

GLOBAL POLYCENTRICITY IN MIGRATION STUDIES



4 - 5 DECEMBER 2023
NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

Global polycentricity in migration studies:
Mapping the invisible work of 'racial capital' beyond Western field sites

Asia has experienced the fastest levels of development and migration growth in the last 30 years (Khanna 2019). Mobility to and from the Persian Gulf constitutes the largest 'migration corridor' in the world (Rajan & Oommen 2020), with Gulf Arab states repositioning themselves as West Asian rather than only Middle Eastern. Yet Gulf countries, much like states in South(east) Asia, are still neglected as 'peripheries' (Thiollet & Vignal 2016) in research agendas on the transnational circulation of people, goods, and capital. Migration scholars continue to resort to analytical frameworks and models that emerge predominantly from empirical contexts in Western Europe and North America, thus reifying static, if not 'provincial' (Chakrabarty 2000), modes of inquiry. This Western-centric dominance in migration studies leaves under-explored the global diversity of the migrant experience and equally, limits conceptual horizons.

This lacuna is addressed by focusing on differential inclusion in a variety of post-colonial nation-building projects outside of established field sites in Europe and North America. Papers submitted to this workshop will present case studies from alternative global contexts that explore how new configurations resulting from migration complicate ethnonational belonging in and across Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. This workshop takes specific interest in mapping the *intimate* work that different migrant actors and groups put into staging, crafting, redefining, or realigning their 'racial capital' during and after migration, and the ways in which these everyday moves (across societies, communities, and labor markets) intersect with the dominant (or alternative) tropes of the racial formations at hand, traveling idea(l)s in specific cultural milieus, and co-constitutive efforts at transnational class-making. The qualitative (neo-Bourdieuian) concept of racial capital (Alloul 2020) is particularly useful in rendering legible the empirical dynamism that characterize migration-led inequalities across societies. Indeed, given the continued significance of racialized status-making globally, and the social and economic privileges that come with it locally, it is important to pay attention to the ways in which 'race' is performed, articulated, and contested at the everyday level in place-specific ways.

In taking up an epistemological perspective that is grounded in and starting from peripheries of academic knowledge production, this Collection seeks to advance a decolonial migration optic generating alternative understandings of concepts typically used to study international migration and mobility. In discussing status mobility and racial capital in often restrictive migration and citizenship regimes beyond the well-researched field sites of Europe and North America, this Collection explores instances of status-making and boundary-crossing that are predicated on empirical and epistemological starting points elsewhere. These analytical explorations allow for a dialogue with existing paradigms and debates in migration studies, and cater to a more inclusive, polycentric, and comprehensive understanding of international migration.

Workshop Organisers:

Associate Professor Laavanya Kathiravelu (NTU Singapore)

Assistant Professor Jaafar Alloul (Utrecht University)

Workshop Programme

4 December 2023 (Monday)	
Venue: The Hive (Level 2), LHS TR+ 50.	
0930 - 1000	ARRIVAL AND REGISTRATION (bus from hotel departs at 9am)
1000 - 1015	OPENING & WELCOME REMARKS
	Laavanya Kathiravelu & Jaafar Alloul Nanyang Technological University, Singapore & Utrecht University
1015 - 1135	PANEL 1: Negotiating racial privilege
Chair/discussant	Laavanya Kathiravelu Nanyang Technological University
1015 – 1035	'I am still an Outsider here': The sense of belonging and home among 'privileged white migrants' in Singapore and Brunei Diotima Chatteraj Nanyang Technological University Ahsan Ullah University of Brunei Darussalam
1035 – 1055	Counterproductive racial capital: Concealing Chineseness in Hong Kong Yao-Tai Li University of New South Wales, Australia
1055 – 1115	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
1115 - 1145	BREAK
1145 - 1315	PANEL 2: Racialised borders and belonging
Chair/discussant	Chahrazad Abdallah University of Quebec
1145 – 1205	The value of "Ummah": Racio-religious capital and Rohingya Refugees' world-building Practices Nursyazwani Jamaludin University of Pennsylvania
1205 – 1225	Cultivating Defection: How Ottoman-Arabs Harvested Indigenous Muslim Knowledge in the Islamic World, and its 20th century Consequences Isa Blumi Stockholm University
1225 – 1245	Permanent Temporariness: An Auto-ethnographic Study of the Turkish Migration Policies and Practices Sanam Vaghefi University of Victoria, Canada
1245 – 1315	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
1315– 1415	LUNCH
1415 - 1645	PANEL 3: More than race in urban space
Chair/discussant	Stephen Campbell Nanyang Technological University (NTU)
1415 – 1435	Race no more: Context and social capital in Africa's urban gateways Kabiri Bule University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg Loren B. Landau University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg & Oxford University
1435 – 1455	Entrepreneurs of desire: space, place, race as ordering mechanisms in Singapore's sex industry Raksha Mahtani Nanyang Technological University/CNRS @ Create

1455 – 1515	Racialized Caste Capital in a Rapidly Urbanizing India Deepak Malghan Indian Institute of Management (IIT), Bangalore
1515 – 1645	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
1645 – 1800	Travel to Dinner Venue
1800 – 2000	CONFERENCE DINNER (For Speakers, Discussants & Invited Guests:) Venue: Sakuntala Restaurant (Race Course Road) Transport from NTU to the dinner venue will be arranged.

5 December 2023 (Tuesday)	
Venue: The Hive (Level 2), LHS TR+ 50.	
1000 – 1130	PANEL 5: Racialised affective labour
<i>Chair/discussant</i>	Phil Kasinitz City University of New York (CUNY))
1000 – 1020	“It’s cheaper to hire Filipinos and they’re great English speakers”: A raciolinguistic approach to labor migration in the United Arab Emirates. Jeconiah Dreisbach De La Salle University
1020 – 1040	Foreign English teachers: Racial hierarchy and English teaching in China Raviv Litman University of Amsterdam
1040-1100	@MinorityVoices: Racialised communicative labour and the emergence of anti-racism in Singapore Selvaraj Velayutham Macquarie University Bittiandra Chand Somiah National University of Singapore
1100 – 1130	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
1130 – 1200	BREAK
1200 – 1240	PANEL 6: Mobile racial capital(ism) in Asia
<i>Chair/discussant</i>	Sahana Ghosh National University of Singapore (NUS)
1200 – 1220	Racial Capitalism, Sexuality and Labour: Experience of North East Women in the Spa Industry in Hyderabad, India Salah Punathil University of Hyderabad
1220 – 1240	Maneuvering the regional landscapes of global racial capital(ism) from southeastern Nepal Jacob Rinck Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore
1240 - 1300	Arabness and its Southeast Asian Sojourns: Racialisations, Fetishizations, and Epistemic Erasures Ali Kassem National University of Singapore
1300 - 1330	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
1330 - 1430	Breakout group discussions over LUNCH
1430 - 1530	CLOSING REMARKS & GENERAL DISCUSSIONS Laavanya KATHIRAVELU & Jaafar ALLOUL
END	

**‘I am still an Outsider here’:
The sense of belonging and home among ‘privileged white migrants’ in
Singapore and Brunei**

Diotima Chatteraj | Nanyang Technological University
diotima.chatteraj@jcu.edu.au

Ahsan Ullah | University of Brunei Darussalam
ahsan.ullah@ubd.edu.bn

Abstract

Migration is diverse and is evolving in Southeast Asia. The region is gaining prominence as a destination for growing number of migrants, especially in countries like Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Brunei. ‘Privileged migrants’, a case in point, make up a large part of this international migrant groups. Despite the growing size and presence of privileged migrant groups, they remain fertile ground for scholarly inquiry, as this group has received little research attention. In fact, the migration of relatively affluent people, especially whites, has generally been largely neglected in migration literature. In this article, therefore, we focus specifically on ‘privileged white migrants’ living in Singapore and Brunei. We document their everyday lives by examining their position within current migration debates in relation to what makes them privileged. To this end, we take a nuanced approach to migrant positioning in terms of the insider–outsider divide and the belief that white migrants still remain as outsiders in the host society. In this context, this article focuses on the sense of belonging and their concept of home among these white privileged migrant groups based in both Singapore and Brunei. We argue that professional hierarchy; socioeconomic and sociocultural factors contribute to their positionality as an insider or outsider in these two countries. A total of 32 interviews were conducted in Singapore and Brunei using online platforms (Whatsapp, Zoom, and Skype video calls) between January and August 2023. Findings suggest that most of the Privileged White migrants position themselves as an outsider for multifaceted factors.

Biography

AKM Ahsan Ullah is an Associate Professor at the Geography, Environment and Development Studies programme at the Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences (FASS), Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD). Ullah has worked at the Southeast Asian Research Centre, Hong Kong; IPH, University of Ottawa, McMaster University, Saint Mary's University, and Dalhousie University, Canada; the American University in Cairo (AUC); City University of Hong Kong, Osnabruck University, Germany, and Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), Thailand. His research areas include population migration, human rights, development, globalization and the environment. Dr Ullah has published more than 15 books, 60 articles in refereed journals and 40 book chapters.

Dr. Diotima Chatteraj is an Adjunct Research Fellow at the department of Social and Health Sciences in James Cook University, Singapore. She was a former Researcher at the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health at NUS, in collaboration with NTU and SMU. Prior to that, she was based as a Researcher at the Faculty of Social Sciences (FASS) in Universiti Brunei Darussalam and was involved in several research projects on Asian migration. She completed her PhD at Ruhr University Bochum, Germany in 2016. Her research interests include Asian migration, mobility, development, ethnicity, international relations, and boundary-making.

She has authored more than 25 journal articles, 4 books, 7 book chapters, and 9 book reviews, in leading journals in migration and development namely, *Mobilities*, *South Asia Research*, *India Quarterly*, *Asian Journal of Social Sciences*, *International Journal of Asia Pacific Studies* and many more. Additionally, she is the Deputy Editor for *South Asia Research* (Sage) and serves as a peer reviewer for a number of refereed journals.

Counterproductive racial capital: Concealing Chineseness in Hong Kong

Yao-Tai Li | University of New South Wales, Australia
aotai.li@unsw.edu.au

Abstract

The identity boundary between mainland Chinese immigrants (MCIs) and local Hong Kongers is increasingly contested, as reflected in not only growing resistance to the sovereignty of the Chinese government but also language and cultural differences (Chinese vs. Cantonese). Research, however, has pointed out that with closer ties to the Chinese market, Mandarin proficiency and familiarity with mainland China have gained importance. In this regard, Chineseness could be a useful socio-cultural capital in Hong Kong's labor market. Drawing on interviews with 28 mainland Chinese skilled immigrants in Hong Kong, this article examines Chinese immigrants' racial capital, particularly their realization of the "counterproductivity" of Chineseness in socially integrating into the local society. This article presents Chinese immigrants, having aware that being a Mainlander may be unfavorable through their interaction experiences with local Hong Kongers, conceal their Chineseness by speaking English or pretending they are from other countries to decrease hostility from the local society. Examining the incompatibility of Chineseness in Hong Kong extends the Eurocentric conceptions of racial capital (learning the limits related to Chineseness) and the meaning of racialization (Chinese immigrants are seen as a different racial group by Hong Kongers). Finally, this article discusses the psychological challenge when Chinese migrants conceal their Chineseness.

Biography

Yao-Tai Li is a Senior Lecturer of Sociology and Social Policy in the School of Social Sciences at University of New South Wales, Australia. He holds a Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of California, San Diego. Prior to joining UNSW, he was an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Hong Kong Baptist University. His research interests include race and ethnicity, migration, identity politics, and social media. His work has been published in several scholarly journals including *British Journal of Sociology*, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *International Migration Review*, *The China Quarterly*, *Identities*, *World Development*, *Urban Studies*, *New Media and Society*, *International Affairs*, *Work, Employment and Society*, *Current Sociology*, *Social Movement Studies*, *International Sociology*, *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, among others.

The value of “Ummah”: Racio-religious capital and Rohingya Refugees’ world-building Practices

Nursyazwani Jamaludin | University of Pennsylvania

syazj@sas.upenn.edu

Abstract

In this paper, I build on scholarship that bridges global religious community with critical migration studies. Through the case of Rohingya refugees in Malaysia, I examine how the figure of the Muslim refugee extends the notion of “racial capital” beyond whiteness while subverting Eurocentric epistemes of migrat/ion categories. Malaysia – a Malay-Muslim majority country with Islam as its state religion – seemed to offer a sanctuary where Rohingya refugees could pursue work and education, and publicly demonstrate piety as part of the *ummah*, the ecumenical global Muslim community. However, Malaysia’s refusal to sign the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention denied refugees the promise of legal-juridical citizenship, causing many to turn to the informal labor economy. The COVID-19 pandemic witnessed Malaysian Muslims’ increasing hostility toward Rohingya refugees - further unsettling the “one-ness” of the ummah. The precarity of Rohingya refugees in Malaysia demonstrates the privileges of ethnonational belonging even within a space of brownness and Muslimness, and limits of ummah which has its various centers and peripheries, logics of dis/placement, and hierarchization. Here, I propose “racio-religious capital” as a framework to render legible the unequal sociopolitical structures that noncitizen Muslims inhabit in the global political economy.

Drawing on feminist and ethnographic approaches, I attend to displaced Rohingya Muslims’ transnational world-building as they draw on racio-religious capital to re/formulate attachments to multiple notions of ummah. I examine their everyday practices and performances of religiosity and Rohingyaness to navigate refugeehood, which also unravel the multiple scales of Rohingya dispossession. I track the processes that contest and constitute ummahs within global power structures that determine stateless people’s value and belonging as political and religious subjects. Rohingya’s world-building practices thus unsettle the sacred-secular binary, potentially revealing worlds that are not dictated by state territories or founded only on liberal subjectivities, while rethinking what “capital” looks like.

Biography

Nursyazwani is a PhD candidate at the Department of Anthropology. Her dissertation research is situated at the interfaces of sovereignty, migration and religious studies, to examine the world-building practices among displaced Rohingya individuals and communities on the peripheries of *ummah*, the global Muslim community. Through ethnographic research with Rohingya refugees in Malaysia, resettled Rohingya in Chicago, and digital ethnography of Rohingya's online communities, her comparative study traces inter-scalar modes of Rohingya world-building across different political, embodied, transnational, and spiritual domains. She has been working with Rohingya refugees in Malaysia since 2017 and resettled Rohingya refugees in Chicago since 2021. She received her M.Soc.Sci. from the Department of Sociology at the National University of Singapore, where her research focused on the co-construction of refugee legibility among Rohingya in Malaysia. Previously, she was a Research Associate at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore and the Research Coordinator at Advocates for Refugees-Singapore.

Cultivating Defection: How Ottoman-Arabs Harvested Indigenous Muslim Knowledge in the Islamic World, and its 20th century Consequences

Isa Blumi | Stockholm University

isa.blumi@su.se

Abstract

By the outbreak of World War I, Euro-American empires sought to expand their influence among still sovereign Muslim ruled polities. In the case of Britain, they deftly used Arab/Muslim intellectuals based in Cairo and India. These connections helped produce reliable assistance in theatres of imperial competition over the spoils of defeated Muslim polities. Unlike these successful campaigns, the Spanish and Americans competing with local Muslim polities in the South China Sea theatre required developing different alliances using different tools of subjugation. This paper proposes upsetting an enduring trope of Euro-American expansionism into Southeast Asia by considering a much more diverse cadre of imperialist benefactors availing themselves at especially violent zones of interface with indigenous peoples. Now cutting across the self-imposed “white man’s” divide that circulated in popular culture and scholarship, a new complexity to the power dynamics at play includes reassessing the profile of the frontiersmen, cowboys, settlers, pioneers, miners, and the state employees who brought modern capitalism’s empire to the Philippines/Borneo.

I propose exploring possible ways of discovering and then making sense of those whose non-European, and thus non-White, backgrounds (in this case Ottoman-Syrian) did not stop them from securing greater social mobility amid the destruction induced by global capitalism. One particularly conspicuous beneficiary of European imperialism was the economic migrant servicing capitalism’s comprehensive subjugation of others’ natural resources. From humble origins in the Middle East such migrants provided the manpower and often claimed access to indigenous knowledge that helped subjugate other peoples still resisting capitalist imperialism. I make the case following the interactions of one Najeeb Saleeby (1870-1935), born into an Eastern Christian (Maronite) household but joined American Protestant Evangelical activists to embrace the new mission of creating a “new world” out of the Spanish Pacific Empire. While acquiring a solid education at the Syrian Protestant College (now AUB), Saleeby’s qualifications won him the opportunity to take the great leap and migrate to New York. Saleeby’s education in medicine positioned him to settle in a complex set of contradictions that make his story especially relevant since he could only practice, being non-White, by volunteering to serve the US military in the Spanish-American wars. This catapulted him by 1903 to a crucial support role as chief cultural liaison in the rebellious regions of Mindanao and Sulu. While unable to communicate to these peoples he became responsible to integrate them within a racial hierarchy he himself could only climb if he helped eliminate their resistance to the White WASP American elite originally denying him status due to his being an Arab. This paper explains his trajectory to becoming a leading colonial figure for the American occupation regime in soon-to-be brutalized Muslim Mindanao and Sulu with the intention of upsetting how we read the circulation of “racial capital” and the consequences for those who prove useful to the capitalist imperialist project in the South China Sea.

Biography

Isa Blumi (Stockholm University, isa.blumi@su.se) researches societies in the throes of social, economic, and political transformation. He compares how European imperialist projects in the Islamic world intersected with, and were thus informed by, events within the Ottoman Empire. His latest work covers the late Ottoman period and successor regimes, arguing that events in the Balkans, South China Sea, and Middle East/Eurasia are the engines of change in the larger world. His research into migration as a primary lens to understand such processes have resulted in numerous articles and books, including *Ottoman Refugees, 1878-1939: Migration in a Post-Imperial World*. (Bloomsbury Academic, 2013) and *Destroying Yemen: What Chaos in Arabia tells us about the World* (University of California Press, 2018).

Permanent Temporariness: An Auto-ethnographic Study of the Turkish Migration Policies and Practices

Sanam Vaghefi | University of Victoria, Canada
sanemvaghefi@gmail.com

Abstract

While Türkiye is known for being the host to the largest refugee population in the world, in addition to having one of the most flexible golden visa and golden passport programs, the migration experiences of those who are not refugees or investors are neglected in the literature. In particular, less is known about the experiences of those who come from countries other than Türkiye while having a Turkic heritage. Turkishness is defined as a citizenship status in Türkiye's constitution, while historically it also refers to the Turkic ethnicity and heritage going beyond the modern nation-states' borders. Therefore, one can be ethnically Turkish/Turkic but non-Turkish in terms of nationality, and vice versa. This autoethnographic study focuses on the researcher's case of living without Turkish citizenship and nationality while having been raised and spent a life under a temporary migration status with a Turkic heritage in Türkiye. The following research questions will guide this study to fill the above mentioned gap: a) How do the Turkish migration policies reproduce the complex ethno-national differentiations? b) How do various aspects of social location intersect in shaping the role of these policies on the individual migration trajectories (as discussed in the researcher's case)?

In the context of these questions, the limitations of Turkish migration policies which reproduce contradictory categories of belonging and exclusion along the ethnic and national lines will be discussed. The determining role of class, socioeconomic status, gender and other social locations and their intersectionalities will also be explored. At the end, future research questions and recommendations about the complexities of ethnonational belonging and exclusion in Türkiye and the region will be identified.

Biography

Sanam Vaghefi is a sociologist with a Ph.D. from the University of Victoria in Canada. Her Ph.D. Dissertation topic is 'Exploring the Health and Migration Trajectories of Iranian Refugees in Canada'. In addition to refugee migration, asylum seekers, and migrant mental health, her research interests are performances of power and agency during the migration trajectories, as well as victim-villain-savior narratives surrounding the representations of refugees and migrants in various international contexts. Sanam currently lives in Istanbul, Turkey, where she was raised as an Iranian migrant and she is looking forward to start working as a Visiting Scholar and Sessional Instructor at Ibn Haldun University this Fall.

Race no more: Context and social capital in Africa's urban gateways

Kabiri Bule | University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
kabiri.bule@gmail.com

Loren B. Landau | University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg & Oxford
University
loren@migration.org.za

Abstract

Cities have historically been sites of production, extraction, subjectification, and subversion. As sub-Saharan Africa's population increasingly moves within, to, and through cities, the continent's urbanism will transform. As urbanism takes multiple forms -- cities and suburbs; high-rises and informal settlements -- so too will the future of solidarity, sociality, and imagination. Yet these spaces remain poorly understood as are the futures unfolding within them. Relationships among the cities' residents remain central to the shape these futures take. The urban gateways where the most rapid growth occurs include a panoply of people -- universally 'African' -- exhibiting remarkable levels of ethnic, religious, linguistic, and geographic diversity. A minority are 'indigenous', others move into, through, and out of these gateway neighbourhoods, creating 'urban estuaries.' Such spaces challenge basic presumptions about host/migrant distinctions informing many of these discussions about the processes, desirability, and ethics of inclusion, integration, and social cohesion. The forms of diversity also question the analytical value of a racial capital and, more fundamentally, 'race' in visibilising salient forms of social boundaries or solidary foundations. Using newly collected (2021) survey data and focus group discussions (2023) from Johannesburg, Accra, and Nairobi, we examine 1) the nature of social connectedness in terms of residence and ethno-linguistic characteristics; and 2) the relationship between residence and background characteristics and measures of trust within and across communities. The variations in our findings suggest the need for more situated analysis that recognise the localised constructions and politics of difference across fragmented and rapidly transforming African cities. These findings underscore the need for new concepts that move beyond race, religion, and nationality to study "communities of strangers" and how people strategize their social mobility in urban contexts. These include, inter alia, people's spatio-temporal orientations and practical political ethics.

Biography

Kabiri N Bule is an Associate Researcher affiliated with the African Centre for Migration & Society (ACMS) at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. Her work revolves around the intricate nexus of African urbanisation, both in historical and contemporary contexts, and extends to an examination of the spatial and temporal dynamics of xenophobic incidents within South African cities. Employing a multidisciplinary framework that draws from criminology, migration studies, geographic information science, and social ecology, Kabiri's academic rigour is underscored by her academic background — a doctoral and master's degree in Migration and Displacement and a Bachelor of Arts degree (Hons) in Organisational Psychology and Sociology, all conferred by the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. Her scholarly contributions are instrumental in advancing the discourse surrounding African urbanisation and migration.

Loren B Landau is Professor of Migration and Development at the University of Oxford and Research Professor at the University of the Witwatersrand's African Centre for Migration & Society. His interdisciplinary scholarship explores mobility, multi-scale governance, and the transformation of socio-political community across the global south. Publications include, *Forging African Communities: Mobility, Integration, and Belonging* (Palgrave); *I Want to Go Home Forever: Stories of Becoming and Belonging in South Africa's Great Metropolis* (Wits Press); *Contemporary Migration to South Africa* (World Bank); *The Humanitarian Hangover: Displacement, Aid, and Transformation in Western Tanzania* (Wits Press); and *Exorcising the Demons Within: Xenophobia, Violence and Statecraft in Contemporary South Africa* (UN University Press/Wits Press). He holds an MSc in Development Studies (LSE) and a PhD in Political Science (Berkeley). Together with Jean Pierre Misago, he co-founded and co-directs the Wits-Oxford Mobility Governance Lab (MGL).

Entrepreneurs of desire: space, place, race as ordering mechanisms in Singapore's sex industry

Raksha Mahtani | Nanyang Technological University
RAKS0002@e.ntu.edu.sg

Abstract

In Asia, service work most associated with 'intimate labour' includes sex workers, hostesses, entertainers, caregivers, bar and restaurant servers, hospitality staff, beauty salon workers, domestic workers, cleaners, and so on, where most of this work is performed by women, migrants, and gender and racial minorities. Current migration literature illuminates the sharp contrasts of unequal conditions within skills-based migration regimes along the lines of desirability. Singapore's sex industry, largely constituted by both regulated and unregulated migrant sex workers from Southeast Asia and the Global South including Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia, presents an ideal case to anatomise how desire and desirability of migrant sex workers is racialised and gendered. Sex workers navigate ethnic layering and labour segmentation practices through the formation of micro markets and embodied technologies of the self. Utilising data from my masters' thesis work where I conducted 30 semi-structured interviews and a year of ethnographic research, this paper aims to explicate the hierarchies of safety, demand, and stigma that inform a reading of sex workers as gendered and racialised 'abilities machines'. While this interpretation offers countercultural possibilities that resist notions of sex workers as indolent and sex work as unproductive, it also highlights how sex workers as 'ethnopolitical entrepreneurs' who navigate hierarchies of race and gender even as they are imbricated within them.

Biography

Raksha Mahtani is a graduate research student in Sociology at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) whose thesis work focused on social stratification and hierarchies in Singapore's sex industry that takes licitness as a differentiating resource. Her work further traces contours of inequality around exclusion, exploitation, safety, earning potential, and negotiating power for sex workers in Singapore. She is also a research associate with the Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS) in Singapore. Her research interests lie at the intersection of intimate labour, gendered migration, racialization, debility, and friendship. Since 2016, Raksha has been a volunteer and member with Project X Society, which advocates for the rights of sex workers in Singapore.

Racialized Caste Capital in a Rapidly Urbanizing India

Deepak Malghan | Indian Institute of Management (IIT), Bangalore
dmalghan@gmail.com

Abstract

We propose to forge a conversation between international immigration scholars, on the one hand, and scholars of urbanization and caste in India and South Asia, on the other. We argue that a workshop centered on "mapping the invisible work of racial capital in international migration beyond the Western field sites" also forces us to think of ways in which the category "racial capital" itself is somewhat provincial. The question of how (if) caste is "racial" is fraught and, at any rate, unproductive for our purposes here. Racialization is analytically distinct from "racial formation," or how races come into being. Racialized social hierarchies are routinely found in places that do not enumerate diverse social groups as "races."

Urbanization is arguably the most critical driver of social, demographic, and environmental change in the Global South, where it also holds the promise of diluting traditional identities such as caste or religion. In both scholarship and praxis, it has long been assumed that larger and economically more vibrant cities can transcend the hierarchical cleavages defined by hereditary South Asian institutions such as caste. We use data from India's first-ever spatially explicit census-scale enumeration and coding of elementary caste categories (*jati*) for Bengaluru — arguably India's most globalized metropolis — to show how urbanization can instead engender new pathways for the racialization of these identities.

We focus on one of the central constitutive features of India's traditional caste hierarchy — the spatial segregation of caste groups. Spatial segregation is also at the heart of understanding how racialized capital drives international and sub-national migration experiences. In Bengaluru, we uncover a racialized segregation pattern representing a palimpsest of three distinct layers — near-perfect segregation as a constitutive feature of India's traditional caste society, the colonial Indian town as the ground zero of modern racial segregation, and the political economy careers of caste and religion in post-colonial and post-liberalization India. Each layer represents a "boundary maintenance" process (à la Fredrik Barth) that accounts for the stability of caste and religion boundaries across the urbanization spectrum, ranging from small semi-urban settlements to a globalized metropolis of over thirteen million residents.

Biography

Deepak Malghan is a chemical engineer and ecological economist working at scale theory and thermodynamics interface. Scale in ecological economics refers to the proportional relationship between the economy and the ecosystem that contains and sustains it. Among other recognitions for his contributions to scale theory, Malghan received the 2015 VKRV Rao Prize in Social Sciences. Malghan has served as an editor at *Ecological Economics*, the field's flagship journal (2018--23). His applied environmental policy research has been centered on urban hydrology problems.

Beyond ecological economics, Malghan's lab at IIMB has pioneered new methods for characterizing ethnic inequality and stratification by combining tools and insights from economics, demography, and political science. His current projects apply these methods to study classical and emerging problems in ethnic politics and environmental injustice.

Outside of credentialed academic pursuits, Malghan is also an unlicensed amateur historian. He is the co-author of an intellectual biography of J. C. Kumarappa (1892-1960), a pioneering Indian ecological thinker and political philosopher (Oxford University Press, 2016). He is currently working on a book project (provisionally titled *Citius, Altius, Fortius: A History of How the World Became Efficient*) that develops the global history of the modern idea of efficiency.

“It’s cheaper to hire Filipinos and they’re great English speakers”: A raciolinguistic approach to labor migration in the United Arab Emirates.

Jeconiah Dreisbach | De La Salle University
jdreisbach@uoc.edu

Abstract

From a raciolinguistic perspective, this paper investigates the linguistic capital of Filipinos in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The data in this paper is derived from a larger two-year critical sociolinguistic ethnography within the Filipino community, part of which interviewed human resource managers and middle management employees in UAE companies. This study argues that raciolinguistic ideologies are extended to discourses on neoliberal labor migration as experienced by Filipino migrant workers who are treated as “cheap but fluent English speakers.”

Labor migration to the United Arab Emirates is racialized which manifests in the type of work, salaries, and benefits of the employees in the country (Watanabe, 2019; Watanabe, 2020). With more than 200 nationalities and spoken languages, English is the lingua franca in the global cosmopolitan UAE. With that, Filipinos both have a linguistic and racial capital in the country as they are ethnically stereotyped as fluent English speakers and are often assigned to the frontlines of their employment environments, may it be as store cashiers, office lobby attendants, call center workers, and other service-related jobs.

The racialization of Filipinos as fluent English speakers stemmed from the English-oriented national language policy in the Philippine education system. Philippine state migration institutions market Filipinos as English speakers, too. While they do have a relative linguistic and racial capital, their position is still situated in the lower socioeconomic strata of the UAE due to their Asian identity. Beyond racial inequalities in the country, they are also victims of neoliberal labor migration exploitation as they are treated by employers to be “cheap and docile” migrant workers. This extends to the family language policies of intergenerational Filipino families in the UAE as children experience a language shift towards English attributable to the higher linguistic valuation of the language as a ticket to employment.

Biography

Jeconiah Dreisbach is a PhD candidate in critical sociolinguistics at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya in Barcelona where he investigates the political economy of languages as utilized by Filipino migrant families in the United Arab Emirates. He was based at the Department of International Studies of the American University of Sharjah from 2021 to 2023 as a visiting doctoral researcher while conducting his ethnographic fieldwork in the country. Concurrently, he is a tenure-track lecturer in Philippine Studies at De La Salle University in Manila. He is a member of the UOC research group Language, Culture, and Identity in the Global Age (IdentiCat). (UOC researcher profile: <https://jdreisbach.folio.uoc.edu/>)

Foreign English teachers: Racial hierarchy and English teaching in China

Raviv Litman | University of Amsterdam
r.m.k.litman@uva.nl

Abstract

From the 1990s-2010s China saw a tremendous growth in private companies offering English programs featuring foreign teachers. The meaning of foreignness in Chinese is disputed because it can become related to Whiteness, and it can also be used as an inclusive term for all non-Chinese nationals. This paper examines dramatic changes in educational infrastructure which have impacted racial hierarchies of foreign English teachers in China by making it possible for Filipino teachers to be categorized as foreign teachers, but only under restricted conditions. I argue that racial boundaries between foreign teachers are reflective of education inequalities between China's first-tier and lower-tier cities. Social geographies of China are intersecting with racial hierarchies of English teachers. Filipino teachers in China teach primarily in online English programs, which both challenge the dominance of EuroAmerican teachers concentrated in first-tier cities, but also leads to the retrenchment of inequalities, because of how online Filipino teachers were consistently paid less than their American counterparts and became unpopular among upwardly mobile Chinese communities. This research is based on data collected through participant observation at a large Beijing private education company between 2018-2020, where I worked as a foreign English teacher, and follow-up interviews conducted between 2020-2022. The company I studied vigorously promoted "foreign teacher classes [wajiao ke]" to reassure parents about the quality of their English education, and the meaning of foreign teacher became actively disputed and contradictory in this context. This paper contributes to a wider literature on racial hierarchy in East Asia by showing how discourses about who is a foreign teacher is evolving beyond Western ideas of Whiteness, but also how those changes are themselves limited by the increasing association of diversity among foreign teachers with a lack of social mobility in China.

Biography

Raviv Litman is a junior researcher at the China White anthropological research project, in the Moving Matters research group, University of Amsterdam. Trained in Anthropology and Asian Studies, he is interested in the changing racial boundaries associated with migrant/foreign teachers of international English. His research focuses on the lived experiences of people from around the world who teach English in China. As a doctoral student, he is currently studying the reproduction and interlayering of racial, linguistic and nationality hierarchies of English teachers in Beijing and in its hinterlands. His Phd dissertation raises questions about the intersectionality of racial hierarchies of English teachers from beyond a traditionally Western context of Whiteness studies. His research highlights subjects at the margins of a global English education industry, including Filipino teachers, Eastern European teachers, and Chinese clients who hire them. Through this research, he aims to expand our understanding of race in a global context through a focus on processes that make and unmake Whiteness as a power structure.

@MinorityVoices: Racialised communicative labour and the emergence of anti-racism in Singapore

Selvaraj Velayutham | Macquarie University
selvaraj.velayutham@mq.edu.au

Bittiandra Chand Somiah | National University of Singapore
chand.somaiah@yale-nus.edu.sg

Abstract

Indian, Malay, and Eurasian ethnic minority youths in Singapore are raising awareness of racism and its harm through digital media. They are performing racialised communicative labour by creating safe spaces for discussing and sharing experiences of racial discrimination, make sense of their personal encounters, own narratives around race and speak back to fellow Singaporeans. These youth are the vanguard of anti-racist efforts in Singapore. Using digital ethnography, we investigate the experiences of racism among Singapore's ethnic minority youths, focusing specifically on its emotional effects and demonstrate how they are using the digital sphere to galvanise an anti-racist movement.

Selvaraj Velayutham is Associate Professor in the Discipline of Sociology, Macquarie School of Social sciences, Macquarie University, Australia. His research interests include race and ethnic relations, multiculturalism, migrant lives, and the Sociology of Everyday Life. His current research projects focus on Race Relations and Racism in Singapore, Informal Sport, Inclusion and Urban Diversity and Survival and Wellbeing among Migrant Precariat in Australia's Gig Economy. He has published several articles on the topic of racism in Singapore.

Dr Chand Somaiah holds a joint appointment as a Research Fellow with the Asia Research Institute (ARI), National University of Singapore; and Yale-NUS College. Her research interests include intimate citizenship practices such as foodwork, and embodied, emplaced and intersectional subjectivities vis-à-vis migration. Since 2017, she has been working on collaborative mixed-methods research projects which investigate the impacts of parental absence on left-behind children and families from sending communities of international labour. Her work has been published in a range of journals including *Global Networks*; *Journal of Youth Studies*; *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*; *Ethnic and Racial Studies*; *Emotion, Space and Society*; and *Journal of Intercultural Studies*.

Racial Capitalism, Sexuality and Labour: Experience of North East Women in the Spa Industry in Hyderabad, India

Salah Punathil | University of Hyderabad
salahpunathil@gmail.com

Abstract

There has been a large scale migration of population from North Eastern states of India to metropolitan cities in the past two decades under Neo-liberal economic policies blurring the historical disjuncture between the perceived 'mainland' the country's North East. While this demonstrates social and economic mobility, such movements have also produced racial discrimination, labor exploitation, hostility and violence against perceived 'others' from the North East as it is shown in the recent literature(See Mc Duie-Ra 2012, Haksar 2016 and Dolly Kikon and Bengt G. Karlsson 2020 and others). Building on this literature, the paper explore how race, sexuality and labor intersects in the soft skill industries, especially in the Spa centers, and examine how specific forms of racial capitalism in India produces complex experience of discrimination and everyday violence among young North Eastern women who migrate to India's metropolitan cities. Ethnographic field work carried out among spa therapists in Hyderabad reveals how soft skill industries effectively maneuver the racialized notions such as exotic and sexualized 'South East Asian look' to attract the clients. While exploitation in the form of lower wage, prolonged working hours and work stress are inherent to this labor field, stories from the field reveals various forms of sexual violence ranging from sexual advances of clients and spa owners in the everyday setting of work space to organized sexual trafficking under the pretext of spa centers. By foregrounding these empirical data, the essay argue for a nuanced theorization of racial capitalism that accounts intersection of race, labor and sexuality to enable a comparative reading of how mobility and migration confronts racial question in unique ways in non-western context.

Biography

Salah Punathil is a Sociologist, teaches at the Centre for Regional Studies, University of Hyderabad, India. Salah has done his PhD in Sociology from JNU, Delhi and has completed his Post-Doctoral Fellowship (2018-2020) at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Gottingen, Germany. He was a DAAD Guest Professor at CeMIS, University of Gottingen from 1 November 2023 to 31 January 2024. His research interests include ethnic violence, migration and borderlands, citizenship, racial inequality and the intersection of archives and ethnography. His book 'Interrogating Communalism: Violence, Citizenship and Minorities in South India' is published by Routledge in 2019. He has published articles in journals such as Citizenship Studies, History and Anthropology, South Asia Research and Contributions to Indian Sociology. Salah's current research focuses on the migration process in and from North East India and the crisis of citizenship and various forms of inequalities in contemporary times. He is currently carrying out a project on how North Eastern women experience exploitation and violence in the Spa industries in South India. Salah is the recipient of M.N Srinivas Award for Young Indian Sociologist, 2015 and Chancellor's Award for Best Faculty at the University of Hyderabad, 2022.

Maneuvering the regional landscapes of global racial capital(ism) from southeastern Nepal

Jacob Rinck | Asia, Research Institute, National University of Singapore
jrinck@nus.edu.sg

Abstract

In the wake of recent, broader reengagements with Cedric Robinson's work, Asian studies scholars have urged that the notion of racial capitalism be examined and re-thought from regions beyond the Atlantic. This paper seeks to contribute to this research agenda by examining how Nepalis engaged in circular migration to the Persian Gulf region and to Southeast Asia engage with the ways in which they are racialized and obtain 'racial capital' (Alloul 2020) differentially in different migration destinations. Ethnographically, I ask how migrants who have returned (perhaps) permanently or temporarily to their homes in rural southeastern Nepal describe their observations, calculations, strategies and aspirations with respect to the racialized regimes of exploitation and accumulation that migration has drawn them into. By paying attention to the slippages and ambiguities in the production of 'cheap labor' that Nepali labor migrants themselves identify and attempt to actively maneuver, I seek to engage with specific structural configurations of racial capitalism in Asia, and ask how it intersects with citizenship, class, gender, and education.

Biography

Jacob Rinck is an anthropologist studying narratives about global inequality through the lens of migration, the national economy form, and development economics as storytelling. He has a PhD in anthropology from Yale University (May 2020) and is currently a Postdoctoral Scholar at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. Before joining ARI, he was a Visiting Scholar at the GWU Department of Anthropology, a lecturer at the GWU Elliott School, and has been working as a consultant for the World Bank. At ARI, he is working on a book manuscript and articles based on his dissertation on transnational migration, agrarian change, and histories of developmental thought in Nepal, and will pursue new research on the emergence of new transnational publics around a 2018 bilateral labour agreement between Nepal and Malaysia.

Arabness and its Southeast Asian Sojourns: Racialisations, Fetishizations, and Epistemic Erasures

Ali Kassem | National University of Singapore
ali.kass@nus.edu.sg

Arabness, deeply entwined with Muslimness, is a negatively racialised identity in Euro-American lived experiences as well as across academic scholarship on race, ethnicity, and mobility. Even within the Arabic-speaking world, much has emerged over the past decades to construct 'alternate identities' as modes of negotiating and resisting the inferiorising hierarchisation of an 'Arab stigma' – from Lebanese Phoenicianism to Egyptian Pharaonism. Aligned with an epistemic and political project of thinking otherwise from elsewhere, this research phenomenologically examines Arabness from/in/alongside the 'different' space of Southeast Asia across the varied sites of mosque, *madrassa*, and intimate relationships. Identifying Arabness as highly valorised – multiply fetishized – the project inquires into the workings of such race-making. Within this, it focuses on the everyday persistent centring of Arabo-Islam as 'authentic Islam' – one to be 'migrated' from the 'Arab world' – configured by legacies of the past that are not exclusively those of European colonisation. In doing this, the project examines the ongoing epistemic erasures unfolding at the intersection of Eurocentric modernity/coloniality and this haunting valorised racialisation – including erasures of what could be liberatory Muslim borderland alternatives beyond a patriarcho-capitalist anthropocentric age.

Biography

Ali Kassem is a Lecturer in Sociology at the National University of Singapore, Singapore. Ali was previously postdoctoral research fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies and the Al-Waleed Centre at the University of Edinburgh where he also taught at the School of Social and Political Science. Prior to that he was a postdoctoral research fellow with the Arab Council for the Social Sciences and the Carnegie Corporation of New York affiliated to the Beirut Urban Lab at the American University of Beirut. He obtained his PhD in Sociology from the University of Sussex, UK where he also taught between 2018 and 2021. His book manuscript titled *Islamophobia and Lebanon: Visibly Muslim Women and Global Coloniality* was published with I.B. Tauris and Bloomsbury Academic in 2023 and he is currently editing a book titled *Coloniality and Arab-Majority Worlds: Across, In-between, and Beyond* with Bristol University Press. Ali's research is invested in anti, post, and decolonial critiques of Eurocentric modernity as well as envisioning alternatives to it particularly thinking alongside Muslim-majority worlds and their diasporas with a focus on questions of race-making, knowledges, sexualities, and anthropocentrism.

Organisers and Discussants

Laavanya Kathiravelu is Associate Professor in the School of Social Sciences at Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. Her research is at the intersections of international migration, race and ethnic studies and contemporary urban diversity, particularly in Asia and the Persian Gulf. Her first book was *Migrant Dubai* (Palgrave, 2016), which explored experiences of low wage migrant workers in the UAE. She has also published widely on issues of race, inequality and migration in Singapore. Prior to joining NTU, she was a postdoctoral fellow at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity. She was also a Fung Fellow at Princeton University between 2015-16. In 2019, she was recipient of the Social Science and Humanities Research Council Fellowship (SSHRC) and recognised as one of the Ten Outstanding Young Persons (TOYP) in the area of academic leadership. Laavanya is board member of migrant welfare organisation, HOME as well as civil society group AWARE, whose aim is to advance gender equality. She comments regularly on public forums and through op-eds on issues of migration, race and diversity in Singapore. In 2022, she was a Fulbright Scholar based at the City University of New York (CUNY).

Email: laavanyak@ntu.edu.sg

Jaafar Alloul is Assistant Professor in Cultural Anthropology at Utrecht University. He obtained his joint PhD degree from the University of Amsterdam and KU Leuven in 2021. Before coming to Utrecht, he held a postdoctoral fellowship in migration sociology at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) Singapore, and was a Visiting Scholar in Residence at Georgetown University in Qatar. His research deals with transnational class-making in global migration, social (im)mobility in relation to racialization in Europe, and state and nation-building in the Middle East. He combines anthropological field methods with fine-grained analyses in cultural sociology and political economy, seeking to advance, among others, the canon of Pierre Bourdieu for benefit of migration and mobility studies in Europe. Dr Alloul has carried out extensive fieldwork in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar. He is currently working on a book project about human capital development in Saudi Arabia and the Emirates, exploring societal transformation in the Gulf Arab states through the lens of state-sponsored (medical) science migration to Europe and North America. He also has applied research experience with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Email: j.alloul@uu.nl

Chahrazad Abdallah is Associate Professor at Université du Québec à Montréal in Canada. She holds a PhD in Management and Organization Studies from HEC Montréal, Canada. Her current research focuses on decolonizing knowledge production systems within the Business School as the site of reproduction of the global racial regime of capital and knowledge accumulation. She is currently co-editing a Special Issue on *Anti-Blackness in Management and Organization Studies: Challenging Racial Capitalism in Knowledge Production and Organizational Practices* for the journal *Organization: The Critical Journal of Organization, Theory and Society*. Her most recent publications appear in *The Routledge Companion to*

Qualitative Research in Organization Studies and in *The Routledge Companion to Anthropology in Management*.

Email: chahra.abdallah@gmail.com

Stephen Campbell is an anthropologist based at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. His research addresses questions of labour, migration, and borders, which he has pursued through ethnographic fieldwork in Myanmar, Thailand, and Singapore. His first book, *Border Capitalism, Disrupted: Precarity and Struggle in a Southeast Asian Industrial Zone*, was published by Cornell University Press in 2018. His second book, *Along the Integral Margin: Uneven Development in a Myanmar Squatter Settlement*, was published in 2022, also by Cornell University Press. His articles have appeared in various anthropology, development studies, and Asian studies journals, such as *American Ethnologist*, *Anthropological Theory*, and *Development and Change*.

Email: stephen.campbell@ntu.edu.sg

Philip Kasinitz is Presidential Professor of Sociology at the CUNY Graduate Center. He was the director of the program in International Migration Studies (IMS) from 2018-2019. He chaired the CUNY doctoral program in Sociology from since 2001-2011 and 2014-2017. He specializes in immigration, ethnicity, race relations, urban social life and the nature of contemporary cities. He is the author of *Caribbean New York* for which he won the Thomas and Znaniecki Book Award in 1996. His co-authored book *Inheriting the City: The Children of Immigrants Come of Age* won the Eastern Sociological Society's Mirra Komarovsky Book Award in 2009 and the American Sociological Association Distinguished Scholarly Book Award in 2010. Kasinitz served as the President of the Eastern Sociological Society in 2007-2008 and received the Society's "Merritt" Award for career contributions in 2015. Since 2005 has been the book review editor of the ESS journal, *Sociological Forum*. He is a member of the Historical Advisory Board of the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation and a former member of the Social Science Research Council's Committee on International Migration and the Russell Sage Foundation's committee to study the social effects of 9-11 on New York City.

Email: pkasinitz@gc.cuny.edu

Sahana Ghosh is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at the National University of Singapore. She studies gendered labor, mobility, policing and the national security state through ethnographic and historical research methods in India and Bangladesh. Her first book *A Thousand Tiny Cuts: Mobility and Security across the Bangladesh-India Borderlands* is published with University of California Press (2023) and she has published widely in academic journals as well as public-facing platforms. She is currently conducting research on soldiering as a form of work in postcolonial India and working on an illustrated book for children on borders.

Email: sahana.ghosh@nus.edu.sg