

## Conflicts of mobility: Migration, labour and political subjectivities

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In recent years, the topic of migration has been the focus of innovative theoretical interventions and intense political debates. The uprisings of French youth of Algerian descent in the *banlieues* of Paris following the police murder of two young men (November 2005); the storming of border-fences at the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla by large groups of co-ordinated migrants from sub-Saharan African countries in order to gain access to Europe (October 2005); the mass protest and general strike across the United States by undocumented migrant workers demanding legalisation (May 2006), all prompted scholars to rethink the relationship between migration, labour and citizenship and to consider, with heightened urgency, the emerging forms of subjectivity related to mobility.

Migrants' crossing of borders, their mobilisations, and strikes in Europe, the United States and Australia are at the centre of this special issue. To begin a discussion on labour and citizenship with border crossing or mass protests means to firmly position migrants as protagonists of struggles around freedom of movement and labour rights. To stress the organised format of these struggles entails advancing a political reading of mobility. Mobility enacted by migrants, such as scaling the security fence at the Moroccan-Spanish border, arriving on boats at Australia's northern shores or getting across the Mexican-US border with the help of a *coyote* (that is 'smuggler') is not seen as political nor are migrants understood as making a political claim. Quite the opposite, they are seen as economically desperate and destitute individuals whose mobility is prompted by economic necessity or humanitarian need. This representation is even more extreme in cases of women migrants who, as the terms 'sex trafficking' and 'sexual slavery' indicate, are often perceived as victims of forcefully imposed mobility and merciless labour exploitation. The depiction of migrants as a disorderly mass of people and/or as desperate individuals reduces mobility to a socio-economic logic and reproduces the distinction between masses on the one hand and citizens on the other (Aradau and Huysmans, 2009).

The emphasis that the contributors to this volume place on collective migrant subjectivity offers a way out of conceiving mobility in terms of coercion, or simply as an economically or socially induced trigger to migration. The reading of movements of migration in terms of collective migrant subjectivity focuses our attention precisely on its real political dynamics and on the ruptures it produces within the existing order, in particular in relation to what is supposed to be its opposite, namely citizenship.

In the first article of this special issue, Engin Isin opens the discussion on migration and citizenship by discussing how migrants' struggles constitute citizenship as contingent and contested. He is particularly interested in the transformation from subject to citizen through the act of claiming rights. The article explores new sites that enable the articulation of such claims. This requires, Isin argues, a shift from already defined actors to acts that constitute them. The key question to ask is not 'Who is the citizen?' but 'What makes the citizen?'. The focus on acts of citizenship leads Isin to distinguish between active and activist citizenship. Active citizenship, the repetitive practice performed by citizens, is contrasted with activist citizenship and discussed through the case of the *sans-papiers* movement in France. This new figure of citizenship is engendered by actors making claims for justice and inserting ruptures into the static understanding of citizenship as a placeholder for status or as a model for integration.

That citizenship as status is centred around masculinity, and grounded within the territorial boundaries of a state is taken up in the contribution by Rutvica Andrijasevic. In her article, Andrijasevic suggests that heterosexuality and patriarchal social arrangements are built into immigration regulations and signal the undiminished urgency for a feminist understanding of migration through the perspective of sexuality and gender. However, feminist analysis of contemporary migration remains bound to the analytical framework centred on control, and interprets borders and immigration regulations primarily in terms of exclusion. In order to capture a more nuanced account of the changing forms of governing as well as of emerging political subjectivities, the author suggests re-examining the premises on which the exclusion model is based. In discussing the transformations of borders, labour and citizenship, Andrijasevic questions the inclusion/exclusion model. She explores how gender and sexuality are taken up by regulatory regimes that in turn produce differentiation and stratification of migrants' statuses and subjectivities.

Insight into how immigration controls function, in all their complex legal 'nitty gritty', is of crucial importance for understanding how migrants' experiences are constituted. Bridget Anderson examines in her article the workings of immigration regulations through comparing the categories of 'domestic worker' and 'au pair' in the United Kingdom. She shows that an analysis of the various categories of migrants must take into consideration their legal construction as well as the ways in which the social imaginary, in particular with reference to gender, class and age, shape them. Although these

categories are constructed as different by law and hence require specific entry visas, in reality this separation is extremely difficult to implement as both categories are located within the family where the line between a worker (domestic worker) and family worker, that is helper, (*au pair*) are blurred. If these two categories are difficult to differentiate on the basis of the type of labour performed, what does differentiate them is the social imaginary and historical practices in which these categories are rooted. Importantly, whether migrants assert themselves as political actors and take part in collective mobilisation will depend not simply on their working conditions but also, and in equal measure, whether they see themselves as workers in the first place.

The blurring of the distinctions between the categories of skilled and unskilled labour, student and migrant, and student and worker are the focus of Brett Neilson's contribution. Discussing the taxi strikes in Melbourne in 2008 that followed the racially motivated attacks on mainly South Asian male drivers, Neilson proposes the student-migrant-worker 'category' as a way of capturing the subjectivity of the protagonists. The overlap of positions commonly seen as separated is due to the working of the immigration regulations. These set unrealistic requirements for each category, resulting in overlapping subject and labour positions identified by the author with the concept of the multiplication of labour. Furthermore, these overlapping positions produce a new form of political subjectivity and of labour organisation that do not follow the familiar, unionised format but rather more informal networks. The unexpected connections, Neilson argues, urge us to consider the relation between migrants' labour struggles and the constitution of a new political subjectivity, which despite its diversification and affiliation to multiple positions has no lesser political impact than traditionally more coherent and consistent subjectivities.

In his piece, Nicholas de Genova proposes an innovative and provocative turn on the classification of undocumented and documented migrant workers. Contrary to the image publicly promoted by the US administration regarding its guest workers programmes, these rarely result in legalisation of migrant workers, in stemming the flow of undocumented workers or in better working conditions for 'legal' workers. Rather, as de Genova argues, the guest worker programmes set in place a system of state-run forced labour. It is not uncommon, in fact, for migrant workers to leave their contracts preferring undocumented work given its more agreeable working conditions. Detention and deportation of undocumented migrant workers are hence not in opposition to guest worker programmes. Rather, these need to be seen as complementary and part of state efforts to control migrant workers via the stigma of illegality. De Genova suggests that in light of mass protests by undocumented migrants and the 1-day nationwide strike in 2006, the heightened policing of undocumented migrant workers enforced in the context of so-called 'war on terror', needs to be understood as an attempt to discipline the undocumented workers' insubordination and political mobilisation.

All of the articles show that the emerging migrant collective subjectivities through political mobilisations have direct bearing on our understanding and conceptualisation of citizenship. Migrants' claims for justice and the contestation of ascribed/prescribed categories challenges the presupposition that citizenship cannot be enacted by non-citizens. Such considerations of migration, subjectivity and citizenship re-illuminate debates around agency. The contributors of this volume investigate the construction of subjectivities in relation to both oppressive and affirmative power dynamics and are working towards a theory of agency that encourages us to think in more nuanced ways about how norms and discourses are inhabited and transformed. This is also the topic of Nandita Sharma's book review of Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos' *Escape Routes. Control and Subversion on the 21st Century* that highlights migrant agency as a constituent force of social change and the primacy of mobility for investigating the present political conjuncture. Although all of the authors in this special issue start from an understanding of subjectivity as germane to subjection and regulation through normative institutional structures – whether these are immigration regulations, border regimes or discursive apparatus in terms of masculinities and femininities – they also emphasise subjectivity as related to movement and agency. This perspective is facilitated through a sustained critique of the notion of the unified male migrant subject that is replaced by a differentiated and stratified subjectivity engendered through the process of migration. Such interpretative shift allows for an insight into the multiple positions that subjects occupy and into the complex and often contradictory process through which migrants both identify and resist particular subject positions. The contributions in this volume show that key to our understanding of contemporary migration is the broadening of scholarly analysis to theorise the making of new migrant political subjectivities and in coming to understand the role migration plays in current conflicts around transformation of borders, labour and citizenship.

## References

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