

... studying transnational class relations is replete with theoretical and methodological problems, which have yet to be resolved satisfactorily. (Embong, 2000: 999)

Social class is normally thought about and researched within national settings we tend to assume, usually quite rightly, that national histories, cultures, economies and political relations construct and inflect social class in particular ways. But in the context of globalisation and its flows and mobilities we may have to begin to think about social class in new ways both globally and locally, in terms of both differences and convergences.

In this paper I want to explore the possibility of the emergence of a global middle class, and the role of education in the production and reproduction of this class. I shall do this by; (1) reviewing and pulling together some of the existing literature on transnational classes, although this is a rather sparse and diverse literature; (2) considering some relevant trends within international education; (3) identifying some questions and issues for further research<sup>1</sup>. Specifically the paper gestures towards a set of research questions which address the relationships between a new global middle class, new forms of 'international education' and the formation of post-national, cosmopolitan sensibilities.

## Global Classes!

Like the literatures in other areas of social class analysis, writing around

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the topic of the Global Middle Class (GMC) is characterised by confusions, contradictions and conceptual slippages. A variety of categories and descriptors are used which either refer to different objects of analysis or conflate different phenomena within unhelpful generalities. What I want to do here is to offer some clarifications of what might be meant by the term GMC (and thus also what it excludes). As in other fields of class analysis and class theory the issues involved are to do with structures, that is categories of class and the boundaries between them, cultures, the specificity of classed lifestyles and behaviours, and identity, that is the sense that people have of themselves and others as of a class, the ‘social structures in their heads’.

The common starting point for almost all of the contributors to the field of trans-national class relations is the processes of globalisation and specifically the point that the transnational corporation (TNC) has ‘unleashed the processes of deterritorialisation of capital’ and thus ‘reconfigured class relations’ (Embong, 2000: 991). That is to say, if we think about social class in relation to conditions of employment, to forms of work and control of the means of production then our conceptualisations of class and its constituent components have to take into account the globalisation of capital and in particular the de-nationalisation of some forms of labour. At one end of these new forms of work is the export of sweated labour from developed to later developing economies, and concomitant forms of economic migration, at the other end are ‘the various actors involved in the globalization process (who are) are at the same time forces for “capturing globalization”’ (Embong, 2000: 991). Between the two is a relatively new kind of professional and managerial transnational employee who we might think about as the global middle class.

For our purposes the key distinctions that have to be drawn are between a GMC and what Sklair (2001) calls the ‘transnational capitalist class’ (TCC), and more finely within what (Cox, 1981) calls the ‘transnational managerial