

Going First Class? New Approaches to Privileged Travel and Movement. *Vered Amit (Ed)*. New York: Berghahn, 2011, 172 pp. \$25.00, cloth.

This volume is the outcome of a panel organized at the 2004 EASA biennial conference in Vienna, Austria. Although this seems a long time ago, the collection still offers refreshingly new anthropological insights on little researched forms of voluntary transnational mobilities in the grey zone between migration and tourism. The title is somewhat misleading in that the relatively privileged groups described – expat spouses, peripatetic professionals, volunteers and labor and lifestyle migrants – certainly not all fly in first class. In other words, this is not an exercise in “studying up”, but an equally important analysis of those middle-classes with the required money, time, skills, or credentials to engage in various forms of border-crossing mobility.

In the thought-provoking introductory chapter, Vered Amit points out that not global convergences but a host of asymmetries link various forms of contemporary cross-border travel. Indeed, geographical mobility does not override and may even exaggerate status distinctions of class, gender, nationality, or race. She asks the critical question whether these asymmetries are not “the source of the cosmopolitanism that has so often been attributed to travel both in popular and scholarly accounts” (p. 8).

The first chapters deal with the lives of those who accompany expat professionals. Sawa Kurotani explores the lives of Japanese expat housewives in the USA, who are “expected to transplant ‘homegrown’ efficiency” (p. 18) in their overseas homemaking work. In their case, more geographical mobility ironically means more domestic fixity. Meike Fechter describes the nature of the leisure spaces accompanying spouses create in Indonesia. She

ethnographically details how these women's lives are "fundamentally structured by boundaries [race, nationality, class, and gender] that they actively construct, maintain, and negotiate" (p. 35).

In her analysis of the peripatetic lifestyles of transnationally mobile consultants, Vered Amit criticizes the "ethnic" template that has dominated anthropological investigation of transnational mobilities. Granovetter's concept of "weak ties" helps her to explain the paradox of globalizing connections, namely that "they are likely to be most effectively facilitated by 'weak' rather than 'strong' interpersonal links" (p. 69). Cathy Greenhalgh focuses on the freelance labor of well-established cinematographers "on location" across the globe. Although their constant work-team flexibilities may seem glamorous to the outsider, the conducted interviews reveal "it requires a hard-won, accrued competence to work and live in this manner" (p. 85).

Karen Fog Olwig analyzes the migration life-story narratives of Caribbean families. The close linkages between geographical and social mobility for their middle-class status point to "the importance of critically examining the ways in which categories employed in migration research may attain particular meaning within the sociocultural contexts in which migration takes place" (p. 87). Angela Torresan describes how Brazilian migrants strive for some kind of intermediary position between their Brazilian identity and their status as middle-class immigrants in Portugal. The clash of representations reaffirm that "images promoted by international media industries play a crucial role in structuring people's expectations ... of what they perceive as a privileged position that they should strive to achieve" (p. 106).

The last two chapters explore the liminalities of aspirational movement. Caroline Oliver focuses on retired British lifestyle migrants in Spain. Their narratives about the transformative

potential of travel and the opportunities for self-discovery reveal a contradiction “between the freedom, sociability, and egalitarian possibilities imagined and emerging out of liminal travel and the strong individualism espoused by those engaging in exactly that practice” (p. 129).

Margaret Rodman’s contribution zooms in on the experiences of resident volunteers (with the privilege of time) at a spiritual retreat center in Hawai’i. She describes two dialogical aspects to their open-ended journey: “a metaphorical travel that is an ‘inner journey’ of self-discovery, and the real-world travel to spend time [at the center]” (p. 155). While these people’s transformative paths are recognized as individual and unique, they have many common cultural dimensions.

Drawing on a diverse set of ethnographic case studies, *Going First Class* teases out the scope and implications of the relatively privileged circumstances under which middle-class transnational mobilities are being undertaken and how these create tensions between different hierarchies and criteria of status and privilege. As such, the volume provides an in-depth anthropological answer to the proponents of the “mobility turn” in the social sciences (mostly sociologists and geographers). Although more attention could have been paid to the methodological challenges posed by an anthropology of transient transnational relations and lifestyles and to their historical genealogies, the collection does contribute to a greater understanding of how the global middle-classes engage in transnational mobilities as a form of asymmetrical distinction.

Noel B. Salazar

University of Leuven