SPECIAL SECTION

Migrants, mobility, and mobilization

Edited by

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Introduction: Migrants, mobility, and mobilization

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Abstract: This issue brings together the work of researchers who seek to illuminate the class configurations of contemporary global diasporas. Contributions proceed by problematizing the relationship between political mobilization and the class locations of women and men as they negotiate and renegotiate the social conditions under which they make a living as *émigrés*, people who are subject to and participants in the processes of global change. Although class and culture, as well as mobility and fixity, are often presented as oppositional lenses through which to view global transformations, articles in this issue explore the possibilities for translation of particularized local or cultural concerns into broader collective mobilizations of class activism, nationalist claims, or struggles for entitlement in the circumscribed political spaces migrants seek to create. The gender, ethnic, local, national, and other cultural components of identity and class formation are made explicit as contributors question how and why political struggles and activism may, or indeed may not, be carried forward in geographic and social border crossings as well as citizenship and migration scenarios. It is the contention of each contributor that any instance of activism, and also its absence, requires sustained critical examination of the politics and economics of its production and reproduction.

Keywords: class, globalization, migration, neoliberalism, political mobilization, transnationalism

Neoliberalism, globalization, and the anthropology of migration

Over the past few decades, in anthropology as in many other disciplines, there has been a proliferation of research on migrants and migration. The upsurge of interest in migration has emerged in response to what is considered by some analysts an unprecedented scale, intensity,

and novelty in forms of transnational movements of people since the last half of the twentieth century (Castles and Davidson 2000; Cohen 2006; Foner 2003; Glick Schiller 1999; Kivisto and Faist 2007; Sassen 1998; Zlotnik 1998).¹ Referred to as the “age of migration” by some analysts (Castles and Miller 2003), this period of heightened mobility of people across national borders followed on the heels of the oil crisis in the 1970s

that precipitated a series of transformations associated with doctrines of neoliberalism in international political economies.

Neoliberalism is associated with a series of interlocking reforms in the political and economic structures of nation-states, including the revision and in some cases liberalization of national emigration and immigration policies²; structural reforms in developing countries under the aegis of multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund; the development of improved telecommunications technology facilitating the transnational connectedness of people along with the mobility of products; increased spatial fluidity of capital; the rise of a new international division of labor as well as the rise of flexible, geographically decentered production regimes (Harvey 1995, 2005). In many economies, the concentration and centralization of enterprises within the framework of the nation-state shifted to the reconcentration and dispersal of economic enterprises across the globe. Mass production in state-regulated enterprises in agriculture and industry diminished in favor of production in small-scale, self-regulated privately run enterprises (Sassen 2001; Tsing 2002). The role of the nation-state itself in regulating economies has come to be reduced with the global integration of markets and the attenuation of borders in support of increased capital and trade flows.

Borders are not necessarily traversed with more ease for migrants seeking work and citizenship in economically privileged nations, however. Exceptions are marked by class and national differences, mostly having to do with historical political and economic arrangements stemming from the colonial period and post-colonial divisions of labor. As with capital moving offshore in search of malleable, low-cost labor, or “greenfields” (Collins 2003) for production sites, wealthier nations exhibit various specialized labor markets where the demand for “cheapened” immigrant labor is intense and there is no shortage of workers socially, economically, and even culturally predisposed to travel to such insecure, intensively exploitative forms of employment (Cohen 2006; Sassen 1998; Sayad

2004). Such migration flows are facilitated by the states that both send and receive. And, as always, the bearers of capital (economic, social, and cultural) continue to seek citizenship privileges in multiple locations (Ong 1996, 2006).

This set of transformations is often associated with globalization, which encompasses the multiple social, economic, political, and cultural processes through which sovereign nation-states are criss-crossed and undermined (Beck 2000). Transnationalism is seen as one facet of globalization, where commodities, capital, and also *people* increasingly move between nations. From both within anthropology and outside the discipline, globalization is also thought of as a geopolitical process of the transnationalization of the Western state (in part), colluding with similar though heterogeneous transnationalizations of other states (Kalb 2005b); or a fragmentation of nations rather than states, coupled with the dislocation of industrial production (Friedman 2003). Instead of seeing the geopolitical and institutional shifts taking place under globalization as the outcome of a conflict between free markets/economics and the state/politics, such approaches relate these global shifts to transnational class formations that reveal changes in power structures and centers (see Kalb 2006).

The volume of migration-related scholarship across the disciplines certainly grew during this “age.” Before the early to mid-1990s, explicit studies of migration as a social, cultural, political, and economic phenomenon within anthropology were few, and those existing left little impact on what was considered distinctive about the research conventions of the discipline. Although well-known ethnographic studies, such as Mead’s work in New Guinea in the 1930s, contained observations about migratory practices (Brettell 2003), the attention was not analytically sustained and linked to theoretical developments. Nor was the primacy of the bounded anthropological field site and geographically circumscribed ethnographic methodology—basically a conflation of geographic locale, identity, and livelihood—subjected to central critical debate until much later (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). As many have pointed out, the study of

the mobility of people from *place to place* was overshadowed by the study of people *in place* (see for example, Brettell 2000). Mobility was eclipsed by a prevailing “sedentarist bias,” which ensured the hegemonic status of studies of locality and the local (Malkki 1995).³

This bias inclined many anthropologists to overlook what is a crucial for an anthropology of migration: the observation made by Wolf in *Europe and the People without History* (1982) that few locales have been untouched historically by the mobility of people.⁴ Wolf demonstrated how the powerful and powerless, socially differentiated into different classes of people, have scored the earth throughout global history. European colonizers and imperialists, compelled by the imperative to accumulate, circumnavigated the globe at least since the fifteenth century setting in motion the now familiar circuits of people, commodities, information, and ideas. Capital and labor also moved in the past, as in the present. “New laborers” moved to capital, whereas capital itself sloughed off workers in one locale after another, relentlessly seeking new, cheaper sources of labor. As the history of slave rebellions, peasant uprisings, and worker revolts have shown in the era of the formation of capitalism and in the contemporary era of the reformulation of capitalism, capital’s relation to labor—the relations between classes—has rarely been one of quiet accommodation.

Classes, conflicts, and migrant mobilization

This special issue then is not merely concerned about adding to the burgeoning literature on migration by focusing on migrants and the experience of mobility across borders. The focus is rather to illuminate the class configurations of contemporary global diasporas by studying the political mobilization of people whose lives and livelihoods are complicated by the experience of migration. Here, we employ a Marxist notion of class as a relational concept to discuss various groups of migrants, set within migration histories that locate them in deskilled, racialized

labor markets or occupational niches, be they factory workers (in Leach’s example), public and domestic-service workers (discussed by Peró, Zontini, and Barber), or members of the petty capitalist class (explored in Lem’s case). By emphasizing how class acquires a different social and material complexion in one location relative to another (Tilly 2001), our work is aligned with writers who have been concerned with class and spatial processes (see Carbonella 2005; Kalb 1997; Narotzky and Smith 2006; Roseberry 1989; Wolf 1982). Each of the articles represents an attempt to problematize the relationship between political mobilization and the class locations of migrant women and men, as they seek to negotiate and renegotiate the social conditions under which they live their lives and make their living against the exigencies of neoliberalism.

Our concern to confront questions of class in this issue is driven by the widespread observation⁵ that class is less discussed in the anthropology of migration and globalization, as well as in anthropology in general. Attention to global processes has been directed more to cultural flows rather than to the class inflexions of migration and mobility.⁶ For example, Appadurai (1990, 1996) set the tone for many research agendas with a then innovative articulation on the paradoxes of cultural flows associated with transnational imaginaries [in Benedict Anderson’s (1983) sense of “imagined communities”]. Such imaginaries are linked to differentiated and disjunctive flows termed “scapes,” a metaphor drawn from the idea of landscape with its connotations of vistas, sentiment, memory, temporality, and so on. Although Appadurai is careful to acknowledge historical migratory interactions initiated by powerful elites—economic transactions are factored into “financescapes”—it is cultural flows associated with “the image, the imagined, the imaginary” (1996: 31) that are privileged. Arguably, this model provided a hugely influential yet culturally circumscribed research agenda for translocal scholarship (see also Inda and Rosaldo 2002). In this body of work on the anthropology of globalization, liberated from place-bound studies, it is striking to us that class, where mentioned, typ-

ically appeared more as a contingency than as fundamental to the character of all global mobilities. It was seldom placed in contention by classed human subjects, migrants, and their nonmobile counterparts.

Although class and culture, as well as mobility and the fixity of people in place, are often presented as oppositional lenses through which to view global transformations, Bauman (1998) reminds us that a more profound understanding of the global forces at work in contemporary capitalism, in its varying manifestations, requires a consideration of the forces that produce categories of people who remain tied to particular locations. To properly assess globalization and the unevenness accompanying the impositions of modernity, various forms of human mobility should be counterposed simultaneously with those whose mobility remains restricted. Later Bauman (2004) continues this theme by speaking of modernity's "outcasts." We should proceed sociologically, he insists, with attention also to the political implications of continuities and as well as dislocations. Bauman's insistence on the social, material, and geographic interconnectedness between those who are mobile, or aspire to be, and those who remain "condemned" to immobility and perpetual impoverishment provides a powerful antidote to *classless* narratives of mobility.

Further exemplification of the classed tension between fixity and movement in the geographies of capitalism (Massey 1994) occurs in the work of anthropologists concerned with the social dynamics of *place making* and social reproduction in particular geographies (e.g., Escobar 2001; Kalb 2005a, 2005b; Narotzky and Smith 2006; Sider 2003). Such work positions class with all its complexities—material, social, subjective, and political—in historical and spatial configurations amenable to ethnographic enquiry. Kalb is explicit in calling for a research program that is "theory driven, comparative, and in search of explanations of divergent spatial and temporal outcomes of universal process" (2005b: 176). The program includes a reconsideration of class for anthropology (Kalb 2005a). He argues that, rather than considering class

reductively, and *a priori*, as a form of consciousness determined by relations to the means of production, it should be thoroughly investigated through an ethnographic research program of historically sensitive local—global enquiry. This seems helpful. However, it is not our intention here to confine our interventions strictly to the debate about the overprivileging of mobility and flux in various global circuits. Rather we wish to advance the proposition that migration and the forces that produce and shape geographic mobility are also the forces that produce and reproduce class distinctions and differentiations in different locations. Moreover, we wish to suggest that the experiences of those processes in the past and in the present, and in different national contexts, play a significant role in situating migrants within the political space of nations and beyond.

Gender, compliance, discipline, and defiance

The articles in this special section draw on the insights about continuities, locations, and dislocations by exploring the possibilities for the translation of particularized concerns of local claims into the broader collective mobilizations of class activism, as well as nationalist claims and struggles for entitlement as denizens within defined polities. Zontini, for example, attempts to understand the question of how such a translation may occur by focusing on the everyday political actions of Filipino and Moroccan women in two locations, Bologna and Barcelona. She argues that anthropologists and feminist scholars have pressed for a redefinition of the "political," offering alternative definitions that reach beyond formal institutions to include broader power relations within the workplace, and family and households, as part of a political project to understand the effectiveness of feminist political strategies. Despite their efforts, however, there has been a failure to identify the needs and claims of important new actors who live and work within the context of the political and economic changes that are specific to the twenty-

first century in contemporary Europe. Her article then focuses on the main concerns of immigrant women as well as the different concrete strategies of resistance that are used to improve their everyday conditions. Through her contribution and also in the contribution by Barber, the class, gender, and cultural components of identity formation are made explicit as the contributors question how and why political struggles and activism may, or indeed may not, be carried forward in border crossings (geographic and social), and citizenship and migration scenarios.

Barber's article addresses the conditions in the gendered labor export market under which Philippine women in domestic service comply with the expectation of docility and subordination, *and* the conditions under which such compliance might translate into defiance. She argues that the individualizing forces of the labor market induce what can be construed as a classed "performance" of compliance. This performance does not necessarily extend beyond the context of the labor market and domestic service. Indeed the consciousness of class is also shaped through the staging of the migration process, the experience of labor-market deskilling and demoralizing class subjugation associated with the labor process, and the many transnational political dialogues about migration that occur in the diaspora and the Philippines. However, the translation from subordinated subjectivity to militant political expression is extremely difficult; the compliant face of class being more visible. Barber illustrates the ways in which this consciousness is reinforced and sometimes challenged, through consideration of how cellular-phone technologies enhance the capacities for organized and personal resistance by Filipino workers while also contributing to the contentious reproduction of the migrant labor force.

These contributions draw on and illuminate issues raised in the current discussion on the feminization of migration (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Jones-Correa 1998; Pessar and Mahler 2003; Werbner 1999), in which the close scrutiny accorded women migrants and the gendering of migration, although remarkably productive, has

yet to provide a sustained emphasis on transnational class dynamics and migrant mobilization. Class, along with the racialization of certain migratory flows, is, however, often acknowledged, even if in a cursory manner, as a feature of gendered migration worthy of further attention. More prominence in feminist work on gendered migration has been accorded the forms of subordination experienced by the vast numbers of women migrants engaged in commoditized social reproduction all over the world (e.g., Anderson 2000; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003; Parreñas 2001; Sassen 2000). Further, with few exceptions (see Barber 2004; Gamburd 2000; George 2005; Gibson, Law, and McKay 2001), it is the disciplining qualities of the emotionally charged labor processes of care-giving work, particularly when it is home-based, combined with gendered cultural politics favoring feminized docility and familial loyalty, which have enabled the elision of class in the ethnographic literature on women migrants.

So one concern we bring to this issue is to suggest that migration research risks becoming preoccupied with narrowly constituted discourses about disciplining migrants, whether as women, or as neoliberal subjects and citizens. To this end, we address the class complexities that attend disciplining regimes. As Leach shows in her contribution, such disciplining mechanisms and the acquiescence of different groups of migrants to them must be understood as produced by the neoliberal transformations that have impinged on the work context in the auto industry in Canada. By detailing these processes and locating the different histories of migration to Canada in different periods of the development of Canadian capitalism, Leach argues that because older histories of migrations have come to be privileged in working-class culture, they subordinate and emphasize the differences, rather than similarities, in histories of dispossession. Their class-based, masculinist, and nationalist ideologies bolster neoliberal agendas and pave the way for super-exploitation and the pitting of worker against worker with a resulting antagonism between immigrants and non-immigrants. Such negative interactions mitigate

the practice of class-based politics. Leach's contribution then explores the ways in which the disciplinary regimes of neoliberalism promote docility and passivism while repressing defiance and activism.

Producing politics, containing contentiousness

It is the contention of each of the contributors to this issue that any instance of activism or its absence requires the problematization of the politics and economics of the production and reproduction of activism. Although Leach explores the question of its absence, both Barber and Lem provide examples of the contingency of militancy. Both articles address the question of the political and economic changes that produce contentiousness in some cases and quiescence in others. Lem's article explores the political and economic conditions that produce compliance and contention among different classes of migrants in urban France. Noting that neither Chinese migrants, nor the French-born children of Chinese migrants, participated in the urban protests and demonstrations in France in the fall of 2005 and spring of 2006, Lem explores the problem of the political quiescence among certain denizens of France by exploring the relationship between livelihood and citizenship. From her observations about petty entrepreneurship, which is undertaken by many Chinese migrants to make a living, she argues that in neoliberal regimes, petty capitalism and entrepreneurship are seen as a means by which immigrants can become integrated into host societies and disciplined into citizens. It is both encouraged by the state and often quickly taken up by migrants themselves. Lem argues that under neoliberalism, such strategies for promoting integration and civic participation also ultimately produce political submission and docility in the face of exploitation and lead to the erosion of the entitlements of citizenship.

To the degree that anthropologists now attend to contemporary migrations as distinctive phenomena—not merely as the movement of

people and their cultural *habitus* from one location to another—the nature of circuits, the cultural and social character of transnational networks, and the ways in which people and resources flow through those circuits have arguably provided more compelling subject matter than the relationships of class that travel along with migrants. Our concerns over the deficit of examining class relations in migration and class mobilizations apply beyond the discipline of anthropology to migration studies in general. Apart from the well-known work of Sassen (1998), Sennett (1998), and others concerned with linking migration, political economy, and issues in contemporary capitalism,⁷ there has been a prevailing preoccupation with the regulation of migration and with the disciplining regimes of citizenship. Where class is discussed, it is often linked with and perhaps subordinated to discourses about particular types of migrant-worker flows, where the classed character of the work enables class relations and subjectivities to be taken for granted. In this issue we contend that class relations are rendered more complex through migration. The classed character of migrant livelihoods throughout emigration, migration, and immigration is thus merely the starting point for a critical examination of how migration and class are mutually constitutive, but in complex ways.

A critical transnational perspective (see Glick Schiller 2006) is fundamental to the project of examining how class travels and with what consequences for migrants' mobilizations. Further, it is through the theoretical and empirical investigation of transnationalism that the discipline of anthropology has made an impressive contribution to migration studies (Gille and Ó Riain 2002). However, various forms of methodological (and individualized) nationalism have persisted through several iterations of transnational scholarship (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003). One example germane to the study of transnational migrant experience concerns what Wimmer and Glick Schiller have identified as a "communitarian" bias evidenced by a tendency to over-represent the commonality of migrants' experiences, a methodological procedure that

replicates a bounded community logic supposedly dislodged through the translocal orientation remarked on earlier with reference to Appadurai's model. Here, our work seeks to show the imbrications and reconfigurations of class in terms of differentiation, as well as relations of dependencies and interdependencies, exploitation and power in the shifting grounds of social, cultural, and political loyalties in transnational migrant communities. Similarly, we touch on the related literature that has emerged on questions of citizenship (see for example Ong 1999, 2006)

Our efforts are an attempt to redress what is an imbalance in the scholarship of migration studies, by presenting ethnographies of migration and mobilization that focus on the social embeddedness of migrant lives and of their political concerns. Yet, we do not translate embeddedness into stasis. One of the ways we tackle this tension is by questioning how migrant agency converts into collective action. This is a point that is strongly emphasized in Però's article, which focuses on the organizations and activities that have been formed among Latin Americans working in the domestic-service industry in England. Però points out that in public debate on social integration, which is characterized by a mounting neoassimilationist and anti-multicultural offensive, immigrants have generally been considered objects to be managed, controlled, disciplined, and exploited. This is a theme echoed in citizenship debates throughout Europe, North America, and Australasia. Però argues that both assimilationist and multiculturalist visions of citizenship fail to address the conditions of exploitation under which migrants work. This in fact fosters the act of "misrecognition" of new migrants. As Però points out, the issue of exploitation, however constrained by citizenship debates, does not remain in a realm outside the formal political sphere. Popular organization and collective grass roots political movements seek recognition and address the relations by which classes are formed among migrant groups.

In this collection of essays, it is clear that our focus is on migrants as subjects of history. Each

of the authors is concerned with the question of agency. The ethnographic examples recorded here serve as ballast to a tendency to present migrants as objects of abstract political and economic forces made concrete in the disciplinary regimes of states and economies.⁸ In each of the articles, the point of departure is to explore *émigrés'* political engagement in the contemporary world of neoliberalism.

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Notes

1. Although many agree that the forms that contemporary migration takes are novel, on the question of scale there tends to be some disagreement. Staring (2000), for example, has presented empirical evidence to show that in scalar terms contemporary migration shows continuity with the past.

2. One example is the case of China, where the relaxation of national restrictions on emigration and population mobility within the country has accompanied the country's transition to a market economy. In Europe of course, the emergence of the Schengen Agreement in the context of the expanding European Union has permitted the freer movement of people within its boundaries.
3. Although there is a case to be made that a turning point in the volume of studies of migration in anthropology occurred in 1970 with the publication of *Migration and Anthropology* edited by Robert Spencer, as Brettell (2000) notes, its affect on the discipline was rather narrow. Later works authored by Glick Schiller, Basch, and Szanton-Blanc (1992), Glick Schiller (1999) and (2006), Gamburd (2000), and Rouse (1995) had a broader effect, both within and beyond the discipline of anthropology, in part due to problematization of locality in terms of migration and setting this current "age of migration" in the context of global history.
4. This is a point that is also made by Mintz (1998).
5. Tilly (2001: 299) concluded that anthropology had "lost its prominence as a source of general ideas about inequality" when he located only 19 out of 337 essays discussing this topic in the *Annual Review of Anthropology* from 1984 to 2000.
6. Some exceptions to this in anthropological studies of migration are De Genova (2005), Ong and Nonini (1997), Rouse (1995), Barber (2004), and Lem (2007). For a recent commentary on anthropology and class see *Anthropology News* 47 (8): November 2006.
7. For an overview of theoretical approaches to migration studies see Castles and Miller (2003) and Massey et al. (1993, 1998).
8. This tendency appears less in anthropological work than in studies of migration that appear in economics, political science, and sociology. For an overview of some of this work see, for example Hammar et al. (1997).

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