

On Hidden Diaspora Communities, a "Borderless" World, and GLOCAL Initiatives

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Previously, I have posted about Flying Communities, Floating Communities, and even Isolated Communities. So a few weeks ago, I curiously went along with four of my Toronto friends to see "hidden communities" in a high-rise condo for sale located in a densely populated area of Toronto; in a compound resembling what the urban missiologist Ray Bakke describes as the "urban jungle." After all, urbanization (and mega-cities) and government multi-culturalisation policies (multi-cultures) are twin results of diasporas. Without population movements, there would be no mega-cities or multi-cultural realities. Thus, evangelism and "church growth" (Donald McGavran) strategies responding to these two issues (current urban/megacities missions, multicultural congregations) are actually addressing realities stemming from the phenomenon of diasporas.

1. Hidden Diaspora Communities

Anyways, back to the apartment block? The condo apartment we wanted to see was located on the 17th floor overlooking the Toronto south view -- including the CN Tower in downtown. Once, we got inside the elevator, I must admit that I felt I was in a different country. Nobody spoke to each other so I did not hear a variety of languages, but I smelled evidence of different cuisines as people entered and exited the small space. Arriving at the 17th floor, I smelled fresh curry intermingled with the scent of fried tortillas! This apartment block was bursting at the seams with new immigrants from the horn of North East Africa, Central Africa, Central America, among many others. I don't know how many nations and language groups are represented in that 25-story building, but I was told there were some 1500 residents in one tower. In the compound there are three towers; so there must be approximately 4500 people, mostly newly immigrated people, from the so-called unreached regions of our planet representing what the late missiologist Ralph Winter described as the "unreached people groups" (UPGs).

Then last week (06.08.2010), I had breakfast with a friend, Nigel Paul B., who is directing a fast emerging missions initiative among the UPGs in diasporas living in mega-cities, such as Toronto. Following breakfast, I said to Nigel: "I would like to move in to one of those towers!?" He looked me in the eye and said: "Joy, really??" To which I responded: "I am serious but I must convince my wife!?" Again he asked: "Are you prepared to leave your nice apartment by the Lakeshore?" I wasn't kidding.

So, together we returned to the 25-story building. Once there, Nigel went straight to the door to read the names of the occupants. He tallied the number of Africans and Middle Eastern people; he can tell where people are from by their names. But as for me, after counting twenty-five Mohameds and another twelve Rezzas, I stopped! I was shocked. These unreached diasporas were hidden in these apartment blocks of my very own Canadian city!

What can be done? Surely we cannot ignore the fact that hundreds (on a greater scale of Canada, thousands) of the people we are trying to reach over there are now right here. I am convinced that we would find this same scenario in other cities such as London, Chicago, Paris, Sydney, and Seoul, etc. While we pour resources into training and equipping our international workers (i.e. missionaries) to "become all to all people" (i.e. language acquisition, cultural debriefings, visa attainments, etc), we are doing relatively little to motivate and mobilize our people locally to do what we are doing globally. Instead of intentionally deploying our local workers to our local "urban jungles", equipping them with cross-cultural training (so they are at least culturally sensitive!), we continue on as we have for eras, expecting newcomers "who do not speak our language or have a firm grasp of our cultural mores, to approach us. Furthermore, we expect them to immediately adjust to our way of

communicating and to our way of doing things. Obviously, there are two sides of this 'adjusting and accepting' coin, but I'm not going to get into that in this article.[1] I do know that I have been a 'foreigner', and I understand the tendency to group with my kababayan (my countrymen in Pilipino) desperately grasping for 'home' in the people representing the homeland I had left behind.

There is great value in the idea of entering a 'foreigner's' world with the Good News of Jesus Christ but it is still a challenge to many Christians to conceive how it is just as valid to enter the foreigner's world right here on our doorsteps. Some organisations may not agree that we need to intentionally and strategically engage these newly arrived UPGs, because to them these people are no longer 'unreached' once they have arrived in the West. This is because they believe that once outside of the '10/40 Window' these people have a greater chance of hearing the Gospel, hence are no longer on the top of the priority list. This is a losing proposition in our increasingly 'borderless' world[2]. I understand this argument from a funding point, but readers, consider that this is a kairos moment in history, and consider ways in which to make it work! This is a time that requires us to be multi-directional, Glocal (global and local simultaneously), and non-spatial in our missions strategy and practice.

2. What I mean by 'Borderless'?

I feel I have to make a note on my usage of the term 'borderless.' There is some debate in missions circles as to the definition of 'borderless.' Obviously political borders still exist, as do cultural, linguistic, economic, etc. borders. What Lausanne Diasporas refers to is the "borderless world" originally used by economists to describe the state of political economy in which institutions operate globally and are not fixed to a specific place. In the economists' 'borderless world,' technology has enabled twenty-four-hour connection, round-the-clock transactions, information and resources travelling across time zones, borders and cultures instantaneously. The progress of technology has also facilitated travel at a mind-boggling speed. It is in this 'borderless world' that migrants cross continents, oceans, and airspace in a matter of hours. Thus, the interconnected economy is influencing more than world markets, but also the international distribution of people. This "borderless world" has immense implications for missions. The fact of the matter is that people all around the world are connected twenty-four-hour, seven-days-a-week, in 'real-time,' and travel technologies enable people to cross time zones in hours. Thousands of people are transplanted daily, and as a result, are immersed in the reality of being truly 'multicultural.' The redistribution of people has opened up a multitude of ministry models.

3. GLOCAL Initiatives

Dr. Paul Eshleman of Finishing the Task (<http://www.finishingthetask.com/>), and Chairman of the LCWE Strategy Working Group, recently observed that many UPGs are currently in diaspora. Specifically, over a quarter of all of the Unreached and Unengaged People groups over 25,000 are diaspora groups. What is 'Unreached and Unengaged'? According to Finishing the Task, Unreached and Unengaged groups are those who have 'less than 2% evangelical believers', and who 'in most cases no one is trying to reach?'. This is a great challenge that requires synchronised global and local, or GLOCAL initiatives!

Is it indeed possible for missions initiatives to be intentionally global and local simultaneously? Does it require great leaps in organizational development to make it possible? Does it necessitate mass changes in funding and structure? In the long run, maybe for some organizations, but there are certainly those who have recognized the challenge and have responded courageously. Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF) is one of the forerunners in adopting a new field: 'Borderless.' Important structural changes aside, let me propose to you, that Diaspora Missiology can even simply be put into action by a response to a Call, and an intentional action to 'Move In' to the foreign worlds on our doorsteps.

In Toronto today there are devoted followers of Jesus Christ who are deliberately moving into the Urban Jungle and are climbing apartment blocks to be his witness in these packed locations where

many of the "hidden" UPGs live. This group, appropriately named MoveIn (<http://movein.to/vision/>) has no complicated or sophisticated organizational hierarchy. They are ordinary folks committed to reach the unreached diasporas who God has sovereignly brought into our cities. So I am praying to move in with them to actively participate in GLOCAL missions among these hidden UPGs in Toronto.

The Lausanne Movement is committed to mobilize the Whole Church to take the Whole Gospel to the Whole World. In our time we have the chance to do this locally and globally. Diaspora Missiology is concerned about reaching the hidden diaspora communities in our mega cities. To learn more about how Diaspora Missiology is practiced, please refer to the Advance Paper for Diaspora Multiplex posted at <http://conversation.lausanne.org/en/conversations/detail/10540>.

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[1] More on the flip side of the "adapting coin" see my response to Dr. Samuel Escobar's article "Mission Fields on the Move" at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/globalconversation/may2010/response4.html>

[2] I am not the only voice on this topic. See Dr. J.D. Payne's article "Immigration and North America: Who in the World Is My Neighbor Anyway?" at Lausanne World Pulse (<http://www.lausanneworldpulse.com/themedarticles.php/1099?pg=all>).

*Note: Photo from flickr user: Phillie Casablanca