

‘Transnational migration and the new subjects of work: Transmigrants, hybrids and cosmopolitans’: (Un)bounded subjectivities in times of Covid-19

Organization

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Transnational Migration and the New Subjects of Work: Transmigrants, Hybrids and Cosmopolitans, Banu Özkazanç-Pan. Policy Press, 2019. **[AQ: 1]**

I was invited to review Özkazanç-Pan’s book, ‘Transnational Migration and the New Subjects of Work’ when it was becoming clear that the Covid-19 virus was rapidly crossing boundaries, infecting and affecting people all over the world. The virus transcends borders showing us that regardless how well we guard our nation-states’ boundaries, we are all interconnected, fluid and vulnerable. Nation-state borders are constructed to give a false sense of security, to guard what we are expected to aspire to: fixed, rational/national selves. Reading Özkazanç-Pan’s book, in times of Covid-19, made me reflect once again on our role as critical scholars; our obligation to challenge bounded subjectivities in the context of an increasingly globalized world; and simultaneously to examine how individual experiences around inequality need to define our study of the mobile body-in-the-world, and the contexts in which we negotiate our translocal identities.

Fundamental in this quest, Özkazanç-Pan proposes, is the creation of epistemological, ontological and methodological spaces that bring to the centre of our study the concept of mobility or what has been described as the ‘new mobilities paradigm’, or the ‘mobility turn’ (Sheller and Urry, 2006; Urry, 2000). This paradigm turns to the politics of mobility that is, the ways in which mobilities are both productive of social relations (between classes, genders, ethnicities, nationalities and religious groups) and produced by them (Cresswell, 2010). This field also interrogates the material contexts within which mobilities are embedded, and their representational and non-representational dynamics, including studies of embodied, material and politicized mobilities, often through the development of innovative and mobile methodologies (Blunt, 2007).

Focusing on the territorial organization (Maréchal et al., 2013), and mobile identities in the context of work and organizations (Daskalaki et al., 2016; Skovgaard-Smith and Poulfelt, 2018), OS scholars have focused on mobility in the past, identifying it as a critical component of organizational experiences that co-institutes complex modes of social engagement. Contributing to the ‘mobility turn’ and discussions of mobile identities in MOS, the book starts by asking a series of important questions: ‘What difference does mobility make for how we understand the world and how people make sense of who they are and cultural “Others”? How does mobility impact the ways in which work gets done and how people live their personal and professional lives under conditions of transnationalism?’ (p. 6). Employing concepts from transnational migration studies, the book offers new insights that establish movement as a new ontological framework for organizational

analysis. Key contributions of such a framework can be made in our theorizing of difference and belonging. Critiquing the static epistemologies and methodologies that guide cross-cultural management and international MOS, the author advocates the prevalence of hybrid and cosmopolitan subjectivities in a ‘post-identitarian’ world. These positionings require a re-evaluation not only of inequalities, and how they have become established, but also the methodologies that we adopt to study difference.

The book is divided into three parts: The first part provides an overview of transnational migration studies and identifies *a multiscalar global perspective, moving beyond methodological nationalism and global historical conjunctures* as key concepts in our quest of ‘doing multiculturalism after mobility’. Throughout the book, these concepts guide the analysis of the social condition of mobility and how it relates to people, difference and work. In particular, acknowledging the role of power, structures and emergent inequalities, Özkazaç-Pan agrees with Blommaert (2017: 95) that a notion of context adjusted to mobility needs to ‘stress its continuously evolving, multiscalar and dynamic aspects, as well as the intrinsic unity of context and action’. She asks ‘How intersections of mobility, stasis and social fields across scales produce a new societal condition, that of superdiversity. . .’ (p. 23). To study this increase in the categories of migrants, not only in terms of ethnicity, nationality, language and religion but also of motives, patterns and itineraries and processes of migration (Vertovec, 2010), the book urges us to move beyond methodological nationalism. This epistemological shift away from nation-based conceptualisations of selfhood also needs to take into consideration the possibilities and methodologies for contextualizing the historic transformations across socio-cultural, technological, economic and political dimensions and how these affect the (re) structuring of contemporary socio-economic contexts (pp. 27, 31).

Part II focuses on proposing new ways for studying identities and the self in the context of work and organization. This part of the book invites us to think how selves and differences are accomplished in a multiscalar fashion and theorizes identity and difference beyond multi-identity approaches. Concentrating on three non-static identity concepts, transmigrants, hybrids and cosmopolitans, Chapters 3, 4 and 5 also touch upon the performative aspects of transnational migration frameworks and the ethics of theorizing difference. Özkazaç-Pan stresses that ‘the agentic unbounding of identity from nation and reconstruction of a reflexive subjectivity simultaneously reconfigures the ethos of nation: nations do not claim individuals, but individuals claim nations in reflexive ways’ (pp. 67, 68). These emerging selves should be represented through novel epistemic, social and material practices that attend to intentional ethical engagement. Critiquing neoliberal notions of the ‘value of difference’ – a way to extract labor from the Other – the author advocates agentic and reflexive performances of value in organizational settings.

The final part, Part III, proposes new directions and challenges for the field, focusing on diversity, inequalities and mobile methodologies. Starting with a proposition for critiquing multiculturalism ‘as a disruptive force, as a control mechanism, as a professed tool for integration’ (p. 88), it seeks alternatives to rethinking difference. Aligning with other theorists (e.g. Zanoni et al., 2010), Özkazaç-Pan rightfully summons us to focus on how the structuring of structures in organizations operates and dismantle existing categories of identifying and differentiating people in the world. To achieve this, the book calls for alternative ways to study mobility, and proposes the use of multiple methods, including life stories, to capture the complexity and fluidity of the translocal experience. These methods ought to represent both the micro-level dimensions of social, epistemic and material practices and the macro-level global transformations in order to enable an embodied, contextualized and historically informed study of the mobile subject of work.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading ‘Transnational Migration and the New Subjects of Work’ and I recommend it to scholars and students interested in critical studies of identity, cross-cultural management and diversity research. This book, I believe, can be particularly valuable in our analysis of

the new post-Covid-19 subjects of work: it urges us to ask questions and adopt approaches that attend to post-pandemic inequality regimes, global historical conjunctures and multiscale transnational social fields.

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