There were a number of problems with the anthropology of transmigration in the 1990s which have gradually been addressed. It is now well understood that transmigration is not a singular phenomenon: there are different ways of being transnational, and transnationalism affects people in different ways—e.g. by gender. There was also a tendency to treat transmigration as a static phenomenon, whereas it is a long-term process which may be viewed, from an analytical perspective, as a trajectory, or rather as a multiplicity of potential trajectories. The paper examines these trajectories in the light of various terms such as cosmopolitan, translocal, hybrid, and l’homme des confins that have been used to characterise actors who in some sense transcend traditional boundaries. Frequently, however, these terms are employed in ways which tend to decontextualise and conflate different personal and institutional subject positionings, and in doing so analyses may overlook the extent to which transmigrants remain bound to nation and class.

Keywords: Migratory Trajectories; Transnationalism; Cosmopolitanism; Class

Introduction

The Odyssey of Amadu Dieng

He set out from Senegal for Marseilles with two thousand ‘Ougadougou’ bracelets. In Marseilles he stayed in a residential hotel with a cousin, whom he left some bracelets to sell, and also bought some Italian jewellery from a Mouride wholesaler. On to Paris, where he bought leather clothes made by Mouride tailors and items in the Turkish garment district to resell in New York. He sold everything in New York and bought some beauty products and music cassettes. Then on to Cameroon, where he sold the cassettes and sent the beauty products back to Senegal with a
cousin. He then headed north to Libya to find work for a few months to make money to return to New York (Ebin 1996: 97).

An interview with Petula Clark

Since 1968 Clark has lived in Geneva. I ask her where is her true home. The seconds pass. There is something melancholic in her silence. 'I have different homes. I suppose London is my slippers-type home—I feel comfortable here. Paris is more of a spiritual home. And New York is the buzz. I enjoy the competition and toughness of New York. It’s like the song—if you can make it there, you can make it anywhere—and New York has always been great to me. And Geneva is a wonderful place to put your feet up and listen to... the silence' (Guardian, 20 February 2002).

New York, Paris, Geneva, Marseille, Dakar. Transnationalism refers to social, cultural, economic and political relations between, above or beyond nation-states, interconnecting, transcending, perhaps superseding, what has been for 200 years their primary locus. Transnational migrants, transmigrants, are those who, in the simplest formula, ‘live lives across borders’ (inter alia Basch et al. 1994; Gardner and Grillo 2002; Glick-Schiller et al. 1992; Smith 2001; Smith and Guarnizo 1998; Vertovec 1999). Transmigration is not new, but the scale is growing, and increasingly individuals, households, families, whole communities find themselves with stakes in interconnected worlds, widely separated spatially, which they try to maintain simultaneously.

There were numerous shortcomings in the early work on transmigration which have gradually been addressed. Initially, it was long on rhetoric and short on analysis, and, in critical areas, on data. The North American context predominated, and transmigration studies were preoccupied with problems arising there, and with debates internal to American anthropology. Lessons from the history of colonial and post-colonial migrations, migrations across the Atlantic, and into Europe, were ignored or paid lip service. The gender dimension was at first poorly documented, and there was, and still is, a tendency to treat transmigration as a static phenomenon. In reality it is a long-term process, which may be viewed, from an analytical perspective, as a trajectory. An instance of ‘transmigration’ is a cross-section through time of an evolving phenomenon, though it may not be obvious towards what it is evolving. Whether what we observe is perceived as a transitional, long-term, or permanent condition may well depend on the historical moment when the observation was made.

Transmigration is, however, not just a trajectory but a multiplicity of potential trajectories (from an actor’s perspective they may also be described as orientations, scenarios, narratives, projects, maybe options) which are often unstable, always likely to become something else. Figure 1, which summarises a more detailed figure discussed elsewhere (Grillo 2001), gives some examples, and this paper deals with those in the bottom half, which are in various ways ‘betwixt and between’, exploring connections between different trajectories or projects of transmigration, different
states of ‘in-between-ness’, and another aspect of transmigration which is often overlooked: class. Postmodernist-inspired celebrations of cultural liminality often neglect to take into account how states of in-between-ness are related to mundane things such as economics and politics. Where they do, these states are all too often treated within a unidimensional political economy perspective which reduces everything to the ‘needs of capital’. The article therefore enquires how states of in-between-ness relate to actors’ social positioning, past, present, and future, hopefully in a non-reductionist way. It begins with some terms used to characterise those who are ‘betwixt and between’, and who in some sense also transcend traditional, i.e. national, boundaries; it then moves on to questions of class, and finally to trajectories, projects, and scenarios.

**Betwixt and Between**

Although we are all cosmopolitans, *Homo sapiens* has done rather poorly in interpreting this condition. We seem to have trouble with the balancing act, preferring to reify local identities or construct universal ones. We live in-between (Rabinow 1986: 258).

Transmigrants are frequently represented as liminal (‘in between’), and perhaps also ‘above and beyond’. A variety of terms (transnational itself, translocal, cosmopolitan) carry this implication or convey a presumed creolity, hybridity, or postnationality. Often these representations decontextualise and conflate different personal and institutional subject positionings and overlook the extent to which transmigrants remain bound to nation, culture, ethnicity, and not least, class. Let me begin with yet another term, *l’homme des confins*, proposed by sociologists in France and discussed by Joanne Nowicki (2001).

Nowicki is not herself concerned with transmigration, though what she says has considerable relevance to it. Her purpose is to develop through ‘intercultural dialogue’ a model for what she calls ‘cultural cohabitation’ in the context of an expanding Europe, and thus move from national identity towards *une identité des confins*. In France there is reluctance to countenance a concern with ideas of cultural identity which is seen as running against the grain of hegemonic ideals of universalism and individualism. These ideals have sought to ‘liberate the individual
from all sources of determinism (race, class, place of birth, religious affiliation) and encourage her or him to choose their identity according to their preferences, their affinities and their values’ (Nowicki 2001: 95, my translation). From a political point of view, argues Nowicki, behind this rejection of a concept of cultural identity lies an obsessive fear of compromising the French Republican ideal of ‘integration’ (cf. Favell 1998). The French model of the integration of foreigners is based on the assumption of ‘voluntary adherence to the shared values of citizenship’. In this context, it is not inconsequential to describe someone as belonging to a particular social category, since ‘the boundary between description and determinism soon collapses’ (Nowicki 2001: 95)

Against this, and mindful of the dangers of culturalist approaches (e.g. Huntington 1996), Nowicki wishes to engage with questions of cultural identity and cohabitation which, she argues, are central to democratic debate. To this end she proposes l’homme des confins as ‘an emblematic figure’ who can act as a guide to cultural belonging in contemporary Europe (2001: 100). Drawing on ‘middle’ European conceptions of plural identity (i.e. in Polish, Hungarian and Czech/Slovak-speaking regions), she contends that these were not incompatible with national identity and citizenship. As well as overcoming the limitations of French universalism, this ‘Habsburgian multiculturalism’, as it might be called (not her term), avoids the pitfalls of essentialist models of cultural difference (often associated with Eastern Europe) which present the most problematic culturalist challenge to the dominant French tradition. Neither métis (‘half-breed’) nor exile, and usually multilingual, l’homme des confins is not without a country (apatride). On the contrary, she or he has ‘double or triple roots’ (Nowicki 2001: 102), and it is on the basis of this multiple rootedness that l’homme des confins attends to the universal. The life-style ‘prefigures’ a trajectory likely to be followed by many others: ‘Little by little, instead of being someone from “here” or “there” we are becoming a kind of l’homme des confins, simultaneously “here” and “there”’ (2001: 103).

Richard Burton (1973: 124) cites a passage by the ethnographer Michel Leiris which provides a gloss on the French trope of confins. Leiris discusses the world of the dead and certain states which he sees as between life and death, such as that of the sleepwalker, the person in a coma, or the Haitian zombie. Burton comments that these ‘inhabitants of the marches between life and death’ may be said to be ‘des confins’, as in its own way is a robot, ‘a hybrid of a living creature and a machine’ (Leiris 1955: 28, my translation). Another passage from Leiris (1955: 55), cited by Burton (1973: 125), also brings to mind the image of the Golem. A remark by Touraine (1997: 314) further suggests a link with Simmel’s conception of the ‘stranger’, someone in society but not of it (see also Lalive D’Epinay 1974 on Roger Bastide). In staking a claim for l’homme des confins, Nowicki does not, presumably, associate this emblematic figure with the interstices of life and death. If she wishes to imply that we are all now, or soon will be, creatures of the marches, she only means it metaphorically. We are not intended to be like the mazzeru (wizard) of Corsican folklore, also l’homme des confins, thought of as a link between the world of the living
Nowicki is recuperating the image to establish the possibility of an identity detached and at a distance from the ‘centre’, and yet not rootless, and thus unlike the novelist Andrei Makine, also described as l’homme des confins, but characterised as ‘a man without roots [déraciné], without hearth and home to defend’.\textsuperscript{1} Déraciné/déracinement, it should be noted, suggest both rootlessness and losing or transcending ethnic origins: a difficult, double-edged condition, not least in a colonial context (see also Adler 1974 on ‘multicultural man’).

Nowicki avows that l’homme des confins has nothing to do with métissage. Nonetheless the idea bears a family resemblance to another term common in contemporary anglophone cultural studies, hybridity. Hybride occurs in Leiris (see above), but hybridity is generally associated with the contemporary critical theorist, Homi Bhabha. It is an awkward metaphor with much historical baggage (Grillo 1998; see also Brennan 1997; Cheah 1998; Papastergiadis 1997; Tomlinson 1999). For Bhabha it refers to linguistic and cultural creativity in the ‘third space’, the ‘interstitial passage between fixed identifications’ (1994: 4). It signals a celebration of polyphony and creativity, of ‘mongrelisation’, and appeals to a social, cultural and physical postmodernist melting pot, as it were, from which would emerge new forms, and new persons. Bhabha also writes of ‘people of the pagus’ (‘colonials, postcolonials, migrants, minorities—wandering peoples who will not be contained within the Heim of the national culture and its unisonant discourse’, 1990: 315), seemingly locating them in an imaginary ‘Paris’, ‘gathering on the edge of “foreign” cultures; gathering at the frontiers; gatherings in the ghettos or cafés of city centres; gathering in the half-life, half-light of foreign tongues’ (1990: 291). Marginality and cultural doubleness are of course an old theme also echoed in l’homme des confins. It is given a novel twist in DeSantis’ application of Bakhtin’s ‘dialogism’ to understanding the situation of exiles, their ‘two-ness’ à la Dubois (DeSantis 2001: 4), torn by centrifugal and centripetal forces, negotiating their self-definition in a new context, struck by ‘identity vacillation’ (2001: 9). This is reminiscent of the old-fashioned conception of migrants as located ‘between two cultures’.

Nowicki distinguishes l’homme des confins from ‘cosmopolitan’, a venerable notion resurrected in the 1990s (see Vertovec and Cohen 2002a for an overview) which is often linked in contemporary writing with hybridity. Recent accounts of cosmopolitanism have entailed aggregation, dis-aggregation and re-aggregation. There is a tendency to write of ‘cosmopolitanisms’ (e.g. Clifford 1992; Robbins 1993), to acknowledge the existence of non-elite/non-Western variants. Cosmopolitanism, say Pollock et al. (2000: 584) should be ‘in the plural’, and not simply identified with a Western liberal tradition. We must ‘look at the world across time and space and see how people have thought and acted beyond the local’ (2000: 586). Their approach is concerned to include the Rest with the West, South with North, poor and illiterate with rich and educated and declares (from en haut) that the Rest, too, are or were or can be cosmopolitan. Thus, ‘we’, they say, ‘have always been cosmopolitan, though we may not always have known it’ (2000: 588). This perspective apparently escapes the essentialism which associates cosmopolitanism with a certain (Western) mind-set: a

Any array of comparative cosmopolitanisms must cobble together quite disparate histories. The term cosmopolitan, separated from its (European) universalist moorings, quickly becomes a traveling signifier, a term always in danger of breaking up into partial-equivalences: exile, immigration, migrancy, diaspora, border-crossing, pilgrimage, tourism (Clifford 1998: 363).

This dis-aggregation/re-aggregation vitiates any attempt to address differences which stem from class, status or gender. Inevitably, one is reminded of Marx’s 18th Brumaire. Thinking and acting beyond the local may make ‘us’ all cosmopolitans, but this does not mean ‘we’ do so in similar circumstances and under conditions of our own choosing.2

L’homme des confins, hybridity and cosmopolitan overlap but, more importantly, may point to different subject positionings vis-à-vis national and ethnic membership and rootedness. ‘Translocal’ also illustrates this. It is used in two ways. For Michael P. Smith it means ‘local to local’. Transnational communities are ‘translocality-based structures of cultural production and reproduction’ (Smith 2001: 170) with connections maintained through economic and technological links. Translocal is a transnational relationship between (local) sites (see also Baldassar 2001: 13). For Werbner (1997), however, it designates people, ‘translocals’ whose subject positionings and transnationalism are different from cosmopolitans. The transnationalism of translocals is, in Werbner’s view, concerned with the ordinary, everyday activities of people across more than one nation-state. Theirs is the quotidian version of the cosmopolitan, and their ‘loyalties are anchored in translocal social networks rather than the global ecumene’ (1997: 12). Cosmopolitans, on the other hand, are ‘multilingual gourmet tasters who travel among global cultures, savouring cultural differences as they flit with consummate ease between social worlds’ (1997: 11). Someone, perhaps, like the British singer Petula Clark in the interview cited earlier. One is reminded of Parekh’s comment (2000: 150) on ‘culturally footloose’ individuals, ‘owing loyalty to no single culture, floating freely between several of them, picking up beliefs, practices and lifestyles that engage their sympathies, and creating an eclectic way of life of their own’. The contrast with l’homme des confins is quite marked. Like déraciné, however, cosmopolitan is often double-edged. As a term of abuse it often meant ‘Jew’.

The idea that these various categories of person occupy different positions in the ‘global ecumene’, the term which Hannerz adapted from Kroeber to refer to the ‘interconnectedness of the world, by way of interactions, exchanges and related developments, affecting not least the organization of culture’ (Hannerz 1996: 7; see also Hannerz 1992a,b), avoids some of the difficulties in which Appadurai lands himself in writing about transnationalism. What Appadurai says is sometimes astonishingly naïve: ‘Everyone has relatives working abroad’ (1996: 171). How true!
We are all transnationals now, but some more than others, and certainly in different ways. The manner in which he and others conflate disparate experiences is disturbing. Take, for example, one of the notions with which Appadurai is associated, ‘ethnoscape’. ‘Ethnoscape’ is ‘the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guestworkers, and other moving groups and individuals’ (1996: 33). ‘These landscapes’, he continues, ‘are the building blocks of… “imagined worlds”, that is, the multiple worlds which are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe’. The difficulty of course is that list of persons who ‘constitute the shifting world’. Like Gupta and Ferguson (1997: 34), who yoke together all those who ‘live a life of border crossings—migrant workers, nomads, and members of the transnational business and professional elite’, and Bhabha (‘people of the pagus’), Appadurai merges very different lived experiences of transnationalism, of states of in-between-ness. Unintentionally, this conflation of Western intellectuals (including postcolonial theorists) with labour migrants and asylum-seekers makes ‘us’ all alike: cosmopolitans, hero(ine)s and victims.

A Question of Class?

An anecdote. In the early 1980s, one of my duties as the then Honorary Secretary of the Association of Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth was to write to the late Lord Rothschild who was conducting an inquiry into the state of social sciences in Britain. Lord Rothschild thanked me for the Association’s submission and in an aside inquired was I related to the Grillo who had operated on him at Massachusetts General Hospital? Touched by this personal note and the idea that the networks of the Grillos and the Rothschilds might have crossed, I regretfully denied the connection. My family is scattered across the world, but none is a surgeon in Boston (the closest, perhaps, a car mechanic in Marseilles). That the mindset of Lord Rothschild, whose family epitomises one long-standing form of transnationalism, led him to make that assumption is, nonetheless, interesting. The idea that the descendants of a man who made a stock market fortune on the basis of inside knowledge of the outcome of the Battle of Waterloo and of another who walked from Naples to find work in Paris might somehow co-exist is intriguing.

The conflation of different states of in-between-ness needs to be countered by their disaggregation. Within existing literature this has been most fully addressed from a gender perspective. Werbner’s contrast of the translocal and the cosmopolitan raises the question of class: the former is the proletarian version of the latter. Victoria Ebin’s (1996) narrative of the Odyssey of one Senegalese Mouride trader, Amadu Dieng, immediately shows that the transnational space Amadu Dieng occupies is different from that in which Petula Clark or Arjun Appadurai find themselves, even when all are in New York, perhaps especially when all are in New York. This is obvious, but needs stressing: class is all too often given short shrift in current anthropology or dealt with in altogether simplistic fashion (Pratt 2003).
Werbner (1999) notes the paucity of analyses of class and transnationalism, though her own work goes a long way towards remedying this. Her discussion of working-class (Pakistani) labour migrants shows that they, like all transmigrants, may also be cosmopolitan, with a willingness to ‘engage with the Other’, and displaying ‘openness to strangers and strangerhood or difference’ (1999: 20, 28). Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan, who associate cosmopolitanism with ‘cultural versatility’, stemming from participation in the ‘multiple cultural worlds’ that migrants ‘straddle’ (2003: 343, 361), also insist that people on different social levels are not precluded from being cosmopolitan. For them, as perhaps for others, this is almost a moral or political question. Rural folks are not backward and traditional, they are saying; their migration has enabled them to operate in a ‘cosmopolitan’ manner too. Nonetheless, like Werbner, Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan remain sensitive to differences in class position. The urban middle managers and the people they employ might both be described as ‘cosmopolitan’, ‘deploying technologies from one world to potential advantage in another’ (2003: 351), but the latter labour for the former. As Werbner puts it, ‘there are multiple modalities of cosmopolitanism’ (1999: 23).

A class perspective also informs Friedman’s attempt to understand the social roots of hybridity, cosmopolitanism, and ethnic essentialism. Discussing what he calls ‘a hybrid worldview’ (1997: 88), he contrasts elite cosmopolitanism and lower-class ethno-nationalism, a distinction representing both his own analysis and what he believes the hybrid worldview expresses. Hybridity, he argues, and he might include l’homme des confins, is elite, cosmopolitan idealism, far removed from the ‘Balkanisation and tribalisation experienced at the bottom of the system’ (1997: 85). ‘The contrast between hybrid/creole identifications and the essentialisation that is common to lower-class and marginalised populations’, he argues, ‘is a contrast in social position’... It is only certain cultural elites that are addicted to such empowerment—or rather self-empowerment’ (1997: 88). In a later paper, he refers to ‘Trans-X + hybridity + globalization’ discourse as the discourse of global elites whose relation to the earth is one of consumerist distance and objectification. It is a bird’s-eye view of the world that looks down upon the multiethnic bazaar or ethnic neighbourhood and marvels at the fabulous jumble of cultural differences present in that space (Friedman 2002: 27–8).

Well, up to a point. It is vital to emphasise social context and situate worldview within class position and the global ecumene. However, as Werbner shows, a simple contrast between elite cosmopolitanism and lower-class ‘tribalism’ is misleading. Not all elites and intellectuals are as besotted by hybridity as Friedman sometimes implies, and, while there is some evidence for working-class essentialism (e.g. Back et al. 2001), there is also much data (e.g. Aitsiselmi 2000; Back 2002) pointing to cultural syncretism, creolisation and hybridity, especially among young people of all backgrounds, which to an extent transcends ethnicity and nation. Cultural hybridity does not, however, preclude xenophobia. There may be a world-wide community of rappers, moulding music and lyrics according to context in New York, London, Paris,
Fort de France, Montreal, Dakar, Madrid, Mexico City or Tokyo. This does not exclude giving other rappers a good kicking. Hybridity, like transnationalism or cosmopolitanism, is not inherently virtuous or progressive (Clifford 1998: 368; Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan 2003: 344; Robbins 1998: 11).

Returning directly to the relationship between transnationalism and class, Friedmann’s argument seems in the end rather static and unhelpful, and from that point of view Werbner’s position has greater potential. Another valuable perspective may be found in the work of the American anthropologist Roger Rouse, who has published extensively on Aguilillan (Mexican) migration to California. Fast and cheap modes of transport and communication, says Rouse (1995: 367), have ‘ensured a considerable amount of movement back and forth and a concomitant growth in their own role as conduits for the further flow of money, goods, information, images and ideas across the boundaries of the state’. Above all, economic (and political) uncertainty and insecurity do not allow migrants to have the confidence to commit themselves to long-term residence in the country of reception, while economic restructuring in Mexico has made it impossible for local people to fulfil their goals and ‘create and maintain small-scale, family-run operations’ (Rouse 1991: 13). International migration has become the main source of income with which to do that. At the same time, the restructuring of jobs within the USA and the consequent polarisation of employment have meant that there are few opportunities for advancement in the economy of reception. He goes on: ‘it has become inadequate to see Aguilillan migration as a movement between distinct communities, understood as the loci of distinct sets of social relationships’. They are, rather, ‘a single community spread across a variety of sites’, and exist within what he calls a ‘transnational migrant circuit’: ‘circuit’ rather than ‘network’, ‘because it more effectively evokes the circulation of people, money, goods, and information, the pseudo-institutional nature of the arrangement (over purely individual ties), and the qualified importance of place (over purely social linkages)’. ‘Only by recognizing the transnational framework within which Aguilillans are operating [can we] properly appreciate the logic of their actions’ (Rouse 1991: 13–14, 20). Aguilillans are, in Rouse’s compelling phrase, ‘members of a transnational semiproletariat, caught chronically astride borders and class positions’ (1992: 45), and one of the distinctive features of Rouse’s work is to ‘approach transnationalism from a perspective attentive to the interplay of culture, class, and power’ (1992: 27).

‘Transnational semiproletariat’, though an important observation, does not capture all the nuances. The Moroccan women and their spouses studied by Salih (2003) have more or less conventional jobs in industry and the service sector in Italy where they reside while maintaining important ties with relatives from ‘back home’, themselves often resident and working in countries such as France or Holland. By comparison, Senegalese Wolof existence is more complicated and in some sense more ‘transnational’. The street-sellers described by Riccio (1999) or Carter (1997) often have multiple occupations spread over more than one country (cultivator, trader, industrial worker). They have, in effect, transnational career portfolios, and
Senegalese operate ‘transnationally’ in economic, social and religious terms in ways that Moroccans do not. It is important not to essentialise; not all Senegalese operate transnationally to the same extent or in the same way as Amadu Dieng. Nonetheless there are important differences between Senegalese transnationalism, their ‘vernacular cosmopolitanism’, as Diouf (2000) calls it, and that which characterises the lives of many Moroccans whose family and household activities (economic, social, ritual) routinely encompass members who are resident in more than one country. That Senegalese economic transnationalism antedates, and cannot in any simple way be said to depend upon, the current conjuncture of capitalism (Riccio 2001), further underlines the point that there is no elementary equation with class.

**Trajectories and Projects**

There is, then, a variety of states of in-between-ness, and though these are often conflated, the variety might be captured in the diverse vocabulary of translocal, cosmopolitan, *l’homme des confins* etc., and through these linked to different subject positionings within the global ecumene. In this section I turn to a third element, trajectories and projects.

The global ecumene is, of course, currently a neoliberal ecumene, and one approach locates transmigration in the context of the economic and social dislocation following from the widespread acceptance, post-1973, of the neoliberal economic and financial principles underlying the so-called ‘Washington consensus’. Migration, it is argued, has everywhere been increasing due to global economic restructuring and that restructuring itself is making everywhere insecure. Racism and xenophobia add to that insecurity. Neoliberal employment principles, emphasising ‘flexible’, deregulated working arrangements, oblige people to scrape together a living from multiple income-earning opportunities. Thus contemporary migrants, for reasons to do with the political economies of sending and receiving societies, are not usually in a position to become ‘settlers’, with the long-term project of permanent settlement in the country of reception. They are more usually ‘sojourners’, destined to return to the country of origin, though if not clandestine, they might become ‘denizens’: migrants with rights to permanent residence in a country of immigration (and possibly other rights) while remaining legally foreigners (Hammar 1990).

Whether as ‘sojourners’ or ‘denizens’, transmigrants are operating across, between and within a multiplicity of worlds, and this reinforces the view that transmigration is not a singular phenomenon. Nor is it static. The transmigration identified as an iconic contemporary phenomenon by Glick Schiller *et al.* (1992) could be a transitional state, something experienced by a particular generation of migrants, and the long-term trajectory (in North America at any rate, and perhaps in Europe) might be, as it was in the past, the permanent settlement of families, though in the early twenty-first century that may mean something different from the assimilation which it meant in the early twentieth. In that case, one might expect over a long period a gradual diminution of contact with ‘there’, networks attenuating, the idea of
return fading into fantasy, the attachment becoming only emotional, like Gans’s ‘symbolic ethnicity’ (1979). Carling’s account of changes in patterns of emigration and return of Cape Verdeans suggests one instance where this is occurring: ‘It is fully possible to be an ethnically conscious Cape Verdean and interact with Cape Verde on a symbolic level without having any contact with contemporary Cape Verdean society’ (2004: 127).

Another possibility is the exact opposite: a return movement in which contact with ‘here’ diminishes. Yet another is that transmigration indeed becomes permanent (Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan 2003: 350), though there are many possible forms: stable dual orientation including dual citizenship; secure ‘denizenship’ (with or without enhanced rights, e.g. voting in elections); state-regulated Gastarbeiter systems, involving a life-long shuttling between one country and another, one town and another, one job and another. This latter is an institutionalised and regulated instance of ‘circular migration’ (see below), which sometimes extends over generations, son following father, younger brother replacing older, as with Soninké migrants from Mali to France (Quiminal 1991; Timera 1996). When this circular migration is uninstitutionalised and unregulated, transmigrants are likely to be in a condition of permanent illegality and insecurity: a perpetual, clandestine, transnational sub- or semi-proletariat.

What, from an analytical perspective, are models, ideal types, scenarios or trajectories, might, for institutional actors in a receiving society, represent actual or potential policy directions, and certainly they have typically informed much policy discussion in Europe (e.g. the Gastarbeiter model). From the perspective of migrants, they may also denote orientations, projects, options and narratives through which people describe themselves, debate whence they have come and whither they might go. Occasionally an entire group may see itself moving in a single direction (e.g. towards assimilation). More likely, there will be a multiplicity of orientations, and while some may have a clear-cut project, others will, consciously or not, be sifting through their options, uncertain about what to do for the best, shifting from one to another as circumstances, personal and collective, change. An Algerian informant of mine, who had lived in workers’ hostels in France for many years, making annual visits to his family in Algeria, deeply regretted never having brought his wife and children to live with him. Now it was too late.

How and why does one trajectory/project become possible or at any rate thinkable for individuals and/or whole groups? For example, why do Moroccan migrants in Italy seem to be moving towards settlement and integration, though maintaining ties with Morocco, while the lives of Wolof-speaking Senegalese for the most part continue to be anchored in Senegal? The answer is complex, requiring an understanding (historically and at a given moment) of the dialectical relationship between, inter alia, the global political economy and the political economies of sending and receiving societies; the local political, economic, environmental and demographic situation ‘there’ and ‘here’; the economic and social niches which exist and/or might be created (ditto); the cultures of emigration and immigration; ideas
about, and ideologies of, ‘race’ and ethnicity; legal systems and regimes of rights and duties; the (changing) nature of systems of kinship, land and property, and gender relations; and, last but not least, religious beliefs, values, practices and institutions.

Let me illustrate with material which also reminds us that transmigration is not solely a modern phenomenon, but was well-established in early and mid-twentieth-century sub-Saharan Africa. The need to generate a labour supply was a critical problem throughout the colonial period, and a major issue engaging officials and scholars concerned with labour was the extent to which Africans from rural areas would dedicate themselves to long-term employment in towns and industry or on plantations or mines. There was specific concern with high labour turnover, and although it was sometime suggested that colonial employers actively discouraged ‘commitment’, as it was called, by the 1960s the prevailing view in academic, political, administrative and industrial circles was one which encouraged ‘stability’, and much time was spent trying to understand how and why it was not happening. In East Africa, a major contribution was made by an economist, Walter Elkan, who worked closely with anthropologists. The title of his book, Migrants and Proletarians (1960), neatly summarised his theme that the Kampala (Uganda) labour force consisted of two groups: those from the immediate locality of the city, mainly Baganda, who displayed long-term commitment to urban employment and who were becoming ‘proletarians’ (as happened with those who moved from country to town in nineteenth-century Britain), and ‘migrants’, principally from Northern Uganda and Kenya, who were not.

Until the idea of a cash economy and the need to earn cash were firmly embedded in people’s minds and practices, various more or less coercive devices were employed to encourage people to learn the ‘dignity of labour’, as Cecil Rhodes put it (Verschoyle 1900: 371), including poll or hut taxes. These certainly encouraged people to seek work, but generally for short periods, to earn enough to pay the tax. In this early phase (e.g. in the 1920s in East Africa), the term used to describe such migrants was ‘target workers’, who typically spent six months or so in employment and then returned to their rural homes. Labour migration could thus generally be accommodated with the demands of the annual agricultural cycle. However, as need for cash increased (notably to purchase education for children), the pattern of labour migration changed from an annual cycle to one covering several years. Workers (mostly male) went into the labour market typically for periods of three–four years, returned home, and reinserted themselves in the rural economy, before going out again. They did this perhaps several times over a working life before returning definitively to their ‘home’. Although this ‘circular’ or ‘circulatory’ labour migration (Elkan 1967) cut across the annual agricultural cycle, it could often be accommodated with longer-term cycles of the kind occurring in systems of shifting cultivation. A classic illustration was Watson’s account of the Mambwe of then Northern Rhodesia whom he described as maximising their income on two fronts (Watson 1958). Georges (1990: 196) describes a similar pattern of migration from the
Dominican Republic, but prefers not to call it circulatory, associating that term with annual, seasonal migration, with the off-season spent at home.

This was not the end of it. During the 1960s, in industries such as mining and railways, African employees began to spend longer, continuous periods in employment, increasingly bringing families with them. At the same time, they were not in a strict sense an urban proletariat. The vast majority of railway workers in Kampala, for example, continued to treat the place where they were born as their ‘home’, and many had built houses there (Grillo 1973: 44–5). In terms of patterns of movement, matters to do with land and investment, remittances, the fulfilment of social obligations of all kinds, chain migration, marriage, the flow of witchcraft and sorcery accusations etc., everything indicated the ongoing significance of the rural base. Thus many railway workers were involved in quite complex circuits of town and country encompassing Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Like others in Central, South and West Africa, East African migrants lived in a ‘dual system’, as Gugler called it in 1965; ‘two spaces’ was the phrase later used by Quiminal (1997), referring to Soninké migrants in France and Mali. Crossing and re-crossing national boundaries, they engaged in a host of transactions: sending remittances, exchanging presents, building houses, purchasing property, setting up businesses and community projects, making philanthropic gestures, participating in rituals of birth, marriage and death, and in a wide range of political and other associational activities, including ‘home-town’ development, of the kind now routinely associated with transmigration. At the time these phenomena were problematised through a discourse of ‘rural’ and ‘urban’, and although it is debatable whether relationships crossing the borders of the Uganda Protectorate and Kenya Colony were ‘transnational, sensu stricto, before they achieved independence in the early 1960s, they certainly became so afterwards. ‘Events’, as British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan once called them, often have considerable impact, and after independence the borders became increasingly real, as many migrants subsequently learned to their cost. Over half the Kampala railway workers came from outside Uganda and, during the Amin regime, were given short shrift.

The twentieth century was often unkind to transmigrants. While some were able to maintain transnational ties relatively easily over long periods, many others found links brutally and abruptly severed. Pogroms, the First World War, the Versailles settlement, and redrawing of the map of Europe, the depression, Nazism and Fascism, the Second World War, the Cold War, the Holocaust, the Iron Curtain, further changes in the map of Europe, decolonisation and its consequences, structural adjustment, civil wars, environmental disasters, famines, genocides, the repercussions of ‘9/11’, Gulf Wars etc. all took their toll. Transmigration could easily become permanent exile, though the opportunity for ‘retransnationalising’ relationships sometimes appears years later, as in the aftermath of the collapse of communism. South Asian emigrants to South Africa (contract labourers for the most part) were trapped there by 100 years of Apartheid but now find they are able to return to India (a very different India to that which their grandparents left) in search of ‘roots’
Transmigration thus seems a volatile condition, inherently difficult to sustain, ‘stable’ transmigration perhaps a contradiction in terms.

Conclusion

My purpose has been to dis-aggregate the notion of ‘transnational’, look more closely at some trajectories/projects, specifically those ‘betwixt and between’, place them in their proper context, and see where class fits it. A major omission is any discussion of gender and generation, which has proved impossible to incorporate in the present article.

One approach to transmigration is to locate it in the context of contemporary neoliberal globalisation. This political economy perspective is found in stronger and weaker versions, and in practice many anthropologists simply treat globalisation as the backdrop to their accounts of the manifold cross-frontier linkages and multiple orientations of populations (individuals, families, collectivities of various kinds) operating in transnational space. There is nothing wrong with that, and indeed one must be ever-wary of the dangers of reductionism: not everything can be laid at the door of capitalism. Another perspective, emerging from critical and postcolonial theory, emphasises transmigration as a vector through which the essentialism hitherto part and parcel of the prevailing system of nation-states is breaking down, to be replaced by more complex networks and identities of a diasporic, hybrid, cross-over nature. It offers a powerful critique of traditional conceptions of culture, nation, and identity. Displacement is celebrated, and the displaced hailed as archetypal hero(ine)s/victims who, obliged to live betwixt and between, must, metaphorically and usually practically, be multilingual and multicultural (Kahn 1995: 130). Thus transmigration is thought to give rise to subject positionings transcending traditional boundaries. Those writing in this vein are optimists, seeing pluralism, diversity, heterogeneity, and ‘créolité’ as a way out of the quagmire of essentialism in which nationalism, multiculturalism, perhaps even anthropology itself, are stuck.

These approaches need not represent wholly antagonistic theoretical paradigms. Mitchell (1997), for one, seeks to bring the two together (see also Riccio 2001). At the same time she regrets that in the celebration of plurality and hybridity there is an absence of concern with power relations. Likewise Parekh (2000: 150) argues against postmodernist writers who ‘romanticize’ the cosmopolitan way of life through ‘the mistaken belief that all boundaries are reactionary and crippling and their transgressions a symbol of creativity and freedom’. These are valid criticisms of the postmodernist enterprise and it is sad to find Appadurai in such company when in the past he has produced such sophisticated analyses of power and the colonial state. His attempts to grapple with the transnational are, however, not persuasive; what he says is under-theorised and repetitive.

Whether referring to transnationals, translocals, cosmopolitans, hybrids, creoles, _hommes des confins_, postnationals or anything else, we have to be aware that there are different personal and institutional subject positionings _vis-à-vis_ nation, ethnicity,
culture and class, that multicultural and intercultural practices (sometimes perhaps polyphonic, syncretic, hybrid) may take many different forms, and that there is no magical state, accessible through transmigration, which allows people readily to escape national, ethnic and cultural rootedness. The lives of ‘migrant workers, nomads, and members of the transnational business and professional elite’ (to repeat Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 34), along with those of cosmopolitan European intellectuals, itinerant Senegalese traders, and Aguilillan ‘transnational semi-proletarians’ are indeed very different. They are following different trajectories, and pursuing different projects which may be more or less realistic or attainable, more or less durable and stable, with more or fewer options, more or less well regarded or rewarded.

It is important both to dis-aggregate and contextualise. The idea of l’homme des confins as a sort of philosophical anthropology, though not developed with transmigration in mind, is interesting in that it proposes the ability to operate and be comfortable in a multiplicity of linguistic and cultural registers while remaining doubly or triply rooted. Yet its limitations (as with much philosophical anthropology) become clear immediately it is put in context. Friedman would undoubtedly treat it as another example of the luxury enjoyed by elite (educated, intellectual) minorities, and up to a point he is right, though not all elites reveal the broadminded tolerance and sophistication of the middle European (Habsburgian) intellectuals of Budapest, Krakow, Prague or Vienna: those who are above all cultures, but rooted in many—someone like Ernest Gellner, perhaps. The Senegalese itinerant trader is also multilingual and certainly able to operate in a multiplicity of cultures, though he (I say ‘he’ deliberately), having followed the yellow brick road, returns ultimately to Senegal. For him, there is no place like home.

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Notes
References


