WORKSHOP PROGRAM & ABSTRACTS

Cities, Mobile Subjects and Transformations in Citizenship in the Asia Pacific

16 and 17 April, 2014
UWS Parramatta South Campus, Building EA, Level 1, Room 02

Wednesday 16 April

9.00am-9.30am. Welcome

9.30am-10.30am. Keynote Presentation 1

The incongruence of migration and citizenship categorisations during ‘return’: transnational migration circuits in the Asia Pacific
Elaine Lynn-Ee Ho, Department of Geography, National University of Singapore

Transnational migration circuits linking emigration and immigration countries have captured the attention of political leaders, policymakers and academics alike because of the economic relationships and social cultural-ties contained within such spatial networks. However, the formation of these circuits is shaped by the extent to which migrants have the right to return to their origin or destination country. The ‘territorial trap’, or ‘the privileging of a national-territorial conception of the state’, that was described by John Agnew back in 1994 persists in shaping the ontology of return and guiding our study towards return migration. The right to return impacts migrants’ willingness and ability to engage in circular journeys, yet it has received less scholarly attention thus far compared to immigration rights. This paper will draw on examples of transnational migration circuits in the Asia-Pacific region to argue that, first, taking the national territory and nationalisation of migration control as the starting point in return migration analyses obscures the geopolitical framings that condition the right to return. Second, the paper urges researchers to be attentive to geographies of ‘return’, oftentimes anchored in urban centres, that may however transcend the spatial imaginary of the nation-state.

10.30am -11.00am. Morning Tea

11.00am- 12.30pm. Paper Session 1

Embedded mobilities and migrant place-making practices in suburban Sydney
Rebecca Williamson, Department of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Sydney
This paper argues for the insertion of a more dynamic theoretical approach to understand processes of migrant incorporation in cities. Such a perspective would need to excavate the entangled everyday mobilities and forms of emplacement that instantiate migrants in city spaces. The continued influence of methodological nationalism in the disciplines of migration and transnationalism tends to perpetuate over-simplified ideas about human mobility that often privilege dominant and highly spatialised notions of national belonging. This paper draws on theoretical frameworks that combine perspectives on scale, mobility and translocality to examine the interplay between migrant incorporation and the production of urban space (Hall, 2012; Brickell and Datta, 2011; Collins, 2011) that problematises this frame. I draw on a study of the quotidian geographies of recent migrants and the co-production of public space in a multi-ethnic suburb in South-west Sydney. The everyday, embodied and material dimensions of migrant place-making practices are traced in order to “map out how other spaces and places can become significant during the process of migration and movement”, beyond national space (Brickell and Datta, 2011). Rather than assuming a sedentary approach to migrant incorporation or settlement, I argue that examining everyday place-making practices and micro-mobilities can contribute to a better understanding of how migrants come to be urban actors and how they might participate more fully in substantive forms of urban citizenship.

The newest Chinese diaspora and the socio-spatial transformation of Sydney’s Chinatown
Ien Ang & Alexandra Wong, Institute for Culture and Society, University of Western Sydney

This paper seeks to examine the recent transformation of Sydney’s urban space through the lens of Chinatown, a long time popular “point of entry” for Chinese migrants to Sydney, and the newest wave of Chinese migrants from the People’s Republic of China, the second largest migrant group in Australia after India. Despite their differences from the previous Chinese migrants from southern Chinese provinces and Hong Kong in terms of spatial attributes and social characteristics, this group of diaspora is relatively under-studied in the recent migration literature in Australia. Yet, with their capital and transnational networks, they have made a substantial impact on the urban development of Sydney’s Chinatown and CBD area through various forms of economic production and consumption. Based on in-depth interviews and content analysis from various media and official documents, the aim of this paper is twofold: first, to capture the complex social, economic and cultural processes through which these Chinese diaspora are helping transform Chinatown into a hub for transnational activities; second, to shed light on the social heterogeneity of Chinese diaspora and the manner in which certain public discourses constitute their identity in the context of rise of China and increased Chinese mobility.

The world as concession: thinking through the COSCO terminal at Piraeus
Brett Neilson, Institute for Culture and Society, University of Western Sydney

In 2009 the Greek government granted Chinese state-owned company COSCO a 35 year lease on Pier 2 of the container port of Piraeus. The concession functions as a transhipment zone where containers arriving on ships from China can be transferred onto feeder ships travelling elsewhere in the Mediterranean without incurring customs duties. A deal between COSCO and Hewlett Packard has sealed an arrangement where hardware products manufactured in China will be transported through the terminal and the Piraeus site is widely identified as China’s ‘gateway to Europe’. With attention to the logistical technologies that facilitate mobilities through this space, the paper examines the COSCO concession in Piraeus from the point of view of labour politics, the production of urban space and the role of infrastructure in building the material fabric of the contemporary capitalist world.

12.30pm-1.30pm. Lunch

1.30pm-2.30pm. Keynote Presentation 2

Spatial capital, citizenship & thorny fields of transnational urban space
Ryan Centner, Department of Geography & Environment, London School of Economics

Cities are riddled with transnational spaces that link to a variety of elsewhere – whether via privileged circuits of financial capital, humble networks of labour migration, shadowy networks of less-than-licit activity, or myriad other webs of connection. An entire generation of ‘global’ urban scholarship has explored these linkages, including growing research on the importance of the urban built environment as a site for the speculative accumulation of transnationally mobile investments. A rather separate body
of work has delved into struggles over citizenship – variously defined – in transnational cities, including the ideas of the right to the city and spatial citizenship. This paper intervenes in these two broad lines of scholarship by forging new ideas from an uncommon, vexed dialogue between Pierre Bourdieu and Henri Lefebvre: it further develops the concept of ‘spatial capital’ with reference to notions of citizenship; it also cultivates the idea of the ‘field’ of urban space, specifically focusing on examples of deep transnational connection such as those that characterise parts of many Pacific cities today. These concepts open an analytic space where it is possible to understand how transnationally fuelled changes in the built environment and local struggles over citizenship together shape shifts in the visions, strategies, and everyday practices of the people inhabiting and making use of these thorny, transforming spaces.

2.30pm-3.00pm. Afternoon Tea

3.00pm-4.30pm. Paper Session 2

**Student-workers and tourist-workers: temporal-spatial boundaries and labour hierarchies in the Australian cosmopolitan city**
Shanthi Robertson, Institute for Culture and Society, University of Western Sydney

Ethnic and cultural difference have long been regularly encountered and produced in Australian cities, yet these processes have often only been understood through the lens of permanent ‘settler’ migration. Recent migration policies are seeing increasing numbers of transnational workers residing in Australia with various noncitizen statuses and uncertain temporal horizons. Among these are student-workers and tourist-workers, who, although constructed in policy through transient mobilities of education and leisure travel, play increasingly important roles in Australian cities as migrant labour. Drawing on fieldwork with student-workers and tourist-workers in Melbourne and Sydney, this paper seeks to examine how the temporal and legal status of these mobile subjects is entangled in complex ways with particular sites of production, consumption and labour within the cosmopolitan urban environment. It looks in particular at how the identities of student-workers and tourist-workers are constructed through specific temporal and spatial boundaries within urban space as well as how they are implicated within racialised hierarchies of labour and spaces of cosmopolitan consumption. This highlights some of the complex socio-spatial relationships between and citizen and noncitizen subjects both within and across ethnic and racial boundaries in the cosmopolitan city.

**Living on the Edge: subaltern cosmopolitanism in Singapore’s Indonesian Hinterland**
Michele Ford, Sydney Southeast Asia Centre, University of Sydney & Lenore Lyons, Department of Indonesian Studies, University of Sydney

When people think of cosmopolitans, they think of jet-setting elites or the chattering classes flitting between countries and consuming the ‘global’ through food, film and other aspects of their privileged lives. But not all cosmopolitans are rich or educated. In fact, some of them don’t even travel. Whether or not Riau Islanders choose or can afford to travel across the border, the visibility of Singaporeans in their towns, on their televisions, and in their newspapers – and their very proximity – imbribrates Singapore in their daily lives. This knowingness has consequences for their understanding of the city state: whereas most Indonesians see Singapore as some kind of paradise, awash with fancy shopping centres and the other trappings of modernity, Riau Islanders’ deep-seated understanding of life in Singapore precludes such blind admiration.

This paper argues that this knowingness sets Riau Islanders apart from the vast majority of working- and lower middle-class Indonesians. Living on the edge of a very large nation-state and on the doorstep of a global city, their daily lives are infused with ‘the global’; their consumption habits and interactions with foreigners fostering a worldview that tends to be outward-looking and open while also being grounded in the realities – and advantages – of ‘the local’. In short, as a consequence of living ‘on the edge’, Riau Islanders don’t have to leave home to be cosmopolitan.

**Movement, network, conviviality: inhabiting translocalities**
Greg Noble, Institute for Culture and Society, University of Western Sydney
The starting point for this paper is the way that the tensions between mobilities and moorings – often glossed through the notion of translocality – call for particular kinds of capacities and literacies. These capacities and literacies constitute resources for inhabiting the ‘turbulence’ – the disjunctive and conjunctive interplay – that ensues from the ‘constellations of mobility’ that inscribe contemporary cities (Cresswell 2010). The paper explores the informal, daily practices through which differences are negotiated in the experiences of a culturally diverse neighbourhood. It undertakes a kind of phenomenology of the labour involved in ‘everyday conviviality’: forms of motility and practices of exchange which produce local liveability. These practices are bound up in ‘loops of neighbourhood’ (Bissell 2013) which people navigate on a daily basis. The competent negotiation of these ‘loops’ enable people to make life habitable amidst a wider set of local, regional, national and transnational networks and flows.

**Thursday 17 April**

**9.00am-10.00am. Keynote Presentation 3**

**Mobility, peripherality and the politics of migrant lives**

Francis L. Collins, School of Environment, University of Auckland

This paper explores the politics of migration through a focus on the intersections between labour migration regimes and the everyday lives of migrants in cities. The typical goal of such regimes is to generate, codify and regulate mobility of productive subjects that can be placed outside of existing political order in peripheral spaces of society. The contention of this paper is that while such regimes are largely successful in reworking the socio-legal status of migrants, the desire for control is often displaced at the level of everyday life, the ordinary and extraordinary presence and practices of migrants as urban residents. To explore this disjuncture the paper focuses on the narratives and everyday lives of South East Asian labour migrants in the Seoul Metropolitan Region. Starting from the notion of the urban periphery as a spatio-temporal configuration that manifests marginalisation but is also potentially generative, innovative and destabilising, this paper explores three ways in which mobility and migrant lives disrupt the mechanisms and expectations of migration regimes: 1) becoming undocumented and the subversion of control; 2) the mobile commons that emerges in ordinary acts of survival; and 3) tactics of recognition that challenge the peripheral location of migrants. These practices of subversion, solidarity and recognition illustrate the political content of mobility and migrant lives and point to its potential for challenging and reworking the everyday fabric of urban life.

**10.00am-11.00am. Paper Session 3**

**The curation of India’s motley infrastructure by mobile elites**

Thomas Birtchnell, School of Social Science, University of Wollongong

India's mega-cities are spaces of extremes and their snugly adjacent slums and skyscrapers are commonly invoked in commentaries on the region's proudful aspirations for economic growth. In this paper I survey the changing nature of a slice of an Indian mega-city from the lofty perspectives of mobile elites who make passes through distinct infrastructural corridors and leave trails in their wakes perceivable to those cognizant of the trickle down nature of cultures of excess. Mobile elites are cast in this paper as curators of urban corridors deftly shaping the spaces they frequent according to cosmopolitan ideals of the urban idyll. Contributing to a growing literature on Indian urban transformation this paper follows an elite consumer movement in an Indian mega-city real estate campaign through its various semantic and logistical route-ways. The paper tallies the various predations of spiritual, indigenous and local cultures that occur in order to construct a trend that is palatable to consumers of global luxury, yet who remain sensitive to India's internal fashions and benchmarks of taste.

“Of course he's paid more”: spatial and racial hierarchies of middling transnationals in Singapore

Amanda Wise & Selvaraj Velayutham, Department of Sociology, Macquarie University
This paper builds on emerging literature around ‘middling transnationals’ (cf Ho, 2011). Drawing on empirical research among Indian IT workers in a global business park in Singapore, the paper advances two propositions. It argues that there has been insufficient consideration of transnational skilled migration in terms of national and racial hierarchies of opportunity, rights and conditions; and that so far, literature on skilled transnationals has been too receiving country centric. IT is an interesting example of a highly transnational skilled occupation that has become associated with workers from India. It is argued that IT has become associated with India in ways that naturalise precarious forms of employment and attracts less favourable conditions than occupational categories more associated with White professionals. Using the example of Singapore, we argue that conditioning occurs via four intersecting factors. First, Singapore has a long-standing tradition of visa hierarchies which situate White, European transnational elites at the apex of the occupational hierarchy, and dark skinned workers from the Indian sub-continent at the bottom. Although ‘dark skinned’ workers have traditionally been low waged low skilled, perceptions of the recent flow of middling transnational skilled Indians builds upon this history of racial sorting. Second, we suggest consideration needs to be given to deeper social, cultural and historical analysis of how labour has been conditioned historically and in the present era in sending countries like India and how this in turn translates into conditions in receiving countries with respect to what workers accept as ‘their due’ and what they consider to be normal. Third, we suggest a more global circulation of colonial era ideas of racial hierarchy continue to cast a long shadow even to the most modern of occupations like IT. Fourth, IT as an industry has emerged as a quintessential post-industrial service industry characterised by highly precarious subcontracting forms of transnational labour supply. And finally, we argue that places like Singapore’s collection of ‘global business parks’ further embed, both materially and discursively, ideas of transnational exceptionalism of this labour category.

11.00am-11.30am. Morning Tea

11.30am-1.00pm. Paper Session 4

Transnational couch-surfing and global graffiti: ‘keepin’ it real’ through accommodation choice
Cameron McAuliffe, Urban Research Centre, School of Social Sciences and Psychology, University of Western Sydney

Graffiti is a mobile practice par excellence. From its formative presence on the subways of New York, through to contemporary manifestations as a global urban visual culture, graffiti has been conceived as a practice disarticulated from many of the constraints of urban spatial regulation. In this paper I will first trace the changing practices that have resulted from the expansion of graffiti and ‘street art’ as a global visual culture. The success of particular graffiti writers and street artists in Sydney has provided new levels of transnational mobility as they are courted by urban spatial managers, cultural entrepreneurs and corporate brand managers in aspiring global cities. This mobility injects them as unsettling agents in local political economies of space. In the second half of the paper I reflect on the way transnational mobility has impacted on the moral economy of graffiti and street art, as legal and sanctioned creativity replaces the formerly transgressive acts of spatial appropriation, and how writers’ choice of accommodation in their travels reproduces social fields and might reflect attempts for them to ‘keep it real’.

The transnational space of heritage
Denis Byrne, Institute for Culture and Society, University of Western Sydney

Many countries now include ‘migrant heritage’ among the categories of cultural heritage that are recorded and conserved and which are deemed to have a part in telling the national story. Australia is a case in point and the heritage of Chinese migration and temporary settlement in Australia has long been a subject of interest. Many of the houses, temples, shops, restaurants, and gold mining infrastructure built by Chinese in Australia are listed on heritage registers and many are protected by legislation. These structures and places are interpreted as evidence of Chinese cultural traditions flowing to Australia and becoming part of the Australian ‘story’. What tends not to be emphasised, or even mentioned in many instances, is that a reverse flow of people, objects and ideas was directed back to China. From the mid-19th century, for example, houses, schools and temples were built in Guangdong villages with money repatriated by Chinese working in Australia, the designs of these structures often reflecting the overseas experience.
My particular interest is in exploring the potential of the transnational heritage of the Chinese southern diaspora for building cross-border dialogue and understanding between China and Australia. The historic buildings and other objects produced in the China-Australia diasporic field have significant potential, as a focus of study and interpretation, to promote bi-lateral cultural diplomacy.

**Communicative ecologies, social differentiation and civic participation in Denpasar**
Jerry Watkins, School of Humanities and Communication Arts, University of Western Sydney & Emma Baulch, School of Culture, History and Language, Australian National University

Our paper reports on a 2013 fieldwork study into HIV AIDS health counsellors in Denpasar, Indonesia— one of the world’s largest markets for social networks. Mobile devices and networks are key to the community of practice of these non-government health counsellors, who serve as intermediaries between official bodies—such as state hospitals and community health centres— and sex workers and drug users whose activities are deemed unlawful. This interaction brings the health workers into frequent contact with new forms of belonging and civic participation, heightened by the social mobility triggered by the changing built environments and labour markets resulting from the boom in hotel and related construction in Bali over the past decade. Many of the sex workers and their client base of migrant labourers come from other parts of Indonesia, as do a number of counsellors—and the professional dependence of the counsellors on their mobile devices is reinforced by the high level of emotional support that social networks provide. Preliminary findings suggest that mobile networks offer different modes of communication to the counsellors including listening, surveillance of field staff, and broadcasting key health messages. Therefore a counsellor’s communicative ecology can constitute attentive, interactive and monological modes of communication.

1.00pm-2.00pm. Lunch

2.00pm-3.30pm. Institute for Culture and Society Seminar Series Roundtable

Roundtable Discussion. ‘Cities and mobile subjects - new directions for research’
Elaine Ho, Ryan Centner, Francis Collins and Shanthi Robertson

3.30pm-4.00pm. Afternoon Tea