

Introduction: Limitations to Temporary Mobility

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Over the past several years social sciences have experienced a mushrooming fascination with issues of global mobility (e.g. Cresswell and Merriman 2011; Urry 2000; Vertovec and Cohen 2002). There are several journals which focus on issues related to the theme and also debates on whether the term *transnational* is appropriate to describe current situations at all. Mobility has become a buzzword of our times, and there are numerous perspectives to mobility – almost to the extent of cacophony. Mobility can mean many things to social scientists: large-scale movements of people, objects, capital and information across countries, transportation, travel / commuting, movement through public space, small scale mobility in people's everyday lives, to name a few interpretations

of the concept. Such intersecting forms of mobility occupy centre stage within contemporary developments in societies, since they reorganise social institutions, family life and lives of individuals. But one question lies central to all these phenomena, namely: How can a transnationally mobile life be sustainable in the long-term? It is therefore important to consider who moves, why and under which conditions (see Brah 1996, 182) – *and* under which limitations. Mobile individuals might be, for example, tourists, refugees, career expatriates or either lifestyle or labour migrants. All these mobile groups and individuals have different positions, motivations, roots and routes but are nevertheless transnationally mobile.

Mobility as the overarching concept for this thematic issue is understood

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as a continuum of various forms of movement of people where the mobility is motivated at one end by necessity and at the other by desire. Another scale related to mobility is that of permanent and temporary moves (see, e.g., Bell et al. 2000, 88; O'Reilly 2003, 301). Yet, there is plenty of room between all of these poles. Categorisations are always difficult and there is indeed a need to problematise the 'classic' boundaries between tourism and migration. For example, even the most economically determined labour migrants or medical tourists will act in their everyday life, to some extent, as cultural tourists, engaging with local food and language, visiting destinations of interest – even undergoing that much-maligned experience of 'culture shock'. Research on lifestyle migration presents empirical examples from various places in the world where a touristic experience leads to a migration to the same place. And while lifestyle migrants are typically not motivated by employment opportunities, many of them do work in their destinations.

Although contemporary political discourses and the rise of nationalistic right-wing movements in various countries might seem to suggest that South-to-North mobility is a monumental growing problem and that those who live in the North want to remain there – alone, with all their privileges – this thematic issue shows that there is in fact much mobility going on in other directions as well.

All five articles in this thematic issue discuss transnationally mobile people who are educated, relatively privileged and whose mobility is (at least seemingly) voluntary. The articles are markedly different in terms of

academic background, methodology, style, geographic span and balance between description and analysis; each looks at mobility from different perspectives. Such perspectives include the deconstruction of the spectacular in mobility and the way in which it can be perceived as uneventful (Jamie Coates), the expatriate-tourist conflict and the various forms of cultural capital to be gained from being 'not a tourist' (Roger Norum), citizenship and the involvement of the receiving state (Nadeem Karkabi), foreign residents' idealised perceptions leading to tensions, land conflicts and changes in environmental practices (Ana Spalding) and the international mobility of corporate professionals within a 'flexible' capitalist system (Anthony D'Andrea and Breda Gray). This thematic issue also queries whether the seemingly privileged are really all that privileged, and if so, to what extent. The issue discusses, among other things, which problems and limitations mobile individuals may encounter: even if at first blush such actors appear privileged and mobile by individual choice, the articles in this issue show that transnational mobility is not necessarily an easy ride, and that one should not forget the impacts such mobility has on the receiving communities.

In the first article, Jamie Coates describes the life of young mobile Chinese in Tokyo as an intersection between the Chinese government's drive for educational and economic success and Japan's flexible student visa labour system. The experiences of young mobile Chinese, who juggle several part-time jobs and studies in Japan, are difficult to position on

the necessity-desire continuum of movement. Moreover, they understand movement as rather (surprisingly?) uneventful and in terms of ‘floating’ or ‘navigation’. Rather than the result of a particular personal desire, many of Coates’ research subjects explained their mobility as a strategic choice made together with their family, viewing such a move as neither liberating nor oppressive. The act of movement does not stand out as an exceptional aspect of their lives but rather more as a ‘tactic’ that fits into wider regimes of life strategies. The article presents an in-depth analysis of an empirical reality where transnational mobility is a fact of life but not a cause of much excitement - or anxiety.

Roger Norum explores the shared imaginaries of mobility among early-career expatriates living in Kathmandu, Nepal. He focuses on the ways in which the expatriates construct, navigate and narrativise the boundaries between themselves and the thousands of tourists who visit the country annually, highlighting the age-old differentiation among travellers between cultured and uncultured. Norum’s article considers the extent to which travel as an idea and a practice is embedded in the identities of the expatriates who live there, the tourists who trek there and, in some ways, in the identity of modern Nepal itself. If some of the most compelling engagements in anthropology are between the ‘hosts’ and the ‘guests’, Norum argues that just as much can be gleaned from looking at the engagements between and among the different types of guests themselves. He shows that the tourists and expatriates in Nepal do not negotiate a *colonial past* but rather a *neo-colonial present*

and its concomitant imaginaries. The article shows how the past affects the present in various ways – something that must be considered when studying various instantiations of transnational mobility and its consequences.

Nadeem Karkabi shows how lifestyle migration from the global North to the South can introduce new dynamics of claiming and practising civil rights in the destination communities. The article discusses how European mobile individuals and indigenous Bedouins in Egypt negotiate civil membership vis-à-vis the Egyptian state in the coastal tourist towns of South Sinai. Political issues arise from granting privileged rights to non-citizen migrants while Bedouins are collectively marginalised, processes which introduce cultural isolation and class distinctions between the migrants and the local populations. At the time of writing, one cannot know the long-term consequences of the January 2011 revolutionary movements but, whatever they are, the article provides a valuable contribution analyzing the developments in the recent past that will undoubtedly affect the future. The article also reminds us of the important fact that mobility – and mobile people’s possible self-discovery *in situ* – is seldom, if ever, directed at an empty no-man’s land but in the midst of local realities and the consequences for indigenous populations can be drastic and far-reaching.

Ana Spalding describes a community of largely American lifestyle migrants in Bocas del Toro, Panama. She focuses on the contradiction between lifestyle migrants’ idealised perception of the place and the at times contradictory local realities,

discussing the creation of emerging markets, land conflicts and changes in environmental practices. Spalding's key concept in the article is the American dream; she argues that the discourse of the American dream ideal affects individuals' decision to move to Panama and eventually has an impact on their lives in Bocas del Toro. A globalized romantic perception of island living also contributes to these lifestyle migrants' detachment from place, limiting their possibility of engagement with local people and their surroundings. Similar processes are occurring in various other locations, too, and there is a need to analyse the deeper significance of such phenomena. In this endeavour, comparing a range of empirical cases could be very fruitful.

Anthony D'Andrea and Breda Gray write about the international relocation of corporate executives. Based on survey reports on international relocation trends, the authors examine how mobile knowledge workers have become entangled in 'flexible' employment regimes, meaning that labour is increasingly episodic, autonomous and unprotected. They show how the traditional expatriate is disappearing and being replaced by the 'nomadic worker', whose international mobility rises to meet the challenges of globalization. The article also outlines the profile of corporate expatriate populations, and D'Andrea and Gray's analysis reminds us that although micro-level qualitative case studies can teach us a lot, we should not ignore research that engages with quantitative studies and institutional levels as well.

Whether related to temporary mobility (a limited stay often linked to short-term visas or lifestyle choices –

Coates, Norum, Karkabi, Spalding), mobility within multi-national enterprises (career-long peripatetic lifestyles as well as regular short-term moves – D'Andrea and Gray, Norum), retirement mobility (permanent or part-time residence in a foreign country – Spalding), student mobility (Coates), transnational service workers (Coates, Karkabi, Spalding), humanitarians and anthropologists (Norum) or other forms of cross-border 'commuting', the articles together provide a comparative investigation of the impact of mobility on individuals in various locations and situations as well as on the impact of mobility on diverse practices and institutions.

The mobile individuals discussed in this issue are in many ways privileged; they move (somewhat) voluntarily and can choose their destinations. This means that they can often be described in terms of flexibility and personal choice. Yet, some actors end up having limited agency in their choice to move again or to return to their country of origin (see also Amit 2012). While different mobile people may experience differing degrees of limitations and obstacles, many of them end up living in situations of precarity or liminality. Institutional forces or practices can also keep such individuals mobile beyond their desire to remain so.

Moreover, in spite of a certain championing of mobility that suits the current economic context and the numerous legal provisions adopted in connection with them – a degree of 'leaving fever' mixed with flexible visas and geographic proximity (Coates), certain destinations becoming particularly popular, cheaper

and more attractive (Norum, Spalding) mixed with support from the receiving state (Karkabi, Spalding) – there are a number of limitations and obstacles that remain, limitations this issue aims to cast into relief.

For one, residence and citizenship statuses are far from simple (Coates, Karkabi, Spalding): this kind of privileged mobility is often vaguely and irregularly regulated, leaving some individuals able to navigate the confusing rules and regulations better than others (see also O'Reilly 2000). Logistical limitations, cultural differences and language barriers are, quite naturally, omnipresent (Karkabi, Spalding, D'Andrea and Gray). Easily identifiable are also the difficulties in developing meaningful relationships beyond the family unit and finding work availabilities for spouses or arranging the education of children (D'Andrea and Gray). Interestingly enough, D'Andrea and Gray's data shows that the mobile professionals consider culturally similar, same-language economies to their own as particularly difficult destinations. On the other hand, lifestyle migrants and expatriates often seek the company of their fellow nationals, which leads to their isolation from the local populations (Karkabi, Spalding, see also Benson 2012; Fechter 2007; O'Reilly 2000), though they may also seek to disavow any association with their compatriots, depending on their positionality in the local context (Norum). The everyday realities of a mobile life can be at once disorienting and difficult (Coates), defamiliarising and decentering (Norum). The relationship to present time and place is often bounded by the process of always leaving (Norum).

Yet, if in the face of all these challenges mobile individuals choose to return home, they may well find they are left behind in career or life opportunities when compared to those that have stayed (Coates). Moreover, for many transnationally mobile individuals, it may not necessarily even be clear where home is.

This thematic issue wants also to highlight that there are often multiple class (and other) hierarchies within communities of expatriates (Coates, Norum, Spalding) and that the mobile individuals often hold idealised and romanticised views of the places where they reside (Norum, Karkabi, Spalding). Some of the challenges and outcomes of a mobile life can lead to tensions among foreigners (Norum) and between foreigners and locals, for example in terms of property speculation (Karkabi, Spalding).

The various methods used by the authors in their studies (interviews, participant observation, quantitative surveys, archival research, etc.) provide different types of data that shed light on different aspects of the mobile phenomena they investigate. With respect to methodology, all the authors experienced difficulties in quantifying the number of mobile individuals in their respective fields as no concrete statistics exist or, for that matter, accurate definitions of who exactly should be counted. This indicates that it is difficult to grasp the fluid phenomena of transnational mobility, which in turn highlights the importance of trying to grasp at least some aspects of it. The abundance of literature and case studies might make it difficult for scholars to find each other, but here in this issue an inspiring

collection of scholars were able to collaborate around the same theme. Although the case studies are very different, they nevertheless contribute to the same discussion, and the different angles provided by the texts remind us of the diversity of mobile phenomena and present us with new perspectives. This issue marks an enthusiastic, if modest, point of departure for future discussions and debates.

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