

Introduction

Migrant Worlds, Material Cultures

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ABSTRACT *While much scholarly work exists on both migration and material culture, there is remarkably little literature explicitly concerned with how these areas of study converge. In this introduction we suggest a number of points of departure for the exploration of the relationships between ‘migrant worlds’ and ‘material cultures’ and we link these points with the contributions to this Special Issue. We hope thereby to shift the theoretical framing of migrancy into some areas of concern that have been of long-standing importance within anthropology (the gift, temporality, translation), but have not necessarily been those raised most frequently in relation to migration studies.*

KEY WORDS: migration, materiality, translation, transformation, ethnography, embodiment, landscape

How to begin to map the intersecting itineraries of mobility and materiality? In this introduction, we provide some points of departure for the exploration of the relationships between ‘migrant worlds’ and ‘material cultures’ – an exploration that will be taken in a number of intentionally disparate directions in the articles gathered in this special issue of *Mobilities*. Whilst respective discourses on migration and material culture are abundant, there is remarkably little literature explicitly concerned with how these areas of study converge, or how a focus on such convergences enables a rethinking of both material culture and migration. We set out with these goals in mind.

We are ambitious in our scope insofar as we adopt an inclusive interpretation of both migrancy and materiality. We refer to ‘migrant worlds’ rather than ‘migration’ *per se*, in that we are not only concerned with the materiality of migration itself, but also with the material effects of having moved, perhaps many years earlier, to a new place, and with the inter-relatedness of the movements of people and things. In addition, we want to convey the sense that a ‘world’ – an often fragmented and fragile set of material and non-material assumptions and resources – can itself be made mobile, seemingly translated from one geographical location to another, even as it is transformed in the process. Thus the migrant worlds explored in this collection range from a ‘temporary’ refugee camp in Uganda to living-rooms in England, from the emotive, as well as locomotive, materialities of rail travel in Scandinavia to the social as well as physical migrations of cloth in South Asia.

Lochaber No More

Appropriately enough, we begin our voyage with a backward glance, by reflecting on a historical painting that depicts the backward glance of emigrants departing from their erstwhile homeland, bound, we assume, for the New World. John Watson Nicol's *Lochaber No More* (1883) (Figure 1) is an exemplar of a genre of Victorian narrative painting that one might term 'emigration art', and it already provides us with one kind of relationship between mobility and materiality: the material representation of migration itself (Macdonald, 2005; Wood, 1976, pp. 221–226). Taking its title from a popular lament, Nicol's painting portrays a shepherd and his wife and dog on the deck of an emigrant ship off the west coast of Scotland. With his elbow resting on the gunwale, his head resting on his hand, Nicol's shepherd stares into space, his expression a mixture of abstraction and stoicism. Sitting on their luggage, with her back towards us, his wife seems overcome with emotion and she buries her face in her shawl. Neither, in fact, looks towards the receding shore, with its cluster of cottages glimpsed beneath mist-shrouded hills: the old home is already lost. 'This is an image of complete hopelessness, of lassitude and despair', writes a recent commentator, 'an elegy for the Highlands', which yet evokes both the 'nobility and tragedy' of its emigrant subjects (Nicholson, 2008).

Nicol's depiction of this departure stands, of course, for the hundreds of thousands of similar departures from the Highlands of Scotland – indeed, for the tens of millions of such departures from throughout Europe – embarked upon in the nineteenth century. Yet the image of emigration evoked in *Lochaber No More* is also a particular one: this is intended as a representation of tragedy in which the emigrants are powerless to resist the inhumane forces that are propelling them from their erstwhile homeland (cf. Miller, this volume). Nicol is cognisant of the inevitability of their loss, painting – as he was – after the event, from a vantage point distanced in both time and space (though a Scottish painter, he was based in London, and by the 1880s, when he painted *Lochaber No More*, the majority of emigrants travelled by steamship rather than under sail). Nicol's emigrants are thus exiles, callously expelled from their 'native glens' by the rapacious greed of absentee landlords during the so-called Highland Clearances earlier in the nineteenth century (Richards, 2000). We might imagine them accepting the offer of 'assisted passage' to Australia under the auspices of the Highland and Island Emigration Society (Richards, 1985; Watson, 1984).

There is, however, an irony in *Lochaber No More*. The male emigrant portrayed in the painting is a shepherd (note the dog and the clasped shepherd's crook), and it was of course sheep – *na caoraich mora* – that displaced people during the Highland Clearances, as landlords profited from turning lands long-cultivated under traditional joint-tenancy holdings into modern, efficient sheep farms. Incoming sheep breeds, sheep farmers and shepherds from the Scottish Lowlands were often demonised in the Highlands during the nineteenth century as the usurpers of the lands of the native peasantry. The figure of Nicol's shepherd emigrant is thus ambiguous, associated with both expropriation and appropriation. In fact, he is doubly ambiguous, and immediately complicates any easy distinction between 'forced' and 'voluntary' migration as well as the contrasting moral connotations associated with each. The nostalgia and pathos of *Lochaber No More* thus disguises

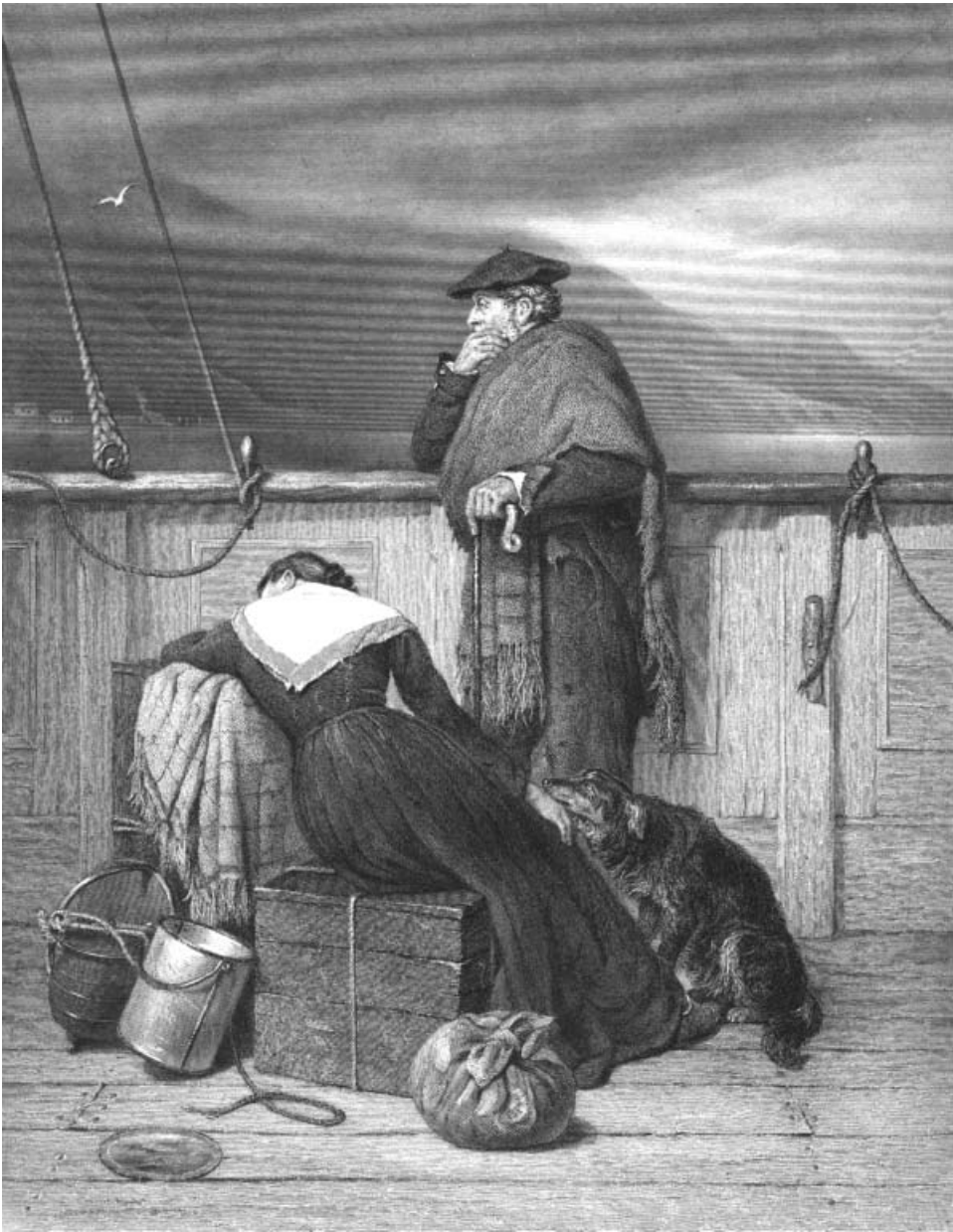


Figure 1. *Lochaber No More* by J. Watson Nicol (1883), engraved by Charles Cousen

the agency that even the impoverished migrants who took advantage of government emigration schemes asserted: their ‘expulsion’ was often from poverty into the ‘land of opportunity’, where the chances of ‘bettering one’s fortune’ were high. The victims of displacement from one land were often also the willing agents of displacement in

another, and it is as well to remember that Scottish settlers – Highland and Lowland alike – were fully implicated in the victimisation of indigenous populations as they transformed Australia into the ‘wool capital’ of the world (see Basu, 2007, for a more detailed discussion of the ambiguities of Highland ‘exile’ and ‘emigration’).

A close reading of *Lochaber No More* already introduces us to a number of varieties of mobility – internal labour migration, forced migration, economic migration, flight from poverty, colonial expansion – as well as alerting us to the difficulties of extracting one category from another. It also provides a powerful evocation of the multiple materialities intertwined in these complex movements. There are, for example, those objects that the emigrants carry with them on their voyage (cf. Burrell, this volume). A household reduced to the few items that can be physically transported with them on the ship (cf. Kaiser, this volume): a cauldron and pail, a bundle perhaps of clothes or food, an up-ended trunk and a wooden kist. As well as clothing, the kist may have contained portable objects of practical or sentimental import: tools, sewing kit, a Bible, domestic utensils, letters, perhaps a cherished musical instrument. Such objects were often enumerated in contemporary emigration guides and proved useful not only in the early stages of establishing a household and livelihood in a new country, but also in providing some – albeit minimal and largely symbolic – semblance of home on the long voyage out (note, for example, how the emigrants’ luggage provides a kind of furniture in Nicol’s composition). In diaspora, these objects would later acquire other kinds of value owing to their continued association with the old country. Such material possessions have often become heirlooms and prized by successive generations as precious links to lost homelands and pasts, while others have found their way into settler museums as objects which chart the historical itineraries of diasporic communities (cf. Henare, 2005, for discussion of Scottish settlers’ museums in New Zealand).

As well as the material presence of their luggage, there is the material culture of the clothes that Nicol’s emigrants wear (see Norris, this volume). The man’s outfit, in particular, is iconic and identifies him immediately as a Scot: his ‘tam-o-shanter’ bonnet, his plaid. Along with his shepherd’s crook, which signals his occupation, this emigrant thus literally wears his identity about him, and one can imagine him continuing to do so in exile, perhaps as a member of a Caledonian Society or St Andrew’s Society or at a Highland Gathering in Australia. (Such diasporic institutions were already flourishing by the mid-nineteenth century.)

Whereas the luggage and clothing that accompany the migrations of people provide an obvious example of the intertwining of material culture and mobility, *Lochaber No More* reminds us that there are other materialities that actively constitute these journeys. There is, for example, the materiality of the means of transport (cf. Löfgren, this volume): the openness of the ship’s deck, the grain and texture of wood and rope (we might imagine billowing sails, the creak of the ropes, the bustle, perhaps, of other passengers). Then there is the materiality of the sea and weather upon and through which the ship voyages. These materialities combine in sensations of movement, sound, temperature, humidity, smell, taste, touch and vision to act upon the bodies of the emigrants themselves, shaping the experience and memory of the journey. Finally, there is the materiality of the unlooked-upon homeland that recedes from the departing ship: the mist-covered hills of home, the

thatched cottages by the shore, the stuff of romantic Highlandist iconography – an imagined landscape, and yet one barely distinguishable from its material counterpart (Basu, 2007; Womack, 1989). In the absence of photographs, one wonders how such once-familiar landscapes were remembered or recreated ‘in exile’ – perhaps the thought of them was banished from the mind, perhaps it haunted the emigrants to the grave (cf. Miller, this volume).

Intersecting Itineraries of People and Things

Whilst Nicol’s painting introduces us to the complex relationships between migration and materiality, it is clear that the full significance of that receding homeland or the migrants’ few possessions is highly contingent upon the particular circumstances, motivations and experiences of the migrants themselves. Was theirs a migration ‘forced’ by an avaricious landowner, or was it impelled by poverty? Was it driven by the prospect of employment or land at their destination? Were they part of a ‘chain migration’, sailing out to join family members who had already established themselves? Will their Scottish ‘ethnicity’ be an asset or a hindrance in their new country? And what about the gendered differences of the two migrants represented? (In current migration studies parlance, might we refer to the woman as a ‘trailing spouse’?) The significance of the migrants’ material worlds is thus shaped by the particular nature of their distinct journeys. Yet the nature of their migration is also shaped by its materiality. We use the term ‘materiality’ straightforwardly to refer to physical objects and worlds, but also to evoke more varied – multiple – forms of experience and sensation that are both embodied and constituted through the interactions of subjects and objects. Such interactions are often both moving, in the sense that they stir the emotions, and, indeed, moving, insofar as they entail the movement of both people and things, subjects and objects.

One of the tasks of this special issue is thus to highlight some of the ways in which the intersecting itineraries of people and things are mutually constitutive. How class identities, for example, are learnt, embodied and performed through the differentiated materialities of commuter train carriages (see Löfgren, this volume). Or how transnational identities are articulated at the interface of public and private space through the consumption of migrating forms of clothing, furniture and other domestic artefacts (see Norris, this volume; cf. Tolia-Kelly, 2004a, 2004b). Or, indeed, how histories of commodity flows (including the flows of people *as* commodities) continue to impact on bodies, societies and perceived fates, shaping personal dispositions and self-conceptions in relation to lost or desired places (see Miller, this volume; cf. Eyerman, 2002).

Migrant materialities are differently constituted through different forms of mobility. The same objects, architectures or landscapes may thus act as floating signifiers, vehicles able to convey an indeterminate variety of meanings and significances, depending on context. Pursuing Löfgren’s discussion of the materialities of ‘motion and emotion’ associated with railway travel, for example, we might widen the contextual range to consider other, less cosmopolitan, forms of rail transportation. The materiality of the freight train comes to mind, with its goods wagons, boxcars and cattle trucks. This shifts our attention to industrial networks of movement, involving the transportation of things, but also of people (those

concerned with managing and manhandling this migration of materials, for instance, but equally the wider-reaching population movements associated with the development of industrial towns and cities around railway networks).

The materiality of the boxcar has associations other than the transportation of goods however. In the USA, the railroad provided a vehicle – literally – for a new, romanticized kind of freedom in the figure of the ‘freight-hopping’ hobo. Thus, from Jack London to Jack Kerouac, ‘the road’ becomes ‘a space of “delight” and chance occurrences, set apart from the “monotony” of conventional life’ (Photinos, 2007, p. 182; see also Feied, 1964). Reflecting on his own youthful itinerancy as a ‘road-kid’, London recalls that learning to ‘ride the freights’ necessitated the acquisition of a new vocabulary associated with the railways (cf. Löfgren, this volume):

A new world was calling to me in every word that was spoken – a world of rods and gunnels, blind baggages and ‘side-door Pullmans’, ‘bulls’ and ‘shacks’, ‘flopings’ and ‘chewin’s’, ‘pinches’ and ‘get-aways’, ‘strong-arms’ and ‘bundle-stiffs’, ‘punks’ and ‘profesh’. And it all spelled Adventure (London, 1914, pp. 217–218).

Shifting contexts again, the same boxcar reminds us that people, too, have been shunted like things – and not even as commodities, as slaves, but as waste might be – to incinerators, herded into cattle trucks as ‘deportees’ to the death camps. The Holocaust has thus left in its wake many material memorials of this altogether more odious movement: the Bahnhof Grunewald on the outskirts of Berlin, for instance, where trains no longer depart, but from which, between 1941 and 1945, over 50,000 German Jews were deported to destinations whose names are now cast in iron on its platforms; or the railway tracks at Auschwitz-Birkenau leading...nowhere. Indeed, the boxcar itself has become an icon of Holocaust commemoration, one of the most prized possessions of museums such as the Dallas Holocaust Memorial Center, the Florida Holocaust Museum, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, and, perhaps most iconically, in Moshe Safdie’s *Memorial to the Deportees* at Yad Vashem (Figure 2) (Stier, 2005). The materiality of the boxcar remains the same, but its significance is transformed from movement to movement. The goods wagon becomes a vehicle of genocide becomes an icon of remembrance, a commodity of commemoration now moving in circuits of a morally-suspect trade in Holocaust relics (Cole, 2000; Linenthal, 2001; cf. Geary, 1986).

If such disparate significations emerge from a single type of material artefact by expanding the range of migrant contexts, it behoves us to consider how much further one could take this approach by distinguishing more precisely different types and experiences of mobility through the application of a wider variety of criteria. Migrancy of one form or another is a near ubiquitous phenomenon, yet it is also a highly differentiated one. In order to reflect this diversity, what seems to be required is a more diligent mapping of typologies of materiality and material culture onto typologies of migration and mobility. This is, however, a task fraught with conceptual and methodological problems. The criteria through which forms of mobility and movement may be distinguished, for example, expand exponentially at each effort to typologize, and, of course, categories made distinct for analytical purposes map uneasily onto the ambiguities and fluidities of lived experience and thereby potentially distort our understanding of them.



Figure 2. ‘The journey towards annihilation and oblivion...’ Moshe Safdie’s *Memorial to the Deportees* at Yad Vashem, Jerusalem. (Photo: Graeusel)

Despite such limitations, *thinking about* the task of mapping material and migrant typologies yields its own insights insofar as it forces us to consider precisely the multiple dimensions that converge in any particular case. Since William Petersen’s ‘A general typology of migration’ (1958), migrationists have attempted to draw increasingly complex models of population movement incorporating ever wider arrays of variables. David J. Robinson, for example, displaces the centrality of ‘migratory force’ and ‘motivation’ as the key determinants of migration types, and considers the different temporal, spatial and racial factors that shaped distinct forms and experiences of migration in colonial Spanish America (1990, p. 6) (Figure 3).

Robinson’s matrix thus draws attention to the qualitative – and material – differences between, say, a European merchant or trader moving from one urban place to another in a circular fashion, a black slave moving between urban places on a seasonal basis (for example, being moved between the households of a wealthy colonialist), and an indigenous person moving permanently from a rural to an urban area. Despite its apparent multidimensionality, Robinson is conscious that this matrix is also a grossly simplified schema. The cells that represent ‘racial groups’ could, for example, be subdivided by sex, and then again by age, by social status, and so on (Robinson, 1990, p. 9). The graphical representation necessarily omits many more factors than it can include. Thus both ‘structural factors’ (e.g. broader economic, political and social forces, access to land and employment, diffusion of technology, and rate of environmental change) and the ‘micro-view’ of individual migrants (e.g. fundamental goals and perceived risks, the need to maximize socio-economic

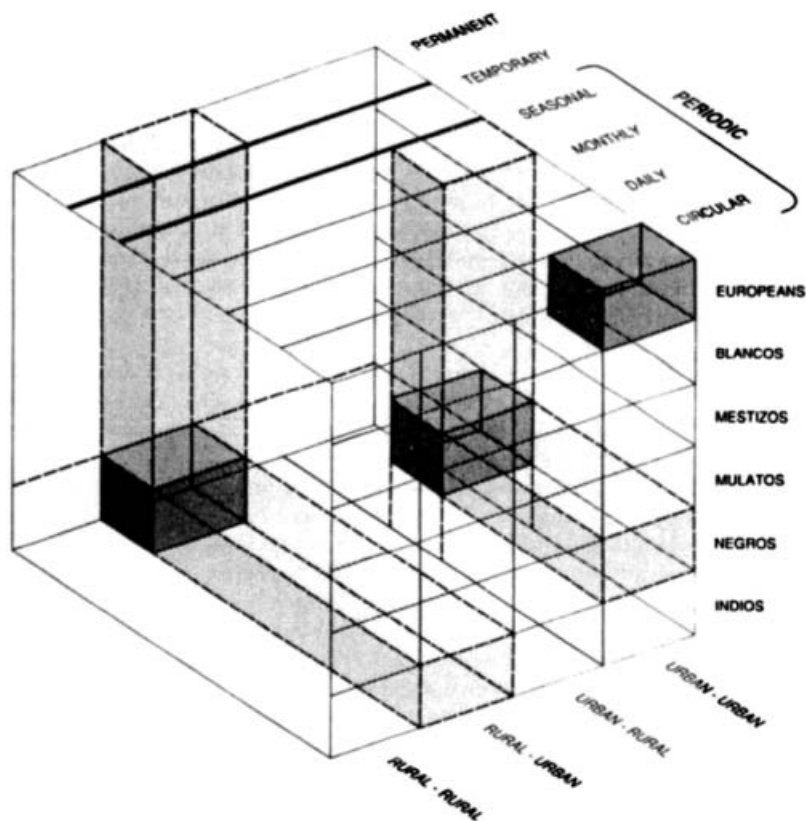


Figure 3. Robinson's matrix of colonial migration (Robinson, 1990, p. 6)

opportunities) are missing, and yet, as Robinson acknowledges, these are crucial to any analysis.

Aside from museum-based classification schemes, there have been fewer attempts to typologize material culture or materiality – particularly in relation to migrancy. A recent exception is Stephen Cairns' 'association experiments' with alternative juxtapositions of 'architecture' and 'migrancy' (2004). Cairns' discussion moves across four 'pairings' through which he seeks 'to explore the shifting interval between the terms, and the kinds of slippages that occur when the most common-sense and obvious associations have been exhausted' (*ibid.*, p. 18). Thus, by considering, in turn, 'architecture-by-migrants', 'architecture-for-migrants', 'architects-as-migrants', and 'architecture's migrancy', Cairns is able to range across such varied topics as the mobility of architectural forms, the adaptations carried out by migrants on the architectures of their destinations, the role of vernacular architecture in sustaining romantic images of homelands, the influence of the architect as 'corporate nomad', as well as considering architectures designed to facilitate migration and to accommodate migrants of different kinds (from the portable architectures of refugee camps to the 'induction', 'detention' and 'removal' centres built to process and assess

asylum seekers). Drawing on the architectural theorists Aldo Rossi and Massimo Scholari, Cairns makes the point that whilst ‘society transits through architecture’, architecture also has ‘the ability (and need) to transit through society’ (Cairns, 2004, p. 34).

Such association experiments might be extended fruitfully to our present discussion of the wider relationships between migrancy and material culture. And yet we stop short of experimenting with another typology here. The intersecting itineraries of people and things are not so amenable to generalization. For, above all, what our examination of typologizing strategies demonstrates is the need for precise contextualization. We propose the value of an *ethnographic* contextualization that mediates between the particular experiences of individual migrants and the broader social, economic and political forces that shape their actions and dispositions. In practice, not all of the papers in this volume rely on conventional ethnography in the anthropological sense of providing a holistic, long-term view of a given cultural field. However, all demonstrate the value of deriving nuanced, grounded perspectives on varieties of, and relations between, materialities and mobilities. Alongside consideration of differences in ‘types’ of population movement and the wide variety of social factors that affect the experiences of migrants, we argue therefore for the need to attend to the multiple materialities of migration in analyses of migratory phenomena. Ultimately, it is this attentiveness that characterizes the contributions of this special issue.

Making Migrant Worlds

In the following, we move from a more general discussion of migration and its links with materiality towards an examination of some tangible, observable ‘migrant worlds’, as discussed in the case studies in this special issue. We hope thereby to shift the theoretical framing of migrancy into classic areas of concern within anthropology, but not necessarily those raised most frequently in relation to migration studies. We thus explore notions of embodiment and the ambiguities of materiality before considering connections between the material and the temporal in migrant contexts, the notion of migrancy as a (complex) form of ‘translation’, and finally the links between anthropological notions of the gift and the analysis of migrant materialities.

The anthropology of gift exchange actually takes our subject back to one of the foundational texts of anthropology itself. Bronislaw Malinowski’s discussion of ‘the kula’ practised by Trobriand Islanders in his *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922) is ostensibly a discussion of how people from different islands create alliances through exchanging necklaces and armshells in opposite directions. Malinowski’s avowed aim is to show something of the ‘rationality’ of these alliances, how they make sense to local actors but also contribute to wider social functions. Yet, at the same time, the kula might be read as an early account of the interrelationships between persons (subjects) and objects, and objects and mobility. Valuable exchange items may be associated with their owners and donors, but are put into social play through being moved around island chains in order to construct and feed alliances between men. Ironically, Malinowski himself tended to play down the study of material culture within anthropology; and still more ironically, his work is often

assumed to present the methodological ideal of studying a territorially bound culture. But in fact he was describing a ‘migrant world’, albeit a very particular kind of one, where the significances of exchanges were articulated within an outwardly ramifying yet also confined sphere, constructed by the players in a system of exchange that spread across different islands. Such themes were developed further and much later by other scholars, such as in Munn’s (1986) brilliant study of how kula exchanges invoked ‘fame’ for donors, deploying and creating objects and subjects over space and time. So in the ethnographic worlds created by both Malinowski and Munn we see mobile objects constituted by but also constituting people, as materialities of performance, of bodies and of objects come together. In these respects we are not so far from the migrant worlds described by our contributors, although most of the contexts described in our case studies are those where the sphere of action transcends conventional pathways, where the movements of people and objects are articulated in novel – and particularly unpredictable – ways.

Materializing and Embodying Migration

Within the past couple of decades or so, two powerful theoretical streams in the social sciences have emphasized mobility on the one hand, and embodiment on the other. While the former has taken us beyond static understandings of social formations, the latter has shown how to transcend overly textualized and mentalistic understandings of culture. There is, however, a potential for a tension between these two orientations: as Orvar Löfgren argues in his contribution, more extreme versions of the ‘nomadic turn’ and the celebration of cosmopolitanism have emphasized almost effortless flux at the expense of understanding exactly *how* people move. Indeed, his piece is concerned with converting our understanding of motion from being a theoretical entity into a bodily, yet culturally mediated, sensation. The point becomes more striking because he is describing a form of motion – travelling by train – that has become so commonplace to the contemporary reader, but clearly needed to be ‘learnt’ when it first emerged in Denmark in the nineteenth century. The materialization of the body in new ways went along with and was partially constituted by other forms of materiality, such as the technology of the train itself, or the objectification of social class in the decor of its compartments.

When viewed as an attempt to complicate and ‘ground’ the experience and production of mobility, Löfgren’s paper presents parallels with a contribution on an apparently very different theme, Kathy Burrell’s analysis of spaces of mobility experienced by Polish migrants in post-1989 Europe. Burrell’s aim, like that of Löfgren, is precisely to show how spaces of crossing are not empty spaces, so that borders should not merely be regarded as gateways to other, more significant contexts for social action. The objects, possessions, performances that make up border crossings illustrate culturally rich modulations of mobility, emergent out of the interactions between state surveillance and the aspirations of transnational economic migrants.

It might be argued that Danish commuters in the nineteenth century and Polish migrants in the twenty-first are exercising a degree of choice in their journeys into and ultimately out of zones of transition. Such cannot be said of the subjects of

another contribution that also deals with themes of seeming absence and emptiness. Tania Kaiser's examination of a Sudanese refugee settlement in Uganda focuses not on movement per se, but on the effects of forced migration. The refugees she works with have suffered losses, both material and non-material, and inhabit a 'liminal' present and uncertain future. Yet, again the analytical emphasis is on the material 'furnishing' of seeming absences. Kaiser's argument here takes a subtle and multi-dimensional turn. She draws on a notion of 'landscape' to explore how refugee environments, apparently lost through mobility, are nevertheless influential in the (re)construction of life in exile. Part of Kaiser's point is that the category of landscape allows us to think of the 'place' inhabited by refugees as both material and non-material, incorporating interleaved objects and aspirations, and not confined simply to place of origin or of exile. Furthermore, as with historical Danes and contemporary Poles, these Sudanese refugees are located in an environment constantly permeated by the material and ideological influences of wider political economies.

The word 'liminal' is used by Kaiser herself to describe the situation of refugees in Uganda, and for anthropologists this term recalls the work of a scholar who was not concerned with migration as such, but who was deeply interested in the role of movement in human life. Victor Turner's studies of pilgrimage (e.g. 1978) emerge from an anthropology developed before current concerns with multi-sitedness, and his language is permeated with a vocabulary of social and cultural 'structures' opposed by 'anti-structures'. What we point to here, however, is the curious parallel between his work and more recent concerns with the geography and sociality of mobility. Famously, Turner saw movements of pilgrims across social fields as producing a particular form of blankness, a stripping away of social, cultural and political identities in idealized versions of 'communitas', a state of simultaneous social void and openness to the other. This is not the place to engage in a critique of the concept, but we do want to point to the way in which Turner's notion of the blankness of communitas prefigures Augé's (1995) depiction of the 'non-place', of the context of transit where the connections between humans are homogenized and stripped of specificity. Of course, Turner's 'anti-structure' is arguably a romantic tale of the return of the organic pre-modern, whereas Augé's 'non-place' is perhaps a more tragic story of the inexorability and alienation produced by super-modernity. But the point is that both draw on metaphors of absence in attempting to characterize the social and material results of mobility. And while we do not deny the significance of the seeming generic in places of transition, we are arguing for close attention to be paid to the ways in which spaces of transition must equally be seen as both materially 'filled' and culturally specific in the ways in which they are perceived and performed.

As is implicit in our arguments so far, we cover both mobility itself and the results of having moved in our coverage of migrant worlds. Thus Sudanese refugees seek agency and a degree of (transformed) familiarity in their temporary home. Migration is grounded in objects, practices and relationships that mediate but also create contexts of movement and (often temporary) settlement. At the same time as constituting the migrant experience, however, certain forms of materiality can also provide powerful ways of indexing the status and/or agency of the migrant. Consider again Burrell's Polish migrants and the embodiment of travel that they share with

many others: the suitcase. In one sense, a suitcase might seem like a modern version of the kist displayed in Nicol's *Lochaber No More*, the container that cannot in itself contain much of a past life, and whose presence for a migrant (as opposed to a tourist) can indicate the losses involved in travel. Yet notice how this index of risk and uncertainty can itself be converted into a measure of a very different kind of status. The migrant who nervously packs a familiar brand of toothpaste on their first visit to England may come back to their family with a case full of gifts, alongside a laptop (opened, in an example Burrell gives, for display purposes at just the right moment), indicating the economic power gained through travel. Again, the airport becomes a place of meaningful performance rather than a 'non-place', as it provides the first stage for the migrant to display their material signs of success. At the same time, material culture can perform a less overt form of indexing, and one that indicates a different kind of transformation in the migration process. The purchasing of products in England can signify a shift in the identity of the migrant/consumer, a certain conflation of the self with images of Englishness – and perhaps an indication that one is no longer reliant on toothpaste from 'home'.

Migration, then, is a process, and the materiality deployed can indicate the changing status of a given migrant over time – the transformation of their place within the 'world' they have entered, willingly or not. In this sense, Burrell's work echoes a fascinating case study of a whole migrant population, the historian Robert Orsi's chronicle of Italian Americans in the New York of the first half of the twentieth century. The title of Orsi's book – *The Madonna of 115th Street* (1985) – refers to the item of (sacred) material culture whose fate itself becomes a telling index of the shifting migration patterns of this ethnic group. The statue of the Madonna is a centrepiece of the annual Italian festa, which flourished between 1880 and 1950. On such occasions it is taken out into the streets, as performances of Italian American culture temporarily traverse the roads, parks and alleyways of the city, forming and displaying an ecology of devotion to both Catholicism and ethnicity. Orsi notes (*ibid.*, p. 50) how the Madonna leaves the basement of her church and adopts a more prominent position just as Italians and their children begin to take control of political and social life in the street spaces of Italian Harlem. And yet the Madonna also indexes a form of mobility that will spell the end of her importance, as the post-war generation of Italians leave their community in the city and the intimate connections between the statue and the place are snapped (*ibid.*, p. 72). In a sense the Madonna takes pride of place in performances that help to domesticate the original, uncertain mobility of migration, the ties that are challenged by the move from Europe to the USA. But as migration turns into upward mobility the 'migrant world' gathered around the Madonna becomes too diffuse to be sustained in any meaningful way.

Both the Polish case and, over a much longer time, the Italian American case point to the complex relationships between temporality and materiality that are entailed in the worlds we are describing. The Madonna, as well as the suitcase containing Polish toothpaste, look back to a time of tradition or at least apparent belonging. And yet their very existence is expressive of ambition, or aspiration, that look both to mobility and to a future state of self transformation. Danny Miller's contribution to this volume similarly highlights complex and ambiguous relationships with time, as indexed and in part constituted through material culture: Mrs Stone's house in

Jamaica expresses a claim to a homeland that is no longer actually a home, based as she is in London. In Miller's account, this form of connection is played out in relation to a wider distinction he makes between transcendence – a link to the long term, to family, to the past – and transience, a project more associated with freedom. Perhaps these distinctions are played out in Orsi's and Burrell's accounts as well, and they can be seen as indicating the tensions between past and future, continuity and transformation, that are played out in acts and performances of migration.

Of course the present must also be addressed in migration as well. Thus Fortier (2000) describes the material and narrativized creation of spaces of belonging for Italian migrants to Britain in a way that attempts to understand how 'here' can be invested by an Italian presence. In the process, she mediates between the supposed isomorphism of space, place and culture on the one hand, and the reification of uprootedness as the paradigmatic figure of postmodern life on the other (*ibid.*, p. 1). Contributions to this volume implicitly make the same point but also approach the 'present' in another, slightly different way, demonstrating the ways in which migration heightens or complicates present experience. Burrell's and Löfgren's accounts exhibit some interesting contrasts in this latter respect. Pawel, the young Polish migrant to the UK, responds to the 'emotional weight' of his journey by sleeping for almost the entire duration of his flight over to England. Experience of mobility here is both feared and denied; the sense of a loss of agency in travel is mitigated by blocking out the sense of travelling itself. Contrast such a strategy with many of the train passengers described by Löfgren, who experience the passage of time and space in new, exciting ways – emotion contained in modernized motion – but whose measurement of mobility and temporality is also transformed, as the standardized economy of time eventually shifts excitement into novel forms of boredom (and, one assumes, frequent frustration at not being 'on time').

The interweaving of materiality with temporality is wonderfully juxtaposed in the very title of Lucy Norris's paper: 'Recycling and Reincarnation', dealing with the journeys Indian saris make within and beyond the sub-continent. Complex trajectories and temporalities are at play in this paper, often of a very different character to those described by Miller, Löfgren or Burrell. Cloth becomes subject to processes of decomposition and recomposition, and the recreation of the 'authentic antique' for a Western constituency is juxtaposed with an evocation of both a sense of reincarnation associated with Hinduism and a more contemporary valorization of recycling for environmental purposes. But Norris's paper points us in two other theoretical directions that are worth highlighting here.

First, there is her use of wider anthropological reflections on materiality itself, and in particular Webb Keane's (2005) critique of the anthropological assumption that material things are generally illustrative of something else, since 'meaning' is derived from yet somehow separated from the physical world. If we are to accept that 'signs are located within a material world of consequences' (Norris, this volume) we have to accept that the fibres Norris describes are not merely representative of wider ideas and assumptions, but are also an ideal medium by and through which flows, and their material as well as ideological consequences, are actually realized. Materiality is not opposed to meaning here, but it is understood to be not entirely reducible to it, and of course a similar point could be made of other papers, such as the trains that form a central part of Löfgren's paper.

Second, we wish to point to Norris's bringing together of notions of the person and the object through cloth. Cloth is often seen as a second skin, creating connections between biological and social selves; but it also takes part in 'gifting' processes, consolidating and making visible links between people separated by space but connected through kinship and friendship; furthermore, in India it has some resonances with notions of the person as a relational entity, connected through the exchange of material substances that flow between people. Again, this raises a theme evident in other papers, perhaps most obviously as the intertwining of person and gifted object can be discerned in the Polish migrants whose presents to relatives back home may both reinforce family ties but also express the cultural distance travelled by the giver. Remittances to relatives from migrants often contain this ambiguity, of course – a combination of reaffirming and resisting ties of community (as also expressed to some degree in Miller's transcendence/transience distinction).

However, if migrant worlds can contain objects that take on characteristics of persons, so (as noted earlier) persons can come to seem like objects. Here, we invoke a contribution to Arjun Appadurai's *The Social Life of Things* (1986) where Igor Kopytoff refers to the distinction in Western thought between 'the natural universe of commodities' and things on the one hand, and people on the other, who represent 'the natural universe of individuation and singularisation' (1986, p. 64). Yet, as Kopytoff points out, people can and have been commoditized again and again, as the example of slavery most dramatically reveals. Migrants are not slaves (usually), but they share with the slave a marginality and ambiguity of status (see Kopytoff, 1986, p. 65) combined usually with the experience of a mobility prompted by demands of political economy, where both agency and individuation must be established rather than taken for granted.

Translations and Transformations

If Keane's juxtaposition of the material and the immaterial draws on a problematic disjunction of object and meaning, we suggest that another way of framing the question of how migrant worlds are formed is to think of migrancy in terms of a metaphor that addresses a number of questions we have highlighted so far, including the relationships between materiality and meaning, movement and meaning, context and culture. The metaphor is that of translation, and notice initially the ambiguity of the word itself, deriving as it does from the Latin *transferre*, to bring across. Such 'bringing' might refer to the literal moving of objects from one place to the other, as in the relics of a saint used to form a holy site of pilgrimage (or a kula object from one island to the next). Thus, in the picture of Pope Gregory's relics reproduced in Figure 4, for example, we see how the ordered and ritualized movement/translation of part of a saint's body appears to render a particular place sacred, even as it provides a powerful and novel frame for the further sacralization of the saint's body as relic. The packed cars or bulging suitcases of migrants and refugees may be deployed in strictly secular journeys, but they do also involve literal and material translations as the part comes to represent a whole: not a skull standing for a saint but a treasured object from home pointing to a whole way of life, and thus being invested with new significance in the process.



Figure 4. Translation of the relics of St Gregory to the monastery of Petershausen. Late seventeenth-century engraving (Rosgartenmuseum, Konstanz)

At the same time, the most common contemporary usage of ‘translation’ refers to the process of expressing the meanings of one language in the words of another, a ‘carrying over’ fraught with issues of ambiguity of interpretation. In discussing the politics of the translation process, Rubel & Rosman (2003, p. 7) consider Benjamin’s question of how translation can constitute the continued life of the ‘original’, and in

doing so make the distinction between ‘translation’ as a word for word rendering from the original, and transduction, where sense-for-sense or category equivalents are sought. Both of these meanings indicate the complexities of what is often called entextualization in the language of linguistics – extracting discourse from its original context and then re-inserting it into a new context.

The point of highlighting these issues is to encourage reflection on what is ‘carried over’ by migrants as they form their new/old worlds in novel territories and contexts. We will see how objects are carried from one country to the next, but also how they may be physically *evoked*, as with the Sudanese elders’ dance costumes described by Kaiser, which are made up of a number of materials, some of which only ‘stand for’ others that are unavailable in the Ugandan settlement. Thus, black plastic bags stretched over a wooden frame substitute for the splendid ostrich feather headdresses once worn in the Sudan. These processes indicate further not only the ways in which materiality cannot always be reduced to meaning, as argued earlier, but also the ways in which translation may itself become a form of transformation. Black plastic reconstitutes but perhaps also changes what it means to wear a headdress. Furthermore, migration (and attendant translations) may prompt a renegotiation of the very relationship between the material and the non-material. Here Kaiser draws on David Parkin: ‘People in flight store, so to speak, their precluded social personhood within mementoes of mind and matter, including cherished small objects, songs, dances and rituals, which can, under favourable circumstances, be re-articulated (even recreated) as the bases of social activity’ (1999, p. 315). Storage takes place in mind as well as matter, and just as the matter itself may change, so the importance of what is in the mind may increase as materiality becomes relatively – and sometimes temporarily – impoverished.

Translation, then, is born of necessity but is itself creative. Lucy Norris raises the issue of translation explicitly and points to its connections with reuse, as the cutting up and reassembling of textiles allows for significant translations between cultural registers. ‘Migrant’ clothing is thus transported through alternative regimes of value in ways that travel wide cultural as well as geographic distances. We see illustrated here the point made by Rubel & Rosman (2003, p. 15), that translation can transform as well as cross boundaries, bridging gaps while also separating self from other. And translation in this respect involves precisely a semantic and performative juxtaposition of translating an object with translating a concept, as movement itself provides the catalyst for transformations in both to occur. At the same time we see a theme that has been evident throughout this introduction and which is made by all of the contributions. To talk of migration *and* materiality gives only part of the picture that we wish to present; rather, we might just as easily say migration *through* materiality, since the one is impossible without the multi-dimensional yet vital presence of the other.

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