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Special Issue : Global Mobilities: United by Dividing and Accelerating Precarities

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Editorial Introduction – Shoba Arun, Benedicte Brahic and Steve Taylor

This special issue was originally founded upon a symposium, 'Global migration in a changing UK', held on the 10th of May 2017, at the Manchester Metropolitan University, UK, discussing how the changing nature of global migration is shaping the local economy, culture and society of Manchester, an emerging global city within the UK. These discussions were set within the context of significant economic and political developments, such as the increasing neo-liberal public spending and policy choices of the UK government and the climate of 'Brexit' – the UK decision to withdraw from the European Union, leading to UK political policy and public opinion clouded in fear and uncertainty. Global migration is currently a highly politicized issue (Porter and Russell 2018) and the political context of the UK has led to a fall in migration numbers (Syal and O'Carroll 2018), bucking global trends. The world leading authority on global cities, Saskia Sassen the keynote speaker at the symposium, drew on her recent work on Expulsions (2016), demonstrating how the term migration actually conceals multiple forms of socio-economic dislocation and predatory formations, whereby assemblages of knowledge, interests, and outcomes, lead to expulsions of people, social groups and livelihoods.The persistent effects of neoliberalism lead to damaging consequences and vulnerabilities for migrants.. The collection of papers here develops these themes by focussing upon the relationship between neo-liberalism, contemporary forms of migrant transnationalism and precarity, within a wider context than the city of Manchester.

Definitions and discussions of transnationalism often distinguish between 'broad' and 'narrow' transnational social practices (Basch et al. 1994; Itzigsohn et al. 1999), or transnationalism 'from above' and 'below' (Smith and Guarnizo 1998), with the former referring to the transnational activities of global economic institutions and nation-states and the latter relating to networks of relationships between migrant populations and people and places within an original sending society. Studies of the migration-development nexus have focussed heavily upon narrow transnationalism, with many celebrating the progressive consequences of migrant transnationalism, in terms of both the social mobility of migrants and the 'development' of sending societies. Whilst it has been recently recognised, not least within the pages of this journal, that the relationship between migration and development is more complex and contradictory than these celebratory discourses suggest, there has been insufficient attention to the mututally constitutive relationship between broad and narrow transnationalism. Migrant social and transnational practices take place within, shape and are shaped by wider, broad, economic, social and political structures and processes. The papers in this special issue place migrant transnationalism firmly in the context of wider economic and political processes, in particular neo-liberalization. It is argued that this wider context is intensifying the precarity of

contemporary migrant experience. This may, in turn, have profound consequences for the migration-development nexus in the future.

Precarity is not a new phenomenon within the migrant experience, nor within the lived experience of the majority of people within capitalist societies. However, as Pourmehdi points out in this collection, it has been argued that recent neoliberal policies have intensified social inequalities and led to the emergence of a new class of insecure people commonly known as 'the precariat' (Standing, 2011). The precariat, a consequence of neo liberalism and globalisation, emphasizes flexibility of labour markets and a lack of secure employment, accompanied by the erosion of cooperation and moral consensus, dwindling trust in human relations (Standing, 2011). Once caught within precarity, it is extremely difficult to escape from it, with little community and state benefit support. To repeat, what is being argued within this collection is that contemporary neo-liberalism is intensifying the precarity of the contemporary migrant experience, however, there is also a focus upon the negotiation of, and in some cases resistance to, the precarious condition. Issues of global migration often raise deep-seated issues about work, equality and policy, resulting in diverse precarious relationships (see Meier 2015; Raghuram 2014; McDowell 2008). Precarity has been much discussed at the political level (Neilson and Rossiter 2008) and in the theorisation of neoliberal labour (Standing 2011) and this collection of papers provides a global and comparative perspective on how contemporary socio-political and geographic contexts interlinks individual experiences of migration. The collection comprises of three thematic areas (1) unifying experiences of precarity (2) methodological and conceptual considerations in transnational inter-connected mobilities; and (3) Accelerating inequalities/vulnerabilities of migrant lives.

Theme 1 : Unified by Precarity

The term precarity relates to low-wage, insecure labour markets, temporary forms of citizenship, and social inequalities (Reid-Musson 2014; Standing 2011) and for some, the term resilience refers to a range of behavioural responses. In all, references to 'precarity' are now ubiquitous. Initially used to refer to the insecure conditions of employment of a growing numbers of workers in the global economy (e.g. Goldring and Landolt 2013; Standing 2011), the meaning of the term 'precarity' has now broadened to reflect the breadth and diversity of lived experiences of precarity. This expansion in meaning reveals the pervasive and ever-expanding nature of precarity under conditions of neo-liberal globalisation, where global capitalism is rigged in favour of rentiers, where labour markets are transformed by outsourcing, automation and the on-demand economy, generating more rental income while expanding the precariat (See Standing 2016). Historically, some have been more susceptible to precarity, such as the low-skilled migrant workers while skilled economic migrants were seen to be the desirable or only visible actors in global mobilities. For example, the UK has seen the constant rise of skilled migrants since the 1990s, closely linked to the processes of global labour markets, sectoral skills shortage and neo-liberal policies. Arun (2018, forthcoming) explores the different forms of resilience, risk, resourcefulness among skilled migrants, engendering forms of adaptation amidst vulnerability. This is suggestive of mixed evidences of precarity through a spectrum of insecurity linked to the nature of jobs, simultaneous deskilling of labour through non-recognition of professional qualifications and reinforced gender relations. As we

see in this collection of papers, rather than being contained and redressed, precarity seems to intensify and expand beyond the world of paid work to pervade to other realms of experience (economic, politico-legal, environmental, social) and become a feature of contemporary migrations, eroding well-being whilst furthering divisions and atomisation. These papers reflect the both interlinking and dividing experiences of precarity. Inevitably, precarity is seen inherent to the condition of migration, creating hierarchies of precariousness- by both material and political forces of change. Thus rather than bettering the lives of migrants, precarity assumes diverse forms and spreading to different kinds of migrants – and as we see later from papers related to Theme 3, there is furthering of some hierarchies/pre-existing stratifications. Often precarious work articulates with new migrant divisions of labour becoming a systemic facet of labour market restructuring (Wills et al. 2010). Whilst entrenching existing hierarchies and divisions – blighting the prospects of many migrants, sprawling precarity has begun to erode the lives of relatively privileged migrants, fragile 'pioneers' of a cosmopolitan future that stalled.

The collection of papers uncover the connections between the (re/des)activation of networks as well as triggering issues of identity and status, citizenship, well-being, and livelihood on the other. **Brahic and Lallement**'s paper explore the impact of the on-going Brexit negotiations on European movers' lives. As French (and European) citizens, these migrants, benefitting from rights of free movement set intra-EU migrants aside from other migrants subjected to (often-restrictive) migration policies. Yet the outcome of the Brexit Vote has left these European movers in the UK (and British nationals living in the EU) with uncertain futures and the sustainability of their current life arrangements. The paper seeks to contribute to contemporary debates concerned with the lived strategies of resilience migrants formulate in response to the precarisation of migration and life across borders. At times the micro-behaviour of individual and groups may also obscure the massive web or impact of neo-liberal practices and thinking, for example, Hall and Lamont (2013) use the concept of social resilience to capture new logics into social life.

Similarly, **Pourmehdi** explores how migrants are able to deal with precarity by engaging in transnational networks, using transnational communication media. For the Iranian diaspora, living under precarious conditions has resulted in awareness and appreciation of the fact that their social existence depends on interdependency and cooperation with others, always remembering that living amidst precarity calls for resourcefulness and creativity. Transnational connections and networks among the Iranian diaspora has been in the making for some time, resulting in greater transnational interaction with Iranians both in Iran and around the world. The condition of precarity is also transferable as **Percot**'s paper shows how Bangladeshi migrants by crossing the border to India, have just shifted from a sort of precarity to another: radical economic and environmental insecurity at home to a precarity of status (Paret and Gleeson, 2016). As 'denizens' in India, deprived of civil, cultural, politic or social rights (Standing, 2016), their main concern is to struggle with the threat of deportation and its consequences. Despite the physical and cultural similarities between Bangladeshis and Indians and the still fragile means through which citizenship can be proved, particularly among poor

citizens, ideologies and policies have however a strong effect on the everyday life of the migrants as precarious and vulnerable workers.

Theme 2: Methodological and Conceptual Considerations in inter-connected mobilities

As van den Broek and Groutsis (2017) suggest, it is indeed a challenge for migration researchers to grapple the complex relationships that link the global to the local, the political to the personal and the industrial to the individual. Through raising attention to methodological and conceptual concerns on researching transnational families, **Francisco-Menchavez** explores multi-sited ethnography as a method and methodology in an increasingly globalized world wherein migration and separation are social facts in the histories of families, such as case of the Filipinos in the US. She argues that multi-sited ethnography and migrant epistemology is a compelling methodology in investigating precarity under neoliberalism as the method mirrors the social realities both migrants abroad and their families in their homelands, that includes an interrogation of the political and economic institutions that pulls families apart.

Similarly, conceptual understanding between mobility, bodies and labour surface within discussions on craft narratives in developed countries, and thus offer important insights about the relationships between narrative, migration, precarity and value. **Schimdt** employs a feminist commodity chain analysis to examine how craft labors and objects are characterized in order to better understand the role of feminized labors in a neoliberal landscape of precarity and migration. Through a feminist commodity chain analysis to situate craft workers in the U.S. and globally as a part of the global precariat, craft work, she argues that crafting labors, and the narratives that characterize them, offer an important site to consider how migration, precarity and gendered labor are perceived. Ultimately the article asks what alliances might be possible between craft workers worldwide if we better attend to the centrality of narrative to studies of migration and precarity. Undeniably, as forms and narratives of mobilities have become ubiquitous with different manifestations seen here, not only through mobile bodies and their relationships, but also commodities and the narratives told about the precarious labours that produce them where such mobilities merit sociological scrutiny, as they activate disconnections or renew social networks and formations.

Theme 3: Accelerating Inequalities/Vulnerabilities

Precarity, an outcome of the unequal distribution of vulnerabilities, is often linked to structural conditions such as crisis, conflicts etc. For example, McDowell (2017) highlights how the crisis and austerity measures have had a deleterious impact on vulnerable groups, including the poor, the youth and women. She further argues that with enormously significant transformations in economy, society and politics have altered the basis of gender relations, within and especially between the generations in contemporary Britain. Similarly, increasing cross-border mobilities triggered by a range of factors and engendering several mobility regimes, render the link between precarity and mobility visibly apparent, which also (re)configure the dynamics of social and personal relationships, in particular reinforcing gender relations, often exacerbating inequalities as seen from the works of Duda-Mikulin; El Abani *et al* and Schimdt (this Issue). Other studies show that despite high levels of human capital, immigrant women are characterized by high risk and precarity, with the salience of gender relations in shaping workers' experience of insecurity (Premji and Shakya 2017; Arun

2010; Creese and Wiebe 2008). Focusing on Polish Migrants in the UK, **Duda-Mikulin** argues that it is key to turn attention to women migrants as those who are often responsible for reproductive labour and who raise future generations of workers and citizens. This is pivotal to consider in light of, on the one hand, ageing European societies and the need for workers and, on the other hand, Brexit. The certainly in the post-Brexit-vote UK and the uncertainty linked to the future shows that precarity is inevitably characteristic of many migrants' lives often punctuated by a lack of job security which is linked to limited material and psychological wellbeing. For women migrants, this state of affairs is further compounded by their attachment to the private sphere which often constitutes a barrier to their engagement in the paid labour market on the same footing as men.

Further, social scientists have long underscored the connections between gender inequalities, structural inequalities, interpersonal power relations, norms of masculinity and femininity and perpetuation of all types of violence against women (Connell, 1995) **El-Abani** et al. in this first study of gender relations among Libyan migrants, focuses on views about DVAW in a Libyan community in the north of England. These show marked continuity with existing gender regimes. The household as a micro-level of control continues to be influenced by norms from the more patrilineally-based extended families in Libya, with patriarchal authority and control over wives -- often including incomes, dress and activities. Traditional gender regimes in Libya entail tacit toleration of some forms of gender violence. In this sample, such toleration or acceptance was less marked among women than men. And a number of women were able to use the migrant context to change their lives and to attain greater autonomy.

Sadly, the Windrush generation will not be the only immigrants affected by the increased hostility of the UK government as such as a divisive and insular attitude could equally affect EU citizens in the post-Brexit era. This would, or already has led to racialised and gendered lived experiences of much needed skilled non-EU migrants, displaying 'unifying precarity' in their working lives, long term life choices and right to social justice. Thus, the wider concern is the redressal of policy and social attitude to immigration currently exposed as the fault line in the global north, and reified through the Windrush affair.

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1. **From 'expats' to 'migrants': strategies of Resilience among French Movers in Post-Brexit Manchester,** *Benedicte Brahic and Maxime Lallment, Manchester Metropolitan University*.
2. **Picking up the neighbours' waste': migration of Bangladeshi villagers to India metropolises.** *Dr Marie Percot,* French National Council for Scientific Research (CNRS)/EHESS *France.*
3. **Defying Precarity: Iranian Diaspora and Transnationalism in the Making** *Mansour Pourmehdi, Department of Sociology, Manchester Metropolitan University* .
4. **Researching Queenila and Living In-Between: Multi-Sited Ethnography, Migrant Epistemology and Transnational Families,** *Valerie Francisco-Menchavez, San Francisco State University*
5. **Precarious Craft: A Feminist Commodity Chain Analysis** *Suzanne Schmidt*, Saint Mary's College of California.
6. **Gendered migrations and precarity in the post-Brexit-vote UK: the case of Polish women as workers and carers**, *Eva Duda-Mikulin, University of Bradford*.
7. **Migration and Attitudes towards Domestic Violence against Women: a case study of Libyan migrants in the UK,** *Suaad El Abani, Department of Sociology, The University of Tripoli, Libya*; Susie Jacobs, Kathryn Chadwick and Shoba Arun, Department of Sociology, Manchester Metropolitan University.