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Transbordering and Diverse Hong Kong Mobilities

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Abstract

Our paper develops the concept of transbordering to better understand the complex relationship between migration and sociocultural change. Noting recent calls to re-theorize the diversity of migration, and mindful of the critique that methodological nationalism obliges consideration of sociocultural processes both across territories and through networks, we develop a practice theory reading of transbordering. We intervene in debates about the spatiality and contingency of sociocultural change by inflecting discussions of borders with an epistemology that attends to integration and assembly as well as fragmentation and difference. Integration is not understood here to eliminate difference- it is not the dissolving of borders into frictionless flows- but neither does it essentialize dichotomies. We illustrate our transbordering approach through a critical reading of scholarship on Hong Kong migration and a discussion of the diversities and intersections among the racialization experiences of various immigrant and minority groups in Hong Kong.

Keywords: transbordering; Hong Kong; migration; networks; racialization

Introduction

The links between the migration of people across borders and patterns of sociocultural change are complex and, for communities and governments, often fraught. Post 9/11 and 7/7 securitization discourses cast unchecked border crossings and under-the-wire financial flows as threats to rationality, democracy, and other precepts mooring western metropolitan society. For example, in today's Hong Kong, well publicized cases of mainland mothers and cross-border traders problematize the form of the border/crossing between the SAR and mainland China, the nature of identification for those moving and those staying, and the sociocultural modalities of what Hong Kong in China looks like and will look like.

However or wherever such anxieties circulate, commentators seem persuaded that parameters including the diversity of migration, the superdiversity of community, and the loss of authority of methodologically-nationalist frameworks are becoming important dimensions of the contemporary links between migration and sociocultural change (Smith and King 2012: 127, Vertovec 2004, Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). Accordingly, one branch of the growing scholarship linking migration with sociocultural transformation examines the role(s) of context, place, and spatiality (Ma and Cartier 2003, Massey 2005). In this literature spatiality is variously theorized as a network of flows that mediates social change (Castells 2000), as constitutive of hybridized identities and emergent consciousness (Anzaldúa 1987), and as reproduced through the ties between migrant practices and socioterritorial boundaries (Mountz 2010). While acknowledging that accounts of everyday migrant practices shed further light on structural transformation, such research has been criticized for an over-reliance on a binary conception of migrants as other (for example, Newman 2006). Furthermore, the way in which such binaries are deployed privileges the nation (and national community) in discussions of migration and sociocultural change.

To attempt a fuller account of the role(s) of context, place, and spatiality means attending to the full and diverse forms of difference, and how it circulates through space and time. As difference pre-supposes and calls into being a concept of "border" that distinguishes between non-similar things, we argue for an explicit inclusion of border into thinking about spatiality. Here we join with, and extend the observation of Jones and Jessop (2010) that ideas about contingency and spatiality can usefully move

beyond a current emphasis on territory, space, place, and network to consider, in our case, borders. In considering borders, we do so in ways that avoid the binary othering function ascribed to how national borders circulate difference about migrants. While we acknowledge that national borders are a significant part of migrants' lives, and their identities (for example, Johnson and Michaelsen 1997), we note they are one of many borders that migrants encounter. That is, for migrants, borders are experienced and reworked in both geographic and social ways, including with respect to class, ethnicity, race, sexuality, and physicality. The goal of our paper is to construct an argument for a critical examination of how border crossing/transgressing/reworking may unsettle the categorization of migrant and thus inform knowledge about migration and sociocultural change.

Our intervention turns to practice theory which attends both to the ways that differencing occurs and is negotiated in everyday life, and to the ways that integrating occurs and is negotiated in everyday life (Kellerman 1987). We ask, how do migrant practises associated with crossing borders re-negotiate processes of sociocultural change? Our specific focus is Hong Kong in China. Like many contemporary urban agglomerations, the diversity of its migrants makes the city an excellent site for considering how sociocultural change is affected by migrant practices. However, many discussions of Hong Kong migration deploy binary constructions of difference and are restrictive. We suggest that by emphasising division rather than integration this literature has encouraged the further fragmentation of discussions about diverse Hong Kong mobilities. Hence, we re-conceptualise Hong Kong's borders and the migrant practices that (re)entrench them. These constituent practices of transbordering which reproduce migration from the ground up through complex and overlapping everyday practices and networks play an influential role in Hong Kong in China specifically and sociocultural change more generally.

The paper intervenes in two literatures. First, we contribute to theories of the diversity of migration. Our case attends to Smith and King's point that "establishing robust theoretical frameworks and migration theories that effectively capture the increasing diversity of migration should be a major preoccupation for scholars of migration" (2012: 127). Such diversity has been linked to growing discrimination and violence against migrants, making timely a critical examination of the intersectionality of the geographical and social borders including those involved in the

accumulation and circulation of racial knowledge in different cultural contexts (Jackson 1989, Burgos 2007, De Genova 2005, Kim 2008). Our paper looks to extend such scholarship which can fall foul of the same binary categorization of difference and othering as we note above (Clarke and Thomas 2006). Second, we contribute to an understanding of borders by showing how the need to re-theorize the diversity of migration can capitalize on the opportunity of engaging with practice-based theories of bordering.

Towards a transbordering concept

We outline a concept transbordering by combining insights about recursivity, bordering as well as borders, multiple contingency, and the integrating characteristics of (social) practice. As Giddens and other theorists of practice highlight, agency and structure are interlinked and interdependent (Giddens 1979, 1984; Bourdieu 1977, 1990; Reckwitz 2002). The social sciences devote attention to studying “social practices ordered across space and time” (Giddens 1984: 2). These practices are recursive insofar as they are shaped by and also reproduce social structures: “In and through their activities agents reproduce the conditions that make these activities possible” (Giddens 1984: 2). Border studies theory argues that borders make migrants who make borders (Brunet-Jailly 2005: 644). As such, processes of bordering draw attention to the everyday constitution of not just migrant social life, but broader cultural and economic reproduction (Dunn 2010). National borders may on occasion seem timeless and inevitable, but borders do not just exist – they are constructed by people. As Cooper and Perkins note, “bordering is . . . a *practical* activity, enacted by ordinary people as well as (nation) states, to make sense of and ‘do work’ in the world” (2012: 57). Narrative borders between us and them, for instance, have a crucial role in naturalizing the materiality of border stations and the activities of border guards (Eder 2006). The relationship between migrants and borders is a recursive one.

Secondly, taking recursivity seriously necessitates highlighting processes (bordering) as well as things (borders). This emphasis upon process shares an affinity with many strands of social theory that highlight the importance of embodied performances to social understandings of everything from sexuality (Foucault 1990) to taste (Bourdieu 1984). Though often the performances of social practices are

routinized and relatively unchanging, social practices can also change (Schatzki 2002), leading to new and unexpected “lines of flight” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Therefore, while migration in general and transbordering in particular are linked to processes of globalisation, and have various symbolic aspects, we follow Ma in also insisting that attention be devoted to their local enactment (2008). This not only provides grounding for embodied and emotional aspects of migrant experience, but also highlights that it is not enough to simply treat ‘migrants’ as an unproblematic and enduring category. It is not just the process of having once crossed a national border or checkpoint that makes borders matter to migrants – it is that they must continually and repeatedly interact with borders in their everyday lives. Transbordering is not a one-time event, but a fluctuating and evolving process.

We also note that bordering takes on multiple, contingent, material and immaterial forms. If bordering is seen to be an inherently social process, and not just a legal one, then borders transcend the power geometries of national lines, immigration checkpoints, surveillance networks and so forth. The practices that recursively enact borders are numerous, mobile and varied in form. In the UK, financial penalties against airlines and trucking companies for carrying undocumented migrants has moved key practices of bordering to airport check-in counters and the dispersed, mobile routes that trucks traverse (Walters 2006: 194-5). In this way, re-making national borders occurs not only beyond the nation (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller 2002: 307-8) but also at dispersed mobile spaces within it. Processes of bordering are also multiple, enacting divisions between groups as well as nations. The creation of the European Union, for instance, involved the multiplication of both permeable and durable borders (Verstraete 2003), and today includes the overlapping bordering of Schengen, the Eurozone, Associate Members and EU Candidates (Scott and Van Houtum 2009). Similarly in North America, national, ethnic, cultural and regional borders play a significant role in the everyday bordering of migrants (Michaelsen and Johnson 1997; Stephen 2007: 23), and Hong Kong can be seen as “a place with real but porous borders that hardened and softened at various times in relation to a fluid regional context” (Siu and Ku 2008a: 5). While these borders can be both *of* the nation and *beyond* the nation (ie, transnational), they can also mark out ethnic, cultural and regional groups with no fixed relationship to nations. For this reason, when talking about the multiple experiences of bordering faced by indigenous

Oaxacans, Stephen takes up the term “transborder” “in order to understand the complete nature of what people are moving or ‘transing’ between” (2007: 23). Understanding borders as multiple therefore involves recognizing that migrants move between many geographic and social divides and edges – national spaces, cultural traditions, social communities, racial assumptions, class positions, and so on.

Finally, we emphasize that social encounters and social change are affected equally by integration and differentiation. Newman notes that borders have often been treated as “a sharp edge and a clear line of separation between two distinct entities, or opposites” such as “us-them” and “include-exclude” (2006: 176). In this approach, bordering becomes about dividing – dividing people, territories and networks. When borders are seen as inherently dividing, they become obstacles to be addressed and overcome: the opening up of borders and facilitating of passage take centre stage (Newman 2006: 183). Undoubtedly processes of bordering enact divisions and create obstacles to movement and social adaptation. Yet, through everyday practice, borders are also integrating forces (Kellerman 1987). That is, by moving across borders, people link and connect what is at other times divided. The migrants in Stephen’s study repeatedly criss-cross the US-Mexico border as they search out opportunities for work and achieving family goals (2007). Similarly, families travel back and forth between Canada and Hong Kong in order to seize dispersed economic, education and lifestyle opportunities (Waters 2003, 2005; Kobayashi and Preston 2007; Ley and Kobayashi 2005). In a myriad of ways, migrants repeatedly bring together people, objects, skills and ideas that are normally divided by social, cultural and national borders. In terms of cultural reproduction and transformation then, migration is a notable process because of how it offers opportunities for both enacting difference and forging new connections. Integration is not understood here to eliminate difference – it is not the dissolving of borders into frictionless flows – but neither does it essentialize dichotomies. Rather, the dividing and integrating aspects of borders and transbordering constitute a duality that is continually reworked through practice. Instead of giving priority to bordering as creating divisions, our focus upon transbordering invites a reconsideration of how living across multiple borders is also an act of integration.

In summary, by emphasising transbordering as a process, we seek to highlight the recursive ways in which people cross and integrate multiple borders. We see

transbordering as an important dimension of sociocultural transformation, and one that highlights how everyday lives involve repeatedly encountering and responding to social and cultural difference. The next section reads literature on Hong Kong migration against these dimensions and seeks to demonstrate the distinctiveness of the transbordering concept.

Re-reading Hong Kong migration

Hong Kong is frequently narrated as a migrant city – as Skeldon notes, since the British occupation from 1841, the city’s population “has been ... heavily and often primarily migrant” (Skeldon 1994a: 21). It is common to see Hong Kong depicted as a place into, through and from which flows of migrants transform its economic, political, and lately sociocultural nature. Such flows are understood in political economic terms, and often associated with particular events. For example, more than 6.3 million Chinese people boarded internationally-destined ships between the 1850s and the onset of world war II (Sinn 2008: 14). Refugees arrived with the onset of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, although when the Japanese took the city in 1941 many relocated to China (Skeldon 1994a: 22). With the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the flow of refugees to Hong Kong surged again. China’s economic reforms in the 1970s were associated with another significant wave of migration (Skeldon 1994a: 22-3). The impending end of Britain’s colonial rule in 1997 prompted emigration, lately followed by return migration and various arrangements of astronaut and split families (Ley and Kobayashi 2005; Skeldon 1994b, 1995; Waters 2002, 2005). Diverse flows of migration have thus shaped Hong Kong and its society for decades.

While illuminating how structural forces associated with, for example, colonialism, imperialism, and globalization affect migration, we argue that much existing theoretical discussion of the link between Hong Kong mobilities and sociocultural change has been constrained by its maintaining of a categorical difference between incoming and outgoing migration flows. Specifically, the (derivative) conceptual focus on the events that trigger in and outmigration can overlook those processes associated with the integration of migrants in the everyday life in the city, and thus the acted out role that migrants play in sociocultural change.

Transbordering suggests that it is the combination of flows in, through, and out of Hong Kong with everyday life in Hong Kong that shapes sociocultural change. For example, despite the fact that both immigrants and emigrants play key roles in the reproduction of local families, the migration of domestic helpers into the city is separately studied by one group of scholars (Constable 1997, 2009; Piper 2005), while another group of scholars considers transnational practices and the astronaut parents separated from Hong Kong migrants in Canada (Waters 2003, 2005, 2010; Ley and Kobayashi 2005; Kobayashi and Preston 2007; Kobayashi *et al.* 2011; Preston *et al.* 2006). Such specialization contributes to a fragmented, and at best partial understanding of migration and of city life.

This fragmentation is related to wider concerns that have been previously raised about the divisions between different categories of migrants. As Sanjek notes, legal categories have often influenced studies of migration (2003: 316). The strict regulation of incoming migrants is therefore taken to be inherently different from outgoing flows, which often go unremarked unless levels rise to the point where “brain drain” is feared (Fan and Skeldon 1995, Skeldon 2009). Naturalising the difference between incoming and outgoing migrants obscures potential commonalities. Sanjek points out that this legal focus erases the similarities between past migration patterns within states and present flows of international migration (2003: 316). Ellis similarly finds the scalar division between studies of internal and international migration troubling, and feels that scholars should question when and how national scales and borders matter to understandings of migration (2012).

Using fixed and juridical boundaries to organise accounts of Hong Kong migration further restricts our understanding of the dynamic and unfolding nature of mobility over the life course and through family networks. Previous episodes of family migration can profoundly shape future ones. Salaff *et al.* (2010) describe of the Luk family, whose difficult experience fleeing Guangzhou during the Communist revolution shaped the next generation’s strategies as the 1997 retrocession of Hong Kong approached. Though several decades apart, here inward and outward migrations are closely interwoven, and integrating these flows provides a deeper understanding of motivations and experiences of migration.

This in turn raises a second challenge in the literature related to avoiding the privileging of nationalism and nation-based communities in accounts of how migrants

are involved in sociocultural change. In the wake of Wimmer and Glick Schiller's 2002 denouncement of "methodological nationalism", migration researchers have been more careful about the implicit territoriality of their studies. Many have turned to the study of transnational networks in order to recognize how migrants maintain relationships and connections that transcend national borders. While Wimmer and Glick-Schiller were right to criticize the divide between migrants and non-migrants (2002: 315), we argue that maintaining a divide between migrants from different national communities is no less detrimental to understanding the complexity of migration practices and sociocultural change. Transnational networks themselves have borders, and often these enclose groups of co-nationals.

Hong Kong illustrates this concern vividly. The Census shows that over 93% of the population is Chinese. Of the others, 1.9 per cent are Filipino, 1.9 per cent Indonesian, 0.5 per cent British, 0.4 per cent Indian, and 0.2 per cent each Pakistani, American, Australian, Nepalese, Thai, and Japanese (Census and Statistics Department 2012: Table A105). These groups have very different conditions of stay in Hong Kong: Western expatriates are granted unconditional stay and the opportunity to apply for permanent residence after seven years, while Indonesian and Filipina domestic workers are tied to two-year contracts, obliged to live in their employers' home, and thus far denied permanent residence¹. These differences in conditions of stay, as well as other class and employment differences, often lead to the segmentation of national groups in government and academic studies, despite the fact their lives intersect in a myriad of private and public ways.

Moreover, the heterogeneity of the Chinese population in Hong Kong undermines the authority of national scaled borders to interpret sociocultural change. That is, while 93.2 per cent of Hong Kong is Chinese, there are daily conflicts between recent migrants from mainland China and those who identify more specifically as Hong Kong Chinese. Reports suggest that discrimination against mainland migrants by mainstream Hong Kong society is widespread. Some scholars interpret this as a form of ethnicization, while others consider it analogous to racial discrimination (Loper 2001, Sautman & Kneehans 2002, Wu 2003). These within-group tensions are accentuated by the large number of cross-border workers, cross-border school children, cross-border traders, and visitors who enter and leave Hong Kong daily from Guangdong province, and further afield. 17,200 cross-border

students regularly cross from the mainland into Hong Kong for their education. But the flows of frequent visitors (including cross-border workers and frequent leisure trip makers) move in both directions, starting on both sides of the border (Hong Kong Government, 2011). The irony is that while articulating a division between sub-national communities of mainland and Hong Kong Chinese sparks public anxiety about the problems that migrants-as-border crossers can pose for sociocultural change in Hong Kong, the empirical reality confirms that considerably more frequent visitors start their trips in Hong Kong and go to the mainland.

It can also be difficult to identify racism in relation to complex intersectional identities. Scholars have noted that foreign domestic workers in Hong Kong often suffer from multi-layered discriminations based on race, gender and class, such that it is difficult to separate one form of discrimination from another (Cheng 1996, Constable 1997, Loper 2001, Piper 2005). While we acknowledge that the specificities of everyday situations can make determinations of how hierarchies are being imposed and negotiated complex, we argue it is crucial to jointly study how migrants not only cross and re-work geographic borders but also social- and racial-borders. A transbordering concept that interrogates how hierarchical, internal-to-group, and placed rankings and otherings of migrants work seems especially apposite to Hong Kong. That is, how does racism function in a non-Western and transnational context where whites are no longer the dominant group? Should, for instance, discrimination within different Asian populations, for example, Hong Kong Chinese against Filipina domestic workers, be labelled as racism?

To summarize, this section has argued that existing accounts that organise migration diversity in terms of direction (incoming, outgoing) and judicial and fixed scale (internal/international), and that link migration to sociocultural change through nationally scaled identifications fail to capture the diversity of mobility seen in contemporary Hong Kong. The need to avoid categorical distinctions between migrant types and the privileging of (trans)national community recommends a transbordering perspective. It is, for instance, by not integrating understandings of diverse migrants' experiences that researchers reinforce nationalistic divisions. As Kristof argues, it has long been in states' interests to enforce boundaries, which inherently separate spaces and peoples (1959). Studying co-nationals maintains and reproduces the importance of citizenship, and with it nation states. Our argument is that while a turn to

transnational migrant networks has been fruitful for studies of Hong Kong migration, the borders of these networks must also be considered. Engaging with transborder practices ensures that transnational networks do not remain focused solely on homogenous national citizens. Rather, transbordering invites a consideration of the everyday practises of diverse migrants.

Transbordering Hong Kong through daily life practises

This section takes the first step in sketching how a transbordering concept might be applied to re-read diverse mobilities through everyday practices and how these are framed. Hong Kong migrants and residents encounter multiply scaled and wide geographic and social borders. Borders are negotiated around Hong Kong itself, the Pearl River Delta, China, and the so-called global. Borders are encountered as income disparities, amongst the greatest globally, as ethnic divisions, and as post-imperial geopolitical relations (with Japan and particularly Britain). Borders are also experienced through temporality, for example across the current “temporarily permanent” space time that started with handover in 1997 and lasts for 50 years under the “One Country, Two Systems” banner.

Some sense of the asymmetrical power relations and everyday border-crossing practises can be gained by initially considering the nexus of crossings between Hong Kong and mainland China. Since Hong Kong’s establishment as a Special Administrative Region of China in 1997, its relationship with China has been complex. The border between the two areas has been officially renamed as a boundary, which Shields would interpret as a move from a material to a semiotic division (2006). However, due to the persistence of political and economic differences and a stringent immigration policy, this internal boundary still functions largely as an international border (Hui *et al.* 2011, Leung & Lee 2005). As an embodiment of the difference between the First World and the Third World, the Hong Kong-China border is similar to the United States-Mexican border in terms of immigration control and the asymmetrical flow of capital and labour (Newendorp 2009, Smart & Lin 2004).

Hong Kong’s economic integration into the Pearl River Delta has fostered deindustrialization while retaining access to cheap Chinese labour and opportunities

for Hong Kong investors. On the ground, however, while many Hong Kongers enjoy considerable freedom to relocate their businesses to China, as well as to integrate repeated transborder crossings into “business as usual” Chinese citizens face significant difficulties entering Hong Kong or starting a business in the SAR. In order to visit Hong Kong, mainland residents must obtain a “one-way permit”, for which the government maintains strict quotas. This makes clear, as Chiu and Ho note, that “the ‘One Country, Two Systems’ policy does not allow bilateral free flows of capital, goods and people” (2005: 307). It is as if transborder flows are regulated to let Hong Kongers come and go but keep mainlanders out. Yet, the contingency and fluidity of borders is illustrated by the fact that this was not always the case as, until 1950 when the quota system was created, the border between China and Hong Kong was open, and there was a free flowing of population from both sides.

The border between Hong Kongers and mainland Chinese citizens is not only enacted through permits and migration policies, but also has a significant cultural dimension. Negative stereotypes about mainland Chinese people have been perpetuated since the colonial era. Between 1950 and 1980, the British colonial government actively cultivated a sense of Hong Kong identity through immigration control and settlement policies, and this identity was distinguished from an inferior “uncivilized” mainland other (Ku 2004). In the late 1970s, the Hong Kong media’s portrayal of illegal immigrants from China as backward, lazy, dirty and welfare-dependant also helped build prejudices against mainlanders (Ma 1999). Then, in the 1980s Siu identifies the emergence of “a new social ethos” where Hong Kong’s status as “a land of immigrants and emigrants” gave over to new “discriminatory stances” to migration (2008: 118). Such an ethos was further developed in the late 1990s when the Hong Kong government, concerned about the implications of granting the right of abode to mainland-born children of Hong Kong residents, sponsored a mass media campaign portraying Chinese migrants as draining public resources, stealing local jobs, and undermining the “population quality” of Hong Kong (Leung 2004: 97). Therefore, despite having shared ethnic and cultural backgrounds, encounters between migrant Chinese and Hong Kong permanent residents can be marked by considerable suspicion, distrust and division.

While at times the lines seem rigidly drawn between the spaces and cultures of Hong Kong and China, in everyday life the story is often one of complex

transbordering that transcends Hong Kong in China to the global, and back again. Border crossing has become a lifestyle for many Hong Kong residents from various social economic backgrounds (Li 1995, Smart 2002), including working-class Hong Kong husbands with mainland wives and children (So 2003). Besides business trips, some Hong Kong residents travel to China to visit family and friends; others cross the border to look for cheap commodities and entertainment (Breitung 2002). Hong Kong residents also choose to live in China because of mainland spouses and children, lower housing prices, better living environments and Hong Kong government-built housing in Guangdong (Hui *et al.* 2011, Chiu and Ho 2005, Lee 1997). In these cases, basic everyday practices such as food provisioning, education, work, and the maintenance of family ties are inherently transborder practices. Migrant and non-migrant family members become tied up in the challenge of integrating spaces, cultures and networks that are often rhetorically held apart.

Indeed, as the social complexity of transbordering involving Hong Kong in China increases, so does the scope and intersectionality of geographic borders being reworked, glocalised, and transnationalised. Because of daily interactions, mobile Hong Kongers in mainland and mobile mainlanders in Hong Kong become simultaneously insinuated in overlapping global networks. For example, the daily interactions between Hong Kong employers and foreign domestic workers, between western expatriates, local Hong Kong residents, and Hong Kong return migrants may well reflect their different yet shifting structural positions in a racialized global labour hierarchy. Hence, transbordering draws attention to racialization processes, which we understand as “the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice or group” (Omi and Winant 1994: 64). Indeed, like the multiplicity of transbordering practises, racialization occurs at multiple levels and involves multiple players in global networks, with the formation of racial boundaries between different groups an on-going process that is open to renegotiation and reconstruction.

Interactions between migrants from different national and racial backgrounds in Hong Kong have already been documented by scholars. Knowles and Harper (2009) use photos and words to discuss British migrants in Hong Kong after 1997, as well as “the American, subcontinental Indian, Nepalese, Filipino, and Thai migrants with which their lives intersect” (2009: 7). What seem initially to be stories of personal

networks become integrated in a picture of dense migrant spaces and heterogeneous migrant networks. Among others, they shed light on relationships between domestic workers, migrant workers from India and British expats, noting how the latter retain an advantage due to their colonial genealogies and ideas of racial superiority that remain largely unchallenged in post-1997 Hong Kong. Relatedly, Gordon Mathews focuses on Chungking Mansions as the centre where the poor and the racially marginalized migrants, mainly traders, tourists, shop keepers, asylum-seekers and sex workers from Africa, South and Southeast Asia, rub shoulders with each other (2011). Regardless of where they originate from, the many people whose lives intersect in this building are busy making globalization a reality as they circulate goods, money, ideas, and hopes for a better life.

Thus, practices involving Hong Kong, Hong Kongers, mainlanders, migrants, and others can be appreciated as elements of transbordering. We have demonstrated our initial four propositions by noting how migrants and borders are related to one another recursively, by noting that bordering is multiply scaled and involves material (commuting) and non-material aspects, by exploring how bordering is a practice of integration and, most generally, by describing how bordering is a process which involves, among other aspects, racialization at multiple levels.

Summary and Conclusion

In developing the concept of transbordering, we highlight key epistemological issues that face migration scholars. An implication for praxis is that our emphasis upon transbordering processes insinuates both empirical contexts and analytical strategies. That is, integration/differencing is performed by both migrants, and those who study them. A theoretical focus upon how borders divide is important, yet it can also fragment understandings of migration's diversity by creating ever more distinctions between unique territories or networks. In order to pursue Smith and King's call to forge theories that address the diversity of contemporary migrations (2012: 127), it is therefore important to also consider how diverse cases of migration might be integrated. The empirical reality of how migration integrates lives across borders should in this way be reflected in an epistemological and methodological commitment to creatively integrating studies of diverse migration. Though the

differences between immigrants and emigrants, as well as members of national citizenry, have long shaped how scholars frame migration research, the set of divisions these categories create, as well as the possibilities for integration that they obscure, need to be challenged. Transbordering may invite inter- or trans-disciplinary research, but it is more importantly about how studies of migration might be shaped if the object of study is the everyday practices of diverse and interacting populations. These practices already exist in abundance – transbordering is habitual for migrants and non-migrants alike, and we have illustrated that Hong Kong provides a particularly rich site for research in this area.

While some studies of transbordering may involve the challenge of struggling against organizations and funding structures set up to privilege methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller 2002: 306), others will open up key opportunities to re-consider local cultures of racialization and migration. Hong Kong's unique position in global networks provides an excellent opportunity to examine the circulation of competing racial ideologies and the re-articulation of racial meanings in a new historical context of transnational flows of people, capital and culture (Omi and Winant 1994). We believe that everyday interactions of multiple migrant communities emphasise the importance of investigating migrant racializations further. Theorizing such encounters through the frame of transbordering may yield new insights on the articulation of the local and the global in terms of racial formation theory. For example, research may interrogate the connections between the specifics of the Hong Kong case and global patterns, such as by examining domestic workers' experiences beyond the boundaries of Asian nation-states (Constable 2010). The insights Madianou and Miller (2012) provide on how Filipina workers in the United Kingdom use multiple media resources to keep in contact with family, for instance, could be compared to similar practices in Hong Kong, where closer physical proximity means less acute time differences but still infrequent co-presence. Research can also supplement an understanding of the reconfiguration of the black and white binary to encompass new forms of differences in a global economy (Clarke and Thomas, 2006; Gregory 1995; Koshy 2001) and the dimensions of what some call a new racism, that is, racism based on the denigration of culture, nationality, and immigration status, rather than skin colour (Balibar 1991; Cole 1997; Sanchez 1997).

Most generally, studies on the relation between migration and sociocultural change in Hong Kong benefits policy discussions and can lead to positive social transformations. As Chan has argued, progressive immigration policies in Hong Kong should not just be about immigration control (2008: 194). Rather, they must answer important moral questions, “such as what kind of community we want to have: do we want a divided, status-conscious community full of split families, or do we want to have a harmonious and fair society that respects equal opportunity and fundamental human rights without any distinction?” (Chan 2008: 194). These questions are important for Hong Kong in China, and all diverse communities.

Notes

¹ In 2011 a domestic helper won the right to permanent residency in court, but this was overturned by the Court of Appeal in 2012 (Hunt 2011, BBC News 2012).

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