

Katharyne Mitchell**Crossing the Neoliberal Line: Pacific Rim Migration and the Metropolis**

Temple University Press, 2004, 296 pp.

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In *Crossing the Neoliberal Line* Katharyne Mitchell addresses some of the key theoretical questions of the era — transnationalism, globalization, neoliberalism and multiculturalism — while clearly locating these contradictory processes within specific spaces and places in Vancouver. Mitchell began working on this book for her dissertation research in geography, arriving in Vancouver in the early 1990s at a time of unparalleled transition that Mitchell refers to a ‘going global’. The book explores how conflicts over the transition of urban spaces were experienced through new subjects and objects redefining neighbourhoods, embedded within larger processes of globalizing capitalism, transnational migration, and drawing upon various ideological variants of what she terms ‘social liberalism’ and neoliberalism to produce/resist particular types of changes. The result is a book that is analytically rich, empirically detailed, and ethnographically grounded.

Mitchell’s main argument is that liberalism, as it has developed in Britain and other sites such as Canada, is both inherently ‘intolerance of the unfamiliar’, and ‘fundamentally national’ in its formation. Thus certain kinds of global flows central to neoliberal state transformations, in particular the flow of ‘wealthy transnational migrants and their capital’, disrupt national liberal narratives about community, citizenship and multiculturalism and result in tensions between state practices that facilitate globalization and local practices and liberal definitions of meaning. These tensions are exemplified in racialized conflicts in Vancouver as investors and business immigrants from Hong Kong, courted through neo-liberal policies of provincial and federal governments, began to arrive in significant numbers and clashed with (largely white middle-class) residents over redefining urban spaces.

Mitchell explores specific sites of urban struggles involved in reshaping Vancouver in the 1980s and 90s that often erupted into overtly racist encounters, but which, she argues, were simultaneously embedded in marshalling complex and contradictory liberal and neoliberal principles. In chapter 2 she explores the entry of Vancouver real estate onto the global stage after Hong Kong billionaire Li Ka-shing purchased the former Expo 86 site on the north shore of False Creek. The subsequent frenzy of on-shore and off-shore property speculation, urban redevelopment, and dislocation of older rental neighbourhoods, including those in the middle-class west side of the city, was epitomized in the image of white middle-class elderly women being evicted from low-density apartment buildings in Kerrisdale. Mitchell teases out the discursive strategies used in this conflict over urban space, where protesters drew on liberal narratives of the livable community against the rapacious greed of capitalist developers, while developers and new immigrants pointed to the racist and exclusionary overtones of protests against development, and government responded with cultural festivals to emphasize friendship and cultural exchange. How discourses of multiculturalism were successfully employed and manipulated in the interests of multinational capital is further explored in chapter 3, the only chapter that is not embedded in a dense ethnography of urban change at the local level. Mitchell’s main argument here is that transnationalism disrupts ‘liberal multiculturalism’ which is embedded in a territorial nation with notions of national tolerance for the national good,

transforming it into 'neoliberal multiculturalism' that reflects the logic of integration on a global scale. Thus older discourses of multiculturalism that emphasized the need for people to get along for the good of the city/ nation were increasingly replaced with the need to check racism so that the city/ nation could become/remain 'key nodes in the expanding network of global capitalism'.

In chapters 4 and 5 Mitchell returns to case studies of conflicts over land use and governance. Chapter 4 explores alliances between developers, planners, politicians and recent Hong Kong immigrants in a series of hearings over modifications to rezoning, the preservation of trees, and media coverage of some of these issues. Mitchell explores the multiple ways that interpretations of liberalism were used to promote specific political and economic agendas by all sides in these debates, with middle-class white residents drawing on discourses of community good 'based on a British-inflected cultural vision of stability and harmony', while developers, politicians and academic planners embraced reference to progress in a global community. Chapter 5 examines the well documented controversy over so-called 'monster homes' as older homes were demolished to make way for larger and aesthetically different new homes in the affluent west side of the city. Mitchell argues that the influx of wealthy Hong Kong residents with the resources to reshape elite urban space in images they considered more culturally appropriate simultaneously disturbed established/British notions of domesticity, home and belonging. She concludes that it is because territorial space is a key marker of belonging for everyone — migrants and long-term residents alike — that urban transformation is a key site in which to study 'the spatial politics of liberal formation'.

Crossing the Neoliberal Line is a major accomplishment: the text is accessible, theoretically sophisticated, well documented, and grounded in an in-depth and complex understanding of social change and urban politics in Vancouver. The book does have some limitations, however. It fails to engage more extensively with the various ways in which class politics was and is played out across this landscape. For example, although Mitchell acknowledges that redevelopment and escalating real estate prices were far more injurious to poor and working-class families, which of course includes many immigrants from diverse backgrounds, she does not attempt to explain the media's preoccupation with middle-class protests to the exclusion of attention to other forms of protest against redevelopment and neoliberalism during the same time period. The latter were located predominantly on the east-side and tended to focus on poverty and the erosion of the welfare state; what impact did they have in affecting/resisting changing urban spaces and discourses of neoliberalism? Secondly, the impact of migration — and the troubling of multicultural discourses — in the 1980s and 90s was by no means limited to affluent immigrants from Hong Kong. By 2001 immigrants constituted 46% of the population of the City of Vancouver (30% of whom are Chinese origin), and 49% identify as people of colour. Mitchell does not tell us how significant flows of immigrants from other parts of the world affected, participated in, or were affected by urban redevelopment. In particular, we learn nothing about how working-class immigrants or those of modest financial means fared, though the corresponding and important shift of immigrant reception from inner city to suburban neighbourhoods in greater Vancouver is surely one part of this puzzle. Finally, *Crossing the Neoliberal Line* remains ungendered, and thus leaves unanswered questions of how gendered subjects may have differentially appealed to discourses of liberalism and neoliberalism in these struggles over urban space, community and belonging.

Notwithstanding its limitations, this book is well worth reading. It could be usefully employed in sociology graduate courses in a wide range of fields, including Canadian society, racialization, urban studies, globalization, migration and transnationalism. Katharyne Mitchell is to be commended for writing an insightful book that deserves to be widely read.

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Gillian Creese's current search explores processes of settlement and belonging experienced by immigrant women and their families in Vancouver. Her 1999 book *Contracting Masculinity: Gender, Class and Race in a White-Collar Union, 1944-1994* was reviewed in *CJS Online* in 2000. In 2003, she reviewed Glenna Matthews, *Silicon Valley, Women, and the California Dream: Gender, Class, and Opportunity in the Twentieth Century*.

<http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/cjscopy/reviews/crossingneoliberal.html>

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