

62. Privileged Movement and Travel: Developing New Ethnographic and Conceptual Approaches

Convenor:

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Anthropologists have a longstanding interest in the social organization and salience of mobility and travel. In addition to the ethnological study of mobility by pastoralist and hunter-gatherer communities and the dynamics of religious pilgrimages, anthropological attention has focused substantially upon patterns of movement that have engulfed disadvantaged peoples who find themselves caught up in labour migration, forced emigration and immigration.

Yet in recent years anthropologists have - as an outcome of their ethnographic and analytical engagement with the processes and ramifications of globalization - become increasingly cognizant of the emergence of other forms of mobility and travel that are not readily accommodated within traditional theoretical models. Indeed, contemporary ethnographers are endeavouring to take account of “frequent flyers” and other travelers who can scarcely be identified as “disadvantaged”. What is more, the movement patterns, practices and purposes of “migratory elites” such as expatriates, transnational business consultants, international exchange students or middle-class youth who participate in “work abroad” programs often conspire to blur the lines between travel and migration, not to mention those that nominally separate work, study and tourism.

This workshop will seek to report a broad range of contemporary forms of privileged mobility and travel. It will ask whether existing anthropological theory is adequate to deal with emerging forms of “elite travel”.

Migration or Mobility? The ‘Problem’ of Corporate Expatriates

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Recent research on migration has often focused on non-privileged, low-skilled migration from ‘developing’ to ‘Western industrialised’ countries. This emphasis disregards the diversity of movement practices, which are not easily subsumed under these migration paradigms. A case in point are Euro-American corporate expatriates, who could be described as ‘skilled labour migrants’, as they are posted abroad by their companies for limited periods of time. Yet, they rarely feature in accounts of labour migration. Instead, they have been referred to tentatively as ‘professional transients’ (Castles 2000) and ‘cosmopolitans’ (Hannerz 1996). However, these definitions rather reveal the difficulties of adequately representing expatriates’ mobile lifestyles.

Instead, I suggest that the notion of ‘mobility’ is productive for conceptualising such privileged movement practices which are marginalised by theoretical migration frameworks. I demonstrate how employing ‘mobility’ rather than ‘migration’ allows for a more nuanced analysis of the situation of Euro-American expatriates working for

multinational companies in Jakarta, Indonesia. I argue that 'mobility' recognises the varied and complex forms of their professional transience, which do not adhere to established migration patterns, but nevertheless constitute an increasingly relevant form of contemporary working life.

A Long Vacation: Narratives of Transnational Mobility and Homemaking among Japanese Corporate Wives in the United States

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In this paper, I focus on the homemaking practices of Japanese corporate wives who accompany their 'corporate warrior' husbands to their job postings in the United States. The mobility practices of highly mobile professionals and their families have received relatively little anthropological attention thus far, perhaps because of the assumption that they are insulated from any profound experience of otherness, because of their socioeconomic privilege and sojourner mentality of getting the job done and going home. In the context of corporate-driven transnational migration, middle-class Japanese women perform the tasks of identity maintenance as an extension of their domestic responsibility. Thus, the home of these expatriate Japanese workers becomes the nexus between the global forces and local identities, and Japanese corporate wives the conservative agents of transnational capitalism. However, the experience of transnational mobility has unintended effects on these women's notions of 'home' and on their relationships to their husbands and children. By delegating the maintenance of transnational labor to the domestic sphere, transnational corporations may have, quite inadvertently, initiated a process of transformation that undermines its own structure of power from the inside out.

Travelling Images, Lives on Location – Cinematographers in the Film Industry

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The idea that images migrate and travel across cultures and borders more than any language is often cited by cinematographers as central to understanding their role as the image makers in film production. The diasporic milieu associated with creative collaboration in the global film industry characterises the higher echelon of personnel and crew. Professional cinematographers work on more feature films and commercials in more countries than directors. They dwell in areas such as London or Los Angeles, identified as 'latent pools' of flexible labour and tacit expertise on which producers draw when financing projects (Grabher, 2001).

Cinematographer informants are frequent flyers who view travel as journeying – to location ‘recces’ and to shoot fiction scripts in a wide range of destinations, cultures and climates. Career narratives reveal the complexity of incorporating constantly changing locale with management of relationships, diversity, technology and environment in working life. This paper will report on examples and quote interviews with these highly mobile professionals, whose lives are lived on and between locations. It will problematise the dynamics of choosing field sites in the researcher’s ethnography of cinematographers’ transnational working practices with reference to recently reconfigured notions of field and mobility in anthropology (see Gupta and Ferguson, Eds, 1997; Amit, Ed, 2000).

Travelling to Labor: Articulation and Dispersal in the Career Lives of Transnational Consultants

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This paper focuses on the peripatetic career lives of consultants working on a variety of infrastructure development projects. Their work involves a succession of work partners in a wide variety of locales and countries. The capacity of these consultants to quickly integrate into new project teams is enabled by the increasing diffusion of a transnational institutional framework promulgated through the protocols of multilateral development agencies. However, it is equally dependent on the capacity of individual consultants to tolerate and in many cases even celebrate, a lifestyle punctuated by frequent discontinuities and absences as working partners come and go and families and friends are repeatedly ‘left behind’. Such discontinuities while acknowledged are often accounted for in terms of an ethos of cosmopolitanism stressing personal autonomy and openness to adventure and experimentation. The increasing global uniformity and hegemony of a very particular bureaucratic culture is thus conjoined with a vernacular of cosmopolitanism stressing individual diversity, autonomy and ‘flexibility’. I will argue that this conjunction of standardization and individuation echoes earlier processes of capitalist transition reflected on by such scholars as Georg Simmel.

Privileged Travelers? Migration Narratives in families of middle class Caribbean background

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In recent years, migration studies have been criticized for focusing narrowly on movements by lower class populations seeking economic opportunities. This has led to questioning of the relevance of the conceptual framework and theoretical analysis, developed within this scholarship, for research on the movements of more privileged migrants. This paper examines the life stories related by members of two middle class family networks that have engaged in extensive migratory movements from the Caribbean since the 1940s. In their narratives middle class family members tend to talk about their migratory moves, and lives in the migration destination, in terms of the pursuit of further education and professional goals. Their accounts differ markedly from those related by members a lower class Caribbean family, that I also studied, who described their experiences abroad in terms of a desire to seek wage employment and help family left behind. These variations in representation, nevertheless, do not reflect clear-cut differences in the actual migration patterns and individual life trajectories in the three families. They rather reveal differing migration ideologies and the desire by members of the middle class families to distinguish themselves from people of lower class background, who tend to dominate perceptions of Caribbean migration.

Middle-Class Professional Brazilians in Lisbon

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During the last decades of the 20th century, middle-class professional Brazilians have left their country in search of better opportunities abroad. This work focuses on the experiences and narratives of a group of Brazilians who went to the Portuguese capital, Lisbon, in the late 1980s and early 1990s. They seized the new opportunities unleashed by an expanding Portuguese consumer society and a skilled job market that was eager to catch up with the other European Union member countries. Adventure, foreign travel, emancipation, and economic motivations were deeply intertwined in their narratives and in the ways they related to the Portuguese people. Migration, to these Brazilians, involved personal emancipation in the form of expanding their life experience through living in a foreign country, which also implied a certain

notion of person related to ideas of freedom and choice. It also consisted of a strategy to maintain and invent new forms of expression of their middle-class identity, which they believed was being threatened by the Brazilian economic crisis. As privileged postcolonial migrants, Brazilians have tried to distance themselves from the image of the oppressed impoverished immigrant, blurring the boundaries between adventure and migration as well as those between colonised and colonizers.

Oasis Regimes: Travels/Travails in Pursuit of Health

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Leukerbad, a resort village in the Valais of Switzerland, has seen dramatic shifts in tourist clientele over the last century. These shifts reflect not only the increased democratization of tourism, but also changing perceptions of what it means to be healthy, and what kinds of health-related functions are sought through travel. Many travelers whom I encountered during recent field research in both Leukerbad and Rishikesh, India, were visiting these destinations specifically to engage in disciplined bodily practices—learning yoga or "taking the waters."

Taking a cue from MacCannell (1976), one interpretation for their actions would be that such touristic voyages represent a quest for authenticity—a cultural and geographic authenticity which could not be found in their own homes. I present here another option: these voyages are pilgrimages of a different sort, and these travelers seek authenticity not of place, but of self. They are going far afield not to meet and mingle with others, but to learn another lifestyle not easily accessible at home. Their goal is to return not only refreshed, but also in possession of new strategies for coping with everyday life and maintaining health.

Working on Spiritual Journeys in North American Educational Retreat Centres

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This paper describes preliminary research with unpaid staff who travel to three educational, spiritual retreat centres: Omega in rural NY, Kalani in Hawaii, and Hollyhock on the Canadian northwest coast. All three centres attract people willing to work for free (e.g., as grounds-keepers) in order to take workshops, practice yoga, and, in many cases, further their personal spiritual journeys. Some staff circulate among retreat centres, for example spending the winter at Kalani and the summer at

Omega. This is privileged travel on a shoe string but privileged nonetheless as one must be able to forego a salary. Rather than seeing the sites simply as discrete “campuses” and the staff as local employees, the project also identifies intersections and silences amongst the people, places, and communities. It traces the movement of people as well as practices and precepts among the sites, and examines the individuals’ and the institutions’ participation in globalized discourses of mind, body and spirit. One objective is to contribute to critically understanding these discursive practices whose expression and contestation circulate in and among the places, communities, and selves in this multi-sited research.

