



Cultural geographies of migration: mobility, transnationality and diaspora

Alison Blunt*

Department of Geography, Queen Mary, University of London,
Mile End Road, London E1 4NS, UK

I Introduction

As part of my last report on cultural geographies of home (Blunt, 2005a), I addressed recent research on transnational geographies of home and family life for domestic and other migrant workers. Building on this, my current report concentrates on recent cultural geographical research on migration in relation to broader debates about mobility, transnationality and diaspora. I begin by tracing some of the connections between cultural geographies of migration and what has been termed ‘the new mobilities paradigm’ and ‘the mobility turn’ (Cresswell, 2006; Hannam *et al.*, 2006; Sheller and Urry, 2006). To do so, I trace some of the creative interfaces between work on mobilities and migrations before turning to cultural geographies of migration in relation to transnational citizenship, urbanism and networks, and to cultural politics and practices in diaspora.

II Mobility

The recent identification of a ‘new mobilities paradigm’ and a ‘mobility turn’ has sought to challenge both the ‘sedenterist’ and ‘nomadic’ production of knowledge (Cresswell, 2006; Hannam *et al.*, 2006; Sheller and Urry, 2006;

see also Urry, 2000; Cresswell and Verstraete, 2002; Sheller and Urry, 2004; Larsen *et al.*, 2006; and the special issue of *New Formations* on mobilities, edited by Tim Cresswell, 2001). The growing field of mobilities research is reflected by the publication of a new journal, *Mobilities*, in 2006. Describing the breadth of a research field that spans ‘studies of corporeal movement, transportation and communications infrastructures, capitalist spatial restructuring, migration and immigration, citizenship and transnationalism, and tourism and travel’ (Hannam *et al.*, 2006: 9–10), the editors argue that identifying this growing body of work as a ‘new paradigm’ raises fundamental questions about ‘the appropriate subjects and objects of social inquiry’ (p. 10). The wide scope of this research field not only encompasses mobility across a wide range of forms, practices, scales, locations and technologies, but also interrogates the politics of mobility and immobility, the material contexts within which they are embedded, and their representational and non-representational dynamics. Rather than celebrate mobility as necessarily transgressive or resistant, or invoke it in largely abstract or metaphorical

*Email: a.blunt@qmul.ac.uk

terms, research includes detailed studies of embodied, material and politicized mobilities, often through the development of innovative and mobile methodologies.

Although much of the recent work on 'the new mobilities paradigm' is situated most directly within the social sciences (Hannam *et al.*, 2006: 5), work within cultural geography traces the productive intersections of the social sciences, arts and humanities in understanding mobility. In a landmark book on mobility in the western world, for example, Tim Cresswell addresses 'how the fact of movement becomes mobility. How, in other words, movement is made meaningful, and how the resulting ideologies of mobility become implicated in the production of mobile practices' (2006: 21). He does so through rich cultural, social and historical readings of bodily mobility (including photography and physiology, factory-based motion studies and their implications for domestic practices, and the regulation of ballroom dancing); the role of mobility in relation to rights, citizenship and immigration in the United States; a particular journey across the Atlantic by two American suffrage activists; and a particular site – Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam – for the production of mobilities. Cresswell's work redresses the 'unspecified' nature of mobility in an increasingly mobile world (p. 2), and reveals the centrality of mobility in shaping 'what it is to be modern' (p. 20).

Although not necessarily situating itself within a 'new mobilities paradigm' or as part of a 'mobility turn', other recent geographical research is similarly compelling in its study of different cultural forms and practices of mobility. Such research has explored walking and landscape (Wylie, 2005); artistic practices of urban exploration and other mobilities in the city (including a special issue of *Cultural Geographies* on 'arts of urban exploration', edited and introduced by David Pinder, 2005; Yusoff and Gabrys, 2006); the cultural spaces of cars, driving, and motorways (Merriman, 2005a; 2005b; 2006; Featherstone *et al.*, 2005); embodied practices of cycling

(Spinney, 2006); and the mobility of objects and commodity cultures (Dwyer, 2004; Hill, 2006). In addition, cultural geographical research on migration – the focus of this report – clearly resonates with other research on mobility.

Alongside the growing literature on the diverse forms, practices and politics of mobility, a wide range of other geographical research continues to illuminate the economic, demographic, geopolitical and cultural dynamics of migration (see, for example, Silvey, 2004, and Yeoh, 2003, for reviews of feminist and postcolonial geographies of migration). The editors of *Mobilities* explain that '[m]igration studies are crucial to the field of mobilities research' (Hannam *et al.*, 2006: 10; see also Sheller and Urry, 2006: 211). As they continue, 'Studies of migration, diasporas and transnational citizenship offered trenchant critiques of the bounded and static categories of nation, ethnicity, community, place and state within much social science' (p. 10), particularly through the analysis of different migrant mobilities, the relationships between dwelling and mobility, and the mobilization of transnational and diasporic networks and other connections. And yet, mobilities research clearly extends far beyond the study of migration, just as the latter extends far beyond the conceptual and methodological concerns of 'the new mobilities paradigm.' Although research on mobilities and migrations cannot be collapsed onto each other, there are many productive connections between them, particularly in terms of materiality, politics and methodology.

The embodied materialities of migrant mobilities have been explored in a wide range of locations and contexts (including a special issue of *Environment and Planning A* edited by Sheller and Urry, 2006). Underpinning much of this research is a close attentiveness to the politics of mobility and migration, both in terms of the legal frameworks that regulate migration, and in terms of the embodied politics of identity and difference that span gender, 'race' and ethnicity, class, sexuality, nationality, age and religion (for more on religion and gender

see, for example, work on Muslim women and mobility by Silvey, 2005; Freeman, 2005; Mohammad, 2005). As much of this research reveals, the legal frameworks that facilitate some mobilities while restricting others are themselves inseparably bound up with the embodied politics of difference. In her book on Latvian women who migrated to Britain after the second world war under various 'European Volunteer Worker' schemes, for example, Linda McDowell shows how 'fit, young and single women with no dependants were selected to fill job vacancies in Britain' (2005: 3). In my research on Anglo-Indian women and the spatial politics of home, I explored the ways in which the migration of this community of mixed descent was restricted by the British Nationality Act, 1948, and, to a far greater extent, by the White Australia Policy (Blunt, 2005b).

While my research concentrated on the material and imaginative spaces of home on domestic, national and diasporic scales (see also Tolia-Kelly, 2004a; 2004b), McDowell concentrates on the spaces of work as well as home (2005; see also Bauder, 2006; Gogia, 2006; May *et al.*, 2007). As discussed in my last report (Blunt, 2005a), research on the migration of female domestic workers has revealed the close ties between domestic economies and global inequalities. Beyond the spaces of home and work – and the home itself as a workplace – other research addresses different migratory spaces of mobility and immobility, particularly the border (Walters, 2004; Wood, 2004; Sparke, 2005; 2006; for a recent review of migration across the US–Mexican border, see Winders, 2005) and immigration stations such as Angel Island in San Francisco (Hoskins, 2004; 2006; Cresswell and Hoskins, 2006) and Ellis Island in New York (Maddern, 2004a; 2004b; Maddern and Desforges, 2004).

The cultural analysis of both past and present migrations reveals a great deal about the politics of mobility and its material dynamics, particularly through legislative regulations, the geopolitics of homeland 'security', and the

embodied politics of identity and difference. In addition to an interest in the politics and materialities of migrant mobilities, recent research in this field has also developed a range of innovative methodologies. Like other researchers across the arts, humanities and social sciences, cultural geographers have employed a wide range of methods to study migration, including ethnographic research, interviews, and the analysis of writings, images, objects, music, performance, and other cultural representations and practices (including Duffy, 2005; Jazeel, 2005a; 2005b; Leonard, 2005; Walsh, 2006a; 2006b; Blunt *et al.*, 2007). Reflecting a wider interest in biography and personal narratives both within and beyond geography, recent research has revealed the importance of personal memories, stories and experiences of migration. Some studies draw on often limited and fragmentary archival sources to write about individual migrants (including Bressey, 2005, on Sarah Forbes Bonetta, an African orphan who travelled to Britain and became a godchild of Queen Victoria; and Pred, 2004, on an African-Caribbean slave, Badin, who was brought to the Swedish court in 1758). Other research includes the analysis of archival material alongside oral history interviews with more recent migrants (including Blunt, 2005b; Jazeel, 2006; McDowell, 2005). The experiences and emotions of more recent and contemporary migrants have also been studied and represented in a range of ways. In their detailed ethnographic research with members of an affluent Sikh family who migrated from Punjab to Vancouver in 1995, for example, Margaret Walton-Roberts and Geraldine Pratt (2005) conducted interviews with different family members in Canada and India over a period of three years. Focusing on different experiences within one particular family reveals multiple and 'mobile modernities' (2005), not only by unsettling stereotypical representations of migrants and their class position, but also by exploring the cultural diversity within, as well as between, families and households (see also

Dyck and McLaren, 2004, and Dyck, 2006, on narratives of health and migration among South Asian women living in Vancouver).

Other researchers employ a range of visual methods alongside interviews and other ethnographic research to study migration. Divya Tolia-Kelly, for example, not only studied the domestic display and meanings of family photographs, landscape images, religious iconography and particular home possessions in the homes of South Asian women living in London (2004a; 2004b), but also asked participants in her research to describe or draw their 'ideal landscapes of home' (2006: 344). In a different context, Lorraine van Blerk and Nicola Ansell employed visual methods alongside interviews to study children's understanding of "moving house" in Malawi and Lesotho (2006a; 2006b). The research involved inviting 800 children aged between 10 and 17 'to draw or write (in English or a local language) about "moving house" – drawing on personal experience or their imaginations' (2006a: 260) and asking them to interpret their images in subsequent discussions. The differences between the images of migration drawn by the children in urban and rural locations in southern Africa reflect the 'social, economic, and cultural dimensions of the communities in which they currently reside' (p. 268) and demonstrate the importance of considering 'the impact of "place" both migrated from and migrated to' (p. 270).

III Transnationality

The relationships between places migrated from and to are a central feature of research on the cultural geographies of transnationality. As Katharyne Mitchell explains, 'Cultural geographies of transnationality examine the embodied movements and practices of migrants and/or the flows of commodities and capital, and analyse these flows with respect to national borders and the cultural constructions of nation, citizen and social life' (2003: 84). Alongside a wide range of research on 'transnational communities,'

(including Vertovec, 1999), other research concentrates on 'transnational spaces' (Jackson *et al.*, 2004; see also Ley, 2004). For Jackson *et al.*, this term 'encompasses all of those engaged in transnational cultures, whether as producers or consumers. It includes not just the *material geographies* of labour migration or the trading in transnational goods and services but also the *symbolic and imaginary geographies* through which we attempt to make sense of our increasingly transnational world' (p. 3). Rather than focus on 'identifiable transnational communities distinguished from other (and often still normative) national communities', the study of transnational spaces, and their material and imaginative significance, 'opens up ways of exploring this multiplicity of transnational experiences and relations' (p. 3).

Recent research on the cultural geographies of such experiences and relations has explored citizenship, urbanism and networks over transnational space. As Desforges *et al.* write (2005), 'citizenship is ... being rescaled upwards above the nation-state ... In an increasingly cosmopolitan and globalized world, new transnational citizenships are emerging based on ethnic, cultural or religious identities and promoted by diasporic communities or faith groups' (p. 441). The papers in a themed issue of *Environment and Planning A* explore 'how diversity and differences among migrants mediate migrants' transnational ties and their understandings and practices of citizenship' (Ehrkamp and Leitner, 2006: 1591) and address the material and metaphorical spaces of transnational citizenship and belonging (see also Ehrkamp, 2005; Leitner and Ehrkamp, 2006; Nagel and Staeheli, 2004; 2005; Staeheli and Nagel, 2006).

Rather than explore the 'hypermobility' (Preston *et al.*, 2006: 1633) of particular transnational migrants, recent research has focused on the importance of grounded attachments, geographies of belonging, and practices of citizenship, both within particular places and over transnational

space. In her research on the Canadian Hispanic Day Parade in suburban Toronto, for example, Luisa Veronis (2006) explores citizenship from the viewpoint of migrants and concludes that this multicultural celebration 'reveals the complexities and constraints of citizenship practice for immigrants in Canada today: the parade simultaneously challenges and reproduces dominant conceptions of multiculturalism and citizenship' (see Mitchell, 2004b, for more on multiculturalism). As part of a larger project on changing geographies of citizenship for migrants from Hong Kong to Canada in the 1980s and 1990s, Preston *et al.* (2006) argue that 'there is a need for a more detailed understanding of the relationships between transnationalism and citizenship participation, particularly from a gendered perspective' (p. 1633). Unlike research that largely concentrates on civic participation and citizenship in relation to places of origin, Preston *et al.* also explore the 'citizenship experiences of migrant families' (p. 1635) within places of settlement. Like Ehrkamp and Leitner, Preston *et al.* employ an expanded notion of citizenship that encompasses 'both formal definitions of citizenship, as defined by the laws and regulations of the sending and receiving nations, and substantive or participatory aspects of citizenship, lived practices, and identities that shape and are shaped by norms and values in both places' (p. 1636). In other words, transnational citizenship spans legal, regulatory and political geographies alongside social relations and cultural meanings, values and practices.

The city has been a particularly important site for the analysis of transnational migration and citizenship. In her book on recent migration from Hong Kong to Vancouver, Katharyne Mitchell (2004a) investigates the impact of transnationalism on urban and national narratives and spaces. In her analysis of the active reworking of liberalism and regimes of liberal governance through urban change and conflict, Mitchell analyses transnationalism in terms of 'respatialization' rather than deterritorialization. Other research also

explores the relationships between urban change and transnational migration in a wide range of contexts. For Michael Peter Smith, the socio-economic, political and cultural dynamics of cities are central in forging transnational networks, circuits and everyday lives (2001; 2005; see also Rogers, 2005; Yeoh, 2005). Describing 'transnational urbanism' as a research optic and a cultural metaphor, Smith argues that it helps 'to focus our sense of transnational interconnectivity because it capture[s] a sense of *distanciated yet situated* possibilities for constituting and reconstituting social relations' (2005: 237). Smith's work has inspired a wide range of research on the everyday practices that sustain the mobile and located lives and social relations of transmigrants (including a special issue of *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* on transnational urbanism, edited and introduced by Conradson and Latham, 2005a). Building on Smith's ideas, Conradson and Latham emphasize the importance of focusing on everyday practices and 'middling' forms of transnational migration, recognizing that 'transnationalism is in fact characteristic of many more people than just the transnational elites and the developing-world migrants who have been the focus of so much transnational research' (p. 229). The networks and connections between such 'middling' and other migrants span family, friendships and other relationships (Conradson and Latham, 2005b; Waters, 2005; Yeoh *et al.*, 2005; Silvey, 2006).

Other recent research concentrates on the material and imaginative relationships between places of origin and settlement and the migrations, networks and other connections that sustain them. While some studies focus on historical and contemporary examples of return migration (including Hammond, 2004; Harper, 2005; Ley and Kobayashi, 2005; Potter *et al.*, 2005; Christou, 2006), others explore seasonal, temporary or episodic mobilities between places of settlement and origin. For example, in her research on the transnational networks between Non-Resident Indians

living in Canada and their villages of origin in Punjab, Margaret Walton-Roberts studies 'the long-term resilience of transnational attachment and the material consequences such attachments have on the landscape of the sending region' (2004: 99). Such attachments 'are highly motivated by *cultural* meanings and desires. This cultural contextualization of capital and information flows repositions such actions outside the typical model of capitalist expansion from the west into less-developed zones, as well as challenging the ideas of assimilation in the destination country' (p. 99). Rather than analyse two separate processes of 'immigrant settlement on the one hand and "third world" rural development on the other', Walton-Roberts argues that both should be brought together 'into one field of interpretation as a transnational space' (p. 99; see also Olson and Silvey, 2006; Mohan, 2006).

Similarly addressing the 'transnational connectivity' between places of origin and settlement, Philip Kelly and Tom Lusis (2006: 833) employ Pierre Bourdieu's notion of habitus to understand 'the value assigned to economic, social, and cultural forms of capital' (p. 831). Drawing on research based in Canada and the Philippines, Kelly and Lusis argue that cultural capital is '[p]erhaps the most important dimension of social practice brought into play by Bourdieu's framework' (p. 845; and see Waters, 2006, who studies the geographies of cultural capital in relation to education and family strategies between Hong Kong and Canada). The ways in which different forms of cultural capital are both valued and devalued have material effects for Filipino migrants living in Canada.

IV Diaspora

Both the conceptual study of diaspora, and substantive studies of particular diasporas, revolve around space and place, mobility and locatedness, the nation and transnationality (see Kalra *et al.*, 2005, for a recent study of diaspora and hybridity; see also the special

issue of *International Journal of Population Geography* on geographies of diaspora, edited and introduced by Cairtriona Ní Laoire, 2003). While the terms 'transnationality' and 'diaspora' are closely related and sometimes equated – not least because both refer to the mobility of people, capital, ideas and objects, and the production of space, networks and politics by and through such mobility – there are important differences between them. As Carl Dahlman explains, 'diaspora is often predicated on transnational social relations. However, transnationalism is not a sufficient condition for diasporas, which additionally imply a common sense of territorial identity among its members, nor are all transnational relations diasporic' (2004: 486). In the final part of this report, I turn to consider recent research on cultural politics and practices in diaspora.

The cultural geographies of diaspora encompass the material and imaginative connections between people and a 'territorial identity', often over transnational space and via transnational networks. As Bronwen Walter explains, 'Diaspora involves feeling "at home" in the area of settlement while retaining significant identification outside it' (2001: 206). The lived experiences and spatial imaginaries of people living in diaspora often revolve around ideas about home through, for example, 'the relationships between home and homeland, the existence of multiple homes, diverse home-making practices, and the inter-sections of home, memory, identity and belonging' (Blunt and Dowling, 2006: 199). In her research on South Asian women from South Asia and East Africa living in London, for example, Divya Tolia-Kelly studies the importance of visual and material cultures in shaping diasporic homes and identities. She argues that the visual and material cultures that shape 'new textures of home' in London 'are shot through with memory of "other" spaces of being' (2004a: 676). Studying photographs, other images and mementoes that resonate with memories of home prior to migration,

Tolia-Kelly shows that 'visual and material cultures are prismatic devices which import "other" landscapes into the British one, and thereby shift notions of Britishness, and British domestic landscapes' (p. 678).

Other research has explored the ways in which particular landscapes play a central part in mobilizing diasporic identities and attachments. In his research on the Scottish diaspora, for example, Paul Basu explores 'the intertwining of personal or autobiographical narratives with broader cultural and historical narratives associated with particular regions, nations and diasporas' (2005: 123). Basu investigates a 'sedentary poetics of clanship' that fosters ideas about kinship over diaspora, often through 'the intertwining of surnames, place names and "place-stories"' (p. 146) and various clan geographies (see also Nash, 2002; 2005). The various cultural practices described by Basu are enacted both within particular places in Scotland and at a distance in the wider diaspora. Other research has investigated the ways in which cultural practices, representations and technologies foster a wide range of attachments across different diasporas. In his research on the Sri Lankan Women's Association, for example, Tariq Jazeel (2006) studies a particular group of migrants who occupied privileged positions of class and status in their country of origin. Doing so, Jazeel contributes to broader debates not only about the heterogeneity of the South Asian diaspora, but also about the gendered dynamics of migration and diasporic organization. As Jazeel concludes, 'The SLWA's continued performance of late colonial modernity has produced diaspora spatialities that have enabled them to negotiate and forge multiple senses of belonging and attachment to Britain and Ceylon, but it has done so by tightly tethering the colonial to the present' (p. 30).

Literary, visual and other cultural representations and practices both foster and recast memories, identities and attachments within particular places and over diasporic space (including Jazeel, 2005a; 2005b;

Leonard, 2005; Yeh and Lama, 2006). New technologies have also played a crucial role in facilitating material and imaginative connections between people, communities and places over diaspora, both on personal levels between families and friends, and in terms of community networking and political activism. In her research on internet use in transnational Haiti, for example, Angel Adams Parham (2004) studies participants' use of a Haiti Global Village forum (see also Staeheli *et al.*, 2002). As Parham writes, 'such forums offer needed space for civic deliberation and provide a valuable infrastructure for networking. Participants' difficulty in translating these assets into an off-line project, however, highlights the importance of place-based social ties' (p. 199).

Other research on the political mobilization across diaspora space also reveals the importance of place-based networks and exchange. Arguing for a 'geopolitics of diaspora', for example, Sean Carter studies the Croatian diaspora in the United States, and its involvement in the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s (2005). As he shows, 'diasporic engagement' in the conflicts involved fundraising, political protest and public relations campaigns (p. 57), bringing community members together in a variety of social and political events and activities. According to Carter, 'The very banality and ordinariness of participating in fundraising activities such as bake sales, picnics, barbecues and concerts mobilized many of those on the margins of the Croatian-American community into the arena of homeland politics. From this position of mundane involvement, it became easier to become enrolled in more overt and "political" acts of engagement' (p. 58). Like other forms of organizing around the diaspora politics of remembered, lost or imagined homelands, Carter argues that there is a 'double re-territorialization' between Croatia and the United States (p. 62). Cultural politics and practices in diaspora are mobilized and enacted over a variety of scales and chart both deterritorialized and reterritorialized spaces of identity, belonging and attachment.

V Conclusions

The cultural geographies of migration represent a wide and diverse field of research, as shown by recent work on mobility, transnationality and diaspora. Work in these three areas is closely connected but also differs in emphasis. Key themes include an interest in the embodied politics of mobility and immobility, networks and other connections between and within places of origin and settlement, and the ways in which migrant mobilities are shaped by, and themselves shape, cultural politics, practices and representations. Research within this field also raises questions about the nature of mobility, migration and other movements over transnational and diasporic space, and the ways in which migrant – and other – mobilities are embodied, embedded and grounded.

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