Cities, and particularly mega-cities like London or Barcelona, are nowadays dustbins into which problems produced by globalization are dumped. They are also laboratories in which the art of living with those problems (though not of resolving them) is experimented with, put to the test, and (hopefully, hopefully…) developed. Most seminal impacts of globalization (above all, the divorce of power from politics, and the shifting of functions once undertaken by political authorities sideways, to the markets, and downward, to individual life-politics) have been by now thoroughly investigated and described in great detail. I will confine myself therefore to one aspect of the globalization process—too seldom considered in connection with the paradigmatic change in the study and theory of culture: namely, the changing patterns of global migration.

There were three different phases in the history of modern-era migration.

The first wave of migration followed the logic of the tri-partite syndrome: territoriality of sovereignty, ‘rooted’ identity, gardening posture (subsequently referred to, for the sake of brevity, as TRG). That was the emigration from the ‘modernized’ centre (read: the site of order-building and economic-progress—the two main industries turning out, and off, the growing numbers of ‘wasted humans’), partly exportation and partly eviction of up to 60 million people, a huge amount by nineteenth century standards, to ‘empty lands’ (read: lands whose native population could be struck off the ‘modernized’ calculations; be literally uncounted and unaccounted for, presumed either non-existent or irrelevant). Native residues still alive after massive slaughters and massive epidemics, have been proclaimed by the settlers the objects of ‘white man’s civilizing mission’.

The second wave of migration could be best modeled as an ‘Empire emigrates back’ case. With dismantling of colonial empires, a number of indigenous people in various stages of their ‘cultural advancement’ followed their colonial superiors to the metropolis. Upon arrival, they were cast in the only worldview-strategic mould available: one constructed and practiced earlier in the nation-building era to deal with the categories earmarked for ‘assimilation’—a process aimed at the annihilation of cultural difference, casting the ‘minorities’ at the receiving end of crusades, Kulturkämpfe and proselytizing missions (currently renamed, in the name of ‘political correctness’, as ‘citizenship education’ aimed at ‘integration’). This story is not yet finished: time and again, its echoes reverberate in the declarations of intent of the politicians who notoriously tend to follow the habits of Minerva’s Owl known to spread its wings by the end of the day. As the first phase of migration, the
drama of the ‘empire migrating back’ is tried, though in vain, to be squeezed into the frame of the now outdated TRG syndrome.

The third wave of modern migration, now in full force and still gathering momentum, leads into the age of diasporas: a world-wide archipelago of ethnic/religious/linguistic settlements—oblivious to the trails blazed and paved by the imperialist-colonial episode and following instead the globalization-induced logic of the planetary redistribution of life resources. Diasporas are scattered, diffused, extend over many nominally sovereign territories, ignore territorial claims to the supremacy of local demands and obligation, are locked in the double (or multiple) bind of ‘dual (or multiple) nationality’ and dual (or multiple) loyalty. The present-day migration differs from the two previous phases by moving both ways (virtually all countries, including Britain, are nowadays both ‘immigrant’ or ‘emigrant’), and privileging no routes (routes are no longer determined by the imperial/colonial links of the past). It differs also in exploding the old TRG syndrome and replacing it with a EAH one (extraterritoriality, ‘anchors’ displacing the ‘roots’ as primary tools of identification, hunting strategy).

The new migration casts a question mark upon the bond between identity and citizenship, individual and place, neighborhood and belonging. Jonathan Rutherford, acute and insightful observer of the fast changing frames of human togetherness, notes1 that the residents of the London street on which he lives form a neighborhood of different communities, some with networks extending only to the next street, others which stretch across the world. It is a neighborhood of porous boundaries in which it is difficult to identify who belongs and who is an outsider. What is it we belong to in this locality? What is it that each of us calls home and, when we think back and remember how we arrived here, what stories do we share?

Living like the rest of us (or most of that rest) in a diaspora (how far stretching, and in what direction(s))? among diasporas (how far stretching and in what direction(s))? has for the first time forced on the agenda the issue of ‘art of living with a difference’—which may appear on the agenda only once the difference is no longer seen as a merely temporary irritant, and so unlike in the past urgently requiring arts, skills, teaching and learning. The idea of ‘human rights’, promoted in the EAH setting to replace/complement the TRG institution of territorially determined citizenship, translates today as the ‘right to remain different’. By fits and starts, that new rendition of the human-rights idea sediments, at best, tolerance; it has as yet to start in earnest to sediment solidarity. And it is a moot question whether it is fit to conceive group solidarity in any other form than that of the fickle and fray, predominantly virtual ‘networks’, galvanized and continually re-modeled by the interplay of individual connecting and disconnecting, making calls and declining to reply them.

The new rendition of the human-rights idea disassembles hierarchies and tears apart the imagery of upward (‘progressive’) ‘cultural evolution’. Forms of life float, meet, clash, crash, catch hold of each other, merge and hive off with (to paraphrase