

Transnational Formations of Class

Research Group Affiliation	Economic Geography Research Group
<p>The concept of class has been widely debated in social science over recent years. Marxist conceptions which emphasised the labour process and relations to productive property have given way to a range of poststructuralist accounts that stress a broader variety of factors (education, 'culture', taste etc) in the ongoing production of class relations as well as the distinctive formations of class arising from interplays between gender, race, and sexuality. While class analysis has greatly benefited from these conceptual advances, explicitly geographical interventions have been largely absent from these debates.</p> <p>The purpose of this session is to explore how the relational ontologies of space emergent within contemporary geography (e.g. Massey, 2005) could further enrich class analysis. Whereas the primary spatial frame in theoretical debates around class is often the nation-state, these sessions serve to illuminate the range of transnational connections and dynamics that contribute to contemporary class formation(s). Session one focuses upon the potentials and problematics involved in conceptualising and practising transnational class politics, drawing upon understandings of sub-alterity and cosmopolitanism (Featherstone), the role of identity in poststructural conceptualisations of class (Thoburn), the moral dilemmas posed by different mobilities in the global economy (Sayer) and the complexities of transnational labour organisation (Anderson). Session two focuses more on the processual elements of class and transnationalism, examining the role of labour market intermediaries and head-hunters in elite labour markets (Beaverstock et al), the micro-geographies and everyday practices of expatriates in Prague (Cook) and the generational aspects of East-West transmigration and work (McDowell). Together the sessions aim to provide a range of contributions to how we understand the transnational dimensions of class, particularly with regards to political mobilisations, labour mobility, and social antagonisms.</p>	
Session Organisers	Andrew Cook (University of Newcastle) & Jeremy Anderson (Queen Mary, University of London)
Session Chair	Andrew Cook (University of Newcastle)

SESSION 1	
Paper 1	Subaltern Cosmopolitanism and the Making of Counter-Global Networks
Presenter	Dave Featherstone (University of Liverpool)
<p>This paper seeks to examine the dynamic forms of political activity associated with forms of subaltern cosmopolitanism. Dominant ways of theorising the geographies of anti-capitalist or subaltern forms of political activity have argued that they often remain bounded or particularist (Cox, 1998, Harvey, 1989, 1996, Miller, 2004). In contrast this paper argues for the importance of geographies of connection and solidarity in the formation of subaltern political identities. It interrogates the important histories and geographies of subaltern cosmopolitanisms which have shaped 'unruly alliances and flows' between different place-based struggles (Edwards, 2003). Such 'unruly alliances and flows', which I term counter-global networks, and how they are negotiated, have important implications for the transnational practices of class formation and for debates around the geographies of internationalism. The paper develops these arguments through discussion of African-American involvement in the Abraham Lincoln Brigades in the Spanish Civil War. I explore the ways in which African American volunteers such as James Yates challenged orthodox left 'maps of grievance', connecting the struggles against fascism in Spain directly to struggles about the racist character of US society and to anti-colonial struggles (Kelley, 1994, Yates, 1989). The paper concludes that engaging with subaltern articulations of cosmopolitanism can be a useful way of transcending bounded accounts of the geographies of working class/ subaltern politics.</p>	
Paper 2	Class Without Identity
Presenter	Nicholas Thoburn (University of Manchester)
<p>Is it possible to subtract identity from class, and what modes of political expression and composition might this entail? This paper is concerned with these questions. They are not entirely new; indeed, they follow a Marxian injunction, as set out by Balibar: 'Let us accept once and for all that classes are not social super-individualities, neither as objects nor as subjects'. But identity has plagued Marxism, nearly as much as those positions that would claim to have superseded Marx. Bringing Deleuze and Guattari to bear on this problem, this paper approaches class as a question of milieu: of layered and discontinuous tactical, affective, linguistic, and territorial fields. The paper does this through a consideration of three aspects of the</p>	

class formations of the Industrial Workers of the World in the early twentieth century: the critique of work, racialisation, and the sites and circuits of migrant labour.	
Paper 3	'There's always someone worse off than yourself' (of whom you can take advantage): moral economic dilemmas of transnational class relations.
Presenter	Andrew Sayer (Lancaster University)
<p>Globalisation involves the continued development not only of a global division of labour but transnational class relations. The apparent freedom of exchange and employment relations conceals a spectrum - from exchanges made between equals to 'desperate exchanges' entered into by the poor as a result of lack of alternatives. Much economic migration lies towards the latter end of this spectrum. Debates about the 'labour aristocracy' and 'unequal exchange' may now sound outdated, but one of the arguments associated with these terms applies more forcibly than ever - that all classes in developed countries benefit from the cheap commodities produced by low-paid workers in developing countries and by poor economic migrants to the developed countries. At the same time, there is growing awareness that the latter have generally 'chosen' to do that work because it is at least better than the alternatives open to them, so that boycotting their products or restricting their migration, will hurt, rather than help, them. The talk will draw out some key moral economic dilemmas posed by these transnational class relations, arguing that they represent a deepening of exploitation, unequal exchange and servant labour.</p>	
Paper 4	Class identification at a distance: Transnational circuits of solidarity and the power of indifference
Presenter	Jeremy Anderson (Queen Mary, University of London)
<p>New union strategies to target Transnational Corporations point to potential shifts in the spatiality of class resistance and identification. Yet while the strategic rationale for transnational union organising is increasingly accepted, the disposition of the union rank and file to a transnational class politics remains ambiguous. It is neither clear whether there is support for transnational organising amongst union members, nor whether such support is necessary in order for such initiatives to be effective. This paper explores the spatial contours of class solidarity amongst trade union members involved in a transnational campaign in public transport. Finding conflicting spatial visions amongst rank and file trade unionists, it argues these do not constitute a break in transnational circuits of solidarity. Engaging with writings on militant particularism, it is argued that locally situated 'imagineers' form the pivots of transnational class mobilisations, as these actors are uniquely placed to negotiate and translate between hierarchical institutions and local assemblages of justice premised on particular imaginaries of ethnicity, gender, religion, class and nation.</p> <p>Lastly, this paper argues that local indifference can have a lubricating effect, as a loose sense of class interests based around shared economic position filters out geopolitical currents that might otherwise undermine the basis for transnational identifications.</p>	

SESSION 2	
Session Chair: Jeremy Anderson (Queen Mary, University of London)	
Paper 5	The role of executive search in reproducing transnational 'elite' labour markets in the knowledge economy
Presenters	Jonathan Beaverstock (University of Nottingham), Sarah Hall (University of Nottingham), James Faulconbridge (Lancaster University) and Andrew Hewitson (Lancaster University)
<p>Much has been written about the development of a creative (Florida, 2002) and transnational capitalist class (Sklair, 2001) in the context of the transformation of work. Following Massey (1995), geographers have contributed to these debates by discussing the dynamics of an international division of labour for transnational managerial elites as firms expect such labour to readily engage in global work (Beaverstock, 2005; Jones, 2007). In this paper, we explore the role of the executive search firm as a significant intermediary in the (re)production of elite, executive labour markets on an international scale. Drawing upon research undertaken in Europe, we unpack the work of the executive search firm in making particular elite, executive labour markets through their 'gatekeeping' organization practices and modes of professionalization. The paper is organised into three parts. First, we discuss the labour market intermediary role of the executive search industry in Europe. Second, we draw upon an interview survey of executive search partners and researchers to tease out the mechanisms of search and placement. Third, we report several conclusions which highlight the powerful role that executive search firms play in the reproduction of particular elite, executive labour markets in the knowledge economy.</p>	
Paper 6	Beyond 'Wealth as Power': Diagramming Everyday Practices and Exclusions Amongst Prague's Expatriate Community.

Presenter	Andrew Cook (University of Newcastle)
<p>This paper draws upon recently completed research concerning the social and spatial impacts of transnational professionals on the city of Prague, Czech Republic. By exploring the everyday lives, practices and spatialities of expatriate professionals in the city, it has been possible to critique the ways in which 'transnational elites' are often normalised as 'Masters of the Universe'. Whilst not avoiding the role of financial wealth, the paper eschews essentialist renderings of elitism that link spatial and temporal 'mastery' to financial wealth alone. The purpose is to develop a more nuanced understanding of the ways in everyday practices can open out our understanding of the micro-geographies of exclusion, Othering and class in post-socialism. This is achieved through an examination of the (potentially infinite) techniques and diagrams of power that are operating and governing the everyday practices of transnational professionals, serving in turn to demonstrate the ways in which exclusionary narratives, imaginaries and spatialities are constructed. The paper also argues that place is vital in understandings of transnational professionals, further critiquing the notion that the lives of transnational professionals are located outside of place and time.</p>	
Paper 7	Migration and class formation: class and gender relations among old and new European migrants
Presenter	Linda McDowell (University of Oxford)
<p>In this paper, I explore some of the consequences of migration under different circumstances to the UK from pre- and post-Soviet nations. I explore the connections between class, gender and nationality as these migrants are inserted into a division of labour in the UK in the 1940s and the 2000s. The early post-war migrants initially were directed into particular jobs but later became socially and spatially mobile. The latter group are 'free' to accept vacancies in any part of the economy and yet like their predecessors typically are concentrated in low waged work. The paper explores some of the similarities and differences between these migrants as they become part of local class-based communities.</p>	