

RÉSUMÉ

Pêcheurs de coques chinois, le virage transnational et le cosmopolitisme au quotidien : réflexions sur la nouvelle immigration globale

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Cet article décrit certaines caractéristiques émergentes des courants globaux du travail, en se basant sur plusieurs exemples parfois durs, dont la mort de 19 pêcheurs de coques chinois sans-papiers. La mobilité des migrants est située ici dans une discussion plus large des mobilités, et est analysée à l'aide de deux concepts bien établis -trans-nationalisme et cosmopolitisme-qui se sont récemment révélés être d'une grande utilité pour décrire les courants transfrontaliers, les affiliations, ainsi que les identifications des migrants globaux.

Chinese Cockle-pickers, the Transnational Turn and Everyday Cosmopolitanism: Reflections on the New Global Migrants¹

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Introduction

It is always a disturbing moment when something that is buried deep in our history and our consciousness suddenly surfaces. Such a moment happened on 5 February 2004, when those tuned to the *BBC News* heard that 19 Chinese cockle-pickers had died on the sands of Morecambe Bay in northwest England. They had been caught by the dangerous tides. The workers had been recruited illegally and risked their lives to collect the cockles for £7 an hour. Father of two children, Guo Binglong, used his mobile phone to reach his family in China: ‘The water is up to my chest. The bosses got the time wrong. I can’t get back in time.’ Could they pray for him? He was from Fujian province, the source for so many Chinese wandering around the world in search of work (Pieke et al). Mr Guo had paid a large fee to a ‘snakehead’ (an illegal labour recruiter) to find him work and had already managed to send £2,000 to his family in Fujian province.

¹ This article is partly drawn from my contribution to *Index on Censorship* 32 (2), May 2003, pp. 60–9, the preface to Cohen (forthcoming) and an unpublished paper first presented at a conference on International Migration and Globalization convened by the Portuguese Social Science Council, Casa de Mateus, Portugal, 4–5 October, 2002.

Mr Guo's situation highlights three issues. First, many migrant workers are still locked into forms of labour exploitation that marked the birth of global capitalism. Second, employer demand for cheap, often illegal, labour has not abated despite the spread of an evangelical form of neo-liberal capitalism proclaiming that opportunity and fairness are available to all. Whether manufacturing is exported to low-wage areas or migrants are imported to work in metropolitan service sectors, the distinctions between established workers, privileged foreigners and helot labourers have remained and may even have deepened.² Third, while politicians in migrant importing states have been publicly zealous in trying to police their national frontiers, whether in the name of security or to prevent economic migrants 'masquerading' as political refugees, they have *de facto* tolerated illegal work.

Migrant Workers in the Twenty-first Century

Let us return, for the moment, to Morecambe Bay. Gangmasters, illegal entrants, hair-raising working conditions, workers living in sleazy hostels: surely this must be the nineteenth century, not a pleasant British seaside resort in the new millennium? After 1834 when slavery in most British colonial territories ended, recruiters had fixed on indentured Asian workers as a means of replacing African plantation slaves. But indenture had long been discredited as 'a new system of slavery' and had been abolished in the British colonies in 1920. Surely it was not back again in the twenty-first century? Sadly, only the poignant phone call to Fujian province reminded us that this is the age of corporate globalization with its triumphalist message proclaiming that connectivity, if not affluence, is in nearly everybody's reach. Somehow, this seemed to make it all worse. That his family shared Mr Guo's anguish in real time made the contrast between their opportunities and those who enjoy the affluence of the West all the more graphic.

The Fujianese are by no means the poorest migrants in global terms — that honour would probably currently be reserved for the refugees from devastated areas like Darfur in the Sudan. Being able to contemplate international migration and work are indicators of relative success in the international labour market. They are a way,

²I first used the expression 'helots' analytically in Cohen, 1987.

however imperfect, of closing the gap between rich and poor. While recruiters, smugglers and travel agents facilitate international mobility, demand for their labour comes from a host of employers, particularly in the catering trade (in the case of Chinese workers). In the wake of the Morecambe Bay tragedy, it transpired that restaurants in London's Chinatown alone (not to mention the thousands of 'takeaways' nationally) were partly staffed by hundreds of illegal workers. Jun Chen of the Luxuriance restaurant in London openly admitted that he hired illegal workers from Fujian and the northeast of China. "They're hardworking and easy to train. And it was easy to communicate with them as we speak the same language" (*Guardian*, 2 June 2004).

Two social actors in the triangular drama of global labour flows have now been identified, namely workers (labour) and employers (capital). The third party to the triangle, namely bureaucrats and politicians (the functionaries of the state), is in a more ideologically contested corner. For the assistant chief constable of Morecambe Bay, Julia Hodson, there was no mincing of words. Asked what she thought of those who profited from the labour of illegal workers like the Chinese cocklers, she said: 'I think they would be criminals of the worst possible kind, that are prepared to exploit those who are the most vulnerable in our communities' (*BBC News*, 6 February 2004: <http://news.bbc.co.uk>). Home Office (the UK's interior ministry) officials were more circumspect, but quietly drafted a circular reminding employers that they faced heavy fines and up to two years in prison if they hired workers without proper documentation. In contrast to their normal verbosity, the politicians stayed tellingly silent, as they did again in August 2004 following suicides in an asylum-seekers' detention centre in Britain. It was embarrassing to admit that the rigid methods of scrutinizing asylum claims designed to placate the dominant population had resulted in such distress.

This mixed response from those who staff the state apparatus or give it direction is explicable if not justifiable. Politicians of all parties have simultaneously to yield to the majority of public opinion and the media (both stridently pressing for immigration restrictions), respect international treaties and human rights, and ensure that there is an adequate labour supply to sustain economic growth and balance the demographic overload towards older,

locally-born dependants. The lobby groups that speak on behalf of migrant workers (churches, some migrant groups and human rights activists) as well as those demanding more restrictions and detentions in the wake of the increased threat and reality of terrorism, provide additional complications.

Border Controls and International Mobility

Nationalists have always needed strong frontier controls and stony-faced sentinels because group identities are much more fragmented and overlapping than their fantasies or historical reconstructions allow. For the pure nationalist, a process of ethno-genesis had taken place (often in the prehistorical past and with divine or biblical sanction). In this reconstruction, a particular ‘race’ is meant to inhabit a particular space, to the exclusion of all others. Even the most naïve cursory appreciation of the history of migration (reinforced now by the evidence of the Human Genome Project) demonstrates a more plausible alternative proposition. A single human race has a common origin in Africa and intermingling, plurality and segmentation based on non-biological markers characterize its subsequent dispersion and settlement patterns.

The idea that nations are socially, not somatically, constructed reached its apogee in Anderson’s oft-cited book *Imagined Communities* (1983). In fact Anderson, or perhaps more precisely the epigones casually referring to his book, rather over-egged the constructionist custard. Incommensurate languages, religions, histories, political institutions and, as Anderson stressed, appeals to a common culture through the medium of print, *have created* distinct societies. Often, too, there are phenotypical differences. One does not have to be a Nazi to observe that most Finns look different from most Malians. By recognizing the weight of ethno-nationalism and the heritage of ethnocentricity, we are better able to gauge the strength of cultural, economic and linguistic hegemony exercised in the name of the more powerful nation-states. By contrast, we can also better the role of the major bearers of the new pluralism, namely international migrants. In generating an enhanced social diversity and complexity they provide major challenges to monochromatic national identities of all societies, particularly many Western industrialized ones.

Despite more guards, more laws and more restrictions, the symbolic and real boundaries that divide societies are eroding. This is a result of ideas, images, money, music, electronic messages, sport, fashion and religions that can move without people, or without many people. These are forms, if you like, of virtual migration that can also be usefully understood through the concepts of ‘transnationalism’ and ‘cosmopolitanism’. While global flows of all sorts have taken place, nothing is as disturbing to national societies as the movement of people. As I will explain, it is useful initially to think about population mobility in general- including tourists — though tourists are not normally considered as migrants. From 1950 to 1990 the volume of tourist arrivals across the world increased by 17 times. There was a modest fall in 2001 following the terrorist attacks in New York on 11 September 2001, but ‘arrivals’ soon went up again, reaching an 763 million in 2004 (Table 1). It is uncertain what the effects of the tsunami, increased security checks in the USA and the bombings in London and Egypt in July 2005 will be, but the numbers are unlikely to be slowed significantly.

Table 1 *International Tourism (1996-2004)*

Year	Arrivals (millions)	Increase in absolute terms(millions)
1996	586	34
1997	610	24
1998	629	19
1999	652	23
2000	697	45
2001	692	-5
2002	702	10
2003	694	-8
2004	763	69

Source: World Tourism Organisation (Website last consulted 24 July 2005). Absolute numbers are rounded figures.

Numbers alone will not in any case tell the whole story. Another important feature of contemporary tourism is the increasing exoticism of the destinations, particularly to the tropical world. This leads to major cultural and social effects. More and more people are drawn into the web of tourism as participants, service agents or objects of a tourist gaze. Often well-intentioned but mulish visitors demand familiar goods, services and forms of entertainment, stipulations that serve to cover isolated societies like a cultural oil slick. Few societies can remain unaffected by the scale and intensity of such cultural contacts.

We should also not forget other kinds of population mobility, such as people on religious pilgrimages (millions go to Mecca, the Ganges and Lourdes each year) or the movement of troops during war, or the prelude to war (think of current US military deployments). The impact of tourism and other forms of mobility is often overlooked because the predominant focus of political sensitivity and social unease is, without question, migrants who are thought to be potential settlers. This is the case for three broad reasons:

- First, to take the important example of the USA, the number of migrants has increased significantly. At 26.4 million people, the foreign-born population attained a 90-year high in 2000 (though at 10 per cent of the population it was considerably short of the 14.7 per cent record achieved in 1910).
- Second, migrants are retaining their languages and cultural distinctiveness to a much greater extent, to the considerable chagrin of the political right.³ Governments have all but abandoned policies of assimilation in favour of ‘integration’, or more nebulous goals such as ‘multiculturalism’, ‘pluralism’ or ‘rainbow nationhood’.
- Third, with increased global inequalities, violent political conflict and often the complete collapse of livelihoods, attaining work and residential rights in favoured societies can be a matter of life and death. Consequently, illegal and refugee migrants advance their claims with a similar determination to those who wish to deter them.

³See, for a US example, Huntington, 2004.

The stage is thus set for ethnic tension between the self-declared indigenes and the desperate newcomers. To be sure, the popular media exaggerate the number of undocumented and irregular migrants, which is rarely comparable with the number of tourists and other migrants who are allowed entry because of family links or common descent, or who come in on permits, visas or work programs. However, the unpredictability of illegal migrant flows and the sense that governments and border guards are losing control of the borders fuel nativist fears. To the more familiar taunts that outsiders take jobs, houses and women away are now added the charges that they bring crime, terrorism, alien cultures and contagious disease with them.

The collapse of programs and policies that imply cultural absorption arise partly because key local actors are xenophobes or outright racists. Abandoning assimilation also stems from a general scepticism towards all forms of social policy. Many political elites have largely jettisoned social interventions in the cynical belief that the poor will always be with us, criminal conduct and corruption are (to a degree) acceptable, certain minority groups are uneducable and immigrants are not dissolvable — either in melting pots or any other receptacles. For such elites, social relations have been reduced to reified commodities — to be bought and sold, like everything else, in the marketplace. Poor locals and marginalized outsiders, who are the victims of the state's evacuation from its sites of social responsibility, will have a long wait for relief from their poverty and isolation. Although a few social democratic regimes show small signs of positive movement, it will still take some time before naïve neo-Thatcherites and American 'neo-cons' recognize the utter futility of relying on the marketplace to solve every social, political and cultural problem.

The Transnational Turn in Migration

Despite my foregoing argument, we must not assume that migrants do not 'fit in' only because they are not allowed to by angry racists or indifferent ruling classes. Retaining an old identity in a new setting, or creating a hybridized compromise between old and new, is often a matter of choice. Migrants are more likely to develop complex affiliations, meaningful attachments and dual or multiple allegiances to issues, people, places and traditions that lie

beyond the boundaries of the resident nation-state. This holds true especially for members of ethnic diasporas and other transnational communities, including faith communities. For diasporas in the traditional sense of that word, this is not at all surprising. Groups such as the Jews, Armenians, Africans, Irish and Palestinians were ‘victim diasporas’ dispersed by force. They ended up where they were more by accident than intent. The traumatic events that triggered their movement were so encompassing that such populations remained psychologically unsettled. They characteristically looked backwards, or manifested a dual loyalty to their places of settlement and also to their places, often creatively fabulated, of origin. Indeed, this propensity to link ‘home’ and ‘away’ often got them into hot water at the hands of monochromatic nationalists.

What has changed is that many more groups than the traditional diasporas are now attracted to a diasporic consciousness and cosmopolitan lifestyle. People move to trade, to study, to travel, for family visits, to practise a skill or profession, to earn hard currency, to experience an alternative culture and way of life and for other reasons too. They are not permitted or do not intend to settle permanently, adopt an exclusive citizenship, abandon their own language, culture or religion, or cut off the possibility of returning to a familiar place. In short, they are transnational by intent, adaptation or compulsion.

These changes in the character of international migrants have led to what is deemed the ‘transnational turn’ in migration studies. The pioneering work was undertaken by Glick Schiller and her colleagues in the early 1990s who argued that many migrants “seem to maintain several identities that link them simultaneously to more than one nation” (Schiller et al, 1992: 11). As Vertovec explains in his insightful survey article, contemporary forms of transnationalism involve “systems of ties, interactions, exchange and mobility [which] function intensively and in real time while being spread throughout the world. New technologies, especially involving telecommunications, serve to connect such networks with increasing speed and efficiency” (Vertovec, 1999: 447).

Using the concept of transnationalism in migration research has, to be sure, attracted some powerful criticism, not least from Portes and his colleagues who suggest that “transnational migration

studies form a highly fragmented, emergent field which still lacks both a well-defined theoretical framework and analytical rigour" (Portes et al, 1999: 218). They called for a more restrictive and more empirically verifiable set of propositions. Another leading sociologist in the USA has found that new migrants are accomplished at 'switching' between a transnational mode when they are with their families and 'home' communities, and standard US idiom when they are seeking jobs, university admission or the social acceptance of neighbours from dissimilar backgrounds (Rumbaut).

While accepting that many social actors display versatility in managing their various affinities, this does not obviate the profound legal and political changes consequent on moving from a singular to a complex identity. Take the litmus test of dual citizenship. From under 10 per cent, the proportion of countries that legally accepted dual citizenship had risen to 50 per cent by 1998. In that year, Mexico (notably) permitted its citizens in the USA, then comprising from four to five million people, to retain both US and Mexican nationalities. They were encouraged, for example, to vote in Mexican elections and, it is clear, they affected the outcome of the last election. By the same token, the USA, which had historically been highly negative about such arrangements, tacitly accepted dual nationality and, perhaps even more crucially, abandoned its hitherto unshakable monolingual stance by recognizing Spanish as a quasi-official language in a number of key states.

The outcome of such a shift away from the goal of cultural absorption can be stated in a more exaggerated form. If full loyalty to a state cannot be assumed, the recruitment of a citizen army, one of the key elements of nation-state power that dates from the French Revolution, has to be abandoned. Increasingly, states are modifying and abandoning conscript armies because citizens are likely to include members of the enemy's country or their descendants. It is thus no coincidence that, with rare exceptions, states will more and more come to rely on technologically driven warfare and a professional, paid, army.

As the Mexican example also illustrates, the attitudes of those governments that export migrants have also shifted radically. In the nineteenth century, Europeans recruited indentured workers from India, Japan and China to work in tropical plantations. This period

is often regarded in those countries with shame, as demonstrating their weakness in the face of European power. Now the descendants of such communities (in Brazil, Peru, the USA and elsewhere), together with new emigrants, are celebrated and lionized in their countries of origin. The NRIs (non-resident Indians) provide an excellent example. They are a conduit for Indian goods and influence flowing out and a source of remittances and investment income flowing back. In 1970, remittance income to India was US\$ 80 million. In 1993 the sum had increased to US\$ three billion; by 2002/3 it had rocketed to US\$ 14.8 billion (Kundu). Investments placed by returnees and NRIs have developed the burgeoning and successful Indian software industry. Rather than trying to stop emigration, the government of India has made large-scale investments in training Indian IT professionals for work abroad. What was decried as ‘brain drain’ in the 1970s and 1980s is now constructed as ‘brain gain’, as skilled exported professionals place contracts at home with Indian companies and close the virtuous circle.

Some rich and wonderfully unexpected cultural products also arise from this new acceptance in the originating countries of their communities abroad. One case concerns two Scottish Pakistanis who developed a TV soap opera called *Des Padres* (Foreign Homeland), filmed in Britain, but aimed at audiences of two to three billion viewers in the Indian subcontinent and beyond.⁴ While cultural flows are often depressingly uniform and are still overwhelmingly sourced from a limited number of rich countries, as the TV soap example illustrates, flows can go both ways, indeed in multiple directions. As diversity is enhanced, social actors become self-aware that they are transgressing national frontiers and identities become broader. Such developments illustrate the benign effects of transnationalism or cosmopolitanism. We could advance the argument that if old-fashioned nation-states, based either on the idea of racial uniformity or cultural absorption, are failing, so what? The benefits of enhanced trade, the return flow of income, the movement of fertile ideas and the enhancement of cultural choices and opportunities may greatly outweigh the benefits of retaining an

⁴My thanks to Steven Vertovec for this example.

undisturbed national heritage. Better a chapatti and a curry than a cold chop in a cold climate.

It may be helpful to introduce here a distinction between globalization on the one hand and transnationalism and cosmopolitanism on the other. The distinction is not generally accepted. However, I use it to argue that powerful nation-states and big corporations often lead the much advertised forms of economic globalization, while transnationalism and cosmopolitanism imply more subtle forms of intervention by a multitude of social actors, notably migrants. Such actors, who have no grand scheme in mind, may nonetheless, through their choices, conduct and movements, effect profound long-term changes. As Vertovec and Cohen (2002: 1-22) maintain, one reason why cosmopolitanism has acquired fresh appeal is because the term:

- transcends the nation-state model based either on uniformity or cultural absorption;
- is able to mediate actions and ideals oriented both to the universal and the particular, the global and the local;
- is culturally anti-essentialist; and
- is capable of representing variously complex repertoires of allegiance, identity and interest.

In these ways, cosmopolitanism seems to offer a mode of managing cultural and political multiplicity and now extends far beyond its historical reference to rootless, disengaged members of the leisured classes, literati or ‘bohemian’ outsiders. Through the agency of travellers and migrants, transnationalism or cosmopolitanism may presage our post-national future.

While there is much continuity in the evolution of global migration flows, particularly when we observe that large numbers of subordinated workers continue to meet the demand for low-cost production and service provision. However, the shift to a trans-national and interconnected world has somewhat improved the bargaining power of a section of migrants, namely the fraction that is economically and culturally able to enter the global labour market and acquire some level of everyday cosmopolitan consciousness. Neither their enhanced mobility nor their claims to relative cultural autonomy have been passively accepted by existing dominant populations and political classes. Enhanced levels of

cosmopolitanism are also by no means universally welcomed. Reactions to these developments have had a major impact on migration.

For the primordial nationalists who have emerged from the ruins of the Soviet empire and the Yugoslavian federation the appeals to ethno-genesis are as enticing as ever, whether in the Caucasus, the Balkans or the Baltic. ‘Georgia for the Georgians’, ‘Bosnia for the Bosnians’ and never mind the ethnic and religious minorities who have been living there for centuries. Historically, the emergence of nationalism was usually linked organically to the growth of liberalism and democracy. This notion has been seriously challenged by the sight of the thuggish conjurors of Balkan nationalism with their fake army uniforms, bulging bellies and menacing handguns. Such nationalism produces long lines of refugees, orphanages, camps, the burning of neighbours’ houses, and that chilling practice, ethnic cleansing.

A second reaction to an embryonic cosmopolitanism can be found in that increasingly clumsy, bloated and dangerous Gulliver, the USA. Enter ‘9/11’ or, as we Lilliputians say, 11 September 2001. It is a poor argument and definitely one I do not make, that what happened in the USA was not a horrific and morally indefensible act of terrorism. However, when we see armies mobilized, Afghanistan and Iraq pounded, the deaths of many civilians and a perilous war against terrorism unleashed it is difficult to find any sense of proportionality or justice. The fatuous evocations of biblical eyes and teeth, the tone of moral righteousness by President Bush (and his ally Prime Minister Blair) the diminished civil rights for travellers to, or residents in, the USA — all this invites comparisons with the reactionary regimes of the 1930s or the McCarthyist period of the 1950s in the USA. The conservative Sikh community, resident in California since 1907, was compelled to pay for TV and newspaper advertisements showing Sikhs and Afghans with their differing turbans. This is a good guy; this is a bad one, pointed out the red arrows. Perhaps the very Orwellian name of a department for homeland security says it all — shoes off at the airports, surveillance and interrogation of the enemy within, and an apparent war without end abroad.

Expressions of extreme nationalism and the mobilization of nativist sentiments by cynical or deluded politicians have been with

us for a long time. Migrants are always convenient targets for hate and fear. Like the biblical scapegoat or Jung's 'shadow' in psychoanalysis, they become bearers of all the morally reprehensible feelings and sentiments that the dominant populations want to offload. What makes the negative projections more complex (as in Jung's shadow) is that migrants also often exhibit exemplary values — showing initiative, sobriety, hard work, dedication to family values, modesty and courtesy. The dilemmas and dynamics of immigrant control and integration thus become mediated in complex ways. Migrants are used and abused, hated and admired. They show a mirror to the dominant populations who do not always want to peer too hard at the looking glass.

Everyday Cosmopolitanism

As I have suggested, transnationalism and international migration can generate enormous shifts at the subjective and cultural levels. Many people in many countries (though by no means all) are now willing and eager to think about themselves collectively, as part of a common humanity. As diversity is enhanced social actors become self-aware that their identities can become broader.

This process of the enlargement of social, cultural and personal agendas is one way of understanding contemporary cosmopolitanism. Since it has been around a long time, the term 'cosmopolitanism' has attracted many understandings and uses over the years. Recently such mixed meanings have been elaborated and extended in a burgeoning body of literature in political philosophy and sociology.⁵ One reason why cosmopolitanism has acquired fresh appeal is because the term seems to represent a confluence of progressive ideas and new perspectives relevant to our culturally criss-crossed, media-bombarded, information-rich, capitalist dominated, politically plural times. Cosmopolitanism suggests something that simultaneously: (a) transcends the seemingly exhausted nation-state model; (b) is able to mediate actions and ideals oriented both to the universal and the particular, the global and the local; (c) is

⁵ For helpful collections see Cheah and Robbins; Archibugi and Held; Vertovec and Cohen; Archibugi.

culturally anti-essentialist; and (d) is capable of representing variously complex repertoires of allegiance, identity and interest. In these ways, cosmopolitanism seems to offer a mode of managing cultural and political multiplicities.

A frequent attack on cosmopolitanism is to conceive it as an ‘option’ only available to an elite — those who have the resources necessary to travel, learn other languages, and absorb other cultures. This, historically, has often been true. For the majority of the population, living their lives within the cultural space of their own locality, nationality or ethnicity, cosmopolitanism has not been a possibility. However, in the contemporary world, cultural and linguistic diversity is omnipresent, and the capacity to communicate with others and to understand their cultures is available, at least potentially, to many. Travel and immigration have led to the necessity of cheek-by-jowl relationships between diverse peoples at work or at street corners, and in markets, neighbourhoods, schools and recreational areas. Some of the most fascinating social research in the field is now generating countless examples of so-called ‘everyday’ or ‘ordinary’ cosmopolitanism where, as Hiebert (2002:212) puts it, “men and women from different origins create a society where diversity is accepted and is rendered ordinary”.

Such everyday cosmopolitanism might be regarded as a newly recognized form of behaviour. However, in more commonly described settings, cosmopolites have been seen as deviant — refusing to define themselves by location, ancestry, citizenship or language. “Cosmopolite or cosmopolitan in mid-nineteenth century America,” for example, meant “a well-travelled character probably lacking in substance” (Hollinger: 89). Here ‘substance’ likely referred to readily identifiable provenance, an integrated and predictable pattern of behavioural practice, including loyalty to a single nation-state or cultural identity. In situations of extreme nationalism or totalitarianism, such as those of the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany or Fascist Italy, cosmopolites were seen as treacherous enemies of the state. It is not coincidental that the Jews and Gypsies — ‘rootless’ peoples without an attachment to a particular land — were the first to the shunted to the charnel houses of the Holocaust and the bleak camps of the Gulag.

Even where the reactions were not so extreme, the common stereotype of cosmopolitans suggested privileged, bourgeois,

politically uncommitted elites. They have been associated with wealthy jet setters, corporate managers, intergovernmental bureaucrats, artists, tax dodgers, academics and intellectuals, all of whom maintained their condition by virtue of their wealth, often inherited wealth, and snobbish and superior attitudes. However, with globalization, mass migration and the awareness of inequality, developing a functional cosmopolitanism is now becoming a matter of everyday survival for many workers, labour migrants and refugees, who are in no sense ‘elite’. Such non-elite cosmopolites need to know how to provide services (as nurses, builders, entertainers, waiters or prostitutes, for example) to foreign sojourners and visitors. If they seek work outside their countries of origin, they need to develop foreign language skills, knowledge of migration policies and routes and the conversion value of currencies.

Four Vignettes

Often simple examples tell a tale that can illustrate wider conceptual arguments. Here are four vignettes that link the themes of international migration, transnationalism and mundane cosmopolitanism:

The South African Dentist

This author (RC) lived in Cape Town, South Africa, over the period 2001 to 2004. He went to his dentist, a white South African of Afrikaner origin. It was bad news. He needed extensive periodontal work and was required to see the dentist several times. They compared diaries. The fourth week in every month was impossible. The dentist travelled routinely each month to London where he had a practice. He loved living in South Africa, where he enjoyed the climate, sports and the countryside, but he was annoyed at the black government for not managing the economy better. The local currency, the Rand, was at that time losing ground against the strong international currencies. By flying to London each month, he earned hard currency and retained his privileged lifestyle. Under the old apartheid regime, South Africans were excluded from the Commonwealth so he would not have been able to work temporarily in the United Kingdom. He saw the irony of the situation and accepted that by making South Africa more globally

respectable, the black government had allowed him to travel and work abroad in a way that was much more difficult before 1994.

The London Taxi Driver

The British have been collecting census data every ten years for over 150 years, so they are experienced enough not to expect too many surprises. However, when the results of the previous decennial census were reported in October 2002, demographers were astonished to find their expectations of counting nearly 60 million people were overturned. The tally was about one million short. A London taxi driver had his own explanation. He was a typical East Ender, a Cockney with a sense of humour, who had decided that he could earn enough in two months hard work (at the wheel for 12-14 hours a day) to fund his relaxed life style in the Portuguese Algarve for most of the year. He rented his cab to his Bengali neighbour, ‘who is a good bloke’, for 10 months each year. Of course he was not counted in the census. He was not there at the time. “There are lots like us — we go in and out of the country as we like”, he said.

The Argentinean Academic

RC’s brother has a friend in Argentina from a middle class, Jewish, family — an academic professionally. The country’s economy had collapsed in a spectacular fashion during 2002 and the family decided to leave Argentina, despite being there for five generations. Some went to Israel, braving the security situation there, as they could evoke ‘the Law of Return’, allowing Jews freely to enter Israel for settlement. Others decided to go Poland where a relevant academic opening had been found. They had had no prior contact with Poland and knew of the history of widespread anti-Semitism in that country. But they also knew that Poland would be in the next group of countries to join the European Union and that would facilitate them entering the more favoured parts of ‘Euro Zone’ one day.

The Philippina Nurse

In October 2002, the British newspapers reported that Philippina nurses were going to be recruited in significant numbers to staff the hospitals in the north of England. There was (and remains) a

desperate shortage of staff and the traditional supplies from the Commonwealth, Ireland and southern Europe had dried up. The Philippina nurses spoke English, but American English. How could they possibly understand the needs of their patients? The decision was made to subject them to many hours of the TV soap opera *Coronation Street* which depicted working class life in the English north. There they could learn that when a patient said they wanted “to spend a penny”, they wanted to go to the lavatory.⁶

Connections and Conclusion

I have suggested in this article that mainly through transnationalism and everyday cosmopolitanism, people are adapting to two important characteristics of the contemporary, corporate form of globalization — its pervasiveness and its unevenness. Pervasiveness includes popular knowledge about many culturally diverse lifestyles as well as more practical issues like immigration policies, comparative wage and unemployment rates and currency movements. Those who are mobile are able to use this knowledge to mediate the uneven impact of global development.

Of course I do not pretend that Chinese cockle-pickers, a South African dentist, a London taxi driver, an Argentinean academic or a Philippina nurse are representative of the global population. However, what their experiences signify is that many people from many countries have been adversely touched by the forces of globalization and can see migration as a possible means to attain social mobility. We also need to remember that there is a whole gamut of intermediaries — travel agents, former migrants, people smugglers and labour recruiters — who are bringing news of opportunities, some real and some exaggerated, to the far-flung corners of the globe. As people migrate, they need to connect and acquire the tools of functional communication. They become more and more cosmopolitan, not in the sense of a *louche* playboy, a *rentier*, or a debonair, rootless, stateless member of the elite, but in a more prosaic sense. Cosmopolites can also be of working class origin. They acquire an international language (often English, or a passable version of it). They are ‘streetwise’ in knowing who is

⁶This may need explanation. Years ago access to public lavatories in the UK was effected by putting a penny in the door — thus the euphemism.

likely to exploit them or turn them away from a border. They learn the cultural ‘manners’ of their hosts — their gestures, greetings, and preferred sports and leisure activities.

The growth of this mundane or everyday cosmopolitanism has profound implications, though perhaps we should be cautious of exaggerating its political significance. The new army of global migrants is not the conscious, politicized international working class that Marx imagined in the 1848 *Communist Manifesto*. Nonetheless, there is a sense in which ‘globalization from above’, driven by powerful countries and transnational corporations, is now being paralleled and to a degree subverted by ‘globalization from below’, driven by the enhanced mobility of labour. Relationships between international migrants and national workers ('blue' and 'white' collar) remain problematic and there is a great deal of differentiation within the migrant groups. Some are looking for settlement and cultural integration; others wish to use international opportunities to buttress traditional lifestyles that are under threat. What is certain is that the ambiguities and complexities of improved mobility and mundane cultural interaction will transform social scientific discussion of labour markets, cultural politics, migration studies and ethnic relations.

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