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Introduction

Race, Class, and Gender in Transnational Labor Inequality

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One of the most important developments in the sociological analyses of labor market inequality in the past two decades or so is a newfound attention to transnationalism. In the process, this field has produced a series of striking and formative perspectives that document the critical range of labor inequalities, namely, those of race, social class, and gender.¹ However, despite this crucial theoretical step, these systems have too often been examined in isolation from each other (Gonzalez, Fernandez, Price, Smith, & Trinh Võ, 2004). Conspicuously underrepresented in existing studies of transnational labor market inequality is a holistic and integrative approach. As global inequality is shaped by multiple hierarchies, we believe it is necessary to adopt a broader perspective that systematically examines both the intersectionality and independence of race, gender, and class (Collins, 1999; Crenshaw, 1989; Wing, 2000) in explaining labor market inequality in transnational contexts.

This issue of *American Behavioral Scientist* seeks to enhance our understanding of transnational labor market inequality by presenting a series of articles with this broader perspective. The issue offers the latest research and viewpoints, first, from a generation of pioneering scholars who have played a pivotal role in shaping the conceptual contours of this field. Patricia Fernández-Kelly (along with June Nash) brought us the term “international gender division of labor” and exposed us to the world of Maquila export processing (Fernández-Kelly, 1983; Nash & Fernández-Kelly, 1983). Arlie Hochschild (2000, 2003b) gave us the term “global care chains,” as well as pioneering the field of gendered emotional labor. Edna Bonacich encouraged us to look “behind the label” to uncover the race and class structures supporting “global production” in Los Angeles and the Pacific Rim (Bonacich & Applebaum, 2000; Bonacich, Cheng, Chinchilla, Hamilton, & Ong, 1994). Saskia Sassen (1998, 2000, 2006) directed us toward the centrality of women’s immigration, honing this into a seminal theory of survival circuits and directing us toward the global city as a new basis for inequality of women and foreign-born workers. We are so indebted to these scholars, and this issue is in many ways a tribute to their ongoing contributions

and talents, along with their colleagues and coauthors, Lise Isaksen, Sambasivan Uma Devi, Sabrina Alimahomed, and Jake Wilson.

In addition, the issue contains pieces from a new generation of specialists in transnational fieldwork with exciting projects. Winifred Poster reveals how high-tech multinational firms in India and the United States variably treat race, class, and gender by “filtering” these themes into their corporate diversity programs. Eileen Otis introduces us to the “virtuous professionalism” of tourism work in a U.S. multinational hotel in China and its sources in systems of ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual relations. Elizabeth Aranda describes how Puerto Ricans use circular pathways of transnational migration as a way to enhance their class status and labor market opportunities.

Redefining Transnationalism

Under the umbrella of transnational analyses of the labor market, the theoretical and methodological scope of studies in this issue bear mentioning. First, the pieces examine different substantive aspects of transnationalism, including immigration, neocolonialism, multinational corporations, citizenship, intergovernmental legal institutions, as well as global finance and banking sectors. Although authors pay close attention to global forces that sweep across borders, they do not disavow the role of the nation as a major player in the process of race, class, and gender labor hierarchies. The agency of the state is highlighted in several of the articles, as it promotes export production (Fernández-Kelly); manipulates citizenship to privilege White workers and takes advantage of foreign-born workers (Bonacich et al.); legalizes and defines racial and gender labor rights (Poster); and even provides opportunities for class mobility (Aranda).

Second, in terms of geographic scope, the pieces focus on a wide range of countries and regions and, as such, illustrate the truly global focus of contemporary research. In particular, the pieces focus most closely on Mexico, Puerto Rico, China, India, the Persian Gulf, South Africa, and the United States. Consistent with existing research, many of these pieces focus on the geo-political divide between the Global North and South as a focal point for conceptualizing transnational inequality. Increasingly, however, globalization is being played in East–West terms, as militarism, oil, and the politics of “terror” draw superpowers into the Middle East (Winant, 2004). Studies like that of Isaksen et al. provide a step in this direction, by exploring the gendered implications of this transregional dynamic.

Third, the articles focus their lens on neighboring countries and territories, allowing us a direct comparative framework to study North–South relations and the transnational interaction therein. This is illustrated well in Fernández-Kelly’s article about the U.S.–Mexico border, as immigrant labor goes in one direction and multinational firms go in the other. Some articles also consider global relations exclusively within the Global South, which is a crucial methodology for “decentering” the

discussion of globalization from groundings in and comparisons to the North (Narayan & Harding, 2000).

Finally, analyses in this issue are brought to us in a variety of forms, from field case studies, to thematic overviews, to theoretical framing. Methodologically, these studies are based on innovative research designs that go beyond typical ethnographic techniques to provide rich accounts of the global labor process. They are often multi-sited (Gille & Ó Riain, 2002) so that authors are able to follow the “chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations” in the labor process transnationally: from parent firms to subsidiaries (Poster), from workers’ class mobility in Puerto Rico to the United States and back again (Aranda), from global health care workers in the Persian Gulf to their children back in India (Isaksen et al.).

Thematizing Race, Class, and Gender in Global Labor Markets

We will argue that the articles in this issue make two significant contributions to the existing literature on transnational labor inequality. The first is in identifying race, class, and gender as core systems within global labor markets. Here, we outline how each article focuses its gaze on a particular axis of inequality, while simultaneously recognizing its connections to other systems of stratification, ultimately to generate a broader, multilayered analysis of race, class, and gender.

Race and ethnicity. Critical race scholars often argue that a marked feature of racialism in the global era is a public discourse, if not an outward appearance, of ethnic harmony (Bonilla-Silva, 1999; Winant, 2004). Poster notes how this is symbolized and practiced in the “diversity” policies of contemporary global firms in her article, “Filtering Diversity: A Global Corporation Struggles With Race, Class, and Gender in Employment Policy.” Poster follows these diversity policies from a U.S. high-tech firm (AmCo) to its subsidiary in India (TransCo), in a study conducted in 1995-1996. Through intensive interview and case study analysis, Poster describes how broad themes of racial and gender fairness are disassembled and repackaged at the local level by plant managers in both countries. Reflecting the institutional frames of their national contexts, managers at AmCo promote a discourse of “gender” (even though racial discrimination is more salient in practice), whereas managers at TransCo promote a discourse of “ethnicity/race” (even though gender discrimination is more apparent). These managerial strategies represent ways to divert attention from overt forms of stratification and avoid disruptions in employee relations, yet, they also generate a mutual critique between the two firms that can help to overcome the filtering process and achieve a more integrated understanding of discrimination.

On a broader level, Bonacich, Alimahomed, and Wilson offer a much-needed critique of political economy approaches to global capitalism in their article, “The Racialization of Global Labor.” Racialization is a concept that points to the institutionalized racism

embedded in global labor markets and how it operates through a hierarchy, privileging some ethnic groups of workers and marginalizing others. Their transnational and historical overview makes poignant linkages between a range of key events, revealing the underlying process of racialization. They take us, for instance, to apartheid-era South Africa, where employers took advantage of the Bantustans to create foreign migrant laborers on their own soil; to the American Southwest, where the state benefited from Latino labor under its Bracero program; to Chinese factories, where workers' skills are devalued through ideologies of nimble fingers; to the rise of mega-retailers like Walmart, increasingly employing workers around the world who have little recourse concerning their jobs. The argument unfolds from historical racializations of labor policy under nation-states, to contemporary global trends of export factory labor, attenuating worker rights and citizenship, gendered production sites, the Whitening of professional service work, and finally, to recent international (i.e., Western) efforts promoting labor empowerment and solidarity. The authors call for an end to the "colorblind" accounts of the global capitalist system through a lens of racialization.

Gender. Otis explores the gendering of globalized service work by taking the reader inside a transnational luxury hotel in China in "The Dignity of Working Women: Service, Sex, and the Labor Politics of Localization in China's City of Eternal Spring." Her analysis is based on an ethnographic study of a U.S. multinational hotel, the Kunming Transluxury, in 1999 and 2000 in the province of Yunnan. Otis relays a captivating story of how virtuous professionalism becomes a salient feature of the labor process. In a context where sex is offered informally along with official hotel services, and where the female hotel workers are often mistaken for "escorts," the frontline staff (of waitresses, hostesses, room service attendants, etc.) use a variety of strategies to enhance their status. They distinguish themselves occupationally by restraining their emotional displays, strategically asserting their sales scripts, and pointing to their official name tags. Virtuous professionalism helps hotel workers retain moral dignity in a context where it is threatened.

An important contribution of Otis's analysis is her link between professional work and sex work. Although both labor markets have been expanding transnationally for women (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2003; Freeman, 2000; Kempadoo, 1999; Kempadoo & Doezema, 1998), they have been cast as relatively disparate phenomena, both physically and conceptually (for exceptions, see Allison, 1994, and Wilson, 2004). Yet, Otis reveals how global tourism can put these two transnationally gendered labor markets in direct contact and even direct contestation. Labor strategies are the product of the interrelation of hotel staff with the escorts (who make considerably more money). And, it is quite curious that professionalism arises here to differentiate office workers from sex workers, rather than from *factory* workers as in Freeman's study.

Furthermore, the dynamic of professionalism takes on a new meaning here, compared with other sites of women's labor (Freeman, 2000; Lan, 2001, 2003). Virtuous

professionalization seeks to desexualize women's work, rather than to enhance sexuality as in Freeman's lipstick-wearing, high-heeled data-entry workers in multinationals in Barbados.

Fernández-Kelly shifts our attention to North and South America in her article, "Gender and Economic Change in the United States and Mexico, 1900–2000." She elucidates how gender has been at the nexus of labor inequality in both the United States and Mexico over the past century. This has happened in "parallel but not identical" ways, however, due to different relations to globalization. Early periods were marked by generous Mexican state policies toward working women (like subsidized child care centers, maternity leave with pay, health care, social security, etc.), in contrast to the weak state policies of the United States (like protective legislation and the family wage, which solidified notions of men as breadwinners and women as housewives and led to sex segregation of the labor market). Globally oriented economies in each country have intensified these problems. In the United States, trends of plant closures, layoffs, and industrial restructuring toward services have strained conditions for working women, creating simultaneous expectations to be income earners and domestic workers. In Mexico, trends of export-oriented industrialization have led to the growth of maquiladoras, which employ women as 85% of their labor force, but without significant improvements in overall standards of living.

Fernández-Kelly's discussion draws from a lively range of sources: statistical data on labor force participation rates, earnings, unionization, and so on, along illustrative case studies from public events and pop culture, such as telenovela shows in Mexico and talk shows in the United States, reflecting the social ideals and movements concerning gender and sexuality. Her analysis also centralizes a crucial but understudied element of transnational labor issues—masculinity. She notes how economic transformations due to globalization have reconfigured male gender identities to become more connected to household and family, as in the case of Mexico, or less connected, as she argues in the case of inner-city African Americans.

In "Global Care Crisis: A Problem of Capital, Care Chain, or Commons?" Hochschild and her colleagues, Isaksen and Uma Devi, take up the issue of global working mothers and the often-overlooked question of what happens to their family lives, in particular their relationships with their children. They note how the breadth of recent studies on migrant women laborers tends to favor the "work" side of the experiences in their adopted countries and neglects women's personal lives and what they leave behind. Expanding Hochschild's seminal analysis of global care chains, these authors follow the emotional effects of women's migrant care work on children and their surrogate parents.

Their empirical research takes us to the Indian state of Kerala and its female citizenry who travel to the Persian Gulf for work in the health industry. They provide some astounding statistics, for instance, that 1 in 5 working adults in Kerala has been a migrant worker, and 1 in 10 are women. With an innovative research design, Uma Devi and her assistant interviewed 120 family members on both sides of the care chain—the

mothers in Dubai and the United Arab Emirates, and their children in Kerala, along with the kin who care for them (interviewing 5, on average), including fathers, grandparents, and other relatives. Sensitive analysis by Isaksen, Uma Devi, and Hochschild shows the range of conflicted emotion management strategies among the children: defending the actions of their departed mothers in the face of critical comments by relatives, taking over maternal roles vis-à-vis younger siblings, reserving an empty place in their hearts for (rather than replacing or forgetting) their mothers, and so on but, at the same time, harboring doubts about why their mothers left them, losing trust in mothers, feeling like a burden to caregivers, and envying other mothers who stay. The authors argue that these carefully negotiated exchanges of love for material items between migrant working mothers and their children are a “hidden injury” of global capital.

Class. In her article, “Class Backgrounds, Modes of Incorporation, and Puerto Ricans’ Pathways Into the Transnational Professional Workforce,” Aranda reveals the deliberate way that Puerto Rican professionals use labor immigration as a strategy for class mobility. Rather than through static dynamics of “inheritance” (typical in the stratification research) or “relation to the production process” (as in neo-Marxist formulations), these workers achieve class standing through fluid and well-crafted strategies. The process involves agency, and, crucial to our issue, it is global. Aranda conducted interviews both in the United States and in Puerto Rico (20 in each location). Noting how studies of labor migration tend to be unidirectional, Aranda refutes these claims by showing how class formation is based on a circular migration process. In particular, Puerto Ricans move to the United States for higher education and initial job opportunities, which enables them to accumulate resources. Then, when returning to Puerto Rico, they use those resources to elevate their class status as they reincorporate themselves back into the labor market. This geographic mobility between political territories and labor markets is crucial to their social mobility.

Taking a macro-structural approach, Sassen considers how class structures and labor markets have transformed on a worldwide scale under globalization. In “Two Stops in Today’s New Global Geographies: Shaping Novel Labor Supplies and Employment Regimes,” she makes the intriguing observation that the labor markets that have become the most internationalized are those at the top and bottom of the economic system. Professional and managerial experts (often male, one could add) occupy the upper tier, through formal and lucrative transnational markets. The lower tier is occupied more often by women and ethnic minorities, as an underclass of transnational workers has developed through informal labor markets. Backed by solid transnational statistics and descriptions of key events, Sassen identifies how this process has unfolded: declining earnings capacities of workers and households, expanding service industries and informalization of labor, and emerging urban marginality through community decline and abandonment.

One of the more stunning observations she makes is how growing economic inequalities of unemployment and debt have been associated with the increase of women from

the Global South in various kinds of “global migration and trafficking circuits.” These international movements of finance and labor from women and the foreign born have created “alternative political economies” that become “survival strategies for households, enterprises, and governments” when those traditional sites have failed.

Emerging Dynamics of Global Labor Inequality

The second collective contribution of the pieces in this issue is reconceptualizing the driving forces and patterns behind transformations in global labor markets. In particular, these authors direct our attention to several dynamics that will be increasingly important for the study of transnational labor inequality.

The dawn of transnational services. If manufacturing was the trademark of the international division of labor in classic studies, services are now the fastest growing jobs in the formal sectors of the economy around the world (Poster, 2007). This work is fundamentally different from factory work, and although many important studies have explored the implications of race, class, and gender of this labor within the Global North (MacDonald & Sirianni, 1996), the transnational implications are yet to be detailed in a comprehensive way.

Sassen provides a welcome grounding for this analysis in her article. She describes how the organization of the transnational economy is marked by a “service intensity.” Due to trends of advancing information technology, the deregulation and securitization of finances, and the hypermobility of capital, firms have increased demands for professional and producer services. Polarization of labor markets follows this process. High-income work expands in technical, managerial, and financial markets, which in turn gentrifies lifestyles of the global elite and fuels a demand for low-wage workers to provide a wide range of personal and household services (health, domestic, retail, tourism, etc.).

These service industries are driving many of the transnational labor patterns in the diverse settings of this issue: the immigration of Indian nurses to Persian Gulf hospitals and health centers in the study by Isaksen, Uma Devi, and Hochschild; the transnational diffusion of U.S. retail industries like Wal-Mart to China; the outsourcing of U.S. customer call centers to India, as noted in the article by Bonacich, Alimahomed, and Wilson; and the global tourism industry, which sends U.S. hotels to China in Otis’s study. The “newness” of these services for some contexts is readily apparent in this last case, as historic organizational styles of the communists in China clash with consumer-driven service requirements of the transnational luxury hotels.

These trends also raise fascinating questions about the meaning and experience of transnational service work, given that it involves Southern workers selling brands and providing services for Northern capital. For instance, this work is distinctive for its performative requirements, often involving direct relations between employees

and the customers and consumers around the world. Yet, this work is racialized and nationalized, as noted in Bonacich and colleagues' article, when Indian workers are asked to act American in the process of handling U.S. consumer calls. Service work is also gendered, as it involves "communicative" and "bodily" labor from women, as Lan (2001, 2003) has theorized so brilliantly. These dynamics are illustrated in Otis's article, where workers use restaurant menu knowledge to command authority with hotel guests and physical gestures like pointing toward their nametags and uniforms to assert their professionalism. An intriguing question is how transnational consumerism will affect labor patterns in these service jobs: What does it mean that these Chinese hotel workers are experts at promoting Western wines and gourmet foods, or that Taiwanese workers in Japanese departments are selling Revlon (Lan, 2001, 2003), or that Thai workers are doing direct sales for Avon (Wilson, 2004)?

The global politics of care. Pieces in this issue support and elaborate on an emerging field of transnational "care" work (Litt & Zimmerman, 2003; Sarvasy & Longo, 2004; Yeates, 2004). Whereas mainstream globalization scholars have been concerned primarily with dynamics of finance, trade, technology, political institutions, and so on, feminist scholars have been looking elsewhere. They call attention to the "globalization of love" and the circuits of care as major forces of transnationalism (Hochschild, 2003a). This approach is more than a shift in focus; it is a reconceptualization of what constitutes globalization and how labor inequality operates.

Isaksen, Uma Devi, and Hochschild provide an innovative theoretical framework for analyzing the transnational politics of care by discussing how love is materialized and commodified in the global economy. Money and gifts are exchanged as symbols of care, when transnationalism precludes a living person from sharing it. Moreover, the costs of this process are more than material. The authors argue that the global economy is leading to a distortion and rupture of the "socio-emotional commons." Historically, care has been sustained by women, yet, transmigration is pulling women in the Global South away to serve markets of the Global North, which erodes the foundation of emotional support for children, families, and the community.

Fernández-Kelly describes a parallel process of "atomization," as global forces fragment labor markets by gender. Deteriorating working conditions, declining state supports for a family wage, and retreating male participation in the household—all signs of transnationally-oriented economies in the Global North and South—have been associated with corrosive trends of care. Notions of masculinity and femininity have become increasingly distanced from each other, under a free-for-all social environment of self-reliance and waning commitment to the family. Care figures into Aranda's analysis as well. Recapturing the dissipated support system of care is part of what motivates Puerto Ricans to move back home in their circular migration path. By focusing on the emotional side of transmigration in this way, Aranda provides a compelling challenge to traditional economic frameworks. In fact, generating a conceptual

alternative to the “social capital” paradigm is an agenda found in the articles from Isaksen et al. as well as Aranda.

As an ongoing field, studies of global care need to consider assumptions of heteronormativity, as Florence Babb (2007) points out. Indeed, the “love” that is globalized in these accounts often involves heterosexual relationships or traditional, nuclear families. A queer studies perspective on global labor inequality is imperative in this respect, to explore the experiences of gays, lesbians, and transsexual workers and families (Altman, 2001; Grewal & Caplan, 2001; Hunt, 1999).

Scattered hegemonies of transnational firms. Fernández-Kelly reminds us of the centrality of transnational corporations in the globalization process. They can serve as the nucleus of national development strategies, as in the case of Mexico in the 1980s. As a consequence, entire economies can become dependent on the labor of women in global factories, like maquiladoras. However, studies here also describe the heterogeneous way that such firms construct race, class, and gender and reassert that global capital operates through “scattered hegemonies” of labor (Grewal & Caplan, 1994). In the tradition of Leslie Salzinger (2003) and Ching Kwan Lee (1998), these articles illustrate variable managerial responses to transnational forces. Yet, they take this conceptual and methodological paradigm one step further by revealing an integrative model of global and local managerial strategies.

Poster and Otis, for instance, reveal a “selective” process (Dickinson, 1997) of transposing Northern business practices on their Southern units. Managers in Otis’s firm appropriate certain features of the parent hotel, such as the U.S. “Transluxury” brand name, to imbue a global legitimacy to their enterprise, to distinguish themselves from the plethora of neighboring Chinese hotels, and to sell European images of sexuality as part of their architectural decor. At the same time, though, managers also adopt regional labor hierarchies, especially with regard to race and ethnicity, to control the labor process. Managers boast about being the first *locally run* five-star hotel in China and capitalize on the interregional tensions within China to marginalize the local ethnic minority workers, referring to them literally as the “backwards” employees.

Selectivity is a theme in Poster’s firms too, as managers pick and choose themes of gender, race, and class from their local institutional environments for their diversity programs. Moreover, this process is interactive between Northern parent firms and their Southern subsidiaries. Rather than simply adopting or rejecting global labor standards, the U.S. and Indian branches formulate their policies in relation and in reference to one another. AmCo officials invoke the rhetoric of “globalness” to overinflate the universality of their policy and to evade alternative definitions of diversity raised by their units in other parts of the world; TransCo officials use the rhetoric of “localness” to overinflate the uniqueness of diversity in their context and to avoid acknowledging common issues of organizational stratification across national borders.

From line to loop: New visions of the “international division of labor.” Finally, articles contained in this issue help to formulate a new version of the international division of labor. The classic vision of the international division of labor involves a linear model. Founded on dependency and world system theories, this approach suggests a unidirectional pathway of transnational firms and their offshore units from “core” to “peripheral” nations. However, articles here offer a different account of how the global economy works.

To begin with, these authors destabilize the role of class as the single governing factor of labor inequality. Racialization and the socio-emotional commons are offered as core systems of transnational labor markets, for instance, that operate in conjunction with relations of capital. These authors also describe pathways of labor, firms, and finance that are nonlinear (Salzinger, 2004) and, in some cases, quite circuitous. Transnational labor migration and the globalization of care occur in a zigzag or rounded fashion in articles by Aranda and Isaksen, Uma Devi, and Hochschild. Circuits of finance are a central dynamic in Sassen’s article, as the remittances of workers’ earnings back to their families in native countries serve as a profound subversive monetary strategy to that of global corporate banking.

Several of our authors consider the policy challenges for empowering female, ethnic minority, and low-income workers. Poster discusses how efforts for gender and racial equity at the head offices of transnational corporations can be derailed at the local level, both the Global North and South. Bonacich, Alimahomed, and Wilson document state campaigns for corporate social responsibility among transnational firms and the tensions they face in practice with respect to other global actors like the international banking and finance institutions. These authors also discuss the limits of strategies like consumer boycotts and suggest that future initiatives should instead focus on solidarity of international actors with local organizations and struggles.

In sum, this issue moves us forward in the relatively new and dynamic field of transnational labor inequality. As thoughtful, well-crafted, and compelling accounts of this process, these pieces will raise new questions and challenges to scholars who explore intersections of race, class, and gender in the global labor process.

Note

1. Many excellent collections on global inequality have come out in recent years: on gender (Basu, Grewal, Kaplan, & Malkki, 2001; Chow & Ngan-ling, 2003; Gottfried & Acker, 2004), on race (Batur-Vanderlippe & Feagin, 1999), on class-based work (Baldoz, Koeber, & Kraft, 2001; Hodson, 1997), and on the labor movement (Cornfield, 1997; Nissen, 2000).

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