerging problems. As well, it allows religious and other community groups to monitor the situation of immigrants and refugees.

5. To help facilitate the formation of self-help organizations by immigrant communities

It is a feature of migration that immigrants form their own immigrant and ethnoreligious organizations, based upon country of origin or language or religion or region or village or even occupational status. The reasons are (a) sense of social belonging (b) solidarity from sharing the same adjustment process (c) community cohesion and (d) community cohesion.

However, for many reasons, migrant communities usually find it difficult to achieve unity and cohesion. For example, in my country, the Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim communities have encountered great difficulty in forming nation-wide umbrella organizations. Religious leaders with intelligent and wise leadership can facilitate this process of formation.

6. To educate one's own religious community and to help educate the general community about migration and migrants generally and about the damage caused by racism and discrimination

Community education, even through the media, is also an important element of the integration process. The first responsibility of religious communities is to educate themselves about the incoming migrants and refugees, their countries of origin and their cultural and religious practices. They need to educate themselves about the realities of adjustment and adaptation as well as about the realities of racism and discrimination. Eventually they will have to deal with the realities of intermarriage.

But beyond each religious community, there is the requirement to educate the broader community. One special aspect of this is to see that the police are well-trained in interacting cross-culturally with the newcomers, perhaps through the formation of a police interfaith advisory council. A particular problem here is the workplace. The workplace is an important element of intercultural relations. Secondly, there is the increasingly multicultural nature of workteams where management must be conscious of the need to appropriately supervise staff and adopt multicultural management techniques. Thirdly, the media need to be strongly encouraged to publish 'good news' stories about migrants even though they specialize in drama, conflict and sensationalism.

7. To help change the self-image of the nation as a growing diverse nation in cultural, linguistic and religious terms, seeing the newcomers as assets

Because of this unprecedented movement of peoples on the move, nations are changing, and changing quite quickly. As this occurs, the national self-image has to evolve and expand to be inclusive of the new immigrant and refugee groups. There will always be resistance to this as core heritage groups defend the nation's past and its core historical legacy. Essentially this task means re-interpreting the nation's past where there will always be some diversity contained in a nation's history and reframing the its self-image in terms of greater diversity and cultural and spiritual richness as well as linking it into the global village.

France is an example of a country where neither the political left nor the political right ever developed the notion of a multicultural France. Instead they were driven by the political philosophy of an anti-religious, secularist *laicite* – now they are paying a price with the rise of the very right-wing Le Pen movement.

The reframing process for any nation will evolve slowly over several decades. The wise person does not hurry history but history does have to be pushed in the right direction, implying that there are many different and additional ways of being Korean or Australian or Indian or Indonesian. Linked to this is to portray immigrants, not primarily as problems or intruders, but as positive assets. Religious leaders, trained in how to conduct themselves in a multifaith society, have a key role to play in their speeches and statements to help the nation evolve in its self-understanding. As well, religious leaders in a multicultural society must accept that religious law, whether Catholic canon law or Muslim shari'a law, has no role in civil or criminal law except where appropriate accommodation has been made.

Migration settlement policy and its implementation has to be underpinned by the principle of accommodation. Accommodation implies a change in a program or law to accommodate a particular cultural or religious custom that does not contravene basic human rights. Burial and cemetery regulations may have to be changed to accommodate Islamic or Hindu or Christian burial practices; criminal justice laws have to be adjusted to accommodate the Sikh wearing of turbans rather than helmets on motorcycles and the carrying of the ritual *kirpan* or dagger in contravention of the laws on offensive weapons. Police dress code may have to be changed to accommodate female Muslim police officers wearing the *hijab*.

Social Cohesion and Immigrant Adaptation

Management of multifaith diversity is aiming at social cohesion. There is no agreed definition of social cohesion but generally descriptions revolve around a shared vision held by a well-functioning core group or community that acts in a continuous and interminable process of achieving social harmony. Scholars across the world base their notion of social cohesion on five dimensions:

- (1) creating a **sense of belonging** incorporating shared values, trust and psychological identification with the nation state and with the religious group. Here, the issue of citizenship is important – citizenship should be made reasonably easy to obtain after 3 – 5 years.
- (2) ensuring **social justice and equity** in terms of access to government services and funding, including special programs to meet the special needs of migrants, including multiple opportunities to develop themselves and their talents through educational and occupational pathways.
- (3) encouraging **participation** by all migrant groups in civic, political and social life as part of creating this sense of belonging. Another aspect is that civic leaders as well as members of parliament need to attend the many varied ethnic and religious community functions as part of creating the sense of welcoming and participation that lie at the heart of social cohesion.
- (4) bringing about **acceptance** of newcomers and minorities and working against racism and discrimination. Religious communities ought be “welcoming agencies” reaching out to migrants..
- (5) forging a **sense of worth** incorporating people’s general happiness, life satisfaction and future expectations. Migrant people must all have a sense of their personal worth as

individuals, generally happy that hard work has brought rewards, generally satisfied with their lives and with achievable and realistic expectations.

Religion is about believing, bonding, behaving and belonging, reflecting its cognitive, emotional, moral and social dimension. All religious groups, drawing from the deep wells of their own spiritualities and rituals, must forge their own understanding of migration and multiculturalism and of interfaith interaction. Today, to be religious is to be interreligious. All migrants and refugees carry with them an eternal sadness because ultimately they did not want to leave their homeland but were driven by economic and political considerations. The Vietnamese elderly refugees living in their strange adopted land of Australia often recall the words of a popular lullaby:

*Every afternoon, I go and stand
On the threshold of the back door,
My eyes are fixed towards my native horizon,
And I feel a heartbreaking nostalgia.*

And they have another beautiful saying, *Birds come to rest in peaceful lands.* Thank you.

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