
Gendered Returns, Ambivalent Transnationals: Situating Transnationalism in Local Asymmetry¹

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Abstract: Drawing on interviews with migrants to Halifax, Nova Scotia, this article illustrates the potential discrepancy between the aspirations of even the most affluent global migrants and the local contexts of immigration. Attracted to Canada for its pluralism, participants sought to contribute to Canadian society while ensuring new opportunities for female family members. However, faced with unemployment, participants developed transnational strategies that reinforced normative gender roles. Furthermore, these strategies engendered a kind of ambivalent transnationalism whereby participants wished to establish themselves locally but, due to conditions in the site of immigration, were compelled to remain highly connected to their countries of origin.

Keywords: business/investor migration, gender, class, cosmopolitanism, transnationalism, Nova Scotia Nominee Program, Canada

Résumé : À partir d'entrevues menées avec des immigrants à Halifax, en Nouvelle-Écosse, cet article illustre le décalage potentiel entre les aspirations des immigrants mondiaux même les plus aisés et les contextes locaux d'immigration. Attirés au Canada par son pluralisme, les participants cherchaient à contribuer à la société canadienne tout en assurant de nouvelles opportunités pour les membres féminins de la famille. Toutefois, confrontés au chômage, les participants ont dû élaborer des stratégies transnationales qui renforçaient la norme en matière de rôles sexuels. De plus, ces stratégies ont engendré une sorte de transnationalisme ambivalent dans lequel les participants souhaitaient s'établir localement mais, à cause des conditions dans leur lieu d'immigration, devaient conserver des liens étroits avec leur pays d'origine.

Mots-clés : immigrants investisseurs/d'affaires, sexe, classe, cosmopolitisme, transnationalisme, Programme des candidats de la Nouvelle-Écosse (Nominee Program), Canada

Migrant identities are generated, in part, through the activities of state institutions in conjunction with recruiting agencies, consultants, lawyers, the media, researchers and employers (Bello et al. 2005; Glick Schiller 2009; Tyner 2004). Drawing on both the technical (immigration and labour policies) and the discursive (ideology concerning both the benefits and risks of migration), these stakeholders create and offer intelligible yet frequently narrow articulations of what it is to be a migrant in a particular setting. Yet where individuals themselves are concerned, the "making of migrants," as it has been labelled by Tyner (2004), is not an altogether passive exercise, one in which potential migrants uncritically and unconsciously assume the identities imposed on them by state policies and the requirements of capital (Basch et al. 1994; Olwig 2007). Rather, the identities cultivated and harnessed by migrants reflect their deliberate efforts to access the benefits of globalization and mitigate the social and economic challenges of capitalism (Barber 2008; Hairong 2008). Responding to these opportunities and restrictions and reflecting the complexity of migrant decision-making, these strategies are at once reactive and creative, responsive and adaptive, and complicit and subversive. They are circumscribed, but not entirely determined, by the requirements, processes and outcomes of neoliberal capitalism.

Drawing on ethnographic field work² completed in Halifax with business and investor immigrants to Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada in the spring of 2009, the migrant narratives presented in this article illustrate the negotiation that occurs between identities cultivated by and imposed on migrants. Each of the migrants interviewed had been in Halifax for no more than two years and no less than six months. Countries of origin included Iran, the Philippines, Korea, China and Turkey. Nearly half of the participants were women. Attracted to Canada for its cultural pluralism and relative gender equality, this group of migrants sought to contribute to and participate in Canadian society; indeed, to live and engage

with difference. The manner in which they understood this participation was very much connected to a set of objectives intended to redress gender inequality as it was experienced by the migrants and their families in the country of origin with many of those interviewed (men and women alike) expressing considerable concern over the social, educational and occupational limits faced by female family members. In Nova Scotia, it was anticipated that female family members would benefit from opportunities for additional educational and career advancement and few social restrictions. However, their aspirations (regarded as attainable by virtue of class status, levels of education, employment experience, articulated in terms of a cosmopolitan openness to difference) were limited by structural barriers in Nova Scotia, inadequate employment opportunities, and subsequently, rapid downward class mobility. From this emerged a sort of ambivalent transnationalism, by which the migrants interviewed hoped to establish themselves primarily as Canadians in a multicultural Canada but due to a number of obstacles were unable to do so. The transnational strategies used to mitigate these obstacles tended to be highly gendered and, following from them, the gendered objectives of migration—increased mobility, opportunity and security for female family members—were largely undermined.

Class Status and Skill as Migration Pathways: Arrival through the Nova Scotia Nominee Program

Provincial Nominee Programs (PNPs) represent a shift in Canadian immigration policy. Prior to the late 1990s, immigration fell largely under the jurisdiction of the federal government. In an attempt to redress declining populations, augment economic growth, and encourage immigration to areas outside of Canada's larger city centres (Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal), the PNPs enable provinces to attract and nominate potential migrants for permanent resettlement according to their own local labour market needs (Carter et al. 2008). Potential migrants, once accepted by the province, are nominated to Citizenship and Immigration Canada, which makes the final decision on their applications. Following the success of PNPs across the country, the Nova Scotia Nominee Program (NSNP) was implemented in 2005.

While their countries of origin varied, the migrants interviewed all arrived in Nova Scotia under the economic stream of the NSNP, which was cancelled in 2006 after considerable controversy (see Dobrowolsky 2009), and all shared similar class backgrounds. Given the economist logic and labour market imperatives of the NSNP (and PNPs more broadly), the category "economic stream" is

somewhat misleading. In a sense, it implies that the other streams are not economic in focus, while in fact they are. More precisely, then, the classification "economic" under the NSNP refers to a business class/investor stream in which applicants had to have a particular skill set (upper management experience) and certain levels of capital to qualify.

In line with the objectives of the PNPs across the country and the subsequent neoliberal reconfiguration of immigration programs, the stated goal of the NSNP business/investor stream was to meet Nova Scotia's social and economic needs by attracting qualified migrants who would bring their expertise, experience and financial capital to the province. To achieve this goal the business/investor stream of the NSNP carefully selected particular kinds of applicants. These would-be-migrants not only had high levels of human capital derived from successful entrepreneurial experience in the country of origin, but high levels of financial capital necessary to duplicate their success in Nova Scotia. The program required that in addition to business experience, successful applicants paid a one-time fee of C\$130,000 most of which was given to Nova Scotia companies that had agreed to serve as mentors. For many of the nominees, the mentorship program, which was to include a six-month, middle management work term, did not go as planned; a number of the nominees were assigned positions well below their skill level, and, as was the case for those interviewed, many were not placed at all (OAG 2008). While the business/investor stream of the program was eventually cancelled, other NSNP categories remain active.

Much of the critique of the PNPs has focused on their tendency to recruit particular kinds of migrants, the downloading of resettlement responsibilities from the state to non-governmental agencies and eventually to the immigrants themselves, and their economic imperatives and subsequent class bias (Dobrowolsky 2009; Lewis 2010). Reflecting what Ley (2010) refers to as the commodification of citizenship, individuals who were able to pay the C\$130,000 fee were effectively fast-tracked through the immigration process. Furthermore, as Dobrowolsky has argued, the economist logic of the business/investor stream of the NSNP was "conspicuous not only in terms of the institutions and actors involved, but also the ideas and political strategies to which they were committed" (Dobrowolsky 2009:21). That said, many of the migrants interviewed, even those whose incomes can be regarded as moderate (health care professionals, managers, and so on), saw this bias as a particular strength of the program—one which, given their own relatively high levels of income, they were able to take advantage of. Their class

status, in other words, was embedded in the immigration pathway available to them. That women generally tend to be relatively disadvantaged economically, however, meant that the class bias present in the program was equally gendered, with the business/investor stream representing a masculinized immigration category (Dobrowolsky 2009). Consequently, the vast majority of principal applicants were male with women arriving as spouses or dependants. This was reflected in the sample of those interviewed.

Among those interviewed class status was equally evident in the lifestyles and activities in the country of origin. Here, those interviewed spoke of high incomes, high levels of credit, private schooling for their children, summer homes, maids, multiple cars, drivers and travel. The migrants interviewed also spoke of their high levels of education and training. Most had upper level management experience, some had run large multinational companies, and many were successfully self-employed. Despite the emphasis placed on status and affluence in the country of origin, these were, however, always posited as conditional. Life was good, they maintained, but restricted by the socio-political environment in the country, the rapid pace of life, the near constant demands of work, and the limitations (delays) they experienced in relation to international travel by virtue of their citizenships. Notwithstanding the limitations of visa requirements and exit permits, all of the migrants interviewed had been able to travel and most did on a regular basis prior to leaving the country of origin. This travel and the cosmopolitanism it engendered emerged as a central feature of how the migrants understood and described their class background.

Further reflecting the class status of the migrants interviewed were many of the objectives for migration, which tended to be social in nature. Having enjoyed economic security in the country of origin, the migrants interviewed expressed none of the economic urgency that so frequently appears in the narratives of migrants concerning the decision to migrate. Instead, by virtue of their secure economic positions (characterized by high incomes, savings and other assets), they were able to downplay the economic impetus of migration and prioritize their extra-economic objectives including increased physical security and political stability, increased opportunities for female family members, spending more time with family, engaging in non-work related leisure activities, and meeting new people. This emphasis on the extra-economic, however, is not meant to suggest that those interviewed did not have objectives related to employment or class mobility, but that these tended to be tempered by these more social objectives. Part of this also stemmed from their expectations of eventual employment in Nova Scotia.

Most of the migrants interviewed expressed some insight into the limitations of Canadian labour markets—most had done considerable amounts of research and all had consulted their transnational and Canadian networks—and most anticipated a period of under- or unemployment. That said, and while employment was not the primary reason for coming to Canada, it was regarded as the obvious outcome of migration with men and women alike expecting to find employment comparable, if not identical, to that held in their country of origin. All believed that their class status, marked by a specific set of sought after skills and aptitudes, would hasten this process, and they believed that any gaps in experience or knowledge would be redressed through the mentorship component of the NSNP. Moreover, most believed that their cosmopolitanism—embedded in status, class privilege and specific values deemed “liberal”—would further mitigate these challenges. In relation to Canada, then, cosmopolitanism, cultivated in the country of origin and through travel, framed both migration objectives and strategies. Those interviewed hoped to reinforce their cosmopolitanism through migration to Canada, while at the same time, they anticipated that their cosmopolitanism would facilitate integration into Canadian society and Nova Scotia labour markets.

Cosmopolitan Identities and Cultural Openness

Cosmopolitanism represents a disembedding of agency and imagination from local or national contexts and a movement toward a global society founded on cultural hybridity and fluidity (Beck and Sznaider 2006; Delanty 2006). It denotes a commitment to the well-being of individuals regardless of where they are located and is predicated on a transcendent moral truth extending beyond the narrowness of nation-states (Unterhalter 2008). Cosmopolitans, the subjects of cosmopolitanism, then, are individuals who assume a position of “openness” toward difference: people, things and experiences that originate in locations different from their own. And while this openness is often circumscribed or may be even superficial (Skrbis and Woodward 2007), it informs how a growing number of people globally understand themselves in relation to others. This movement toward openness can be linked to the tactile experiences of globalization, the proliferation of various sorts of virtual, imaginative or corporeal mobilities (Skrbis and Woodward 2007), as well as the rhetorical potency of globalization (Kelly 2000).

Following, however, from the universalist-bent of cosmopolitanism, debates surrounding it have frequently evaded the analytical clutches of more normative

categories of identity: gender, culture, class, nationality, and so on, and instead emphasizing neutral, universal terrains. Stiven (2008) argues that this lack of concern over, for example, gender may be related to a broader disregard in political thought for that which is seen as “private,” “domestic,” or “intimate,” spheres typically associated with women. The universalist or essentialist underpinnings of cosmopolitanism have led to a tension between Third World and First World feminists, with the latter accused of harnessing and perpetuating exclusionary epistemologies and practices that locate gender equity in the West and the most oppressive patriarchal relations in non-Western contexts (Walton-Roberts and Pratt 2005). Cosmopolitanism from this vantage point, then, is viewed as a civilizing project (Stivens 2008), an extension of an already protracted imperialism that permeates Third World/First World dynamics. Herein lies the tension of cosmopolitanism itself: openness on one hand, universalism on the other.

Attempts to broaden cosmopolitanism have resulted in the inclusion of subjectivities often ignored within the literature (Werbner 1999). Through the process of opening up cosmopolitanism, class emerges as an important feature of the debate: is cosmopolitanism the prerogative of the global elite, those who are easily mobile with high levels of capital, or is it an attitude, a way of living in the world, open to all including the working class (labour migrants, refugees, and so on)? In her early work Werbner (1999:18) argues that it is the latter, and that working class migrants inevitably “engage in social processes of ‘opening up to the world’, even if that world is still relatively circumscribed culturally.” The manner in which the migrants interviewed engaged in cosmopolitanism was very much linked to their status as global elites (see Woodward et al. 2008). Yet, the processes described by Werbner are still very much applicable. The cosmopolitan identities cultivated and harnessed by the migrants interviewed corresponded to the global diffusion of images, narratives and ideologies concerning human rights and equality, and the migrants often situated their understandings of gender equality and multiculturalism in these universalizing yet clearly potent discourses. Fostered, in part, by these circulating discourses, the migrants interviewed can be regarded as having a particular disposition toward cosmopolitanism, a sensibility reflected in and reinforced by their activities and routines.

Before arriving in Canada, several of the migrants interviewed had lived outside of their countries of origin, some had been educated abroad, earning degrees and receiving training, all had vast transnational kinship and social networks, and all had travelled extensively.

This back and forth was often regarded as a means of redressing social, political and economic restrictions in the country of origin. Following from these experiences, many of the migrants interviewed expressed an affinity toward ways of life different from their own. Added to this, many felt they had developed significant cross-cultural competencies: frequent travel to Canada, the United States, Europe and Asia; the transnational presence of family and friends; and university degrees earned abroad had given them a sense not only of the world, but also of their capacity to live in and with the world. Canada with its long history of immigration and its reputation for multiculturalism represented a microcosm of the world those interviewed wished to access. It was, as one male participant put it, an “international” place, and it represented an opportunity to engage with difference and to further develop cross-cultural competencies not just during travels but on an ongoing basis. As one female participant explained because of high levels of immigration in Canada, there were opportunities to meet and interact with people from different countries. She was excited about this possibility and anticipated that she would feel more comfortable in Canada relative to other migration destinations. While abroad, Canadian citizenship and a Canadian passport would facilitate their travel and subsequent engagement with difference. In these ways, Canada as a multicultural and, indeed, cosmopolitan place loomed large in their imaginations.

Like Werbner’s (1999) working class subjects, the capacity of the migrants interviewed to “open up to the world” was predicated on a series of social practices (travel, accessing international media, and maintaining contact with friends and family abroad) that, if not culturally circumscribed, were simultaneously limited and propelled by the socio-political context in which they occurred. At the same time, however, and further reflecting the class privilege of the migrants interviewed, their particular cosmopolitan sentiments entailed a convergence of their willingness to “open up to the world” and their ambition to have the world opened up to them; their interactions with difference and their understandings of the “global” predicated on an appreciation of western liberalism and capitalist economics—their decision to come to Canada and to Nova Scotia in particular, partially informed by a desire to be more fully integrated into that socio-economic system.

Migration to Canada in itself became a particular kind of cosmopolitan project, one through which the migrants interviewed sought to expand their cosmopolitanism. Yet, as articulated by the migrants, cosmopolitanism was also very much a strategy: a means through which

the perceived limitations of global capitalism (although not expressed as such) were to be mitigated. Unlike the migrants described by Barber (2008) in her work, who adapted themselves knowingly and thoughtfully to the requirements of capital through processes of deskilling and performed subordination, this group of migrants hoped to overcome the normative relegation of immigrants to low-paid, low-status work by emphasizing their capacity to traverse diverse landscapes, to engage with the “other,” and to fit in with Canadian society (as they understood it). In other words, by bringing to the forefront their liberal, cosmopolitan identities, this group of migrants felt prepared to overcome the limitations of migration as it is so frequently experienced. This was particularly well articulated by one male participant from Iran: “My wife and I are very interested in Canadian society. We match. Our [way of thinking] is very similar to the Canadian style.” Yet, in Canada, faced with marginal employment opportunities and the subsequent “failure” of their cosmopolitanism, these migrants resorted to transnational strategies that reinforced their often ambivalent attachment to the country of origin.

Dominant Discourses and Gender Equality

Despite their affluence, all of the migrants interviewed felt constrained by the social, economic and political conditions present in their countries of origin. These were redressed through travel and the cultivation of cosmopolitan identities that, according to those interviewed, distinguished them from their compatriots in the country of origin. And in many ways and in spite of their privileged status within the country of origin they saw themselves in opposition to the political and social conditions present there. In talking about their cosmopolitan identities, the migrants interviewed frequently alluded to an affinity for Canadian multiculturalism and its corresponding values and practices. Equality, it was believed, was a very real possibility in Canada not just between different ethnic and cultural groups, but between men and women. In addition to the expectation of lucrative, meaningful employment, those interviewed arrived in Canada with particular expectations about the social and economic inclusion and participation of female family members.

Gender has emerged as a consideration for both conventional and more critical accounts of migration. In much of the earlier literature and paralleling the “cosmopolitanism as civilizing project” discussed above, it is anticipated that women’s participation in national contexts (typically situated in the West) viewed to be more egalitarian will result not only in the empowerment of individual female migrants but also in the transmission of more equitable

understandings of gender and the sexual division of labour in the country of origin (typically in the global South) (Fouron and Glick Schiller 2001; Pessar and Mahler 2003). And while much of this work focuses on the extent to which gender inequality informs migration pathways, in other words, who migrates and why, as well as the decisions of individual women in relation to emancipation from traditional gender roles, little research has been done on the extent to which gender equity informs the migration decision-making of families. Yet, for many of the migrants interviewed, men and women alike, gender equality represented a significant motivator and objective in relation to the decision to migrate, and a number of the migrants interviewed expressed specific objectives related to female family members, including both daughters and spouses. These included facilitating the growth and development of female family members and permitting their children, both male and female, more freedoms in light of higher levels of physical and political security. As one young woman who was in Nova Scotia from Iran with her mother (her father had returned to Iran to work) said: “[We came to Canada] because we can live better. The usual reasons. And because here, you know, we have some freedoms that we didn’t have in our country.” Echoing these sentiments, an Iranian man stated: “I have one daughter. I prefer to send [her] to a different kind of country, a more free country.” Although female family members tended to be well-educated and employed, the migrants interviewed expressed considerable concern over both the social, educational, and occupational restrictions experienced by female family members in the country of origin.

With these objectives in mind, the decision to leave the country of origin was tied largely to the restrictions placed on the mobility of women, and, in this way, migration became a deliberate means of redressing gender inequality. That female partners and children were unable to access the opportunities and rights of their male counterparts in the country of origin was, for some, reason enough to leave. It is important to note, however, that while the promise of enhanced gender equality motivated the migration of many of those interviewed, the female partners of the men interviewed and the women interviewed had, with few exceptions, been employed in the country of origin. This employment, however, tended to be gendered even where it was highly professional, and additional opportunities for education, training, and subsequently, career advancement were seen as insufficient. This was particularly true for those interviewed from Iran, both men and women, who also cited various social restrictions as limiting the full participation of

female family members. One male migrant who arrived in Halifax from Tehran stated, “my wife is a paediatrician and she’s very interested in continuing her studies, she is very sharp, and she can grow here.” One female migrant, also from Iran, lamented the social restrictions placed on young people in Iran, commenting that in Canada, young men and women can socialize and date without fear of repercussion. For these migrants, then, enhanced emancipation was indeed perceived as located in the West. This does not negate the agency of women in the country of origin. Rather, it draws attention to the intersection of the migrants’ cosmopolitanism (informed by their exposure to globalized rights discourses as mediated through travel, education and various kinds of transnational networks) and the objectives of migration. In this instance, gender equality as connected to a series of specific opportunities—labour market participation, educational advancement and particular kinds of social experiences—was regarded by the migrants as attainable in Canada rather than in the country of origin. For other migrants interviewed, where gender equality was more easily achieved in the country of origin vis-à-vis the labour market and access to education (for example, in the case of those who had arrived from the Philippines), other considerations related to gender emerged.

More often than not in the country of origin, despite both men and women working long hours in paid employment, domestic work was often performed by the female migrants or in some instances by female family members (typically grandmothers) or paid domestic labour. Even when they were not directly providing child and elder care, cooking and cleaning, the women interviewed were typically responsible for the management of these social reproductive tasks within the home. As a result, these tasks remained gendered not only in terms of who performed them (hired domestic labour or other female family members) but in terms of who managed them (the migrant woman interviewed). In the absence of paid household labour and female kin in Canada, several of the migrants hoped to renegotiate the conditions of the patriarchal household, with men and women and male and female children alike, engaging equally in a variety of household duties. Further illustrating the extra-economic nature of their migration, this hoped for shift in household or family gender relations paralleled an anticipated and even welcomed decrease in class status or appearance of class status. This was particularly true for those who had employed paid domestic labour in the country of origin.

For these groups of migrants, the value of gender equality (in both the domestic sphere as well as the public sphere of employment and education) was understood in terms of a universalism that can be likened to both

their cosmopolitanism and their liberalism. It was a pre-existing value as opposed to one that was cultivated in the country of resettlement. And because gender equality and an egalitarian division of social reproductive labour was regarded as more likely to be achieved in Canada than in the country of origin, it informed their decision to migrate. As a result, a kind of reversal is apparent whereby the migrants interviewed arrived in Canada with an existing interest in and dedication to egalitarianism. This challenges both theoretical and more pragmatic framings of gender equality and women’s rights as uniquely situated in the West and instead, diffuses it, linking it to global circulations of ideology but also locating it firmly within the country of origin (as embodied by the migrants prior to their departure for Canada).

For a number of participants, Canada represented the possibility of upward class mobility coupled with increased social opportunities and enhanced gender equality as reflected in educational and employment opportunities for female family members. For others, it represented the possibility of a shift in gendered family dynamics in the absence of female kin and paid (typically female) domestic labour. As opposed to potential or unexpected outcomes, these changes (both within the family and in relation to society more generally) were anticipated and hoped for; they constituted the objectives of migration and were regarded by those interviewed as fundamental. This remained true even when class status was jeopardized. Drawing on their cosmopolitanism, many migrants articulated their affinity for what they saw as core Canadian values: an openness to cultural difference, evident not only in multiculturalism but in Canada’s increased efforts to recruit new migrants, and gender equality. Cosmopolitanism facilitated their move, motivating them to seek out new opportunities, and moreover, it was regarded as an asset that would expedite the processes of resettlement and integration. However, the hoped for outcomes of migration were unevenly attained, with most of the migrants interviewed unemployed and forced to rely on familial, social and business networks in and from the country of origin. This reliance on transnational networks was both unexpected and unwanted as demonstrated, in part, by the migrants’ decision to move to Nova Scotia in the first place. There, they believed, they would be able to establish themselves independently of the large networks of their compatriots in larger Canadian city centres. Furthermore, the consequences of unemployment meant in some instances the re-establishment of normative gender roles as the migrants interviewed engaged in a number of unexpected transnational strategies that undermined the gendered objectives of migration.

Transnational Strategies: An Unexpected Reliance on Gendered Norms and Practices

While diverse, the objectives of the nominees can be conceptualized in relation to a particular kind of cosmopolitanism cultivated and pursued by the participants. As discussed in the previous section, very much a part of their cosmopolitanism was a genuine interest in redressing gender inequality as it was experienced by the participants in their various countries of origin. The “failure” of this cosmopolitanism in the site of immigration, Nova Scotia, was prompted by myriad social and economic conditions that are all the more salient where newcomers are concerned. As Chira (2011) points out in her work on international students to the province, relatively low levels of diversity and declining levels of immigration coupled with an overt dependence on informal social networks to access labour markets, has left many immigrants (typically without the local networks required to secure employment) struggling to find work locally. In the case of many of those interviewed, this resulted in a reliance on transnational networks to secure the employment and income they required. The consequences of this set of circumstances and the strategies it prompted were multiple and varied, yet frequently gendered in similar ways.

Unable to access the hoped for benefits of the mentorship program, which was meant to facilitate integration into local labour markets, and unable to secure employment in light of the social and economic configuration of that labour market, the migrants interviewed quickly came to learn that their previous successes were not so easily duplicated. And just as they had harnessed particular kinds of identities believed to be well-suited to foreign labour markets and immigration requirements, they were compelled by the circumstances of resettlement (in this context, characterized by the shortcomings of an immigration pathway predicated largely on economic outcomes and marginal employment opportunities) to re-evaluate these identities and adopt new, unexpected transnational strategies.

Transnationalism represents the ongoing connection among people, ideas and things across national borders (Basch et al. 1994). It differs from cosmopolitanism in that it is the “emerging reality of social life under the conditions of globalization,” as opposed to the subjective feelings or attitudes individuals or groups may have toward that reality (Roudometof 2005). The transnationalism expressed in the migrants’ narratives can be regarded as “ambivalent” in the sense that it was more profound than was anticipated. In other words, while the intention was never to sever ties with their respective homelands

and while a transnational identity was both expected and desired, the breadth of these ties was unexpected.

The migrants interviewed all anticipated continued social and familial ties to their countries of origin. Some, by virtue of having already lived abroad or by the migration of family members, already belonged to vast transnational networks. Further, while many of the migrants came from relatively privileged families, most spoke of providing some financial or material support to family members. All spoke of regular visits to the country of origin, in some cases to provide respite for siblings caring for elderly parents, but in other instances for vacation. All remained interested in and informed of the political situation in their home countries, and all kept in regular contact (through email or by phone) with friends and family. In other words, the question was not whether they would remain connected but rather to what extent.

Unable to access the purported benefits of the NSNP business/investor stream (gaining necessary Canadian work experience and making contacts with professionals in their fields of expertise) or secure employment, most of the migrants interviewed engaged in a variety of modified survival strategies. These strategies were highly gendered, in some cases reflecting the very dynamics and hierarchies that migration was meant to remedy. For example, one couple returned to Iran after 10 months in Nova Scotia to sell property they had there. Downplaying her own employment potential while emphasizing that of her husband’s, the participant stated:

We had to sell property there because we needed money here. My son is in university. We needed money but there is no job for my husband, and I speak very little English. My husband is a doctor. We didn’t leave Iran for any job. In our country, he worked very hard. For example, if he worked at McDonald’s here, that would be very hard. In my country, he had a good position, a good position.

These sentiments were echoed by a woman whose husband commuted between Korea and Nova Scotia, spending two months in each location at a time:

My husband is very smart. He is a businessman, “white collar.” He comes to Halifax and he wants to live here, but right now he makes his money in Korea. He isn’t able to find work or make money in Canada even though he is trying. Some Korean people come to Canada and they become “middle” workers, sometimes they even do dangerous jobs. This is a choice my husband won’t make. He wants higher-level work, but because he can’t find it, he stays in Korea.

In light of class considerations, professional experience in the country of origin, and levels of education, most of the migrants interviewed, but in particular the men, were unwilling to accept low-paid employment. There were exceptions to this. The husband of one woman interviewed took on employment that she described as “casual,” doing translation for a telecommunications company, and several of the female migrants interviewed decided (albeit reluctantly) to work part-time well below their skill level. But again, and reflecting the gendered dynamics of the strategies employed by the migrants, these exceptions were themselves gendered with women more likely to accept low-paid, low-status work relative to their husbands. Despite these setbacks, several of the migrants interviewed described going to great lengths to maintain the appearance of class status and affluence despite their under- or unemployment and their dwindling economic resources (see Dobrowolsky et al. 2011). This meant buying a car, going on family trips, and ensuring that their children, in particular young children, did not recognize or experience the consequences of rapid downward mobility.

Faced with unemployment and generally unwilling to take on local survival jobs, many of the migrants interviewed developed strategies that spanned great distances and relied on familial, social, and business networks in the country of origin. For some, this meant continued employment in the country of origin, a strategy effective in cases in which one family income earner, typically the male partner/parent, had been able to maintain employment in the country of origin. In these cases, the migrant’s spouse, typically the female partner/parent and children remained in Nova Scotia living on money earned not in Canada, as anticipated, but in the country of origin. The strategy itself was gendered, drawing on divisions of reproductive and productive labour; however, it was also predicated on access to employment in the country of origin. Take for example one couple from Iran; she was a doctor who sold her practice before leaving for Canada, while he was a businessman. He was far more able to re-establish himself professionally in Iran and, perhaps most importantly according to him, was able to do so independently. Put differently, in the case of this particular couple and, in fact, a number of those interviewed, the socio-political climate in the site of emigration in addition to the opportunities available in the site of immigration informed the strategies developed by the migrants.

Although living apart was not the ideal solution for those who embarked on this kind of strategy, it represented the partial attainment of the goals of migration: the female partner and children’s security. That said, living alone in Canada, left a number of women in very

precarious situations. This was particularly true for those who were not employed and who relied exclusively on their husbands’ earnings abroad. Isolated, often with very little English, and uncertain of how to navigate the social landscape of Nova Scotia, these women themselves longed for the country of origin and the advantages they had there: cars, houses, maids, and the presence of friends and family. Furthermore, female partner/parents who may have been income earners in the country of origin yet were unable to secure employment in Nova Scotia, became fully responsible for the day-to-day responsibilities of social reproduction and household management in Nova Scotia. For some, this meant assuming responsibility for work that had previously been done by domestic labour or family. Their roles were, in essence, reconstituted within the traditional sexual division of labour. This division of labour, however, stretched across considerable distances, with social reproduction occurring in Canada and production or income generation occurring in the site of emigration, and as such it represented a new set of challenges and offered a series of unexpected outcomes. Notably, it compromised the awaited outcome of migration: increased social and economic mobility for female family members and, in several instances, served to diminish the autonomy achieved through paid employment in the country of origin.

For those women who took on low-paid, low-status work, the career advancement hoped for in Nova Scotia was also curtailed. Relegated to the very kinds of work they had hoped to avoid, their experiences came to correspond to those of so many labour migrants who are propelled through the circuits of global capitalism in search of employment: their skills devalued and underutilized yet representing considerable value added for their employers (Barber 2008; Ley 2010). Finally, separated from their children, a number of the men were not afforded the opportunity to engage in family and domestic life as they had imagined. For both men and women, then, normative gender roles present in the country of origin were reassigned and reinforced by the circumstances of resettlement. In these ways, gender equality, as it was envisioned by the migrants interviewed, remained elusive even in the context of migration and despite their arrival in the West.

Contradictions and Conclusions

Situated in global patterns and processes of interconnection and asymmetry, migration occurs at the intersection of a variety of material and discursive practices that are at once complimentary and conflictual. These include the strategies of states to control migration and to elicit

near permanent national allegiances despite emigration; the efforts of capital to obscure and maintain inequality between places and people in order to ensure the flow of labour and the accumulation of capital; and the objectives and activities of migrants and their families (non-migrant and migrant alike). Far from spontaneous or inherent, the identities of migrants are embedded in these practices, and they reflect the attempts of sending- and receiving-states to produce and attract particular kinds of migrants often to the benefit of capital.

Returning to Werbner's (1999) formulation of working class cosmopolitans, the migrants interviewed cultivated practices, forged identities and expressed objectives that were situated in a particular set of circumstances within the country of origin. These practices, identities and objectives spoke to the cosmopolitanism of those interviewed, their liberalism and their subsequent commitment to gender equality. Migration to Canada for many of those interviewed was very much understood as an expansion of their cosmopolitanism—an identity that had been previously developed through travel and ongoing engagements beyond the country of origin and harnessed through the immigration process. And although this objective was, in part, economically motivated, it was equally non-economic in nature. Here, the migrants interviewed prioritized security, political stability and social opportunities for both male and female children, but for female children in particular. Stemming from this, migration, and by extension their cosmopolitanism, was also regarded as a means of redressing the disparity between opportunities for men and women in the country of origin.

The NSNP sought to capitalize on the experiences and assets of a specific class of cosmopolitan subject. Despite these intentions, however, the program falsely, and to the detriment of many who arrived through the business/investor stream, assumed and presented a level playing field. It took for granted that success in one context would inevitably lead to success in another, and in so doing it overlooked the “geographical differentiation, the fundamental spatial breaks in culture, politics, and society that intervene and provide barriers” (Ley 2010:8). Ensuing from these barriers, the cosmopolitanism that facilitated migration through the NSNP did not help the migrants interviewed resettle or integrate in Nova Scotia as planned.

Once in Nova Scotia and faced with limited employment opportunities and rapid downward mobility (circumstances predicated on the asymmetrical positioning of places and people within labour markets), the migrants interviewed were compelled to develop transnational strategies that were at once informed by the conditions

in the receiving- and sending-states (who could return and to what kind of employment). This reliance on transnational networks to secure employment meant a broadening and formalization of the transnational social fields occupied by the migrants interviewed. This expansion, however, was unplanned for and typically unwanted with the vast majority of those interviewed wishing to establish themselves socially and economically in Canada. These outcomes are important to highlight as they underscore the social ramifications of immigration programs geared explicitly to economic ends.

As outlined, the transnational strategies employed by many of the migrants interviewed to redress downward class mobility were themselves highly gendered, responding to the lack of opportunities deemed appropriate for male migrants in Nova Scotia, to conditions in the country of origin, conditions that prevented female family members from returning to the country of origin in order to work, and often to normative gender roles concerning child care. With male partner/parents working abroad and female partner/parents remaining in Halifax, this unanticipated transnational strategy corresponded to conventional divisions of productive and reproductive labour, and as such, it effectively undermined the gendered objectives of migration.

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Notes

- 1 A shorter version of this paper won the first CASCA Women's Network Student Paper Award in Feminist Anthropology, 2010.
- 2 Data for this analysis were collected under the auspices of “Who comes, who stays, and at what cost?: An ethnographic and political analysis of Nova Scotia's Provincial Nominee Program” for which the author was a research assistant. While the analysis presented here is the author's, use of this data has been authorized by the study's principle researchers, Dr. Pauline Gardiner Barber (Department of Social Anthropology and Sociology, Dalhousie University, Halifax NS) and Dr. Alexandra Dobrowolsky (Department of Political Science, Saint Mary's University, Halifax NS). I would like to extend my thanks to Dr. Barber and Dr. Dobrowolsky for their on-going support, encouragement and generosity. I would also like to thank the CASCA Women's Network for their support in the preparation of this manuscript.

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