Introduction: Migrant Politics and Mobilization: Exclusion, Engagements, Incorporation

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Introduction
Migrant Politics and Mobilization:
Exclusion, Engagements, Incorporation

Davide Però and John Solomos

Abstract
In this paper, we set the scene for this special issue by outlining the main concerns that underlie the study of migrant politics and related forms of social and political mobilization. We begin by examining the changing ways in which migrant and minority politics and mobilization have been articulated in recent decades, exploring key facets of the intersections between forms of migrant and minority mobilization and the wider social and political environment. We continue by discussing how these politics and mobilization have been analysed, both from a conceptual and empirical angle. We conclude by mapping the core themes of the substantive papers that make up this volume and by highlighting some issues for further research.

Keywords: Incorporation; migrants; migrant politics; minorities; mobilization; politics; citizenship.

This special issue of Ethnic and Racial Studies grew out of a series of papers that were presented in draft form at a workshop organized under the auspices of the research network on International Migration, Integration and Social Cohesion [IMISCOE], at the University of Sussex in September 2007. The network brings together researchers, research students and scholars from a wide range of academic disciplines and national environments to discuss key facets of international migration and the policy and social responses to this important social phenomenon. It is in this context that we organized a workshop that focused especially on the theme of the changing forms of migrant and minority mobilization in contemporary society.

We invited contributors to the workshop and the special issue to explore (1) the question of the changing forms of migrant politics and
mobilization in contemporary societies, and (2) to reflect on the impact of these actions and mobilizations on processes of inclusion and integration. We did so with an eye on developing a more critical perspective on these issues and to encourage more dialogue about what could be learned from comparing the experiences in different countries. The seven papers that make up this special issue draw from a wide range of conceptual and disciplinary perspectives and draw on empirical research carried out in a variety of settings. Taken together, they also address some of the most important conceptual debates about the context and impact of migrant and minority political mobilization. They also, hopefully, provide some signposts indicating the direction and the need for new research to address lacunae in current research and policy debates.

As guest editors of this special issue, we have set ourselves the task in this introductory paper of situating the main themes and questions that will be covered substantively in the papers that follow. We begin by highlighting the trajectory followed by migrants and ethnic minority mobilization in Europe since the 1960s, seeking to discuss in a contextualized manner the continuities and changes that occurred in the last four decades or so. We then move on to chart how studies of migrants’ and minorities’ mobilization have changed during the same period, paying particular attention to placing recent emerging trends in a historical perspective. Finally, we outline the main contribution of the volume as a whole, as well as of the individual articles that are comprised in it. While the overview provided in the following pages refers in particular to migrants’ and minorities’ mobilizations in the European context, the key themes and questions that we touch upon have direct relevance to wider global trends.

Migrant and minority mobilization: changing forms and objects of contention

If one follows the history of international migration and ethnic minority formation that became such an important feature of social and political change in the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, it becomes evident that forms of political mobilization, self-help organization and community networks have played an important role throughout this process. In the past decade, new forms of migrants’ political, social and cultural mobilization have grown noticeably alongside new patterns of migration, mobility and community formation. These forms have not always been recognized by scholars of migration and ethnic minorities, though it is evident that in recent years there has been a growing scholarship on various facets of migrant politics and minority mobilization, particularly in Europe and in North America as we will see in the next section.
Until the end of the 1970s, Western Europe was an industrial society based on the Fordist mode of production. For years, it had been recruiting migrant workers to sustain production in this economic sector (Castells 2002: 198). These immigration flows were for the most part constituted by young males, especially in continental Europe (Castles and Miller 2009). During the same period, Western Europe experienced a great social unrest – an ‘era of collective action’ in which factory workers played a central role together with students and feminists (Ginsborg 2003). Where their legal status and other conditions allowed them, many migrants joined in the native workers’ mobilizations at the workplace and in the community. For example, this was the case of many ‘colonial workers’ in the UK (Castles and Kosack 1973; Ginsborg 2001), ‘guest workers’ in France (Grillo 1985) and of many ‘southerners’ in the Italian Industrial North (Castles and Kosack 1973).

By and large, the organizations of the working classes included migrant workers in their projects and efforts of transformation of society. This inclusion can be seen in the accounts provided by Castles and Kosack (1973) in Germany, by Grillo (1985) in France and that by Però (Però 2007a) in Italy, and can be illustrated with the words of Monello, a southern Italian factory worker and Communist Party [PCI] and trade union activist who migrated to Bologna from the province of Naples:

The PCI and the union operated strongly in favour of southern immigrants . . . the strong communist ideology kept [anti-southern] prejudice under control . . . everybody from the party would intervene if for example somebody had said something like ‘All you marocchini want is to be given a house straight away!!!’ In this case the comrades from Bologna would have intervened in defence of the immigrants and given political explanations . . . Today, the situation is quite different: people are less sympathetic towards the extra-comunitari than they used to be towards the meridionali. The ground is no longer being prepared. . . . No more work is done at the grassroots. (Quoted in Però 2007a, p. 50)

This inclusion had, however, significant limitations with which Però (2007a), working in the Italian context, identified: assimilationism; paternalism; electoral instrumentalism; and economic reductionism. Castles and Kosack (1973) illustrated the diffidence and discrimination Turkish Migrants experienced in German Trade Unions, Grillo (1985) mentioned those experienced by migrant workers in France, Sivanandan (1982) and Gilroy (1987) highlighted those experienced in the British trade union movements, while Kertzer (1980) and Però (2007a) described those of southern migrants in socialist areas of Northern Italy.
For those migrants who enjoyed citizenship rights – such as the so-called British ‘colonial workers’ – political participation included the possibility to vote at national elections. Those who did not (i.e. the vast majority of migrants in Europe) could only engage in alternative forms of political participation. Mark Miller, among others, helpfully identified five key channels (Miller 1981), namely the extra-parliamentary avenue, consultative institutions, industrial democracy, the organizational avenue and the diplomatic channel. To these channels, a more recent typology has added that of transnational political participation (Martiniello 2006).

Partly reflecting the political climate of the time (both in the receiving and sending contexts), the migrants’ mobilizations in ‘the era of collective action’ were for the most part about issues of material justice. However, these issues were not the only ones migrants mobilized about. In Britain, encouraged by their secure legal status of British Citizens, migrants soon began to mobilize also about other questions that negatively affected their lives, such as racism and discrimination, lack of inclusion in structures of representation, cultural rights, etc. (Solomos 2003) A famous instance in this respect was the debate about the so-called Black Sections of the Labour Party that took place in the 1980s and 1990s (Solomos and Back 1995; Garbaye 2005).

Subsequently, the sketchy scenario just outlined began to change. Industrial production progressively lost its economic centrality in Western European societies, which increasingly turned into post-Fordist economies centred on the service economy. This transformation meant a shrinking base of recruitment and support for traditional working class politics and organizations, which were put on the defensive by the emerging New Right lead by Thatcher and Reagan. It was also accompanied by increasing ideological rethinking, a process that Meiksins Wood called ‘the retreat from class’ (Meiksins Wood 1998; Moschonas 2001).

In the context of migrant incorporation, this demise of class politics meant that a political discourse centred on ethnicity and ethnocultural recognition and increasingly deprived of a redistributive dimension has been established as the master political discourse through which to address questions of integration of migrants and minorities. During the 1980s and throughout the 1990s, in the UK and the Netherlands in particular, multiculturalism – the approach to integration that is considered to have started in 1967 with a speech by British Home Secretary Roy Jenkins – reached its moment of highest significance.²

Indeed, by the mid 1990s, multiculturalism, with its stress on ethnocultural recognition (decoupled of material justice), had already inspired institutional practices of integration in southern European countries like Italy and Spain, which in the meantime had turned into
countries of immigration after having been countries of emigration for decades. This emphasis on ethnocultural recognition is true in general (Grillo and Pratt 2002) and with special reference to the political participation of migrants.

With the progressive rolling back of the state and advent of regimes of governance—whereby significant policy delivery is contracted out to civil society organizations and NGOs—many of these organizations take up governmental functions at national and local levels and/or functions of policy legitimization. This process has been shown to have implications that are often very ambivalent for the social and political inclusion of migrants. On the one hand, opportunities for incorporation into the political systems of the receiving context are made available to migrants (e.g. by hiring increasingly professionalized and de-politicized migrant-support organizations); on the other hand, this incorporation is expected to be expressed in the forms envisaged by such context, which often means co-optation. Empirical research illustrates how ‘progressive’ local authorities like Bologna and Barcelona (Però 2007a; 2007b) focused on ethnicity in their attempt to promote the political participation of migrants which was realized in perfunctory and limited ways. Ambivalent institutional practices, however, do not concern only southern European countries but those of Northern Europe, too. For example, in Sweden, Kugelberg (2010) illustrates well the increasing regulation, control, instrumentalism, bureaucratization and disempowerment ethnic minority associations have to undergo in order to receive funding. Hence, during this period, migrants and minorities were encouraged to organize around ethnicity, forming associations and NGOs in exchange for resources and recognition from the state (national and local) that saw them as governmental tools for social cohesion and status quo maintenance.

By this time, Europe had become inhabited by a large number of new migrants, many of whom arrived from countries without direct colonial links to those of destination, lacking citizenship and often even authorization to live and work in such countries. These new migrants are increasingly excluded and criminalized by the mounting neo-assimilationist and increasingly xenophobic public discourse and policy which are replacing those of recognition, accommodation and tolerance of cultural diversity typical of multiculturalism (Back et al. 2002; Grillo 2005; Però 2008b). The condition of vulnerability, abuse, injustice and denial of recognition, rights and opportunities to secure a decent living for these new migrants pushed many of them, with the support of advocacy organizations, to campaign for regularizations (like the San-Papiers movement in France, the Sin-Papeles in Spain or the Strangers into Citizens campaign in the UK, among others), as
well as other rights that are progressively being restricted, such as those around the entitlement to a free primary health care in the UK.

At the same time, the realization of the high exploitation experienced by new migrants at the workplace and the lack of adequate support and representation on this question, from both the working class organizations of the receiving society and from service-delivery ethnic or mainstream charities, has induced some migrants to organize around class and ‘politically’. In the UK, interesting examples are found in the trade union movement, such as Kalyaan, the organization campaigning for domestic workers’ rights (see the paper by Anderson), or in the Latin American Workers Association and the Justice for Cleaners campaign (Però 2008b).

These openly political and democratically ‘conflictive’ mobilizations and protests for basic rights and/or for dignified working and living conditions (where class features prominently in intersection with ethnicity and gender) seem to represent an element of novelty and diversification in a scenario dominated by ‘non-political’ and often self-restrained or co-opted NGOs mostly organized around ethnicity. Another growing form of migrants’ mobilization and protest is that taking place against the mistreatments and violation of human rights that are taking place in the detention centres (Rovelli 2006; Amnesty International 2009) which have been set up across Europe (and surrounding regions) as part of increasingly converging and coordinated immigration policies.

On the ‘minorities’ front, the mobilization agenda has been characterized by the need to combat the persistency of racism and its shifting articulations and guises (emergence of cultural racism) exclusion and discrimination as documented by research in London and Birmingham in the early 2000s (Back et al. 2004). It is also clear that over the past decade more mobilizations around religion have also come to the fore in the context of minority mobilizations in a number of countries. Such mobilizations are complex in form and need to be located in local, national and transnational networks. But it is also clear that religious networks have been formed across national boundaries and that they utilize ideological and political categories alongside religious symbols and values (Levitt 2007; Back et al. 2009).

Another form of migrants’ and minorities’ mobilization that seems to have intensified in the recent period (favoured by the new communication technologies of globalization) is that of transnational politics, sometimes articulated in alternative to integration politics, sometimes alongside and even in synergy with integration politics. This ‘multidirectionality’ often encountered in the political practices of migrants (Però 2008a) reflects the ‘simultaneity’ (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004) of their belonging which develops as a result of migration.
In sum, this overview has pointed out that mobilization of migrants and minorities in recent decades has always been there and been very diverse, even though the presence and diversity of such agency has not yet been adequately reflected in social scientific research. On the whole, it seems that after an early stage when migrants joined in the class mobilization of the native working classes during the ‘era of collective action’, ‘ethnicity’ (encouraged by the multicultural paradigm) became the prevalent way of organizing in Europe up to these days. However, the ‘new immigrations’ of the most recent years and the increasingly exclusionary and exploitative immigration policies and conditions to which newcomers are being subjected have favoured the emergence of mobilization for rights, as well as dignified working and living conditions, that challenged from below the politics of (neo-liberal) multiculturalism. This challenge is very different and less visible than the one moved to multiculturalism from above by the neoassimilationist public policy and discourse of contemporary governments and ‘allied’ organizations and commentators, and it requires scholarly attention, as we will suggest in the following pages.

**Migrants and minorities mobilization studies**

In the previous section, we gave a general account of the mobilization of migrants and minorities in Europe in recent decades; here we wish to provide an overview of how the study of such mobilization has changed over the same period. Migrants’ political agency has on the whole received little academic attention, although in recent years there has been a growing interest in the subject (Ramakrishnan and Espenshade 2001; Back et al. 2004; Koopmans 2004; Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad 2008; Reed-Danahay and Brettell 2008). This scarce attention appears connected to several factors. Reviewing some of these factors in this context is important, not just to understand better how this has come to be the case but also to discuss how the study of migrant and minority mobilization has developed over the years.

A first factor is connected to what (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003) have called ‘methodological nationalism’, i.e. the conflation of national interests with the purpose of social sciences. In our context, this conflation has resulted in the question of migrants and politics having traditionally been interpreted in terms of migrants as objects rather than subjects of politics. Accordingly, priority has been given to how to manage, use, control and discipline migrants most effectively in the interests of the receiving nation-state. While such an instrumental approach can be ‘understood’ with regard to policymakers and politicians whose role is to govern the national territory, the same cannot be done for social scientists whose cognitive task includes problematizing the taken-for-granted independently from
governmental interests and policy agendas. A second reason for not looking at migrants as political actors seems connected to the narrow and formal understanding of politics prevailing in the social sciences that tends to be restricted to voting and standing for elections. In this context, migrants – who are not normally allowed to vote – have come to be seen as politically passive or quiescent. A third reason for overlooking migrants’ political agency has been, for some social sciences like anthropology, intrinsic to their disciplinary development. As pointed out by Caroline Brettell (2008), until not long ago anthropologists have been concerned with the study of peoples as embodiments of cultures conceived as territorialized and essential entities. People who moved across borders, resettled in other countries while inhabiting a transnational space and hybridizing their original views and practices were not functional to this disciplinary project. Clearly, in this context, there was little room for the study of migrants’ political agency.

The scarce interest in migrants as political actors seems also connected to the influence played by approaches that saw migrants’ mobilization as mechanistically determined by two main types of ‘structures’. One considered migrants’ mobilization as a reflection of the position migrants occupied in the class structure and viewed migrants’ mobilization as a form of working class mobilization determined by the exploitative conditions typical of the organization of labour in a capitalist society. The other approach explained migrants’ mobilization as a reflection of their ethnicity. Migrants’ mobilizations were not seen as the direct product of exploitative class conditions but of their ‘culture’ of origin (i.e. ethnicity) essentially conceived. In this second case, migrants’ mobilization was seen as determined by the specific cultural traits of a given ethnic group whose members homogeneously embodied it. In sum, both these approaches reinforced the idea that migrants’ mobilizations constituted a theme of little scholarly interest, as the phenomenon was ‘easily’ explained away as something structurally determined one way or the other.

Recent developments

In the mid-early 1990s, the study of migrants’ mobilization started to receive more attention, and a new approach developed out of the dissatisfaction with the prevailing political quiescence attributed to migrants and with the explanatory capabilities attributed to class and ethnicity. In an influential book, Patrick Ireland introduces and applies to the field of migration studies the political opportunity structure approach (Ireland 1994). This approach, which had previously been developed by political scientists in connection with the study of social movements to explain their emergence, consisted in
highlighting the strategic importance of the opportunities for mobilizing provided to migrants by the institutional set up of the receiving context. This approach (also referred to as neo-institutionalism) has been adopted and refined by many authors and has become the prevailing approach to date to the study of migrants’ mobilization, stimulating further the debate on the topic.

In recent years, and partly as a result of a growing engagement of scholars from anthropology, human geography, feminism and sociology, the political opportunity structure (POS) approach in migration studies seems to have undergone two types of critique: one suggesting a rethinking of the notion of POS in broader and looser terms; the other suggesting a ‘decentring’ of POS from the position of grand monocausal explanation for mobilization that seems to be attributed to it.

First, at the level of rethinking of the notion of POS, Eva Østergaard-Nielsen (2003) timely pointed out the inadequacy to conceive the political opportunity structure as coincident with the territory of the receiving nation-state. She argued for a rethinking of political opportunity structure in transnational terms so as to reflect more adequately the transnational spaces that migrants inhabit also at political level. For many migrants, the relevant political opportunity structure affecting their mobilization is not necessarily limited to that found in the receiving context, but often transcends it so as to comprise that of the sending context. Drawing on ethnographic research conducted among Latin American migrants in London, Però identified further problems in how the political opportunity structure has been conceived so far, namely in static, rigid, ethnicist and formal terms (Però 2008b). In fact, as currently conceptualized, POS appears unable to adequately account for the diversity and change of mobilizations of a given ethnic group within a single and stable institutional environment. Another inadequacy has to do with ethnicist and over-homogenizing tendencies, which tend to privilege ethnicity a priori as a key mobilizing category while overseeing internal differences and other experiences of mobilization within the same ethnic group. A further limitation has to do with the narrowly and rigidly defined range of forms that POS is seen as able to assume, which at present appears limited to the institutional and policy apparatus of the receiving society. Accordingly, POS seems in need of rethinking in a looser and more comprehensive way to include in what may constitute a political opportunity for mobilization migrants’ mobilizations themselves, as well as the wider cultural–political attitudes to diversity and integration of a given context or locality (e.g. multiculturalism).

Second, on the need to decentre the significance of POS, Bousetta (2000, p. 235) points out how the POS approach, by overemphasizing the significance of institutional environment, represents migrants as
passive agents whose actions are structurally determined by institutional factors’. This overemphasis of the institutional structure places the POS approach in the paradoxical situation of having started off seeking to recognize migrants’ political agency and overcome perceptions that saw them as quiescent, but ended up explaining it away with another structural account. Però (2008b) points out that the explanation for migrants’ mobilization is more complex than the POS approach – with its monocausal explanation – allows, and provides a ‘working’ typology of other important explanatory factors that – alongside and in interaction with POS (and with each other) – appear to shape migrants mobilizations. These factors include: the political socialization, background, experience and values of the migrants; the living and working conditions they experienced in the receiving context (e.g. of exploitation, marginalization, etc); their networks and social capital; and their migratory project.

To these factors we would like to add a further one here, namely that of migrants’ feeling, and emotions, so as to balance the rational choice approach that underpins prevalent theories on migrant mobilizations (e.g. POS) and enable more comprehensive explanations of such mobilizations. In fact, migrants, like the rest of the population, may at times mobilize in partial or total disregard of the chances of success and the achievement of concrete goals and material rewards, and be substantially driven by their values, affection, sense of self and of group membership, need to feel well and realize themselves, and so forth, all significant elements that are overlooked in the ‘rational actor’ decision-making model.

Overall, the above criticism of POS, while substantial, is ‘constructive’, i.e. it does not dismiss the POS approach – at least in as much as POS is no longer seen as a monocausal explanatory factor. Rather, its intent is that of complementing and enriching current explanations of migrant mobilizations and to ultimately help in enhancing our awareness and understanding of their complex and multifaceted nature.

The growing interest for the question of migrants’ mobilization that in recent years has come from different disciplines and fields of studies, as also reflected in this special issue, has meant a pluralization of approaches, sensitivities, foci, concerns and methodologies which on the whole have changed this sub-field of migration studies, making it broader, more diverse and possibly better researched and theorized. It is beyond the scope of this introductory paper to review these emerging works, so, without any claim of exhaustiveness, here is a selective account of their contribution.

First, at the level of approach, many of these recent studies follow a qualitative methodological approach. This approach is often based on multi-sited ethnography involving participant observation and/or different interviewing styles that seek to explore ‘in depth’ and ‘in
context’ the practices, lived experiences, social relationships and views of political engaged migrants and their interlocutors (rather than measuring, testing hypothesis, etc.). Many of these works also follow an inductive approach that produces theoretical inferences and generalizations out of closely observed case studies. Examples of this work can be found in a recent special issue of Focaal (2008) on ‘Migrants, Mobility and Mobilisation’ and in a collection edited by Reed-Danahay and Brettell (Reed-Danahay and Brettell 2008), as well as in Wessendorf (2008), Zinn (2009), and in this special issue in the papers by Anderson, Piper and Lem.

Second, these works also tend to be explicitly positioned and committed. Rather than claiming to speak from an abstract and neutral position, as if located over and above social relations and power dynamics, many of these works have an intrinsic transformative social justice agenda, one which does not take the nation-state and its interests at face value and as a point of departure.

Third, many of these works avoid the dangers of ethnicism or culturalism in studying of migrants’ mobilization, i.e. of attitudes that a priori focus on ethnicity, as they assume and expect migrants’ mobilizations to develop around such axes of differentiation at the expenses of those revolving around others axes or intersections of axis. Indeed, these works have signalled the current relevance of other ‘axes of mobilization’, such as class and gender, that alone or in intersection with ethnicity and each other form the basis for many contemporary migrants’ mobilizations. For example, Anderson (this volume), Hamlin (2008) Hearn (2009) and Però (2008a) have all shown not only how migrants are still mobilizing around issues of class, and doing so cross-ethnically, but also how such mobilization – far from being obsolete as the advocates of neoliberal and third ways multi-culturalism and those of neo-assimilationism alike would claim – can be of crucial importance for the achievements of social and material rights.

Fourth, underpinned by comprehensive conceptions of the political (as such, the feminist and the anthropological ones), many of these studies have shown how migrants can be politically engaged while appearing quiescent. Linked to more engaged traditions of collective action research (e.g. ‘resistance studies’) than those commonly found in migration studies and informed by notions of ‘resistance’ such as that of Scott (1985)3, a number of recent studies have examined instances of such practices in relation to migrants (Stasiulis and Bakan 2005; Gardiner Barber and Lem 2008; Zontini 2008; Hearn 2009; Zinn 2009). Among these, Però (2010) has highlighted the importance of focusing on ‘transition moments’ in migrants’ engagements – when their tacit resistance ‘comes out’ and ‘scales up’ into manifest and larger-scale collective action – as well as on the actual policy impact.
migrants’ action makes on both oppressive policies and on ‘positive’ policies that are unapplied (e.g. when mobilizing occurs to ‘demand’ the enforcement of labour laws against exploitation).

**Mapping the special issue**

Having highlighted some of the key themes in debates about migrant politics and mobilization, we now turn to the content of the substantive papers that make up the rest of this volume. The first substantive paper is by John Mollenkopf and Jennifer Hochschild, and it provides an overview of some of the ways in which migrants and minorities have been incorporated into host societies over the past fifty years or so. A recurrent theme in Mollenkopf and Hochschild’s analysis is the argument that we need to examine the assets and liabilities that migrant groups bring with them as they try to enter the political realm. Drawing on research in the US as well as in Western Europe, they argue that it may well be that migrant political incorporation will become more entrenched in the former, while remaining somewhat weaker in the European context. They situate their account within the context of recent empirical research on the development of migrant political incorporation and mobilization in the US.

This is followed by a wide ranging paper by Chetan Bhatt that is framed around a detailed account of the processes that have shaped what he terms the ‘British Jihad’. Bhatt’s account seeks to locate the actions of jihadi groups in the UK within a wider political frame that is based on a systematic analysis of associations between the UK-based groups and Pakistani militias operating in Kashmir. In developing this account, he seeks to problematize accounts of political Islam that are focused on the state or on transnational migrant communities, and in turn to prioritize the role of ideologies and networks that are based on a ‘political religion’. A recurring theme in his account is the importance of researching the role of specific movements, tendencies and ideologies in shaping jihadi mobilizations, rather than generalizing about ‘global terrorism’.

An important area of recent migration research has focused on the changing forms of incorporation experienced by migrant domestic workers. The experience of this group is the focus of the paper by Bridget Anderson. Anderson’s account focused particularly on the work of Waling Waling, a migrant domestic workers’ organization, and their support group, Kalayaan. She argues forcefully that their campaign to change the migration status of domestic workers needs to be seen as both a form of political mobilization ‘from below’ and a challenge to the construction of migrant workers as victims. Anderson’s critical perspective suggests that there has long been a tendency in
scholarly research to construct migrant workers as victims rather than as active social actors who seek to shape their social and political environments.

The focus of the next paper by Anastasia Bermúdez is on Colombian migrants in Europe, focusing particularly on the transnational political practices of these migrants oriented towards the home country. Her analysis suggests that such forms of mobilization towards the home country can go hand-in-hand with political mobilization in the host society. From this starting point, Bermúdez seeks to explore the connections between Colombian migrants’ political involvement, comparing similarities and differences across geographical locations, as well as highlighting the importance of factors such as gender, type of migration and previous political experiences on migrants’ political agency.

The paper by Winnie Lem takes a somewhat different slant from the other papers in this special issue, exploring as it does the political and economic forces which condition the possibilities for collective action and its absence amongst diasporic populations in urban France. Lem’s analysis draws on research among Chinese small entrepreneurs in France, and argues that that is important to explore de-politicization as a process that can lead to the acceptance of the prevailing order, rather than mobilizations that challenge it. This perspective highlights the importance of looking at forms of political mobilization within a broader analytical framework that seeks to analyse the conditions for the maintenance of order.

The penultimate paper in this special issue is by Nicola Piper, and it is focused on the changing forms of activism around the issue of migrant workers’ rights. Piper argues that in an era of increasingly fluid migration patterns which give rise to complex rights issues transcending the boundaries of states, it is necessary to adopt a transnational perspective in addressing migrants’ socioeconomic and legal insecurities. Her paper contains detailed examples of what such a transnational perspective actually involves, and is suggestive of the need to look beyond nation states.

The concluding substantive paper by Therese O’Toole and Richard Gale completes the analytical focus of this special issue by exploring the changing forms of political engagement and disengagement of young minority activists. Drawing on detailed empirical research on Birmingham and Bradford, O’Toole and Gale seek to understand the role of activism among minority youth within the wider local and national debates about race and ethnicity in British society. They suggest that minority youth activism in the two cities needs to be situated within an analytical framework that highlights both local and transnational networks.
Conclusion

We would like to conclude this introduction by indicating some questions for future research on migrants’ mobilization that seem to stem from the works presented in the above sections. Without claims of exhaustiveness, these would include questions of affects and emotions addressing – for example – the role played by attachments and feelings in migrants’ collective action. Another aspect that would seem to require attention is the question of rewards. It would be important to gain insights into what migrants seem to get out of mobilizing, especially when concrete gains and changes appear clearly out of reach from the outset. Lastly, a third area of research on migrants’ mobilization that seems important to us is around issues of impact. In particular, in addressing this issue, it would be important to explore the impact that migrants’ mobilization has on policy, especially around issues of ‘allies’. At a time when migrants are actively being marginalized in society – e.g. demonized in public and policy debates by right-wing and left-wing parties alike, and excluded from the political process – it is crucial for them to find allies with whom to mobilize to promote their rights and conditions. One obvious place to look for allies is civil society (Moya 2005; de Graauw 2008), especially in those sectors that retain autonomy from government and are not ‘bridled’ or domesticated as a result of participating in the processes of governance and service provision as documented by Gibb (2008), Kugelberg (2010) and Però (2007b). However, civil society is not the only place where migrants can find allies and advocates; the state is another. As it is crucial not to conceive civil society as a homogeneous, virtuous and salvationist entity (Hann 1996; Smith 1999; Hearn 2001), at the same time, we would argue, it is important not to conceive the neoliberal state as a compact and coherent anti-immigrants engine which is strongly committed to and fully effective in enforcing governmental policy. Rather, we should think of the state as a vast and heterogeneous entity made of diverse sectors, levels and people that at times and for a variety of reasons (ethical, ideological, practical, economical, etc.) may not apply governmental immigration policy in the way it is intended by policy-makers. In what Nugent presents as a ‘post-Weberian’ approach, some ‘scholars question the unity of the state. In place of coherence and consistency of purpose, they find state activities to be chaotic and incoherent assemblages of sites, processes, and institutions that lack any underlying, coordinating logic … and that often work at cross-purposes with one another’ (Nugent 2004, p. 198). The implication of this ‘post-Weberian’ conceptualization of the state for the study of migrants’ mobilization is that researchers studying migrants’ mobilization should be prepared to explore and identify the sectors of the state that are ‘uncomfortable’ with applying immigration and integration
policies and that form ‘platforms of advocacy’ for migrants rights together with migrant and civil society organizations. Focusing on these platforms, how they form, operate and impact, is especially important in the current hostile climate, as these platforms may well constitute the best chances for migrants to produce significant policy changes.

In addition to the above questions, there are a number of further more general questions that remain open and in need of more detailed research and analysis. Examples of these questions include: What forms did the political agency of migrants and minorities take in the past? What were their mobilizations about? In what ways did these mobilizations differ from those of the contemporary period? What are the main changes and continuities between the two periods? Is there evidence of more inclusion of migrants and minorities in mainstream political institutions and the political process more generally, both locally and nationally? What evidence is there of continuing forms of racism and exclusion from political participation?

In this introduction, we have sought to outline some of the background and context to the substantive papers that make up this special issue. In doing so, we have located current debates and preoccupations within a somewhat broader analytical and historical frame, suggesting the need to go beyond a narrow definition of migrant and minority politics and mobilization. In particular we have suggested that there is a need to link research in this field to theoretical and conceptual debates about the transformation of politics and culture that is taking place in contemporary society at local, national and transnational levels. We have also pointed to the need for more theoretically informed empirical studies of the forms that such mobilizations take in specific environments. The various papers that make up this special issue do not speak with one voice, but taken together they provide an insight into the complex forms of mobilization that have emerged around minority and migrant communities.

Notes

1. We are grateful to the coordinator of the B3 cluster of IMISCOE, Rainer Baubock, who has supported the workshop, and to Wiebke Sievers for her administrative assistance.
2. Below we report the passage of Jenkins’ speech which is considered seminal:

Integration is perhaps a rather loose word. I do not regard it as meaning the loss, by immigrants, of their own national characteristics and culture. I do not think we need in this country a ”melting pot”, which will turn everybody out in a common mould, as one of a series of carbon copies of someone’s misplaced vision of the stereotyped Englishman . . . I define integration, therefore, not as a flattening process of assimilation but as equal opportunities, coupled with cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance. (Quoted in Grillo 2005, p. 7)
3. Scott’s notion would include seemingly ‘non-political’ practices of dissent of subordinate actors that have the tacit intent to disrupt the oppressive arrangements in which they are embedded.

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