Editorial

Tarik Sabry
Communication and Media Research Institute
University of Westminster

Interest in the phenomenon of migration from developing countries to Western industrialised societies is not a new one. In fact, scholarly contributions to the compendium of research and analysis dealing with the subject of migration, its mechanics, causes and consequences have now been accumulating for more than a century. The result is a compendium with a 'largely fragmented set of theories that have developed largely in isolation from one another' (Massey, 1996: 432). Examples include: neo-classical micro and macro theories, network theory, migration systems theory...etc.

These theoretical approaches are, however, deterministically positioned within a rationalising framework that locates mechanics of supply and demand at the core of its thesis. They disclose a largely unquestioned consensus—that despotism, poverty and disequilibrium between labour markets—are the main intervening variables or push factors that lead to migratory flows from developing countries to Western industrialised societies. Consequently, these approaches do not account for the symbolic dimensions of migration, displacement and mobility.

Certainly, it is only relatively recently that the phenomenon of migration has caught the interest of scholars in Departments of Media and Cultural Studies. There are many possible reasons for this. Here, three possibilities are worth mentioning. a) In recent years, migratory flows of illegal emigrants and asylum seekers from countries of the periphery to liberal Western industrialised societies have generated a lot of interest in the Western media, so much so that a number of universities have added Refugee Studies to their teaching curricula.

b) Diasporas in Britain, whether Asians, Greeks, Japanese or Turks have, thanks to satellite technology, access not only to British media, but also consume television channels and programmes from their countries of origin. This development has led, in the last few years, to a growing interest amongst scholars of Media and Cultural studies in what is now known as studies of 'Diasporic Media'.

c) No subject taught in Media and Cultural Studies has paved the way more for the interlocking of different fields of study than globalization. The latter is a problematic that can only be grasped through a comprehension of its constitutive relational systems. In the case made by Appadurai, the 'complexity' of the phenomenon of globalization 'has to do with certain fundamental disjunctures' between different scapes (Appadurai, 1990: 296). It is important to note how 'ethnoscpaes'—by which Appadurai means 'the shifting world (…) of tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles (…)' (ibid. 297)—constitute an important element in the comprehension of the complexity of the global condition. In Ian Chambers' book (1994) *Migrancy, Culture and Identity*, the complexity of the post-modern condition is explored vis-à-vis complex relationships between identity spaces, migration and culture (See also Morley and Robins, 1995; Morley 2000).

Although a number of contemporary scholars within and outside the West mention the role of global media in the emergence of migratory flows, very few actually focus on the complex ways in which media and migration flows interconnect. Far from dismissing the key role played by economic and demographic imbalances in migratory flows, future research on migration should integrate these dimensions within a perspective acknowledging the ways in which migration emerges from the contact between societies which are different in their socio-cultural organisation, production and distribution of both economic and symbolic power. Acknowledging the role of media in eliciting displacement (with its different meanings), mobility and migration means implicitly troubling the difference between physical and subjective (mental) displacement and addressing 'sending' and 'receiving' countries, not only as mere physical geographies, but also as contested spaces of belonging and identification (Mai and Sabry 2004).

The task of troubling the difference between physical and mental migratory trajectories will hopefully lead to a shift in our thinking about migration from a phenomenon that derives its meaning from the 'economic' to a way of thinking which positions migration within its wider relational structure. In the initial issue of WPCC, the first five contributions attempt to do just this. They share a common intellectual purpose: exploring symbolic dimensions of migration.

References

Appadurai, A. 1990. 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy', in Featherstone, M (ed.) *Global Culture: Nationalism Globalization and Modernity*, (pp. 295-310), London: Sage.

Chambers, I. 1994. *Migrancy, Culture and Identity*, London: Routledge.

Massey, D. et. al. 1993. 'Theories of International Migration'. *Population and Development Review* 19(3): 431-466.

Morley, D. 2002. *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity*, London: Routledge

Morley, D, and Robins, K. 1995. *Spaces of Identity: global media, electronic landscapes and cultural boundaries*, London: Routledge.