

ICS Seminar Series

INSTITUTE FOR CULTURE AND SOCIETY

Noncitizens in Contemporary Australia: Consumption, Contract and Resistance

Dr Shanthi Robertson

Date

Thursday 18 September

Time

11.30am – 1pm

Venue

EB.2.21 Parramatta
(South) Campus

Abstract

Australia has experienced a rapid and radical shift in its immigration regime over the last 20 years, from a dominant paradigm of permanent settlement and full political membership to a complex range of temporary statuses and 'gradations' of rights occurring within heterogeneous and 'staggered' migration flows. While many other Western countries have long histories of transient and noncitizen migrants moving in and out of their borders, in Australia this remains a relatively recent phenomenon. This paper thus seeks to situate the large numbers of noncitizen subjects now living and working in Australia within a context of the workings of 'millennial capitalism' (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001), which renders labour invisible and foregrounds consumption and contract in the relationship between self, state and society. I argue that migration governance has increased intakes of migrants who are ostensibly temporary, but often in fact seeking permanent membership. The various fractured and fragmented migration journeys that this creates work to construct citizenship as a mode of uneven contractual exchange, within which investment of financial and labour capital, as well as particular consumption practices and performances of desirable migrant subjectivities are 'exchanged' for citizenship rights and status. The 'promise of citizenship' (Lee and Pratt 2012), however, embodies forms of 'systemic violence' (Žižek 2008) and works to construct intimate forms of state power in which noncitizens become complicit in their own intensified governance. Policy mechanisms and narratives further construct noncitizen subjectivities in ways that minimise the capacity of any incipient solidarities of resistance to state control.

Biography

Dr Shanthi Robertson is a Career Development Research Fellow at the Institute for Culture and Society. Shanthi was awarded her PhD in International Studies from RMIT University in 2009. She worked as a lecturer in Global Studies and researcher at the Globalism Research Centre at RMIT University until she joined the Institute in 2013. Her research interests centre on migration and multiculturalism, particularly temporary labour migration, citizenship and urban transformation in the Asia-Pacific region. Her work has been published in several international journals, including *Ethnic and Racial Studies*; *Population, Space and Place*; *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*; *Journal of Intercultural Studies*; and *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. Her first book, *Transnational student-migrants and the state: the education-migration nexus*, was published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2013.