African migrants and trade union mobilisation in Japan

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In the company-centred employment context of Japan, a strong work ethic is considered intrinsic to the success of firms. Social conflict, on the other hand, is viewed as deeply disruptive and thus to be avoided and contained. This paper draws on theories of how conflict is resolved in Japan to examine how African labour migrants deal with work conflicts in Japanese firms. Based on qualitative fieldwork conducted in Tokyo, the paper focuses on migrants’ relationships with their co-workers and on how trade unions represent their workplace grievances. I argue that African workers are expected to assimilate into the dominant work culture but that their cultural diversity and migrant status lead to challenges to the social norms of conflict resolution. This can mean that even if they are mobilising to gain benefits for the entire workforce, their co-workers can be reluctant to support them.
Polish migrant workers, trade unions and mobilisation: myth or reality?

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The scope and extent of the Polish migration following the 2004 accession led to both issues with the poor treatment of Polish workers (Anderson et al, 2006; Hardy and Clark, 2007) and with regard to the labour market and settlement (McKay and Winkelmann-Gleed, 2005; Zaronaitė and Tirzite, 2006). These early on were often inseparable as employers owned living accommodation and failed to undertake even the most basic of employer duties (e.g. provision of contracts). As Kelly (1998) has argued collective organisation and activity ultimately stem from employer actions that generate a sense of injustice or illegitimacy among employees. This of course intersects with notions of class identity (Holgate, 2005) and ultimately the agency of trade unions. This presentation provides a reflection on this early stage of Polish settlement and role that trade unions provided in supporting mobilisations, as well as, questioning the longevity of these trade union approaches.

References
New migration, class and housing

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International migration is frequently blamed for the crisis in the English housing system. Rather than questioning why housing policy under successive governments has failed to secure the supply of reasonable quality, accessible, affordable and secure housing, popular debate has pointed the finger of blame at the relatively large number of new migrants who have arrived into the UK over the last 20 years. This has legitimised new forms of social discrimination against migrants, ranging from subjective discrimination of actors within the housing system, through to the exclusionary measures of government, including restricted rights of access to social housing and housing related benefits. The housing choices of new migrants are therefore being made within a greater system of constraints than those facing longer-term residents. Whilst acknowledging this point, this paper points to convergence in the housing experiences of new migrants and a growing class of people exposed to similar patterns of power, privilege and inequality, who find themselves on the same side of a major fault line in the consumption of housing in England. As the labour insecurities common place within the lives of migrants are extended to an increasing sub-section of the working population via a de-regulated labour market and the growth of low-paid, zero hours contract work, so owner occupation is proving beyond the reach of many households. Meanwhile, reforms to social housing and limited regulation of the private rented serve to render renting ever more expensive and precarious. Consequently, increasing numbers of people are forced, like new migrants, to rely on housing left behind or avoided by others, which is often insecure, overcrowded and in a poor state of repair. Recognising commonalities within the housing experiences of new migrants and an growing sub-section of the wider population raises important questions about the nature of social divisions and inequalities in society. It points to fundamental shared interests that straddle the ‘them and us’ divide common within popular and political debate about migration, and demands that attention shifts from blaming migration for the housing crisis to solving it for the benefit of all.
Migration and social class: insights from the new mobilities paradigm

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It has been argued that the ‘mobility turn’ is over-celebratory regarding human movement across space. Yet, critical studies of mobilities have emerged that refute this, demonstrating how various forms and aspects of mobility are bound up with unequal power relations. This paper engages with debates over migration and mobility through an in depth analysis of three life history interviews recorded in England in 2011. The subjects of the interviews, all men in their fifties and sixties, are former factory workers of south Asian heritage who moved to England as minors. The stories in all their affectivity and sensuousness disrupt standard tropes regarding migration and contribute to understanding of the relations between mobility, fixity, race and class. The built-in historical perspective shows how, looking back, someone who may once have migrated across international borders does not necessarily see that as the most significant moment in their life; how someone’s past moves within a nation state may have greater significance to them than their moves into it; how people who move at one point can also be stuck, reluctantly immobile, at another; and how both the representations and materiality of mobility and fixity are imbued with, and reproduce, class inequality, and racisms.
Dual disempowerment of Chinese migrant workers in transnational ethnic enclaves: a perspective from the UK

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The phenomenon of poor working conditions or labour exploitation in Chinese ethnic economies in western countries can hardly be attributed to one or two isolated factors as it involves the evolution of the world capitalist system. With a focus on the latest development of Chinese immigration and employment conditions in the Chinese business in the UK since the beginning of the 21st century, this paper draws attention to the causes, process and implications of the dual disempowerment, referring to the marginalization of ethnic Chinese workers versus the local host society and ethnic employers. Although class consciousness does exist among Chinese migrant workers, it is difficult for them to mobilise in defence of their common interests. There are a number of factors or relations contributing this process. They include, but not limited to, the establishment of a transnational network for capital and labour supply, intensified competitions between Chinese enterprises, segmentation and fragmentation of Chinese communities, ambiguous and unsupported policy environments in the hostland. A series of empirical studies have been undertaken in East Midlands, UK since 2010, which involved participatory observations of and in-depth interviews with Chinese entrepreneurs, migrant workers and community leaders. This paper aims to address the following questions: What are key factors responsible for the disempowerment process? How do Chinese interact with co-ethnic employers in the UK and elsewhere? Why does class consciousness among Chinese migrant workers matter for both ethnic Chinese and mainstream communities in Europe? What are implications to understand the complexity and mechanisms behind empowering Chinese migrant workers and other vulnerable groups in the UK and beyond?