LIVING IN AN AGE OF PRECARITY
Living and Lives in 21st Century Asia
27-28 February 2017
Cover Image

Photograph taken in the island of Bali, Indonesia by Teresita Cruz-del Rosario. Known as Bali “punks,” these young Balinese boys roam the center of Bali in the late afternoon, looking for a “gig,” as informal tourist guides, interpreters, driver assistants, or as drivers, if they own a motorcycle.
Precarity, once a French neologism (précarité), is today purportedly the word for our time. It is a description of a specific subjectivity, an existential angst of living a life of ambient insecurity, strongly suggestive of the breakdown of stable social bonds and identities, and the disappearance of old reliances.

Conceptually, the rise of precarity has a lot to do with the retraction of the state and its responsibility to promote social protection, to preserve entitlement, and to foster a sense of belonging among its citizens. Instead, workers, for whom the condition of precarity is most pronounced, are left to fend for themselves, bearing all the risks of impermanent jobs while receiving limited or no social benefits and statutory entitlements. In the sphere of geography, precarity is manifested in the tenuous borders of the nation-state, as subject peoples demand for greater spaces to express their separate (ethnic/racial) identities and the nation-state becomes a site for contestation, negotiation, and adjustment. Further, the once hard and fast borders of delineated territories are being silently redrawn according to commodity and transportation lines, for example, oil and gas pipelines, railways, large-scale plantations dedicated to monoculture production. The term ‘spatial fix’ has been used by David Harvey to describe “capitalism’s insatiable drive to resolve its inner crisis tendencies by geographical expansion and geographical restructuring” (Harvey 2001). Finally, in the realm of affective life, precarity is an experience of hypermobility and compression of time. “Dependence networks” that previously defined personhood and belonging — “a relation among the members of a morally binding membership group” (James Ferguson 2013) — have collapsed and disappeared particularly in the Global South. These networks of affect have been replaced by atomized individuals with little or no social attachments, giving rise to asocial inequalities in much of the Global South. Belonging has become “mobile.”

In this conference, we invite scholars and researchers to tackle the notion of precarity as the new social condition of the Global South, but specifically in the Asian region. In particular, the conference seeks to advance the study of precarity through addressing the following questions:

1. How is precarity expressed and experienced in the Asian context? What are its concrete manifestations and how do they differ from conditions in the global North?
2. How is precarity produced? What are the specific political/power relations that give rise to conditions of precarity? Who are the precarity-producing agents (e.g., transnational capital, multilateral institutions)?
3. What are the spaces for resistance/renegotiation/creativity/personal autonomy which impermanence can engender? What possibilities exist for the return to co-dependent networks that are re-valORIZED and accepted as socio-economic mechanisms for staving off asocial inequalities?

CONVENORS

Dr Teresita Cruz-del Rosario
Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore
E | aritcr@nus.edu.sg

Prof Jonathan Rigg
Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore
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**Monday, 27 February 2017**

**09:15 – 09:30**
REGISTRATION

**09:30 – 09:45**
WELCOME AND INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Chairperson: Jonathan Rigg, National University of Singapore
Teresita Cruz-del Rosario, National University of Singapore

**09:45 – 10:45**
KEYNOTE ADDRESS 1

Chairperson: Jonathan Rigg, National University of Singapore

Conceptualising Precarious Work

Kevin Hewison, Kyoto University, Japan, and The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, USA

10:30 Questions and Answers

**10:45 – 11:15**
MORNING TEA

**11:15 – 13:15**
PANEL 1 | UNDERSTANDING/DISSECTING/ANALYZING PRECARITY IN ASIA OF ASIANS

Chairperson & Discussant: Teresita Cruz-del Rosario, National University of Singapore

**11:15**
A Cinema of Precarity

Gerald Sim, Florida Atlantic University, USA, Stanford University, USA, and National University of Singapore

**11:35**
Precarious Demographics: The Gulf’s Insecure Populations

James M. Dorsey, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore, and University of Würzburg, Germany

**11:55**
Biopower, Precarization and the Postcolonial State: The Bengali-origin Muslims in Assam, India

Rafiu Ahmed, Sikkim University, India

**12:15**
Encountering Difference through Social Assistance: Migration, Diversity and Precarity in Singapore

Junjia Ye, Massey University, New Zealand
Brenda S.A. Yeoh, National University of Singapore

12:35 Discussant’s Comments

12:40 Questions and Answers

**13:15 – 14:15**
LUNCH

**14:15 – 15:45**
PANEL 2 | THE PRODUCTION OF PRECARITY

Chairperson & Discussant: May Ngo, National University of Singapore

**14:15**
Privilege and Precarity in Singapore

Chuan Fei Chin, National University of Singapore

**14:35**
‘Still Ok,’ Not Ok: Precarious in Singapore

You Yenn Teo, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

**14:55**
Secondary Precarity: Family Vulnerability in an Age of Unfree Labour

Sallie Yea, La Trobe University, Australia

15:15 Discussant’s Comments

15:20 Questions and Answers

**15:45 – 16:15**
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<td>The Production of Precarity: Phnom Penh’s New Satellite Cities</td>
<td>Teri Shaffer Yamada, California State University – Long Beach, USA</td>
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<td>Precarious Lives with Economic Land Concessions: Gendered Vulnerability under Expansion of Rubber Plantation in Northern Laos and Northern Shan</td>
<td>Kyoko Kusakabe, Asian Institute of Technology, Thailand</td>
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<td>Thailand’s Border Special Economic Zones and Precarious Life and Work</td>
<td>John Walsh, Shinawatra University, Thailand</td>
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<td>Contradictions of Care and Control in an Age of Precarity: Migratory Surveillance and Strategic Resistance in Hong Kong</td>
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<td>Nicole Constable, University of Pittsburgh, USA</td>
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<td>THE PRECARITY OF LABOR</td>
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<td>CHAIRPERSON &amp; DISCUSSANT  Bernardo Brown, National University of Singapore</td>
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<td>11:15</td>
<td>Precarity, Agency, and the Emerging Conservative Working Class in China</td>
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<td>Jake Lin, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand</td>
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<td>Who are the Goldsmiths? A Sociological Study of Network, Mobility and Precarity among Migrant Goldsmiths of West Bengal, India</td>
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<td>Anindita Chakrabarti, Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur</td>
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<td>11:55</td>
<td>Everyday Precariousness and Socialization among Nepali Migrant Workers in Malaysia</td>
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<td>Tina Shrestha, National University of Singapore</td>
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<td>STRATEGIES TO MITIGATE/OVERCOME/ELIMINATE PRECARITY</td>
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<td>13:45</td>
<td>“Share House” – A New Living in the Age of Precarity?</td>
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<td>Helena Grinshpun, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel</td>
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<td>Precarious Intimacy: Frontier Erotics in a China-Vietnam Border Town</td>
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<td>Juan Zhang, University of Queensland, Australia</td>
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<td>Mobilising Affinity Ties: Kachin Internal Displacement and the Geographies of Humanitarianism at the China-Myanmar Border</td>
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<td>Elaine Lynn-Ee Ho, National University of Singapore</td>
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<td>Emerging Co-dependent Networks: Precarity and Community Social Organizations in Rural Myanmar</td>
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<td>Mike Griffiths, Social Policy &amp; Poverty Research Group, Myanmar</td>
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<td>CONCLUSION AND CLOSING REMARKS</td>
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Conceptualising Precarious Work

Kevin Hewison
Kyoto University, Japan, and
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, USA
khewison@unc.edu

“Precarious work” has been described in the literature in many ways and as many things: atypical, irregular or non-standard work, work that is temporary or seasonal, casualization and part-time work, homeworking, self-employment, contracting-in, contracting-out and outworking, informalization, flexibilization, and contingent employment. The term, along with “precarity” related to work, has both activist and academic lineages. The take-up of the terms owes much to European social movements and the considerable political traction these terms gained from European responses to poverty and waged work in the 1950s and 1960s, when associated with the radical Italian Autonomia group. The confluence of radical and activist politics and rapid changes to the nature of production, work and social life have seen the terms gain widespread use in contemporary academic and other literatures. Arguably, the most significant in the academic uptake has been the work of Guy Standing. Yet as the term has entered our lexicon, a critique has developed over these usages of the terms and what they add to existing approaches and terminologies. In particular, considerable criticism has focused on Standing’s notion of the “precatariat” as a “new dangerous class.” This paper seeks to assess the analytical location of precarious work, precarity and the precariat.

Kevin Hewison is Weldon E. Thornton Distinguished Emeritus Professor of Asian Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, USA and Editor-in-Chief, Journal of Contemporary Asia. He is currently a Visiting Research Fellow at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at Kyoto University, Japan. Prior to his retirement, he was Director of the Asia Research Centre at Murdoch University, where he is also Sir Walter Murdoch Professor of Politics and International Studies. His previous appointments include Director of the Southeast Asia Research Centre at the City University of Hong Kong and Foundation Chair of Asian Studies at the University of New England. He has held visiting professorships at Mahidol University, Singapore Management University, the University of Malaya and the University of Warwick. Professor Hewison has expertise on Thailand’s modern politics, work and labour politics and democratisation. He is currently working on issues related to comparative populism and the political foundations of universalist welfare.
Contradictions of Care and Control in an Age of Precarity: Migratory Surveillance and Strategic Resistance in Hong Kong

Nicole Constable
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This talk presents a concrete example of how precarity is produced, experienced, and resisted in an Asian context. It provides a critical analysis of the connections between flows of people and capital, national pressures to modernize, and the precarity of Asian migrant workers, by examining new forms of governmental migratory surveillance. In particular, I ask why and how the new electronic passport system introduced as a pilot project by the Indonesian Consulate in Hong Kong in 2015, that was intended to protect migrant workers, has in practice created serious problems and greater precarity for them. Justified by government officials in terms of care and control of migrant worker citizens, the e-passport policy reflects the Indonesian state’s desire to create “legibility” of its citizenry (James Scott). It also illustrates biopolitics, governmental control and discipline. An ethnographic examination of the new passport policy in practice, reveals how “caring policies” entail control, mixed motivations, and often contribute to the increased precarity rather than the protection of migrant workers. This talk reveals numerous social tensions and cultural misunderstandings concerning the politics and wider contradictions of care and control within the context of precarious migrations, governmentality and Asian flows of bodies and capital. It also illustrates the opportunities and openings for creative resistance among migrant worker activists.

Nicole Constable is Professor of Anthropology and a Research Professor of International Studies at the University of Pittsburgh. She is former JY Pillay Professor of Social Sciences at Yale-NUS College, former Director of the Asian Studies Center and Dean of Graduate Studies and Research at the University of Pittsburgh. Her research has focused primarily on migration and mobilities; the commodification of intimacy; gender, sexuality and reproductive labor. She is the author of four monographs including, Maid to Order in Hong Kong: Stories of Migrant Workers and Romance on a Global Stage: Pen Pals, Virtual Ethnography, and Mail-Order Marriages. Her most recent book, Born Out of Place: Migrant Mothers and the Politics of International Labor is about Filipina and Indonesian migrant workers who become mothers in Hong Kong, and their legal and personal struggles in relation to work, family, citizenship and parenthood.
This paper reflects on how cinema aestheticizes precarity. When Singapore’s film production resuscitated during the mid-1990s, the national cinema introduced itself to foreign audiences with art films that borrowed their stylistic sensibility from European New Wave movements of the 60s and 70s. Directors well versed in those visual and narrative abstractions characteristic of modernist cinema earned prizes and coveted spots at major international festivals. These films feature working class characters left behind by Singapore’s economic miracle. They are socially immobile, alienated, devoid of hope, agency, and the will to live. These downcast, disaffected denizens, shunted to the margins of society, teeter on the edge of sanity, and as it were, on the ledges of public housing high-rises – structures that are an equally important part of this visualization of precarity. The figures are mired in vast, impersonal seas of concrete, diminished by the buildings’ uniform size, and suspended in time as they trudge along endless hallways.

Current scholarship about these films by and large weighs these artistic choices in political terms. What are the consequences of appropriating a style originally fashioned to represent the alienation of Western subjects from modernity, for an Asian attempt to negotiate postmodernity? Does this undermine the authenticity of an emergent cinema, and the efficacy of the local voices articulated within? Against the tendency to apply postcolonial theories regarding mimicry, ambivalence, or subaltern voices, this paper turns to the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, which enables us to recalibrate our understandings of both film history and world history.

Gerald Sim is the Lee Kong Chian NUS-Stanford Distinguished Fellow on Contemporary Southeast Asia for 2016-17. He is a Visiting Scholar at Stanford’s Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center in Autumn 2016. He is Associate Professor of Film and Media Studies at Florida Atlantic University, and the author of The Subject of Film and Race: Retheorizing Politics, Ideology, and Cinema (Bloomsbury Academic, 2014). His current manuscript, tentatively titled, Besides Hybridity: Postcolonial Poetics of Southeast Asian Cinema, is contracted with Indiana University Press. He was a Visiting Senior Research Fellow at the Asia Research Institute in 2013 and 2016.
Precarious Demographic: The Gulf’s Insecure Populations

James M. Dorsey
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Nanyang Technological University,
Singapore, & Institute of Fan Culture,
University of Würzburg,
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Qatar’s successful bid for the right to host the 2022 World Cup has put the Gulf state at the forefront of demands for legal changes to its labour regime that potentially could change the very nature of its society and politics and together with Dubai could serve as a model for other countries in the region. The bid has also sparked the beginnings of long overdue debate of taboo issues, including rules governing citizenship and naturalization.

As a result, in a world in which mega sporting events largely fail to leave the kind of legal, social and political change that international sports associations like the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), the world soccer body, hope to spark, Qatar’s World Cup and more generally its greater sporting ambitions hold out the potential of being a rare success story. Activists’ pressure has sparked initial change not only in Qatar but also in other Gulf states.

International criticism and pressure is however a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it helps tear down taboos and produce improved conditions for workers albeit no security in terms of a path to citizenship or permanent residency even for those who were born and raised in the Gulf. On the other, activists’ demands highlight the precarity of citizenries who are minorities in their own countries. As a result, they fuel widespread fears among Gulf nationals that they will lose control of their culture, society and state if they open the Pandora’s Box of greater rights for non-nationals.

James M. Dorsey is a Senior Fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Co-Director of the University of Würzburg’s Institute for Fan Culture, and the author of The Turbulent World of Middle East Soccer blog, a recently published book with the same title, and also just published Comparative Political Transitions between Southeast Asia and the Middle East and North Africa, co-authored with Dr Teresita Cruz-Del Rosario.
Encountering Difference through Social Assistance: Migration, Diversity and Precarity in Singapore

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Brenda S.A. Yeoh
Asia Research Institute, and Department of Geography, National University of Singapore
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On this side of the 21st century, global cities in Asia are again experiencing wide-ranging temporal and spatial dimensions of migrant-led diversification. These twin processes of migration and diversification prompt scrutiny of how contemporary Asian global cities incorporate increasingly diverse groups of newcomers. Existing conceptualizations of urban diversity are inadequate for capturing the distinctive diversity of Asian cities such as Singapore. Indeed, the diversification of peoples in the global city is also paralleled by the diversification of precarious subjects. Yet, how new configurations of difference are producing more nuanced if still shadowy subjects of citizenship, deserve more conceptual and contextualized attention. While much has been written on the management of migration, far less attention has been focused on the management of multiplying forms of precarity resulting from insecure socio-legal status, disadvantaged labour market position and deeply inscribed social prejudice. Even less has been documented on how these forms of management set up specific vernaculars about citizenship, migrancy and precariousness. We address the relationality of social inequality in the context of diversification in Singapore, a city-state that has a particular historical understanding of diversity through a fixed formulaic “multi-racialism” and “meritocracy”. Drawing upon state narratives and interview data, we analyze organized social support for both migrants and citizens both by state organizations and NGOs to demonstrate the limits and possibilities of change and continuity in the constitution of precarity in the diversifying city.

Junjia Ye is Human Geographer at Massey University who completed her PhD in Geography at the University of British Columbia. Her research interests lie at the intersections of cultural diversity, critical cosmopolitanism, class, gender studies and the political-economic development of urban Southeast Asia. Alongside extensive ethnographic research methods, she also uses techniques of film and photography to create visual narratives through her work. The fundamental question that underlies her research is what accounts for how social and economic inequalities are constituted through people’s mobilities to, through and from diversifying cities? Her writings have been published in journals such as Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, Geoforum, and Gender, Place and Culture. Her first monograph is entitled Class Inequality in the Global City: Migrants, Workers and Cosmopolitanism in Singapore (Palgrave Macmillan).

Brenda S.A. Yeoh is Professor (Provost’s Chair) in the Department of Geography as well as Research Leader of the Asian Migration Cluster at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. Her research interests include the politics of space in colonial and postcolonial cities, and she has considerable experience working on a wide range of migration research in Asia, including key themes such as cosmopolitanism and highly skilled talent migration; gender, social reproduction and care migration; migration, national identity and citizenship issues; globalising universities and international student mobilities; and cultural politics, family dynamics and international marriage migrants. She has published widely in these fields. Her latest book titles include The Cultural Politics of Talent Migration in East Asia (Routledge, 2012, with Shirlena Huang); and Migration and Diversity in Asian Contexts (ISEAS press, 2012, with Lai Ah Eng and Francis Collins); Return: Nationalizing Transnational Mobility in Asia (Duke University Press, 2013, with Xiang Biao and Mika Toyota); as well as a paperback reprint of her book Contesting Space in Colonial Singapore: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment (originally published in 1996 by Oxford University Press; reprinted by NUS Press in 2003 and 2013).
Privilege and Precarity in Singapore

Chuan Fei Chin  
Department of Philosophy,  
National University of Singapore  
phiccf@nus.edu.sg

How does Singapore manage its responsibility for precarious labour? I analyse its policies and practices for managing transient migrants who are construction workers and domestic helpers, in order to illuminate the moral relations and social dynamics between privileged citizens and precarious workers in Singapore.

My paper has three parts. First, I examine how the state and employers in Singapore manage responsibility for these migrant workers. They diffuse responsibility widely within Singapore or displace it outside Singapore. They also try to reduce their responsibility by disentangling the lives of migrant workers from those of Singaporean citizens. Drawing on recent social scientific research, I explain why these strategies contribute significantly to the workers’ vulnerabilities. Second, I argue that these strategies make Singaporean citizens variously complicit in the workers’ precarity. Here I distinguish how we are complicit by enabling, collaborating with, and condoning exploitation. I also clarify why our complicity is consistent with the workers’ ability to make choices. Third, I explore how this constant complicity challenges our social virtue, social harmony, and social identities. Using models of the self developed in moral and social theories, I explain what happens when we dehumanise others and draw moral boundaries based on narrow loyalties and ethnic stereotypes. Together these parts of my paper build a conceptual framework for analysing what it means for Singaporeans to live in complicity with precarity.

Chuan Fei Chin is Senior Tutor at the Department of Philosophy in National University of Singapore. He won the Alexis de Tocqueville Prize in Social Studies at Harvard University, and received a DPhil in Philosophy from Oxford University in 2016. His research interests are in the philosophy of psychology and applied ethics. He is also the author of ‘Margins and Monsters’ in History and Theory, and an editorial board member of the new Routledge book series Microhistories. This paper on precarity is part of a long-term project on everyday ethics in Singapore.
Outside the view of most observers of contemporary Singapore are approximately 50,000 low-income rental flats. Residents in these flats live lives that are the very definition of ‘precarity’ — incomes barely enough to cover basic needs; uncertainty of wages from week to week; and no real prospects for stability and upward mobility for their children on the horizon. This paper describes the everyday experiences of a group of persons not often acknowledged in stories about Singapore. It focuses on two aspects of their experiences that illuminate the contours of living with everyday precarity in Global City Singapore. First, I discuss their experiences with wage work and the deep and endemic sense of crises that permeate their days. Second, to illustrate that precarity is also, importantly, a gendered experience, I discuss the ways in which notions of femininity and masculinity are embedded in experiences of precarity. Through the concept of precarity, scholars have drawn renewed attention to capitalist exploitation while highlighting contemporary political economic transitions that undercut workers’ access to stable employment and access to various goods and services. They have thus raised doubts about the fundamental long-term sustainability and justness of tying people’s wellbeing to wage work. This paper illustrates the ways in which political economic macrophenomena map onto people’s everyday lives. It shows, importantly, that what is at stake is not just jobs but human dignity and moral worth.

You Yenn Teo received her PhD in Sociology from the University of California at Berkeley. She is currently Associate Professor in the Division of Sociology at the Nanyang Technological University. In her research, she explores issues around governance, citizenship, public policy, poverty and inequality, and the institutionalization and reproduction of gender and class inequalities. Outside academia, she is active as a volunteer in a few non-governmental organizations, writes regular op-eds, and gives talks at public forums. In 2016, she received the American Sociological Association Sex and Gender Section’s Feminist Scholar Activist Award.
Secondary Precarity: Family Vulnerability in an Age of Unfree Labour

Sallie Yea
Department of Social Inquiry, La Trobe University, Australia
s.yea@latrobe.edu.au

Scholarly discussions of precarious work have yielded a robust engagement with the conditions and structures that produce precarity, the contextual nuances that characterize worker relations across a range of sites and sectors, and the possibilities of resistance and re-working amongst the precariat. In these discussions precarious workers are often regarded — perhaps unintentionally — as autonomous actors, with their embeddedness in social relations and particular places relatively under-conceptualized, dispute recent calls for an embedded approach to labour geography.

Taking workers’ embeddedness in social relations and norms as a starting point for analysis, this paper explores a secondary circuit of precarity amongst families of exploited workers. This circuit is analysed according to three registers of vulnerability and risk: economic (household and livelihood), intimate (anxiety and negative emotional relations), and physical (mobility and movement).

The paper proceeds with an outline of this analytic framework for exploring secondary precarity through a case study of trafficked fishers and their families from Cambodia and the Philippines. Human trafficking is an extreme form of precarious labour, characterized by unfreedom and hyper-exploitation. Trafficking amongst migrant fishers not been subject to rigorous academic documentation to date, and is relatively poorly understood in comparison to other forms of human trafficking, such as in the sex industry or amongst migrant labourers deployed in land-based sectors. Thus, in addition to the analytic proposed in this paper, discussion also hopes to contribute to the extension of understandings of unfree labour and precarious work in the contemporary milieu.

Sallie Yea gained her PhD in 2000 from Monash University and has held academic positions in Geography and International Development respectively at universities in Australia, New Zealand and Singapore. Currently she is a Tutor and Honorary Fellow in the Department of Social Inquiry, La Trobe University, Australia. She has researched and published extensively on various dimensions of human trafficking and vulnerable migration, and has two books on the subject; a monograph titled Trafficking Women in Korea (2015) and an edited volume titled Human Trafficking in Asia (2013), both with Routledge. She has over twenty books chapters and journal articles on the subject, including in journals such as Annals of the Association of American Geographer, Antipode, Political Geography, and Environment and Planning D. Her research spans Australia, Singapore, the Philippines, South Korea, Mongolia and, most recently, Cambodia and Vietnam. She has also consulted for various governments and international organisations on human trafficking, including capacity building of NGOs and government officials on the subject. Currently she is finalising a book manuscript on the exploitation of South Asian male migrant workers in Singapore.
This paper analyses the implications of changing property laws and the emergence of monumental building projects on the urban environment of Phnom Penh: 1997-2016. A governmental switch in focus from the needs of ‘ordinary citizens’ (low middle to low income) who comprise the majority of Phnom Penh’s inhabitants to international investment in the real estate development and construction sectors occurred after the 1997 coup. The coup resulted in a consolidation of the two-party leadership structure established by the United Nations under UNTAC (1991-2) to a single Prime Minister, Hun Sen, and the majority rule of his Cambodian People’s Party. From 1998-2006 development in Phnom Penh, including some badly needed infrastructure repair, progressed largely under the international donation structure, which had supported the government of Cambodia (RGC) since UNTAC. Because this type of infrastructure development (roads, bridges, pipelines, water purification system upgrade) progressed under contractual oversight of international donors and their Cambodian partners, there was some fiscal accountability and quality control built into the projects that essentially benefited the majority of citizens in Phnom Penh. Even in 2001, however, the RGC had begun its satellite city development implementation by reclassifying public lakes and wetlands as public private land and selling it to outside investors and developers. The first was Camko city, whose Korean developer filled in several miles of lake and wetlands to build high-value condominiums, shops, villas, and office buildings. Camko City’s investment backer went bankrupt during the 2008 global economic crises and the project remains incomplete today with five partially built concrete high-rise “ghost” towers surrounded by miles of sandlands. A lesson could have been learned from this excess in speculation.

With the global economic crises of 2007-8, investment in the construction industry fell by about 50%. In order to kick-start the economy, which had a robust annual growth of 7.5% from around 2001 until the financial collapse, the RGC established new land laws allowing for foreign ownership of property (with some restrictions) and the right of Cambodian nationals to own an apartment. This rapidly lead to a massive construction boom and real estate bubble with billions of dollars invested from other Asian countries — China, Taiwan, Korea, Malaysia, Thailand, Japan — on wetlands and lakes in Phnom Penh reclassified as public-private property. Over the past seven years over 70% of Phnom Penh’s remaining lakes and wetlands have been filled with sand for the construction of high-end mega city projects: satellite cities. These are being built in an unregulated construction industry, with no regulatory oversight over building safety or construction quality once a building permit has been issued. Satellite cities are built on an ad-hoc basis with sole oversight by the investment company who may change plans according to investment flows.
In none of the six satellite cities I have investigated is there any low-income housing under development. In fact, many low-income city dwellers were displaced from their wetland homes for the satellite city developments without adequate compensation. This research explores the consequences of such unmitigated mega-development — the production of precarity — on the majority of Phnom Penh’s citizens.

Teri Shaffer Yamada received a master’s degree in Southeast Asian languages and literatures in 1975 and a doctorate in Buddhist Studies from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1985. She has studied seven Asian languages, including Chinese, Japanese and Khmer, and lived in Japan for seven years. In 2002 she organized the Nou Hach Literary Association (www.nouhachjournal.net) to promote the development of literary and modern literature in Cambodia. This NGO publishes the only literary journal in Cambodia, sponsors yearly literary awards, and promotes writers workshops in Cambodia. Currently she is the Chair of the Department of Asian and Asian American Studies at CSU Long Beach. Her research interests include modernity and Southeast Asian literature, development and sustainability in Cambodia, where she has done field work in Phnom Penh since 1995. Recent conference papers focusing on development in Phnom Penh include: “The NagaWorld Casino in Phnom Penh: The Ideology of Unmitigated Development and Its Ethical Implications” invited by the International Institute for Asian Studies, the Netherlands, for the international workshop Beyond the State’s Reach: Casino Spaces as Enclaves of Development or Lawlessness? at the Center for Khmer Studies, Siem Reap, Cambodia. August 21-23, 2015 and “Phnom Penh’s New Diamond Island Development: Simulacrum of ASEAN Eclectic” Association for Asian Studies Annual Conference, Chicago, March 26-29, 2016. Her publications include the compilation Virtual Lotus: Modern Fiction of Southeast Asia (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002); Modern Short Fiction of Southeast Asia: A Literary History (Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, 2009); ‘Just a Human Being’ and Other Tales from Contemporary Cambodia (Nou Hach Literary Association: Translation Series, No 1, Charleston S.C., 2013); Modern Literature of Cambodia: Transnational Voices of Transformation (Nou Hach Literary Association: Translation Series, No 2, Charleston S.C., 2016).
Precarious Lives with Economic Land Concessions: Gendered Vulnerability under Expansion of Rubber Plantation in Northern Laos and Northern Shan

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Since the 1990s, there is an expansion of rubber plantation in Northern Laos and in Northern Shan State in Myanmar. Both are driven by increasing Chinese capital, but are arranged in a different way: Laos based more on small-holder production as well as contract farming arrangements, and in Myanmar, by economic concession. The paper utilizes the concept of exclusion’s double edge (Hall et al. 2013) to analyze how the expansion of rubber plantation is shaping indigenous people’s access to land and to the market. The shift from subsistence upland cultivation to cash crops such as rubber and banana, as well as loss of land altogether in the case of Myanmar is increasing their dependence on agriculture wage labor. The paper echoes what feminist economists such as Deere (2005) noted as the feminization of agriculture wage labor. Deere (2005) pointed out that such independent income contributed to their improvement in decision making in the household. This paper argues that there are certain pre-requisites that are needed to achieve such translation of income into decision making. At the same time, there are cases where people are getting worse off with higher dependence on market and eating less food than before. The paper argues that different adjustment strategies are needed under different access to land and between women and men, and hence some group of women and men become particularly vulnerable in the process.

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Aye Chan Myae is from Myanmar. She got her master’s degree in Gender and Development Studies from Asian Institute of Technology in 2016. She graduated with a bachelor of science in forestry from University of Forestry, Yezin, Nayphyitaw in 2013. She specializes in gender and forestry/environmental science.
Thailand’s Border Special Economic Zones and Precarious Life and Work

Thailand’s proposed new special economic zone (SEZ) policy calls for more than ten projects in border areas across the country. After the military coup in 2014, it was stated that the SEZs would be used as internment camps for migrant workers as part of the campaign against the poor initiated by the junta. That policy has now changed to using day migrants in value-adding activities that will help lift Thailand out of the Middle Income Trap. These top-down approaches instil little confidence that genuine market demand or complementarity of production assets will lead to thriving SEZs with skilled and well-rewarded employees. Indeed, the presence of SEZs located across the Lao and Cambodian borders suggests there will be over-capacity of industrial space and, hence, under-utilisation of sites and the driving down of costs, including wages. Existing SEZs are already lying unused or, as in the case of Boten, stand as tribute to the damaging effects of cowboy capitalism. These examples suggest a flaw in the claim for SEZs in Thailand that they are different from industrial estates and not paces of pollution, contestation and social problems. This paper investigates the logic of the border SEZs in Thailand in the light of projects across the Mekong Region and, specifically, considers the extent to which they promote safe, decent and stable employment, in contrast to the precarious work and lifestyle of the factory hand and family members.

John Walsh is Director, SIU Research Centre, Shinawatra University, Thailand. He is Editor of the SIU Journal of Management, the Journal of Shinawatra University and the Nepalese Journal of Management Science and Research, as well as being Regional Editor (Southeast Asia) for Emerald’s Emerging Markets Case Study Series. He received his doctorate from the University of Oxford for a thesis related to international management. These days, his research focuses on the social and economic development of the Greater Mekong Sub-Region.
Precarity, Agency, and the Emerging Conservative Working Class in China

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Workers’ agency is important to understand the Chinese working class’s formation and gauge its ability to forging transformative movements. Recent labor study literature posits that inequality and volatile capital movement increase workers’ precarity and lead to stronger labor resistance. When capital moves geographically in search of cheaper labor, labor unrests shortly follows and creates new working class; capital flight in the late-industrialization region leads to strong labor movements. This paper examines empirically how Chinese workers’ cognitive agency relates to capital movement inflicted precarity in the megacities and lower-tier cities. Despite precarity and capital movement causing more strikes, it does not necessarily lead to a stronger cognitive agency, such as a clearer class identification, stronger willingness to participate, and better sense of solidarity. I argue that higher inequality and precarity in the more developed megacities, exacerbated by capital movement, contribute to the making of a more conservative and cognitively weak working class in post-socialist China. This distinction of workers’ cognitive resistance and action-based resistance is vital. It may eventually challenge all labor interest parties to re-think their current strategies of labor relations and organization.

Jake Lin received his PhD on political science and international relations at Victoria University of Wellington in 2016. His research focuses on labor struggles, social movement, inequality and capitalism, and comparative politics in China and East Asia. He has a number of publications, including book chapter, book review and articles on the above topics internationally, such as the journal of International Sociology.
Who are the Goldsmiths? A Sociological Study of Network, Mobility and Precarity among Migrant Goldsmiths of West Bengal, India

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The paper explores the concept of precarity among the migrant goldsmiths from West Bengal. The liberalization period since 1990 has led to the making of a new generation of goldsmiths who have developed a network of artisans traveling to different states within India as well as to Nepal and Bangladesh. While the concept of precarity primarily traces the transformation of secure labour to uncertain and unpredictable work, the case of goldsmiths of Bengal offers a more complex story. Their move, the goldsmiths point out, was to escape the lack of economic opportunity in the villages and severe flood situation that periodically destroyed the crop. Our multi-sited fieldwork in three states of India suggests that while migration had started from this area in the 1980s after the devastating flood of 1978, large-scale migration began in the 1990s. With the repeal of the Gold-control Act of 1968 in 1990, the gold industry expanded and provided an opportunity to these ‘new goldsmiths’ to join the work-force. A village network developed that brought in remittance, hopes of upward mobility and a new identity to these first generation goldsmiths. Goldsmithing, which was once a caste-based occupation, gradually shifted towards a village-based, guild-like master-apprentice structure. The paper argues that the concept of precarity in the context of goldsmiths of West Bengal signifies not breakdown of stable social ties but on the contrary, village ties became the basis of a new guild-like bond that imparted skills and assured work in the volatile gold economy.

Anindita Chakrabarti is Associate Professor of Sociology at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur, India. Her research and teaching interests lie in the field of sociology of religion, law and sociology of work. She has received her doctoral degree from the Department of Sociology, Delhi University. She has been a Visiting Scholar at the University of California, Berkeley and Visiting Professor at Leipzig University, CSSS, JNU, and at the Department of Sociology, Delhi University. In 2010 she won the Professor M. N. Srinivas Memorial Prize, awarded by the Indian Sociological Society for her paper titled “Judicious Succession and Judicial Religion: Internal Conflict and Legal Dispute in a Religious Reform Movement in India”. She is a Fellow, at the Humanities Centre for Advanced Studies (HCAS) at Leipzig University (2016-20). Her book titled Religious Reform, Civil Society and Democracy is in press with the Cambridge University Press.

Sruti Kanungo is Research Scholar at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur, India. She has completed her Masters in Sociology from University of Hyderabad in 2013.
Everyday Precariousness and Socialization among Nepali Migrant Workers in Malaysia

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In this paper, I describe how Nepali migrant workers understand and experience their precarious living conditions and employment in Malaysia. Drawing on the anthropological discussion on precarity and precarious labor, I situate my study to illuminate the interconnection between “precarious labor and precarious life” (Millar 2014: 35; Allison 2012; Neilson and Rossiter 2008). In particular, labor precariousness that migrant workers unwittingly experience and participate in, as they articulate it, extends beyond the dominant narrative of exploitative working conditions and implicates migration infrastructure, political instability and socio-economic immobility in Nepal. As such, low-wage Nepali migrants depend on foreign employment recruitment and placement agencies’ services that they are deeply critical of yet, at the same time, understand as an outcome of the collapse of the Nepali state. I argue that migrants’ perceptions and, especially their overlapping narratives of precarious lives at ‘home’ and labor ‘abroad’ (Malaysia in this case) and their self-reflexive critique of the state provisions are embedded within the condition of possibility for migrant sociality and normalization of precarity.

Tina Shrestha received her PhD in Sociocultural Anthropology from Cornell University. Prior to joining Asia Research Institute (ARI), she was Postdoctoral Fellow at the International Institute for Asian Studies, Leiden (2015-2016). Her research interests are transnational labor migration, bureaucracy and brokerage, humanitarianism, asylum systems, and critical refugee studies.
“Share House” – A New Living in the Age of Precarity?

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In the last decades Japan has been undergoing an extensive societal change centered mainly on family, employment, and patterns of social interaction. Later and fewer marriages lead to a growing amount of singles; new patterns of employment produce new groups with diversified income and living conditions; the virtualization of communication generate new patterns of social interaction, often linked to the problem of alienation, especially among the younger generation.

As the traditional networks of intimacy and belonging are replaced by atomized modes of digitalized interaction, new institutions emerge that enable new forms of social bonding. This paper focuses on one such institution — a new form of housing referred to as the “share house”. “Share house” is a format of collective residence, whereby large living spaces are divided into separate units, furnished, and rented out to individual tenants. Often they are organized by a certain principle, such as same-gender houses, houses for single mothers, multicultural houses etc. The popularity of the “share house” is in sharp contrast with the conventional style of Japanese housing, where “home” is defined by centrality of nuclear family and demand for privacy.

This talk will present the “share house” phenomenon as a new format of collective residence addressing Japan’s changing socio-economic agenda. I suggest that “share house” represents a means of coping with precarity triggered by long-term economic stagnation and the “liquidization” of social bonds. It is conceptualized as a form of “new family” available to those seeking alternative social environments and substitute modes of familial intimacy.

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Precarious Intimacy: Frontier Erotics in a China-Vietnam Border Town

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This paper presents an ethnographic account on the intimate ways in which precarity is experienced through erotic encounters between Chinese businessmen and Vietnamese women in a China-Vietnam border town. With the reopening of the border and the establishment of special economic zones since the 1990s, increasing interactions at the nation’s edge produce novel spaces for exotic and erotic encounters. Chinese businessmen at the border share experiences of their sexual adventures as a collaborative exercise that reinforces a masculine sense of self; and at the same time they construct the Vietnamese Other as the dangerous femme fatale. Their erotic fantasies reveal shifting tensions in cross-border relations, in affect and emotions, and in memories and practices. Intimate pleasures and pretend jeopardies in the borderland sex market mirror a mixed sense of excitement and anxiety in cross-border trade and frontier reform. Taking intimacy as inherently a contested site of power, this paper argues that such erotic liaisons reflect how precarity is deeply embedded in Chinese masculine subjectivities, and that it creates new inequalities in the negotiation of body politics when it comes to sex and money. While precarity continues to signify the ontological vulnerability of life when borders open up to suit the expansion of capitalism, intimate desires become another vector through which games of domination are played out as experiments of control and power.

Juan Zhang is a Postdoctoral Fellow with the School of Social Science at the University of Queensland in Australia. Her research interests include social change, transnational migration and mobility in Asia. She has published in journals including Environment & Planning D, Environment & Planning A, Gender Place & Culture, International Development Planning Review, and the China Journal.
Mobilising Affinity Ties: Kachin Internal Displacement and the Geographies of Humanitarianism at the China-Myanmar Border

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This paper considers the precarity experienced by Kachin internally displaced people (IDP) in camps at the China-Myanmar border resulting from territorial contestation between the Myanmar military and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). The IDP situation directs attention to how geographical and geopolitical constraints deter international humanitarian assistance yet provide opportunities to engage a different set of humanitarian actors. The paper first argues that the Kachin IDPs are treated as surplus populations by the sovereign states in both Myanmar and China. Surplus populations come into existence when nation-states impose punitive measures that compromise the survivability of populations that are considered threatening to national sovereignty. Second, the paper examines how mobilising affinity ties enables Kachin humanitarian workers to leverage the citizenship resources of empathetic Chinese nationals to negotiate humanitarianism constraints at the China-Myanmar border. Affinity ties refer to connections emanating from a dynamic constellation of cultural attributes to do with history, ethnicity, religion and place amongst other malleable identity constructs. Affinity ties may congeal into durable ties of solidarity and activism, but no less significant are vernacular expressions of affinity that prompt empathy for proximate or distant strangers and a predilection to act on behalf of those experiencing oppression. The paper proposes that conceptualising affinity ties draws out transversal webs of connections that bridge people of differential social positionings and nurture caring relationships despite the physical and cognitive borders that exist within and between societies.

Elaine Lynn-Ee Ho is Associate Professor at the Department of Geography, National University of Singapore (NUS). Her research addresses how citizenship is changing as a result of migration in countries like China, Myanmar and Singapore. Her current research focuses on three areas: transnational ageing and care in the Asia-Pacific (including Singapore), international student migration to China, and border mobilities between Myanmar and China. Prior to joining NUS, she was a lecturer at the University of Leeds. She completed her PhD at University College London, after which she was awarded postdoctoral fellowships at Royal Holloway University of London and the University of British Columbia.
Growing precarity amongst rural households in Myanmar is linked to decades of neglect, resulting in a near-absence of social benefits and statutory entitlements (McCarthy, 2016b). Despite this, recent evidence demonstrates the emergence of community-based social organizations in rural communities in Myanmar, formed along traditional principles of reciprocity. Analysis of large-scale rural household surveys demonstrated that such organizations are found in nearly half of communities in rural Myanmar (M Griffiths, 2016a), collecting and redistributing on average $2,500 per community per year on healthcare assistance, educational assistance, funeral assistance and other social welfare initiatives such as elderly care and nutritional assistance (E. E. Thu, 2013). The presence of such organizations is strongly linked to higher levels of household resilience, achieved largely through reducing the inequalities linked to gender, disability and poverty. Compared to communities without social organizations, inequality levels relating to poverty were 14% lower, inequalities linked to gender were 4% lower, and inequalities linked to disability 40% lower in communities with social organizations. Resilience, measured as an aggregate of both negative and positive coping strategies, demonstrated higher degrees of household resilience in households in communities with social organizations. Communities with higher levels of migration are more likely to have community based social organizations, possibly a result of economic and social remittances. In the absence of formalized social protection in Myanmar, existing social organizations continue to provide the majority of social assistance in rural communities, representing new co-dependent networks which serve as evolving socio-economic mechanisms for staving off social inequalities and building resilience.

Initially trained in clinical medicine and public health, Dr Mike Griffiths has worked in the social protection sector in Myanmar for over 13 years, currently working as lead researcher for the Yangon based Social Policy & Poverty Research Group (SPPRG), which has a particular focus on conducting research relevant to emerging government policy. Previous research work in Myanmar includes being lead researcher on the National Disability Survey 2009-10, a nationwide survey on formal sector migration, and two large-scale surveys looking at profiles of rural poverty in Myanmar. Forthcoming publications include compilations of contemporary migration research and disability research in Myanmar, and analysis of the performance of traditional social protection organizations in delivering social assistance. As well as working for SPPRG, Dr Griffiths is also a PhD candidate for the University of Hull, with current research focused on studying patterns of resilience in rural households and studies of traditional social protection organizations in Myanmar.
ABOUT THE ORGANISERS AND CHAIRPERSONS

**Bernardo Brown** is Research Fellow at the Asia Research Institute (ARI), National University of Singapore, affiliated with the Religion and Globalisation and the Asian Migration clusters. His work on Sri Lankan Catholic return migration has recently appeared in *Contemporary South Asia* (2014), *Ethnography* (2015) and *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* (2015). His current research projects focus on Catholic seminaries and priestly vocations in South and Southeast Asia. He received an MA from the New School for Social Research and a PhD in Cultural Anthropology from Cornell University. Before joining ARI, he held a post-doctoral fellowship at the International Institute for Asian Studies in Leiden.

**Jonathan Rigg** is Director of the Asia Research Institute and Professor in the Department of Geography at the National University of Singapore. Prior to that, he was Head of the Geography Department at Durham University in the UK. He was also based at the School of Oriental & African Studies, London University where he was a Lecturer, British Academy Post-Doctoral Research Fellow, and PhD student. He is a development geographer interested in illuminating and explaining patterns and processes of social, economic and environmental change in the Asian region and the impacts of such changes on ordinary people and everyday life. In his work, he has tried to give a “face” to the individuals buffeted by modernisation and ascribe to them an agency which is sometimes absent in higher level interpretations of change. He has been concerned to treat ordinary people as special and the geographical contexts in which they live—and which they help to shape—as distinctive. He is currently working on three projects: an international, interdisciplinary study of resilience to earthquake risk in the continental interior of Asia; a study of the role of land in agrarian change in Thailand; and a project on the survival of the smallholder in East and Southeast Asia. His latest book *Challenging Southeast Asian Development: The Shadows of Success* was published in August 2015.

**My (May) Ngo** is Postdoctoral Fellow in the Religion and Globalisation cluster at Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. She earned her PhD in Anthropology at Swinburne University of Technology, Australia. Her doctoral research examined the role of religious actors in the humanitarian field, focusing on a case study of a Christian faith-based organisation in Morocco working with Sub-Saharan African irregular migrants. Her research interests include how constructions of both the ‘sacred’ and the ‘secular’ are negotiated within the humanitarian and development field, and how an examination of these processes render into question values that are assumed as universal and neutral. She will be completing a book manuscript based on her doctoral dissertation, and working on a new project examining the politics of religion and development in Cambodia, with a focus on Catholic organisations.

**Rita Padawangi** is Senior Research Fellow at the Asian Urbanisms Cluster at Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore (NUS). Dr Padawangi was previously a researcher at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, NUS. She has also been a Research Fellow at the Global Asia Institute, NUS; Center for Urban Research and Learning at Loyola University Chicago; and Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Jakarta, Indonesia. She has taught at the School of Design and Environment at the National University of Singapore and at the Department of Sociology at Loyola University Chicago, with a special focus on urban sociology and the sociology of the built environment. She received her PhD in Sociology from Loyola University Chicago where she was also a Fulbright Scholar for her MA studies. She holds a Bachelor of Architecture degree from the Parahyangan Catholic University and was a practicing architect in Bandung, Indonesia. Her research interests are in the following: (1) public space, urban heritage, place-making and spaces of hope through community engagement in city-building; (2) sociology of architecture and the built environment; (3) social movements and politics of space; (4) environmental sociology in the city; (5) environmental resource governance with a focus on water.
Teresita Cruz-del Rosario is Senior Research Fellow at the Asia Research Institute (ARI), National University of Singapore. She was previously an Associate Professor at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy and Senior Research Fellow at the Center on Asia and Globalisation. Her teaching experience has been in Development Policy, Social Movements, and Sociological/Anthropological Theory and Methods. She has a background in Sociology, Social Anthropology and Public Administration from Boston College, Harvard University, and New York University. Apart from peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters, she has authored the following books: “Lost in Transition: Comparative Political Transitions in Southeast Asia and the Middle East” (co-authored with James M Dorsey, Palgrave MacMillan 2016); “The State and the Advocate: Development Policy in Asia” (Routledge UK 2014) and an edited volume entitled “The Democratic Developmental State: North-South Perspectives” (forthcoming Ibidem Publishers). A fourth book is currently under preparation and is entitled “Vanished History: Recovering Pre-colonial Transnational Philippine History” (Hong Kong University Press 2018). Her current research interests are in the broad field of Arabia-Asia historical and sociological connections, religion and globalization, and comparative regional development.

Tracey Skelton is Associate Professor of Human Geography at the National University of Singapore and Visiting Professor at Loughborough University, UK. She was the Principle Investigator of a Global Asia Institute, National University of Singapore, research project: Asian Cities: Liveability, Sustainability, Diversity and Spaces of Encounter. The project focused on the cities of Busan (South Korea), Hyderabad (India), Kunming (China) and Singapore. She also works on geographies of children and young people and was the co-editor (and an article author) of a special issue published in the journal Urban Studies in 2013 (vol. 3): Young People’s Im/Mobile Urban Geographies. She is also the Editor-In-Chief of a major reference work published by Springer, Geographies of Children and Young People, which comprises 12 volumes, of which 6 have been published in 2016 and 6 forthcoming in 2017.