

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](http://ScienceDirect.com)

Geoforum

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/geoforum](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/geoforum)

## Editorial

## Labour geographies on the move: Migration, migrant status and work in the 21st century



This Themed Issue is dedicated to the memory of the late Dr Kerry Preibisch, who contributed so much to understanding and advocating the cause of low-paid migrant workers in Canadian agriculture (see, for example, [Preibisch, 2010](#)). Kerry's tragically early death has robbed the field of a major scholarly voice – both critical and compassionate.

### 1. Introduction

We are pleased to introduce this themed issue on migrant work and employment which originates from three events held at the Annual Association of American Geographer's conference in Tampa, Florida in 2014. The first were two sessions we organized, each filled with rich contributions that probed the intersections between migration scholarship, theory on migrant work and employment, and the subfield of labour geography.<sup>1</sup> These sessions and this themed issue have emerged at a time in which flows of migration arising from a diverse array of factors – from individual choices, labour market change, climate destabilization, ethnic, religious and racial persecution or war – are fundamentally reshaping labour markets across the global north and south. A world of workers is (still and increasingly) on the move. We contend that the subfield of labour geography – and geographic scholarship concerned with questions of work, employment and labour more generally – must contend more deeply with theoretical and empirical questions relating to migration, the production of migrant status, and the role that varied conditions of non-citizenship play in the production of labouring subjects. Ours is not a new contention, of course (see [Castree, 2007](#); [McDowell, 2015](#)), but rather is one we wish to reiterate, revisit and reanimate in scholarly conversations on the geographies of labour and work within and beyond the subfield.

At the same meeting in Tampa, these sessions were greatly complemented by Linda McDowell's Roepke Lecture for the journal *Economic Geography*. In it, [McDowell \(2015\)](#) expressed the need for geographers to expand on the relationships between migrant work and employment. Advocating multi-scalar and historically-grounded analysis, she urged scholars to continue to deepen their engagements with the economic and social contexts which give rise to complex forms of precarious work among migrants, and to attend to the ways that migrants' participation in contemporary labour markets is both fundamentally shaping, and shaped by, processes of transformation and continuity in the global economy. Running through McDowell's cogent reminder about the

increasingly central role that non-citizen workers are playing in contemporary economies (across an array of occupational sectors and pay-grades), and the complex and intersecting ways that social axes such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, 'race', citizenship and class are mobilized and reproduced in migrant labour markets, lie fundamental questions about how we conceptualize precarious work in economic and labour geography and in *Lier's* (2007: 829) words, "...which workers we recognize as active spatial agents" in contemporary capitalism (original emphasis).

In this themed issue, our goal is to take up McDowell's challenge and present work that opens new pathways – methodological, empirical and conceptual – of understanding the relations that produce economic and social precariousness among workers constructed as 'migrant' in one way or another. The category of 'migrant' is itself a fraught one with many different meanings and connotations. The papers in the themed issue are not necessarily united by any single definition of the term, but broadly focus on people who do not have permanent leave to reside and work in their country of residence; each paper is focused on individuals living and working under different territorial regulations governing residency and employment and with a range of visa terms and associated legal statuses, including undocumented workers. The contributors discuss five different national contexts in which international migrant workers are employed (South Korea, Sweden, Singapore, Canada and the United Kingdom), and a broad range of sectors of employment, including shipbuilding and construction as well as agriculture and food. Given these very different national, immigration and employment contexts, the papers in this themed issue together highlight a variety of ways in which citizenship – or the lack of it in some form – can be a highly dynamic axis on which migrants' agency and their construction as hyper-exploitable labour is produced, regulated and spatially negotiated.

Perhaps more importantly, the contributions here also point to the ways that labour geography has yet to more substantively contend with the power relations, institutions and legal fabrics that produce varied forms of non-citizenship which are extraneous to migrants' workplaces, yet which are crucial to securing control, consent and retention within them. In particular, the papers in this issue make three overarching contributions to labour geography that provide new insight into: (i) how non-citizenship shapes the time-geographies of migrant work and employment; (ii) the role of various arms of the state in producing precarious employment among temporary non-citizen workers; and (iii) the value of 'thick' methods such as oral history and ethnography for understanding and theorizing the agency of those working under conditions of precarious non-citizenship.

<sup>1</sup> These sessions were envisioned, initiated and led by Siobhán McPhee.

In the remainder of this editorial, we provide more detail on these contributions. In doing so, it is important to note that while we draw on the rich scholarship within what might be considered ‘Herodian’ labour geography with its ‘industrial or productionist emphasis’ (McDowell, 2015: 3) and its analytical focus on organized, collective forms of agency, we also ground ourselves in scholarship that is often seen as somehow ‘outside’ of the subfield, such as feminist scholarship on social reproductive work, spatially-oriented sociological studies of work and migration, decolonial and critical race scholarship on work, labour, and informality, and migration studies literature more generally. These literatures likely align with but also extend beyond what Peck (2016) has helpfully called ‘pluralist labour geography’. We also therefore consider wider questions that scholarship on the production of migrant status raises for the geographical study of work and employment. The papers themselves are located in a broad range of geographies, and vary in methodological approach and topic, each framing ‘work’, ‘citizenship’, ‘migrant’ and the ‘state’ in contextually specific ways. Our editorial thus concludes with some preliminary thoughts on how the ontological mutability of some of these categories and the spatial and analytical frameworks through which labour and the state are understood in research on migrant work and employment are part of both the challenge and the opportunity that, in our view, this research poses to ‘labour geography’ – a loose amalgam of diverse scholarship which is, and always will be, a (sub-)field in formation.

## 2. Negotiating work, forging futures: on the temporal geographies of migrants’ workplace agency

In recent years, labour geography has developed a renewed focus on the experience of migrant workers as they strive to overcome the challenges of deteriorating working conditions under intensified workplace regimes (Wills et al., 2010; McDowell, 2013; Lewis et al., 2014). These trends are most evident in, but not exclusive to, non-citizen workers in low-waged and/or low-status jobs, or jobs that are regulated as “low-skilled”, including hospitality, construction, agriculture, food processing and social care. Axelsson et al. (2017) explore how aspirations for *de jure* forms of citizenship intersect with the power that temporary migrants have - and choose to exert - over their daily working lives. They use a case study of the choices that Chinese restaurant workers in Sweden make in accepting poor conditions and lower wages in the hope of better working conditions in the future, both within and outside of the country in which they are currently employed. By highlighting workers’ decisions to accept exploitative and sub-optimal working conditions and wages in exchange for permanent status in Sweden, Axelsson et al. foreground the complex connections between precarious employment, worker agency and citizenship status (see also Paret and Gleeson, 2016). Scholarship in labour studies more broadly has been concerned with the ways that the individuated and atomized work of migrants with temporary or contingent legal status (or none at all), may preclude any long-term strategies for improving their livelihoods. For example, Standing (Standing, 2011) argues broadly that the fact that precariously positioned workers are not often part of a solidaristic community of labour

... intensifies a sense of alienation and instrumentality in what they have to do. Actions and attitudes, derived from precariousness, drift towards opportunism. There is no ‘shadow of the future’ hanging over their actions, to give them a sense that what they say, do or feel today will have a strong or binding effect on their longer-term relationships. The precariat knows there is no shadow of the future, as there is no future in what they are doing.

By contrast, Axelsson et al.’s conclusion – based on workers’ own testimonies – that the strategy of Chinese restaurant workers of “waiting... [is] an active and intentional practice”<sup>2</sup> disrupts blanket claims that precarious livelihoods are “defined by short-termism” (Standing, 2011: 18–19).<sup>3</sup> Quite the contrary, Axelsson et al. demonstrate that long-term settlement aspirations are the very axis on which some migrants choose to accept poor quality precarious restaurant work. In this case at least, precarious work is considered and negotiated by migrants as a necessary “cost” of acquiring citizenship. As the authors show meanwhile, the ways in which the Swedish state has constructed the pathway for migrants to gain permanent residency play a direct role in the suppression of their wages: the state’s requirement for migrants to submit workplace tax records as a prerequisite for attaining permanent residency has led to employers extracting this tax directly from migrants’ real wages with their consent. It is important to note of course that these kinds of decisions by migrants are crucially shaped by the particular territorial regimes for citizenship and belonging that encode specific workplaces; for example, for many temporary migrants working in the Arabian Gulf states where permanent citizenship or residency is not granted, the currency of *de jure* citizenship would arguably be very different. Similarly, within the pre-Brexit context of free movement of workers within the European Union, Anderson et al. (2006: 113–4) note that the temporary “trade-offs” that some highly-educated migrants in low-paid jobs in the UK chose to make were related to the economic gains, experience or networks that they imagined would enable them to move on to other labour markets in the UK or abroad, rather than to acquiring citizenship.

While such tactics could be dismissed as simply self-exploitation in order to gain opportunities for social mobility, in our view, Axelsson et al. offer a less simplistic and more provocative answer to Coe and Jordhus-Lier’s (2011: 216) question of “what counts as agency?”. This research also prompts us to reflect that *not* to resist or rework exploitative working conditions may be an act of agency, and perhaps to reconsider both what constitutes the exercise of migrant workers’ power in the workplace, and the ends to which it is exercised. The paper contributes to addressing critiques of labour geography’s inadequate attention to the “timing of agency” (Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2011: 220) that surround workers’ expressions of resistance, negotiation or resilience (see also Coe, 2013: 273). The authors show how aspirations towards permanent residency and citizenship constitute a set of *temporally-delayed* ‘re-working’ strategies (Katz, 2004: 247) adopted by migrants; such strategies are intended to foster “a better distribution of gains within the capitalist system” (Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2011: 217) not in the present, but well into the future.

## 3. Across the continuum of unfreedom and constrained choice: (re-)spatializing agency

Three contributions to this themed issue (Seo and Skelton; Strauss and McGrath; and Yea) also advance understandings of the role of nation states and employers in producing relations of ‘unfreedom’ in migrant labour markets. That immigration controls are centrally implicated in fashioning precarious workers whose choices are diminished in ways advantageous to capital is well established (Anderson, 2010; De Genova, 2002; LeBaron, 2014; Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013). Less has been written, however, about the spatialized impacts of institutional efforts to regulate migration flows and migrants’ everyday lives, and migrants’ own responses to these diminished choices. Strauss and McGrath examine the relationship between precarious work, workers’ mobility

<sup>2</sup> On waiting, see also Conlon (2011) and Xiang (2012).

<sup>3</sup> Standing’s dismissal of the potential for collective organizing by migrant workers has been critiqued by, among others, Chun (2016) and Paret (2016).

strategies and the unfreedom produced by immigration policy restrictions in the case of Canada's Temporary Foreign Workers Programs. They show in particular how programmes that effectively limit workers to a single named employer or create indebtedness as part of the migration process produce precarious legal status as well as precarious work and continue and expand gendered and racialized labour market segmentation and injustice. They conclude that this is a globally 'uneven and contested process... shaped by worker contestation and organizing at multiple scales, shifting and sometimes conflicting strategies of different factions of capital, and reactive (and occasionally chaotic) processes of policy formation by the state.'

In their article on migrants' experiences in Seoul, South Korea, Seo and Skelton illuminate how state efforts to curb particular modes of exploitation caused by informal labour recruitment practices have been replaced by new, state-managed forms of unfreedom through the Employment Permit System (EPS). Like Strauss and McGrath, these authors exemplify the role of labour-receiving states in constructing particular forms of labour market unfreedom through a case study of the South Korean government's migration schemes which tie workers to one employer, and severely restrict migrants' options regarding jobs and housing. Both these papers complicate false binary associations between undocumented/unfree and regulated/free labour. Seo and Skelton frame unfreedom as arising in particular from the *state's response* to a burgeoning informal economy and the associated mobility that undocumented workers had been able to exercise both between employers and between different living quarters under the earlier labour migration system (the Industrial Trainee System). Drawing both distinctions and connections between migrants in South Korea as *politico-territorial subjects* and *employees*, the authors probe the very different spatial and political freedoms and constraints experienced by undocumented migrants in the past and those working more recently through the formal temporary labour migration regime of the EPS.

In doing so, Seo and Skelton illuminate the spatial character of new expressions of constrained agency among Nepalese migrants. Building on earlier work on the production and creation of 'counter spaces' (Yeoh and Huang, 1998) and ethnicized 'weekend enclaves', Seo and Skelton further trace the production of Nepali Town in Seoul as a response to state-sanctioned forms of unfreedom within the new EPS system. While undocumented migrants could previously live wherever they chose, but were fearful of occupying and claiming public space because this visibility would risk drawing the attention of state authorities, formalized migrants under the EPS system are ostensibly 'legal' subjects with permission to work, yet in contrast tend to have far less choice about whom they work for or where they live. The loss of particular forms of freedom for EPS migrants within their working and private lives thus arose in tandem with gains in state-sanctioned freedom and mobility in the streets: "hanging out and wandering around" in public space has become a key part of workers' new spatialized agency for legal migrants now tethered to particular housing and employers. Thus in lieu of directly challenging unfree conditions of labour within the workplace, migrants instead have tended to carve out spaces of freedom, support, pleasure and self-determination in the city. In shifting the focus to migrants' struggles over public space, Seo and Skelton not only evoke a different understanding of *de facto* forms of urban citizenship that extends the *de jure* conceptualization on which other contributions to this themed issue are based (Axelsson et al.; McGrath and Strauss; Yea), they also demonstrate in novel ways how a fuller understanding of the kinds of power and freedom that contemporary working subjects possess lies not only in understanding *how* agency is exercised, but *where*.

Through a focus on South Asian men in the construction and shipyard sectors in Singapore, meanwhile, Yea explores the rela-

tions of unfreedom through what she calls "the micro dynamics of workplace discipline", arguing that, in this case, unfreedom must be understood in part as a set of pre-meditated constraints on migrants' ability to contest exploitation. By demonstrating the specific tactics used by employers – such as filing false police reports against migrants – Yea demonstrates how such employer actions serve to preemptively criminalize and discredit migrants, and thus ultimately dissuade them from lodging complaints with protective state institutions over workplace abuse and exploitation. Yea's paper contributes to understandings of local labour control regimes (Jonas, 1996) as well as place-based processes of illegalization (De Genova, 2002) by demonstrating how everyday forms of labour control and conditions of unfreedom for migrants can intersect. Moreover, Yea foregrounds the *temporal* character that underscores these tactics, with employers preparing them in advance but only bringing them into action when faced with a complaint of abuse or a worker's absence through illness. The paper thus shows how in these cases, various relations of unfreedom emerge as responses to worker agency put in place by employers seeking to maintain labour control. By focusing on agents outside the labour process, like the police, these employer tactics directly leverage migrants' precarious legal status and their already-tenuous entitlements to state protection to produce and maintain an acquiescent labour force.

Taken together, these three articles show that regulation of migrant workers has entailed the drawing of new relationships not just in the workplace, but *between* the workplace and other spaces of social life. They offer some crucial insights around the role of both national and local arms of the state as labour market regulators (and build on key feminist contributions on the role of the state in constructing and spatially regulating divisions of labour, both paid and unpaid, e.g. Mullings, 2012; Silvey, 2004). Further, they partially address the need expressed by scholars such as Herod (2010: 25) for "...a greater consideration of the state and what its spatial praxis means for workers" (see also the related call by Hastings, 2016: 311) and complement the recent special issue of *Citizenship Studies* that explores migration as a lens for understanding inequality and social change (Paret and Gleeson, 2016: 277).

#### 4. Methodological interventions: oral histories and ethnography

While the above contributions attune us to the blurred lines and public and private actors involved in both the production of unfreedom and the regulation of migrant labour markets, a final contribution of the papers in this special issue relates to the methodological implications of how workers' agency is studied. That worker agency remains both under-theorized and under-specified in labour geography has been well-argued by others (see for example Castree, 2007; Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2011; Herod, 2010; Coe, 2013). A number of scholars have also cautioned against romanticizing agency (e.g. Seo and Skelton, 2017). Yet, '[b]eyond the structures that render migrant life precarious, an honest answer must also recognize struggle' (Paret and Gleeson, 2016: 278). How this is to be done necessarily involves a greater engagement with methodology than has tended to be the case in labour geography. Despite the proliferation of research and theory within the subfield over the last two decades, scholars have charted relatively little ground in addressing questions about the connections between methodology and knowledge production (as well as questions of methods, praxis and dissemination) on the geographies of work and employment (although feminist labour scholarship in geography has been a notable exception to this, e.g. Pratt and Johnston, 2013; Caretta and Riaño, 2014). Building productively on this important critique, Hastings has drawn attention to turns in labour geography 'to both the labour process and labour history

traditions' (2016: 315; see also Featherstone and Griffin, 2015). While it can be argued that archival methods and historical approaches have in fact long been central to labour geographers' ways of working (see, for example, Mitchell, 1996; McDowell, 2005, 2013; Ekers, 2015; Reid-Musson, 2014; Domosh, 2008), Hastings makes an important point about labour process. Although the micro-politics governing the labour process has been highlighted by some scholars in relation to identity formation (Wright, 1997), and labour control (Jonas, 1996; Yea, 2017) these forms of 'soft' power over the labour process itself have not been subject to the same level of scrutiny in labour geography. Yet within some strands of theory on precarious employment, a lack of control over the labour process is a defining facet of precariousness (Vosko, 2004).

Hastings (2016) bases this argument on the classic ethnography carried out by Paul Willis in 1970s England. This helps to clinch his case for including within the scope of research on agency that which may not be conscious or deliberate, which has delayed and unintended effects, and engages with conflicts *among* workers as well as between labour and capital. Other scholars have reiterated that an 'ethnographic and interview-based approach... helps to reveal the exercise of both individual and collective agency' (Paret and Gleeson, 2016: 278; see also Herod and Aguiar, 2006; McDowell, 2010). Rogaly and Qureshi (2017) argue that oral history interviews in particular, and the wealth of methodological literature produced about them by oral historians, can help not only to shed greater light on workers' subjectivity, but also to co-produce knowledge with workers, maintaining a challenge to the contradictions inherent in research by tenured academics. Narration itself, taking some degree of control over the story of workplace struggles, is a neglected form of agency in labour geography (though see Gray, 2014; and McDowell, 2016). While much labour geography has focused on struggles over the wage-relation in defining labour justice, through the use of oral histories of food sector workers in the UK, Rogaly and Qureshi's paper highlights how relations such as camaraderie at work and the right to socialize with co-workers were crucially important to workers' own sense of work that is just, dignified and fair.

Moreover, as labour scholars within and outside of geography have noted (e.g. Shah, 2006; Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2011), in addition to being places of wage labour, alienation and subordination through the labour process, workplaces are always also sites in the development of non-capitalist social relations including the pursuit of things like love, friendship, and even leisure – even in harsh labour regimes. In this sense, oral history as a method has the advantage of enabling narrators themselves, not just researchers, to 'share authority' (Frisch, 1990), helping to determine which relationships inform the theorization of exploitation and precariousness, thus engendering some productive tensions in envisioning of what 'labour justice' might consist. These perspectives have demonstrated how fundamentally important the production and contestation of identities can be in shaping processes of class formation (see also Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2011: 217; Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan, 2003). Coe and Jordhus-Lier thus argue that any understanding of labour agency must be 'embedded' in the cultural, political, identitarian and economic arenas in which people struggle; the paper by Rogaly and Qureshi demonstrates that *how* we do this is not only a theoretical question but also a methodological one.

## 5. Conclusions: migration's challenges to labour geography

Together, the papers in this themed issue offer insight into the role of national and local state authorities in producing precarious employment conditions for migrant workers across the global north and south, point to some of the methodological limits of

current labour geography and their impacts on the theorization of agency, suggest new understandings of the temporality of both employer and worker agency, and illuminate the political constraints produced through the intersection of precarious residency, aspirations for various forms of citizenship and unjust employment conditions. Perhaps just as importantly, however, part of the value of these papers lies in what they do *not* address directly, but towards which they (alongside other salient migration research) broadly point labour geography as a subfield.

First, we suggest that a focus on migrant labour geographies raises broader questions about the need for the subfield to more substantively grapple with empirical and epistemological questions of migration and coloniality, imperialism, racialization and racial and ethnonational forms of privilege (building on existing notable contributions such as Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan, 2003; Mullings, 2012; Kelly, 2015; Mann, 2007; and Featherstone, 2013, 2015 among others). While Coe and Jordhus-Lier (2011: 214) have rightly pointed to the pressing need for, and partial emergence of "new geographical domains" in labour geography that are broadening the sub-field's overwhelming focus on Europe and North America (see also a similar argument by Herod, 2010: 23), in our view (echoing Castree, 2007), a key challenge facing labour geography at this juncture is not only to expand the geographies of research but to turn this gaze inward on the subfield's own ontologies of work, agency and precarious livelihoods. The growing engagement with questions of precariousness among non-citizen workers,<sup>4</sup> particularly as it pertains to immigration controls, neocolonial regimes of bordering, illegalization, populist upheaval and migrant policing raises a much larger question about the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that accompany this focus. As Munck (2013) points out, the study of precarious work, migration and employment in the global south has a far longer history, one largely conducted under the umbrella of marginality studies (e.g. Oliveira, 1972), or research and theory on informality (e.g. Hart, 1973; Portes et al., 1989). Indeed, as Castree (2007) noted nearly a decade ago, the disjunctures between the study of economic livelihoods and agency within 'development studies' and 'labour geography' remain largely underexplored and in great need of engagement. Significant care must thus be taken not to inadvertently reproduce geographical and scholarly elisions by deploying Euro-American notions of what constitutes 'precariousness' – or other conceptual categories such as 'work' or 'welfare' – outside the global north while ignoring the longer thread of debates on these very issues in different disciplines (see also Yea, 2017; Breman, 2013; Ferguson, 2013; and Domosh, 2015: 27).

In so doing, considering the colonialities inflecting research and theory on work more broadly might also prompt new forms of labour geography research *within* the global north; scholars such as Sangster (2012) and Hall (2016) have demonstrated, for example, the imposition of settler colonial norms of what constitutes 'work', and which subsequently order working life itself, are an integral part of the everyday experience of colonial governance for Indigenous women across Canada and the United States.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, as a crucial corrective to understanding the challenges of labour geography as those pertaining solely to new trends, new geographical terrains, or new moments of epochal transformation in need of attention, it is imperative to respond to various calls by critical race, feminist and anti-colonial scholarship (for example Hill Collins, 1990; McDowell, 2015; Domosh, 2015; Reid-Musson, 2014; Mullings, 2012) to pay equal attention to trajectories of continuity that inflect the working lives of particular groups of people,

<sup>4</sup> For an excellent example, see Lewis et al. (2014).

<sup>5</sup> As both authors also note, colonial conceptions of what constitutes work and non-work, as well as assumptions about patriarchal gendered divisions of labour, inflect labour studies scholarship more generally.

and the colonial legacies and non-capitalist social relations that continue to shape the production of contemporary labour markets and labouring subjects.

Secondly, part of what we feel makes the study of migrant work and employment so enriching to labour geography as a subfield is that the very elements necessary to produce migrants' value and acquiescence *within* the workplace are largely secured through the regulation of their daily lives *outside* of it. Research highlighting how statutory limits on migrants' terms of territorial residency, restrictions to their entitlements to various state welfare schemes, endemic extortion by the police or exclusions from political rights such as voting deeply shape migrants' agency in the workplace, and respond directly to calls within labour geography to pay more attention to the ways that workers as subjects are produced by relations "other than their worklife" (Herod, 2010: 24). Of course, this question - of how individuals' non-waged, cultural, sexual, ethnolnational, social reproductive or non-capitalist lives have fundamentally shaped their working lives - has been a central and defining one taken up by critical race, feminist and queer scholars for several decades both inside and outside geography (Mullings, 1999, Yeoh and Huang, 2000; Tiemeyer, 2013; Tsujimoto, 2014; Hoang and Yeoh, 2015). Indeed, it is in part due to their concern with various social relations entangled with class relations that many feminist geographers in particular have also been among those at the forefront of research on migration, work and employment, drawing attention to the complex ways that norms surrounding gender/sexuality, (ethno)nationality, race and space have been mobilized, produced, enacted and resisted within segmented labour markets (e.g. Pratt, 1999; Silvey, 2004; McDowell, 2015; Hoang and Yeoh, 2015). The papers in this special issue contribute to this broad question by foregrounding how states' production of migrant status is often imbricated and co-constituted with *de facto* forms of belonging and entitlement, calling attention to a wide array of relationships between the 'labour market' and informal practices in the countryside or the city. These foci raise a raft of productive questions that extend well beyond the study of migration itself, including what conceptual frameworks exist within labour geography to grasp how wider processes of urbanization, enclosure, dispossession or geopolitical change are connected to the shifting world of work; how migration and immigration influence contemporary labour markets (Bauder, 2006); how circular patterns of migration might shape labour's spatial fixes (Herod, 1997; Scott, 2013); and what theoretical and methodological tools geographers still need to develop in order to understand contemporary forms of informalized work and employment in all their diversity.

Finally, perhaps the greatest rationale for a more concerted focus on migration and work is that more attention is needed in labour geography to the hard battles being fought right now by non-citizen workers organizing for change across the world (see Waite et al., 2015).<sup>6</sup> In 2015 migrant domestic workers in Lebanon began an historic campaign - the first for any country using the *Kafala* immigration system - for the right to unionize, as undocumented workers in South Korea also did recently following an eight-year legal campaign. Crucial questions are raised by the dramatic recent expansion of temporary visa schemes for both high- and low-skilled workers in countries such as Canada (see Strauss and McGrath, 2017) and Australia, and the rise in migrant worker deaths and illegal labour strikes in countries hosting global mega-events, such as Qatar, as the country prepares for the 2020 World Cup. The importance of this is starkly punctuated by the uncon-

scionable deaths of thousands of people who have crossed the Mediterranean in the last few years (Collyer and King, 2016), and the very important reality that the vast majority of those who made the journey successfully are not concentrated in refugee camps but in many cases are carving out livelihoods in towns and cities across Germany and elsewhere in Europe. Indeed, with the United Nations reporting historically-unprecedented levels of international displacement due to war, conflict or persecution - a staggering 60 million people, nearly half of whom are estimated to be of working age (Sengupta, 2015) - Castree's (2007) argument for the need for more attention in labour geography to temporary, unauthorized or irregular border-crossing workers, both waged and unwaged, is more pressing than ever.

## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Rachel Silvey for helpful feedback on earlier versions of the introduction, and the editors at Geoforum for their assistance in putting together the themed issue. All errors and omissions are of course the authors' responsibility. Ben Rogaly's contribution to this editorial introduction formed part of his recent Arts and Humanities Research Council grant, reference AH/J501669/1.

## References

- Anderson, B., Ruhs, M., Rogaly, B., Spencer, S., 2006. Fair Enough? Central and East European Migrants in Low-Wage Employment in the UK. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Anderson, B., 2010. Migration, immigration controls and the fashioning of precarious workers. *Work Employ Soc.* 24, 300–317.
- Axelsson, L., Malmberg, B., Zhang, Q., 2017. On waiting, work-time and imagined futures: Theorising temporal precariousness among Chinese chefs in Swedens restaurant industry. *Geoforum*. 78, 169–178.
- Bauder, H., 2006. Labor Movement: How Migration Regulates Labor Markets. Oxford University Press, UK.
- Breman, J., 2013. A bogus concept? *New Left Rev.* 84, 130–138.
- Caretta, M.A., Riaño, Y., 2014. Feminist participatory methodologies in geography: creating spaces of inclusion. *Qual. Res.* 16 (3), 258–266.
- Castree, N., 2007. Labour geography: a work in progress. *Int. J. Urban Reg. Res.* 31, 853–862.
- Chun, J., 2016. The affective politics of the precariat: reconsidering alternative histories of grassroots worker organizing. *Global Labour J.* 7 (2), 136–147.
- Coe, N.M., Jordhus-Lier, D.C., 2011. Constrained agency? Re-evaluating the geographies of labour. *Prog. Hum. Geogr.* 35, 211–233.
- Coe, N.M., 2013. Geographies of production III: Making space for labour. *Prog. Hum. Geogr.* 37 (2), 271–284.
- Collyer, M., King, R., 2016. Narrating Europe's migration and refugee 'crisis'. *Hum. Geogr.* 2, 1–12.
- Conlon, D., 2011. Waiting: feminist perspectives of the spacings/timings of migrant (im)mobility. *GenderPlace Culture* 18 (3), 353–360.
- De Genova, N., 2002. Migrant "illegality" and deportability in everyday life. *Ann. Rev. Anthropol.* 31, 419–447.
- Domosh, M., 2008. Labor geographies in a time of early globalization: strikes against Singer in Scotland and Russia in the early 20th century. *Geoforum* 39 (5), 1676–1686.
- Domosh, M., 2015. Commentary on "The lives of others": body work, the production of difference, and labor geographies. *Econ. Geogr.* 91 (1), 25–28.
- Ekers, M., 2015. A fix in the forests: relief labour and the production of reforestation infrastructure in depression-era British Canada. *Environ. Plan. A* 47 (12), 2537–2553.
- Featherstone, D., Griffin, P., 2015. Spatial relations, histories from below and the making of agency: reflections on the Making of the English Working Class at 50. *Prog. Hum. Geogr.* 40 (3), 375–393.
- Featherstone, D., 2013. Black internationalism, subaltern cosmopolitanism, and the spatial politics of antifascism. *Ann. Assoc. Am. Geogr.* 103 (6), 1406–1420.
- Featherstone, D., 2015. Maritime labour and subaltern geographies of internationalism: black internationalist seafarers' organising in the interwar period. *Polit. Geogr.* 49, 7–16.
- Ferguson, J., 2013. Declarations of dependence: labour, personhood, welfare in southern Africa. *J. Royal Anthropol. Inst.* 19, 223–242.
- Frisch, M., 1990. *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Public and Oral History*. SUNY, New York.
- Gidwani, V., Sivaramakrishnan, K., 2003. Circular migration and the spaces of cultural assertion. *Ann. Assoc. Am. Geogr.* 93, 186–213.
- Gray, M., 2014. Producing: educating *Reeds* Mia. In: Lee, R., Castree, N., Kitchin, R., Lawson, V., Paasi, A., Philo, C., Radcliffe, S., Roberts, S., Withers, C. (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Human Geography*. Sage, London, pp. 343–362.

<sup>6</sup> This is particularly salient, we would note, to Hastings' (2016) important call for labour geographers to consider the moral economies of agency and intra-labour competition in which particular workers' aims are advanced at the expense of others' (e.g. Ince et al., 2015; Rogaly and Qureshi, 2017).

- Hall, R.J., 2016. Reproduction and resistance: an anti-colonial contribution to social reproduction feminism. *Hist. Mater.* 24 (2), 87–110.
- Hart, K., 1973. Informal income opportunities in urban employment in Ghana. *J. Mod. African Stud.* 11 (1), 61–89.
- Hastings, T., 2016. Moral matters: de-romanticizing worker agency and charting future directions for labour geography. *Geogr. Compass* 10 (7), 307–318.
- Herod, A., 1997. From a geography of labor to a labor geography: labor's spatial fix and the geography of capitalism. *Antipode* 29 (1), 1–31.
- Herod, A., 2010. Labour geography: where have we been? And where are we going? In: Bergene, A.C., Endresen, S.B., Knutsen, H.M. (Eds.), *Missing Links in Labour Geography*. Ashgate, Surrey, pp. 15–28.
- Herod, A., Aguiar, L.M., 2006. Introduction: cleaners and the dirty work of neoliberalism. *Antipode* 38 (3), 425–434.
- Hill Collins, P., 1990. Work, family and black women's oppression. In: *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. Routledge, New York, pp. 43–66.
- Hoang, L.A., Yeoh, B.S.A., 2015. 'I'd do it for love or for money': vietnamese women in Taiwan and the social construction of female migrant sexuality. *22(5)* 591–607.
- Ince, A., Featherstone, D., Cumbers, A., Mackinnon, D., Strauss, K., 2015. British jobs for British Workers? Negotiating work, nation, and globalisation through the Lindsey Oil Refinery disputes. *Antipode* 47 (1), 139–157.
- Jonas, A., 1996. Local labour control regimes: uneven development and the social regulation of production. *Regional Stud.* 30 (4), 322–338.
- Katz, C., 2004. *Growing Up Global: Economic Restructuring and Children's Everyday Lives*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN.
- Kelly, P., 2015. Transnationalism, emotion and second-generation social mobility in the Filipino-Canadian diaspora. *Singap. J. Trop. Geogr.* 36 (3), 280–299.
- LeBaron, G., 2014. Reconceptualising debt bondage: debt as a class-based form of labor discipline. *Crit. Sociol.* 40 (5), 763–780.
- Lewis, H., Dwyer, P., Hodgkinson, S., Waite, L., 2014. *Precarious Lives: Forced Labour, Exploitation and Asylum*. Policy Press, Bristol.
- Mann, G., 2007. *Our Daily Bread: Wages, Workers, and the Political Economy of the American West*. UNC Press, Chapel Hill.
- McDowell, L., 2005. *Hard Labour: The Forgotten Voices of Latvian Migrant Volunteer Workers*. Routledge, London.
- McDowell, L., 2010. Interviewing: Fear and Liking in the Field. In: DeLyser, D., Herbert, S., Aiken, S., Crang, M., McDowell, L. (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Geography*. Sage Publications, pp. 156–171.
- McDowell, L., 2013. Working Lives: Gender, Migration and Employment in Britain, 1945–2007. Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester.
- McDowell, L., 2015. The lives of others: body work, the production of difference, and labor geographies. *Econ. Geogr.* 91 (1), 1–23.
- McDowell, L., 2016. *Migrant Women's Voices: Talking about Life and Work in the UK Since 1945*. Bloomsbury, London.
- Mezzadra, S., Neilson, B., 2013. *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor*. Duke University Press, Durham and London.
- Mitchell, D., 1996. *The Lie of the Land: Migrant Workers and the California Landscape*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.
- Mullings, B., 2012. Economic geographies of race and ethnicity: explorations in continuity and change. In: Barnes, T., Peck, J., Sheppard, E. (Eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Economic Geography*. Blackwell Publishing, Oxford.
- Munck, R., 2013. The precariat: a view from the south. *Third World Quart.* 34 (5), 747–762.
- Oliveira, F., 1972. A economia Brasileira: crítica a razão dualista. *Estudos CEBRAP* 2, 4–70.
- Paret, M., 2016. Politics of solidarity and agency in an age of precarity. *Global Labour J.* 7 (2), 174–188.
- Paret, M., Gleeson, S., 2016. Precarity and agency through a migration lens. *Citizen Stud.* 20 (3–4), 277–294.
- Peck, J., 2016. Pluralizing labor geography. In: Clark, G.L., Feldman, M.P., Gertler, M. S., Wójcik, D. (Eds.), *The New Oxford Handbook of Economic Geography*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Portes, A., Castells, M., Benton, L., 1989. *The Informal Economy: Studies in Advanced and Less Developed Countries*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD.
- Pratt, G., 1999. From registered nurse to registered nanny: discursive geographies of Filipina domestic workers in Vancouver, B.C. *Econ. Geogr.* 75 (3), 215–236.
- Pratt, G., Johnston, C., 2013. Staging testimony in Nanay. *Geogr. Rev.* 103 (2), 288–303.
- Preibisch, K., 2010. Pick-your-own labor: migrant workers and flexibility in Canadian agriculture. *Int. Migr. Rev.* 44 (2), 404–441.
- Reid-Musson, E., 2014. Historicizing precarity: a labour geography of 'transient' migrant workers in Ontario tobacco. *Geoforum* 56, 161–171.
- Rogaly, B., Qureshi, K., 2017. That's where my perception of it all was shattered: Oral histories and moral geographies of food sector workers in an English city region. *Geoforum* 78, 189–198.
- Sangster, J., 2012. Aboriginal women and work across the 49th parallel: historical antecedents and new challenges. In: Williams, C. (Ed.), *Indigenous Women and Work: From Labor to Activism*. University of Illinois Press, USA, pp. 27–45 (Chapter 1).
- Scott, S., 2013. Labour, migration and the spatial fix: evidence from the UK food industry. *Antipode* 45 (5), 1090–1109.
- Sengupta, S., 2015. 60 Million People Fleeing Chaotic Lands, U.N. Says, in *The New York Times*. Accessed at: <<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/18/world/60-million-people-fleeing-chaotic-lands-un-says.html>>.
- Seo, S., Skelton, T., 2017. Regulatory migration regimes and the production of space: The case of Nepalese workers in South Korea. *Geoforum* 78, 159–168.
- Shah, A., 2006. The labour of love: seasonal migration from Jharkhand to the brick kilns of other states in India. *Contrib. Indian Sociol.* 40 (1), 91–118.
- Silvey, R., 2004. Transnational domestication: state power and Indonesian migrant women in Saudi Arabia. *Polit. Geogr.* 23 (3), 245–264.
- Standing, G., 2011. *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. Bloomsbury Academic, London.
- Strauss, K., McGrath, S., 2017. Temporary migration, precarious employment and unfree labour relations: Exploring the continuum of exploitation in Canada's Temporary Foreign Worker Program. *Geoforum* 78, 198–208.
- Tiemeyer, P., 2013. *Plane Queer: Labor, Sexuality, and AIDS in the History of Male Flight Attendants*. University of California Press, USA.
- Tsujimoto, T., 2014. Negotiating gender dynamics in heteronormativity: Extramarital intimacy among migrant Filipino workers in South Korea. *Gender Place Culture* 21 (6), 750–767.
- Vosko, L., 2004. *Confronting the Norm: Gender and the International Regulation of Precarious Work*. The Law Commission Ottawa, Canada.
- Waite, L., Lewis, H., Craig, G., Skrivankova, K. (Eds.), 2015. *Vulnerability, Exploitation and Migrants: Insecure Work in a Globalised Economy*. Palgrave, Basingstoke.
- Wills, J., Datta, K., Evans, Y., Herbert, J., May, J., McIlwaine, C., 2010. *Global Cities at Work: New Migrant Divisions of Labour*. Pluto Press, London.
- Wright, M., 1997. Crossing the factory frontier: gender, place and power in the Mexican maquiladora. *Antipode* 29 (3), 278–302.
- Xiang, B., 2012. Labor transplant: 'point-to-point' transnational labor migration in East Asia. *South Atlantic Quart.* 111 (4), 721–739.
- Yea, S., 2017. The art of not being caught: Temporal strategies for disciplining unfree labour in Singapore's contract migration. *Geoforum* 78, 179–188.
- Yeoh, B.S.A., Huang, S., 1998. Negotiating public space: strategies and styles of migrant female domestic workers in Singapore. *Urban Stud.* 35 (3), 583–602.

Michelle Buckley<sup>a,\*</sup>

Siobhán McPhee<sup>b</sup>

Ben Rogaly<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of Human Geography, University of Toronto Scarborough, Canada

<sup>b</sup>Department of Geography, University of British Columbia, Canada

<sup>c</sup>Department of Geography, University of Sussex, United Kingdom

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [mbuckley@utsc.utoronto.ca](mailto:mbuckley@utsc.utoronto.ca) (M. Buckley)

Received 16 September 2016

Accepted 23 September 2016

Available online 13 October 2016