

WORKSHOP

CONCEPTUALISING MIGRATION BROKERAGE IN (IM)MOBILE TIMES



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In Asia and elsewhere, the development of a temporary migration regime has been accompanied by the rapid growth of an ecosystem of intermediaries filling the “middle space” of migration (Lindquist, Xiang and Yeoh, 2012). Key to the mobility across international borders of prospective migrants is a thriving migration industry that is comprised of a wide range of brokerage actors – licensed recruitment agencies, transport providers, immigration lawyers, housing and placement agents, and informal recruiters. While the term “migration industry” often connotes pejorative meanings, it plays a strategic role in bridging the barriers to mobility and facilitating transnational migration (McKeown, 2012).

Arguably, it is precisely because migration management has become increasingly complicated and intense that the demand for brokers with the expertise of navigating labyrinthine migration regulations has increased at all levels. The more restrictive and complex labour migration policies become, the more expensive the process of migration becomes, while also increasing migrants’ dependence on brokers (Wickramasekara and Baruah, 2017).

With the rise of the migration industry in propelling migration over the last half-century, many aspects of global labour markets have been transformed. On the one hand, the receiving state is able to save costs, ensure flexibility, avoid blame and circumvent the need for formal cooperation with migrant-sending countries by outsourcing certain elements of migration governance to the migration industry while retaining regulatory authority (Goh, Wee and Yeoh, 2017). On the other hand, migrant indebtedness has ballooned, serving as a broker-facilitated mechanism in paving the way for the capital-poor to finance their migration and sell their labour abroad in exchange for remittances for their families, or an opportunity to achieve upward social and economic mobility.

As skilled mediators, migration brokers not only facilitate migration through the work of recruitment and placement, but also assume multi-faceted roles from securing visas, permits and other documentation to providing training, housing, transport and remittance services. Bureaucratic know-how and the ability to establish trust among prospective clients are important brokering traits since migrants are often required to make significant initial financial investments and/or entrust valuable personal documents for processing and handling (Marius-Gnanou, 2008; Lindquist, 2012).

In this context, this workshop underscores the importance of conceptualising the multiple roles played by the various migration brokers, and the relationships between them and with the state. We welcome new and previously unpublished work on the following themes:

- How the range of migration brokers, alongside states and technologies, (co)produce migrant (im)mobility across borders
- How migration brokers repair, maintain and transform mobility infrastructure in (post-)pandemic times
- How pandemic times have transformed forms of migration brokerage, including of debt and finance
- How migration brokers shape migrant subjectivities and reproduce migrant precarity and resilience
- How brokers engage in social reproduction, including the rules, standards and regulations within transnational labour markets
- How brokers (co)produce inequalities, including of freedom of mobility, within and between regions
- The role of digital technologies in mediating the migration brokerage

WORKSHOP CONVENORS

Prof Brenda S.A. YEOH, FBA

Asia Research Institute & Department of Geography, National University of Singapore

Prof Katharine JONES

Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University

Prof Pragna RUGUNANAN

Department of Sociology, University of Johannesburg

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25 APRIL 2024 • THURSDAY

10:30 – 11:00	WELCOME REMARKS
	<p>BRENDA S.A. YEOH, National University of Singapore KATHARINE JONES, Coventry University PRAGNA RUGUNANAN, University of Johannesburg</p>
11:00 – 13:00	PANEL 1 • BROKERS’ BUSINESS STRATEGIES
<i>Chairperson</i>	LOÏS BASTIDE , National University of Singapore
11:00	<p>The Pandemic’s Effect on the Migration Industry in Nepal RICHA SHIVAKOTI, Toronto Metropolitan University ARJUN KHAREL, Tribhuvan University</p>
11:20	<p>Finding A New Home Abroad: Locations, Agents, and Migrant Networks YVETTE TO, Hong Kong Polytechnic University</p>
11:40	<p>Pressured by Time? Study of Japanese Brokers Mobilising Vietnamese IT Professionals and Employers in the Uncertain Time AIMI MURANAKA, University of Duisburg-Essen</p>
12:00	<p>Recruitment Agents in a Debt-financed Migration Regime: Moving Domestic Workers from Indonesia to Singapore BRENDA S.A. YEOH, National University of Singapore</p>
12:20	Questions & Answers
13:00 – 14:00	LUNCH
14:00 – 15:30	PANEL 2 • BROKERAGE AND MIGRANTS’ JOURNEY
<i>Chairperson</i>	YI’EN CHENG , National University of Singapore
14:00	<p>Narrating Migration Journeys: Incidental and Evasive ‘Telling’ of the Role of Brokers in Ghanaian Migration JACQUELINE ANDALL, University of Tokyo</p>
14:20	<p>Contingency of Proximity: Strategizing the Space-Time of Vietnam-China Undocumented Labor Migration DANG THI HOAI LINH, Alumna of Fulbright University Vietnam (Undergraduate)</p>
14:40	<p>Migration Brokerage, Risk and Resilience among South Asian Migrants Traveling to South Africa PRAGNA RUGUNANAN, University of Johannesburg</p>
15:00	Questions & Answers
15:30 – 16:00	AFTERNOON TEA
16:00 – 17:30	PANEL 3 • MULTI-SCALARITY, RELATIONALITY AND GLOBAL PRODUCTION
<i>Chairperson</i>	KRIS HYESOO LEE , National University of Singapore
16:00	<p>Calo, Preman and Kinship Networks: Brokerage of Domestic Fishing Workforces in the Context of Seafood Global Production Networks KATHARINE JONES, Coventry University</p>
16:20	<p>Workers at Sea: How Southeast Asian Crewing Agencies and Brokers have Enabled Supply Chains for Migrant Fish Workers in Global Fishing PETER VANDERGEEST, York University PHILIP KELLY, York University</p>
16:40	<p>Precarious Brokerage: How Close Emotional and Social Ties between Migrants and Informal Intermediaries Reproduce Transnational Vulnerabilities MOHAMMAD RASHED ALAM BHUIYAN, Dhaka University, and Coventry University</p>
17:00	Questions & Answers
17:30	END OF DAY 1
18:00 – 19:30	WORKSHOP DINNER (For Presenters, Chairpersons and Organisers Only)

26 APRIL 2024 • FRIDAY

10:30 – 12:00	PANEL 4 • BROKERING MIGRANTS’ DECISION-MAKING
<i>Chairperson</i>	JACOB RINCK , National University of Singapore
10:30	Information, Influence, and Intermediaries: Migration Decision-Making among Indian International Students in Canada RICA AGNES CASTANEDA , Toronto Metropolitan University ASHIKA NIRAULA , Toronto Metropolitan University ANNA TRIANDAFYLLIDOU , Toronto Metropolitan University
10:50	Facilitating Mainland Chinese Student Mobilities to Malaysia: Student Agents, Social Media and Brokerage Tactics SIN YEE KOH , Universiti Brunei Darussalam
11:10 <i>Online</i>	The Pravasi Dream: How the Agents/Brokers in Kerala Reshaping and Reengaging the Preexisting Social Networks in India DIPSITA DHAR , Jawaharlal Nehru University
11:30	Questions & Answers
12:00 – 13:00	LUNCH
13:00 – 14:30	PANEL 5 • SOCIAL EMBEDDEDNESS OF BROKERAGE
<i>Chairperson</i>	YANG WANG , National University of Singapore
13:00	Tracing Brokerage and Social Networks in Malabar: The Moral Economy of Mappila Migration to the Persian Gulf MUFSIN PUTHAN PURAYIL , O.P. Jindal Global University
13:20	From Worker to Broker and Back Again: Precarity Cycles and Fluid Migration Brokerage SALLIE YEA , La Trobe University
13:40	Channeling Exploitation? The Role of Co-ethnic Agents in the Global Recruitment of Temporary Migrants to Australia YAO-TAI LI , University of New South Wales
14:00	Questions & Answers
14:30 – 15:00	AFTERNOON TEA
15:00 – 16:30	PANEL 6 • INSTITUTIONAL EMBEDDEDNESS OF BROKERAGE
<i>Chairperson</i>	BERNICE LOH , National University of Singapore
15:00	Migration Brokers and the Overlapping Regimes of Labour Migration Governance YUK WAH CHAN , City University of Hong Kong
15:20	Contracted Life: Migrant Domestic Work in a Malaysian Ethical Recruitment Agency JING HAO LIONG , Duke University
15:40 <i>Online</i>	Institutional Embeddedness of Migration Brokerage: The Case of Run-Away Migrants in Nepal-Malaysia Corridor SANDHYA A.S. , Bielefeld University
16:00	Questions & Answers
16:30 – 17:00	CLOSING REMARKS
	BRENDA S.A. YEOH , National University of Singapore KATHARINE JONES , Coventry University PRAGNA RUGUNANAN , University of Johannesburg
17:00	END OF WORKSHOP

The Pandemic's Effect on the Migration Industry in Nepal

Richa SHIVAKOTI

Toronto Metropolitan University
rshivakoti@torontomu.ca

Arjun KHAREL

Tribhuvan University
akharel@ceslam.org

The migration industry in Nepal form powerful networks through different associations and are known to be influential at the policy level. They play a central role in the migration process, linking workers to jobs abroad, especially in the Gulf countries and Malaysia.

This article takes a look at the effect of the pandemic on the otherwise lucrative migration industry in Nepal. The findings are based on 2 sets of interviews, one with 20 people related to the migration industry (recruitment agencies, orientation agencies, medical screening centers, insurance agencies) as well as from civil society organizations and Government officials. These interviews (conducted Sept-Oct 2022) focused on the pandemic's effect on the migration process and on the challenges faced by actors in the migration industry. The second set of interviews (conducted May-Aug 2022) were with 150 migrant workers who had returned to Nepal after the pandemic. Migrant workers share about the costs involved during the recruitment process, and their pandemic related returns and challenges.

People from the migration industry mostly spoke of their own challenges as lockdowns forced their businesses to come to a complete halt. They lamented over the fact that they still had to pay their operating costs (rent and salaries) and got no support from the government. Though they got some calls of distress from migrant workers, they did not see return and rescue as their responsibility but that of the government. Returnee migrant workers, on the other hand, talk about the steep cost of migration, the debt burden, contract deviances resulting in lower salaries or different jobs, challenges during the pandemic, pandemic forced early return, exorbitant chartered airline fees, no support in Nepal and additional debt to sustain themselves. Post pandemic, workers burdened by debt are looking to go abroad again while the migration industry is also finding new ways to compensate their pandemic related losses.

Richa Shivakoti is Research Lead on Migration Governance at CERC Migration. Her research focus is on the governance of labour migration within Asia, particularly between the labour-sending states of South Asia and South East Asia and the labour receiving states in the Middle East. Her current research questions the sustainability of the circular temporary migration governance regimes in Asia. She is the primary investigator for a SSHRC insight development grant and works with partners in Nepal and the Philippines to explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on temporary migrant workers. Richa has a PhD in Public Policy from the National University of Singapore and a dual Masters in Public Affairs and Political Science from Indiana University, Bloomington. Previously, she was a research officer at Carleton University, a postdoctoral fellow at Maastricht University and the United Nations University in the Netherlands, and a visiting scholar at Georgetown University.

Arjun Kharel is Assistant Professor of Sociology at Tribhuvan University and a research fellow at the Centre for the Study of Labour and Mobility, Kathmandu. His research focuses on migration, labour, social change, development and health and wellbeing. He has achieved a PhD in sociology from Kansas State University.

Finding A New Home Abroad: Locations, Agents, and Migrant Networks

Yvette TO

Hong Kong Polytechnic University
ymyto@yahoo.com.hk

Since 2019, nearly 200,000 Hong Kong residents have applied for and been granted visas that would lead to permanent residency and citizenship in foreign countries. While socio-political changes are one of the notable factors prompting Hong Kong people's departures, migration intermediaries also play a part in increasing people's desire to emigrate.

Building on the author's previous research of the "PEFTs" (property agents, education consultants, financial planners, and tax advisors) and their role in supporting outmigration from Hong Kong, this paper focuses on the real estate sector. I introduce and develop the concept of 'smart migration'. This process that encompasses, on one hand, aspiring middle-class migrants engaging in thorough pre-migration and continuous research, maximising benefits, consulting with experts, and making contingency arrangements for their migration; and on the other hand, migration intermediaries actively advocating and assisting prospective migrants with strategies for 'smart migration'.

Drawing on in-depth interviews with intermediaries in the sector and participant observation at property fairs and real estate webinars, this study identifies new players — property investor-educators — and examines the evolving roles of traditional property agents in promoting properties, locations, opportunities, and specific lifestyles to potential and current migrants. I contend that the research on migration intermediaries should expand to include new participants in the industry, such as property investor-educators. These emerging players, previously overlooked in established literature, play a part in influencing the migration decisions of wealthy middle-class migrants. Furthermore, the study reveals how both new and existing intermediaries utilise digital platforms, social networks, and migrant communities to engage with potential migrants, shedding light on the changing dynamics between intermediaries, migrants, and the broader migration ecosystem. Their intricate interactions not only reshape and sustain the migration industry but also affect cities and destinations as individuals contemplate their migration journeys.

Yvette To is Assistant Professor at the Department of Applied Social Sciences of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. She is interested in issues of class, power, and identity surrounding migration. Yvette co-edited (with Yuk Wah Chan) a special issue for *American Behavioral Scientist* on post-2019 migrations from Hong Kong. Her two papers in the special issue examined commercial actors in Hong Kong driving the emigration wave, and intra-ethnic tensions among Chinese Christian migrants in the UK, respectively. Yvette also investigates policies related to China's technological catch-up in strategic industries, and the global talent race in high-tech sectors. She is the author of *Contested Development in China's Transition into an Innovation-driven Economy*, Routledge, 2022.

Pressured by Time? Study of Japanese Brokers Mobilising Vietnamese IT Professionals and Employers in the Uncertain Time

Aimi MURANAKA

University of Duisburg-Essen

aimi.muranaka@uni-due.de

This paper explores how Japanese private brokers approach the temporal aspects of the migratory process, considering employers and Vietnamese IT professionals in Japan during the COVID-19 pandemic. Brokers/intermediaries are crucial in processing the skilled migrants' mobility, especially in Japan which denies an introduction of an official migration policy. Temporality shapes the migrants' life in the host society, for example their visa status is closely tied to the length of an employment contract. Brokers use the temporality of migrants' conditions to expose them to precarious working and migration conditions, as brokers are more informed about the employment contracts. Numerous works have underlined the necessity of examining the temporality of the migrants' life, but studies on how brokers deal with their temporality remain scarce. Accumulating time and experiences, migrants and employers become less dependent on these brokers, while they seek to maintain reliance from both employers and migrants. Through the temporality lens, this study investigates how brokers seek to retain the interest from both migrants and employers. Drawn from the data of semi-structured interviews with over 20 Japanese brokers and 30 Vietnamese IT professionals, the findings of the paper are following: Firstly, brokers sought to continuously demonstrate their need for both employers and migrants during the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, brokers attempted to persuade employers to hire more IT professionals, due to the expanding digitalisation of work during the pandemic. Additionally, without knowing the possible arrival of migrants, brokers maintained contact with both employers and Vietnamese migrants. Secondly, pressured by the workforce need, brokers mobilised the Vietnamese IT professionals already available in Japan, to survive under the (temporal) border restrictions in Japan. This paper argues that brokers seek to continuously maintain more advantageous position than employers and migrants, but brokers are also "pressured" by time to maintain the mobility business.

Aimi Muranaka works as a postdoctoral fellow at the Institute of East-Asian Studies in the University of Duisburg-Essen in Germany. She now works for a collaborative research project "Qualification and Skill in the Migration Process of Foreign Workers in Asia (QuaMaFA)" funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). Having completed her PhD in the University of Duisburg-Essen, and she has conducted qualitative fieldwork in her dissertation which sheds light on how Japanese private brokers contribute to "make" a cross-border labor market between Japan and Vietnam. Using qualitative research methods, her current project investigates how the Vietnamese IT professionals seek to move and navigate in the labour market in Japan and in Vietnam. Her research interest is marketisation of international migration, skills/qualifications in migration and brokerage in Asia.

Recruitment Agents in a Debt-financed Migration Regime: Moving Domestic Workers from Indonesia to Singapore

Charmian GOH

Independent Researcher
charmiangoh@gmail.com

Kellynn WEE

University College London
kellynn.wee.20@ucl.ac.uk

Brenda S.A. YEOH

National University of Singapore
geoyasa@nus.edu.sg

In 'fly now, pay later' systems across Southeast Asia, prospective migrant domestic workers accrue a snowballing debt, through recruitment processes beginning in their source villages and ending in their employers' homes, which they repay through salary deductions. This paper examines the debt of migrant domestic workers as it circulates spatially across and within borders, temporally over the course of a migrant's recruitment, and socially among a chain of migrant brokers and employers. Based on in-depth, qualitative interviews with placement agents, regulatory authorities, and NGO representatives in Singapore (n=48) and Indonesia (n=13) as well as focus group discussions with migrant women between 2015 and 2017, we theorise placement agents as debt-financed migration infrastructure, which channels migrant mobilities and debt, among other circulations. The capacity of Singapore placement agents to bear and pass on debt with limited knowledge about its decomposition allows debt to accommodate the low-level corruption in Indonesia, to preserve the profit of their cross-border suppliers, and to direct advances to the migrant and her family to secure recruitment. Further, agents are able to manage the risks of debt crossing the border through shaping the size and timing of advances paid to their suppliers, investing in phatic labour and relationship upkeep, forging cross-border relations with caution and pruning unsuccessful ones, and re-casting the business partnership through the regime of friendship. Finally, the collective capacity of agents to move migrant debt across the border creates the possibility of migrants escaping without monetary repercussions in cases of default.

Charmian Goh is an independent researcher and a former research assistant in the Asia Research Institute at National University of Singapore.

Brenda S.A. Yeoh, FBA is Raffles Professor of Social Sciences, Department of Geography, National University of Singapore. She is also the Research Leader of the Asian Migration Cluster in the Asia Research Institute (ARI). She was recently awarded the prestigious Vautrin Lud Prize (2021) for her outstanding achievements in the field of geography, and was also elected to the Fellowship of the British Academy as a Corresponding Fellow. Her research interests include the politics of space in colonial and postcolonial cities, and she also 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.

Kellynn Wee is a PhD researcher in the Department of Anthropology at University College London. Her research focuses on play cultures in tabletop roleplaying games in Singapore, with an emphasis on the materiality and sociality of play. She is also interested in play as participatory methodology and the incorporation of games into multimodal ethnography. Her previous work examined migration brokerage, debt-financed migration and migration policy in Southeast Asia.

Narrating Migration Journeys: Incidental and Evasive ‘Telling’ of the Role of Brokers in Ghanaian Migration

Jacqueline ANDALL

University of Tokyo

jandall@g.ecc.u-tokyo.ac.jp

This paper focuses on how Ghanaian migrants talk about brokers [connection men] and what this reveals about brokers' role in facilitating migration out of Africa towards established or new destinations. It is based on qualitative primary research conducted with male Ghanaian migrants regarding their destination decisions and eventual settlement and working experiences in Japan. Conceptually, it draws on the work of oral historian Alessandro Portelli, who emphasized the importance of viewing oral narrative sources as co-creations, where the agenda of the oral historian must meet the agenda of the narrator. The paper focuses on a period of Ghanaian migration when immigration restrictions meant Ghanaians needed to develop innovative ways to construct migration plans, frequently combining legal and illegal methods. Indeed, as undocumented African migrants, they pioneered the shift from a straightforward country A to country B model of migration to a new longer form of 'journey' that could take months or years and for whom various brokers would be necessary at different stages of the journey. The paper explores both their incidental narration of brokers' roles and their deliberate evasiveness about brokers' identities, even when the interaction with a specific broker had occurred many years previously. Drawing on Portelli's insight that 'telling' is influenced by the social framework of memory and additionally filtered by individual responsibility, my research suggests that the incidental references and the evasive 'telling' reflected a desire to protect identities and leave opportunities open for subsequent migrants. In other words, the enigmatic 'telling' derived from a shared understanding of the significance of what it means to become 'stuck' on the migration journey and the related importance of ensuring that pathways to complete migration journeys are left open for unknown others.

Jacqueline Andall is Associate Professor in the Department of English at University of Tokyo, Japan. She has held previous academic and research positions in the UK and Switzerland. Her main research interests are on gender and migration, labour migration, second generations and African diasporas. Her current work focuses on comparative Black migration to Italy and Japan and Japanese migration policy. She has published widely on migration issues, including books on Black migrant domestic workers in Italy and gender and migration in Europe. She has additionally consulted for the UN on African women's intra-continental migration.

Contingency of Proximity: Strategizing the Space-Time of Vietnam-China Undocumented Labor Migration

Dang Thi Hoai LINH

Alumna of Fulbright University Vietnam (Undergraduate)
shadesofanthro@gmail.com

Vietnamese popular discourse on undocumented migration to China tends to be cast in the unfavorable light of “human trafficking.” The idea of border-crossings evokes fears of malicious human traffickers who “sell” innocent rural Vietnamese into marriages, exploitative labor, or even organ trade in China. Focusing on Vietnam-China border-crossings, this paper challenges the reduction of undocumented migration to crime and involuntary participation by exploring its status as a complexly mediated labor-seeking practice, characterized by state complicity and migrants’ agency. It considers changes in the infrastructure for undocumented border-crossings and employment in China, called *đi chui*, amid COVID-19 restrictions. Based on ethnographic interviews with migrants and their family members from a rural village in Nghe An province, I investigate the ambiguous entanglement of kinship sentiments, moral obligations, and profit incentives in brokered *đi chui*.

On the whole, this paper wishes to expand the migration infrastructure literature (Lindquist, Xiang, and Yeoh 2012), especially Shrestha and Yeoh’s (2018) conceptualization of brokerage as “indeterminate and emergent” (664), to intra-Asian migration contexts outside the state’s official regulation. I nuance the scholarship on brokerage, precarization, and migrant agency (Deshingkar 2019; Paret and Gleeson 2016) by emphasizing the potentialities for flexibility and freedom within the precarity of *đi chui*.

Playing with the referents of “proximity” as Vietnam-China geographic closeness and as kinship ties conditioning migrants’ cross-border work, this paper argues that *đi chui* brokers and migrants negotiate contingent spatio-temporal contours of proximity. In the whirlwind of competing values and unstable alliances, *đi chui* brokerage, fragmented between travel logistics and job search, simultaneously precarizes and empowers migrants who accumulate unequal levels of cultural and social capital (Bourdieu 1986). I articulate the entwined uncertainties and possibilities in the space-time of *đi chui* through what I term *contingency of proximity*.

Dang Thi Hoai Linh earned her BA in Social Studies from Fulbright University Vietnam in 2023 and is an incoming PhD student in Anthropology at Yale University. During her studies, she undertook ethnographic fieldwork for her research, particularly on Vietnamese labor and marriage migrants, and assisted international scholars in their anthropological research projects. Her undergraduate thesis investigates the infrastructures for transnational labor migration from a rural village in Nghe An, the top labor-exporting province in Vietnam, to Asian countries including Taiwan, Japan, and mainland China. She is interested in how changing conceptions and practices of value, in “secular” and “sacred” realms, mediate people’s lived experiences of rural-urban transitions and grand development projects in Vietnam.

Migration Brokerage, Risk and Resilience among South Asian Migrants Traveling to South Africa

Pragna RUGUNANAN

University of Johannesburg

prugunanan@uj.ac.za

The migration brokerage industry across the African continent spawns a powerful network of agents, formal and informal, smuggling networks, and communities that result in a complex and multifaceted chain of actors and role players. After South Africa's transition to democracy in 1994, it became a symbol of opportunity and hope for many migrants. Its political stability and economic prosperity attracted people from countries across Africa and beyond. The ease of entry into South Africa is influenced by the porous nature of its borders with five neighboring countries. This porosity makes it easier for migrants to enter the country, both legally and illegally.

This article will provide some insight into the journeys undertaken by Bangladeshi, Indian, and Pakistani migrants as they make their way to South Africa. It examines the role of networks of agents, family connections, and transactional costs inherent in these high-risk journeys. While the growth in undocumented migration, smuggling networks and human trafficking had steadily increased, the scale and intensity of these dense, operational networks stretching across continents, revealed in the participants' narratives, show a level of sophistication, but also high levels of risk and resilience. The role of migration brokers in the transatlantic journeys of predominantly less-skilled South Asian migrants across Africa has not been given much attention. The article is based on in-depth interviews together with secondary research on the migration brokerage industry across the continent. Some of the results elucidate the extended network of friends and family to create or find opportunities for employment, resource networks to support migrants along the routes, and the financial and human risks of the journey. Through Bourdieu's (1985) lens of social capital theory, we examine how specific sets of interpersonal relationships induce trust, mitigate risk, and build resilience among the South Asian migrants precarious journeys.

Pragna Rugunanan is Vice-Dean of Research in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Johannesburg. She was invited as a Scholar of Excellence by the Canadian Excellence Research Chair in Migration at Toronto Metropolitan University in 2022. Pragna's research focuses on southern perspectives of migration and integration with a specific focus on the construction of African and South Asian migrant communities to South Africa and migration in the Global South. She led a Sociology of Migration initiative for a community of migration scholars in South Africa which resulted in a co-edited book, *Migration in Southern Africa*. Her research interests include the sociology of migration, labour studies, changing patterns of work, social networks, and community studies. She has published on migration, gender, xenophobia, education and citizenship. Her current research is titled 'Migration, Identities and Trans-continental Linkages: Studying the South Indian Diaspora in South Africa'.

Calo, Preman and Kinship Networks: Brokerage of Domestic Fishing Workforces in the Context of Seafood Global Production Networks

Katharine JONES
Coventry University
ac0136@coventry.ac.uk

Seafood is big business and an increased appetite for fish in western food markets coupled with technological innovation has quadrupled trade over the past half century. The consequent environmental as well as human costs of this global trade are substantial. To date, most research on the latter has addressed the severe exploitation of international migrant fishers recruited to work on large fishing trawlers in Asia. These accounts tend to situate responsibility for exploitation with criminal and 'unscrupulous' actors, including recruitment intermediaries. Yet, these analyses - like most studies of migration intermediaries - with very few exceptions, ignore the inherent structural inequalities of modern globalised fishing that underpin fishers' working conditions as well as the behaviours of their recruiters. In contrast, this paper adopts a political economy lens to analyse the brokerage of domestic fishing workforces in the context of globalised seafood production networks. The paper is based on analysis conducted for a study of recruitment and employment in the seafood export industry in Indonesia in 2019, involving 140 interviews with fishers, civil society and government officials, intermediaries, international buyers and retailers. Indonesia is the second largest producer of marine fisheries in the world, accounting for almost half of all seafood production within the Southeast Asia region. However, unlike neighbouring Thailand, the seafood workforce comprises domestic, rather than international, migrants. Nevertheless - and despite the absence of the mediating factor of immigration controls - many of the same exploitative working conditions are present as in the international boats. The paper advances the argument that rather than solitary - and abusive - actors, intermediaries of domestic as well as international migration should be conceptualised as multi-layered social and economic processes that are deeply embedded in global capitalist production networks. In this case, I argue, the brokerage of labour relations via intermediaries is a mechanism deployed by international seafood businesses to co-opt the informality associated with small-scale traditional fishing to maximise the extraction of surplus value.

Katharine Jones is Professor of Migration and Social Justice in the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University in the UK. She has been writing about migration intermediaries for over a decade and conducting research on migration for over 20 years. Professor Jones has had a long career outside of academia, previously working as a consultant for the UN, managing a grant-making foundation and working for the UK government. Katharine is active in supporting migrants' rights outside her day job and is currently a trustee for Scottish Refugee Council and for JRS, Scotland's leading law centre for migrants.

Workers at Sea: How Southeast Asian Crewing Agencies and Brokers have Enabled Supply Chains for Migrant Fish Workers in Global Fishing

Peter VANDERGEEST

York University
pvander@yorku.ca

Philip KELLY

York University
pfkelly@yorku.ca

Southeast Asia has become the main source of migrant workers in global fishing. A majority of Distant Water Fishing (DWF) vessels are owned and operated from East Asia, but many rely on workers who are recruited from Indonesia, the Philippines and other Southeast Asian countries. To supply these workers, an extensive network of intermediaries has emerged since the 1990s that finds, prepares, trains, regulates, sends, and oversees them. This is what Xiang and Lindquist (2014, 122) call the “migration infrastructure” – “the systematically interlinked technologies, institutions, and actors that facilitate and condition mobility”. Understanding such an infrastructure is important in developing an expanded conception of migrant labour exploitation – as the latter process occurs not just in the relation, and space, of production (on board a vessel) but also in the networks of actors that deliver the worker to the production process. This presentation will explore these themes through the role of crewing or manning agencies, and the local brokers who often supply workers to crewing agencies, in Indonesia and the Philippines. We will explore: how manning agencies took control of crew supply chains; the specific arrangements agencies make to supply workers to mobile workplaces around the world; how crewing agencies contribute to producing migrant worker subjectivities and a lack of worker understanding of their rights; the ways in which migrant workers are exploited in the process of migration and not just in the process of work; how workers and civil society support organizations have acted to influence these networks, assert worker rights, and contest exploitative practices; the contradictory attempts to regulate migration infrastructures by home governments (Indonesia, the Philippines); and the positioning of crewing agencies in a wider network that also comprises vessel flag governments, some vessel owner associations, and labour unions or activists.

Peter Vandergeest is Professor Emeritus of Geography at York University in Toronto. He has been conducting research on forestry, agriculture and fisheries in Southeast Asia since the 1980s, always with a focus on rural livelihoods and the situation of the most marginalized resource users. His current research concerns migrant workers from Southeast Asia who work in industrial fisheries globally. Key themes include explaining unacceptable and sometimes brutal working conditions in industrial fishing, the applicability and enforcement of labour standards in situations of unclear jurisdiction, worker legal status and bordering practices (e.g. in port states), processes through which workers are recruited through crewing agencies in worker home countries, and finally, worker involvement (or lack of) in programs and campaigns that aim to improve working conditions and recruitment practices.

Philip Kelly is an economic geographer at York University, Canada. He was born and raised in the United Kingdom and was trained at Oxford, McGill and the University of British Columbia. Before coming to York in 2000, he was Assistant Professor of Southeast Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore. His research and teaching focus on issues of global development, economic inequality, labour and migration. He has a longstanding commitment to research in the Philippines and Southeast Asia, and has also worked extensively on immigration issues in Canada. His current research focuses on how transnational ties forged by migration between Canada and the Philippines foster alternative economic and political practices in both places; and, with the Work at Sea project, he is examining the deployment and employment of migrant crew members in global fishing fleets. He has held various administrative roles at York, including Director of the York Centre for Asian Research, Chair of the Department of Geography, and Associate Dean and Interim Dean at the Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change.

Precarious Brokerage: How Close Emotional and Social Ties between Migrants and Informal Intermediaries Reproduce Transnational Vulnerabilities

Mohammad Rashed Alam Bhuiyan

Dhaka University, and Coventry University

rashedalam@du.ac.bd; bhuiyanm2@uni.coventry.ac.uk

In this paper I will present findings from my PhD project which has explored migration from Bangladesh to Malaysia, with a particular focus on the transnational reproduction of precarity. The term precarity has commonly been utilised by scholars in global North contexts to refer to vulnerable and insecure employment, especially temporary, flexible, hourly-based contracts of employment. However, recent theoretical approaches extend analysis beyond *employment* conditions and emphasise that it can be a valuable analytical concept for understanding the plight of international migrant workers (Schierup and Jorgensen 2016). To date most studies on labour migration that explore precarity have concentrated on issues such as migrants doing dirty, dangerous, demeaning ('3D') jobs, receiving poor salary or benefits, or on the vulnerabilities that arise from discrimination, lack of citizenship and irregular status (Vosko 2000; Piper 2014; Roy and Verdun 2019). However, there has been limited exploration of the root causes of precarious employment for migrants. This paper argues that examining the recruitment process and the role of transnational intermediaries, including informal intermediaries, is pivotal when understanding the precarious conditions faced by short-term international contract migrant workers. In what follows, I set out to define precarity as a transnational state of being incorporating migrants' emotional, legal and social conditions as well as their workplace experiences.

The paper is based on 85 interviews conducted between 2021 and 2023 with Bangladeshi migrants, recruitment and informal migration intermediaries, civil society representatives, and governmental actors in Malaysia. I reveal how the close social relationships which develop between migrants and informal brokers in Bangladesh during the process of migration contributes to migrants' transnational experiences of precarity whilst living in Malaysia. This dynamic has several stages to it. Firstly, I identify how aspirant migrants instinctively trust informal intermediaries (known as '*dalals*') through living in the same social field and being part of the same social fabric of relationships. Such individuals were often introduced via family and extended kin connections, and *dalals* were often powerful actors within local communities. Several researchers have observed that these types of relationships can be a source of protection for migrants. However, my research shows that close relationships with *dalals* also meant that migrants tended to feel uncomfortable asking for more details or clarity about life in Malaysia, job conditions or salaries. Secondly, close trusting relationships also meant that money changed hands between aspiring migrants and *dalals* informally. As a result of the social connections between them, migrants trusted their *dalals* to be honest about the required costs and did not seek cash receipts or did not feel sufficiently powerful to ask for them. Thirdly, I show that these issues experienced early in the migration process subsequently impacted on migrants' sometimes abusive experiences with recruitment agencies in Bangladesh, including last minute contract substitutions and charging of high recruitment fees. Ultimately, these vulnerabilities were compounded – and amplified – during the transnational process of migration, impacting on migrants' experiences of precarity in Malaysia. This paper concludes that when analysing the precarious experiences of Bangladeshi migrants in Malaysia, it is important to also consider how the type and nature of social relationships with the *dalals* who first recruited them contribute to their transnational life experiences.

Mohammad Rashed Alam Bhuiyan is Assistant Professor at the Department of Political Science, University of Dhaka. He is currently pursuing his PhD on 'Migration and Precarity in Bangladesh to Malaysia migration corridor' with a research studentship at the Centre for Trust Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University commissioned by UK Research and Innovation and Coventry University's South-South Migration, Inequality and Development Hub. He also did an MSc in Sustainable Development from the University of Exeter with a Commonwealth-Shared Scholarship. His expertise lies studying various forms of internal and international migration, intermediaries, adaptation to climate change, sustainable and inclusive urban development, migrants' rights and well-being and on the issues of political economy, international trade and finance. Previously, he served the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit as a research associate.

Information, Influence, and Intermediaries: Migration Decision-Making among International Students in Canada

Rica Agnes CASTANEDA

Toronto Metropolitan University
r2castaneda@torontomu.ca

Ashika NIRAULA

Toronto Metropolitan University
ashika.niraula@torontomu.ca

Anna TRIANDAFYLLIDOU

Toronto Metropolitan University
anna.triandafyllidou@torontomu.ca

In recent years, majority of permanent residents in Canada have been selected from the pool of temporary foreign workers, including international graduates already residing in the country. In particular, the expansion of the two-step immigration pathways during the pandemic period has made Canada an attractive destination for international students, resulting in a significant rise in international students from South Asian countries. In this paper, we examine the role of migration brokers in the decision-making process of South Asian international students in deciding Canada as a destination, and on choosing educational pathways (ie university or college) to study in Canada. Drawing on data from 35 interviews and 192 survey responses from prospective and actual South Asian international students, this paper highlights the roles of intermediaries of international education within contemporary Canadian context. This study investigates information-seeking strategies of international students (i.e., what types of information they seek about Canada) and the types of resources (i.e., brokers, social networks, social media, and self-initiated) utilized in actualizing the process of moving to Canada. As South Asian international students navigate the complex marketization of international education, we find that the search for 'accurate' information (i.e., about the visa process, fees, accommodation, migration pathways, etc.) is crucial on both ends – for international students and people who influence their decision-making seek and/or provided, and those which brokers are privy to (and which they appear to convey). Our findings show that international students get simultaneously acquainted with an assemblage of features - transnational connections, social media platforms, and educational consultants - to verify the information. The paper argues that while the recent two-step migration process is a welcome change in managing highly skilled migration in Canada, this ladder process has also espoused migrant precarity and exploitation through layers of 'subcontracted' brokerage.

Rica Agnes Castaneda is a researcher at the Canada Excellence Research Chair Migration and Integration at Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU, formerly Ryerson University). She works on the SSHRC funded grant *Decentering Migration Knowledge* (DemiKnow), which examines Indian international students' experiences in Canada and the dynamic role of families in the migration decision-making process, and the DEMA project (decision making of highly skilled migrants under uncertainty). She is a PhD candidate at the TMU Policy Studies Programme under the Immigration, Settlement and Diaspora Stream.

Ashika Niraula is Senior Research Fellow and Project Lead at the Canada Excellence Research Chair Migration and Integration Program at Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson University). Her current research examines how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the decision-making of highly skilled migrants and international students to come to Canada and apply for permanent residency.

Anna Triandafyllidou holds the Canada Excellence Research Chair in Migration and Integration, at Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU, formerly Ryerson University). She is also the scientific director for the Migrant Integration in the Mid-21st Century: Bridging Divides research program funded by the Government of Canada under the Canada First Research Excellence Fund (CFREF). Prior to joining TMU in August 2019 she held a Robert Schuman Chair at the Global Governance Programme, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University

Institute, Florence, Italy. She is the editor of *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies*. A sociologist by training, her research interests include the broader area of migration and asylum governance, as well as national identity and cultural and religious diversity from a comparative perspective.

Facilitating Mainland Chinese Student Mobilities to Malaysia: Student Agents, Social Media and Brokerage Tactics

Sin Yee KOH

Universiti Brunei Darussalam
sinyee.koh@ubd.edu.bn

Since 2020, there has been a surge in prospective and actual international student mobilities (ISM) from China to Malaysia. This paper examines how and why these Chinese students engage with student agents and their services; how some of them in turn became student agents; and how student agents utilise social media and brokerage tactics in their work. It draws from (1) qualitative interviews with current and recently graduated Chinese students (including students-turned agents), and university staff conducted in 2023-2024; and (2) social media content produced by student agents on WeChat and *Xiaohongshu*, platforms popular amongst Chinese users. It finds that, because Malaysia's higher education system and student immigration processes are unfamiliar and somewhat opaque to Chinese students, they turn to student agents (and the content they produce) for what they perceive to be reliable and readily comprehensible sources of information and expert advice. Student agent services are also utilised as outsourced professional help in exchange for convenience and reassurance in the context of a predominantly domestic-oriented student clientele. Importantly, student agents often come through referrals from Chinese students' personal, educational and familial networks, as well as Chinese social media. In response to the market information gap and growing interest in Chinese ISM to Malaysia, some current and former Chinese students have become student agents themselves. To ensure commercial survival in this rapidly competitive market, student agents engage in entrepreneurial and collaborative brokerage tactics aimed at Chinese ISM consumers, including producing a variety of targeted social media content and co-organising study tours with Malaysia-based partners.

Sin Yee Koh is Senior Assistant Professor of Asian Migration, Mobility and Diaspora at the Institute of Asian Studies, Universiti Brunei Darussalam. She is also Adjunct Senior Research Fellow at the School of Arts and Social Sciences, Monash University Malaysia. She is a human geographer working at the intersections of migration studies, urban studies and postcolonial geography. Her work uses the lens of migration and mobility to understand the circulations of people, capital, and aspirations in and through cities. Her published work on migration brokerage includes intermediaries of the super-rich (2018, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*), the interurban migration industry (2022, *Urban Studies*) and crisis infrastructuring (2023, *Applied Mobilities*).

The Pravasi Dream: How the Agents/Brokers in Kerala Reshaping and Reengaging the Preexisting Social Networks in India

Dipsita DHAR

Jawaharlal Nehru University

dipsita.dhar@gmail.com

The Indian state Kerala has a distinct development paradigm, fueled by welfare state mechanisms and the remittance economy. The state with highest Human Development Index score inside India, has 30% of their total GDP coming from the international remittance. There are ample number of studies that discusses the impact of international migration on Kerala's economy, there are quite a few on the social capital formation and migration as well. But what seems unexplored is a structured analysis of the new forms of institution due to migration (recruitment agencies, travel agencies, independent agents etc.) and their impact on the existing social network. For a society like Kerala with a well-established "culture of migration" (Kandel and Massey 2002; Massey 1990b; Osella and Osella 2000), community networks, what does the brokers or the agents do? Do they replace the existing networks built upon kinship, religion and geography? Or do they fill in the unclaimed middle space (Lindquist, Xiang and Yeoh, 2012) that remained outside the periphery of the existing social networks. One can also argue that the agents' function may not be a substitutionary one rather it has a complimentary effect (Williams 2020). In this paper we try to locate the brokers or the agents in Kerala's Migration Infrastructure (Xiang Lindquist 2014), not as a pre modern, vilified middleman (McKeown, 2012) but as a component functioning within the social facilitation (Garip and Asad 2016) for migration.

Following a mixed method approach, I have used the Kerala Migration Survey 2018 as a primary database for the quantitative part of the study, 15 open ended interviews that ranged from 45 minutes to 83 minutes in length and multiple informal focus group discussions were also recorded, to bring further nuances in the paper. Our paper argues the Agencies (brokers) play a varied role depending upon the corridor that they are operating and the migrant subjectivity. Where there are cases, the agents were able to challenge the network externalities and democratize "normative influence" (Dolfin and Genicot's 2010), there are also instances where their substantial extra fee (Graner and Gurung 2003; Kepes 2016) actually gate kept the corridor for people from the margin. Our study also shows the agencies, particularly those operating in small towns or semi urban regions, are not independent of the local social network, caste-religion dynamics.

Dipsita Dhar is a PhD scholar at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India. She is currently pursuing her research on "Social Capital Formation among the Out-migrating Muslim Household: A Case Study of Ponnani, Kerala". Recently her co-edited book *Education or Exclusion: The Plight of Indian Students* was published by the Leftword Books publication. She was jointly awarded Young Researchers Prize 2018 by Regional Science Association of India. Currently she works as an external project member for "Digital Labour Platforms: A Study of Workplace Resistance and Unionization in India and Canada" at STREET Lab, University of Toronto.

Tracing Brokerage and Social Networks in Malabar: The Moral Economy of Mappila Migration to the Persian Gulf

Mufsin Puthan Purayil
O.P. Jindal Global University
mufsinpp@gmail.com

Migration from India to the Persian Gulf is known for its 'pay-to-be-mobile' nature. Labour intermediaries and recruitment agencies are seen as primary sources of job information and pivotal figures in migration management in India. However, there is also widespread scholarly consensus that international migration is a network-determined and network-dependent process. Such an understanding has produced a dichotomy in mobility studies where migration brokerage is often pitted against social networks – while the former is generally perceived as exploitative, the latter is seen as positively facilitating cross-border migration. Against this backdrop, this article investigates the job search and migration strategies of a leading migrant community in South India, namely, the Mappilas.

The essay delves into the nuanced strategies employed by Mappilas during their migration to the oil-rich Persian Gulf states. The findings of fifteen months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Malabar's 'Gulf pockets' – high migration areas – reveal a vast grey area where brokerage and social networks coexist and interact in complex ways. We see that in the case of Mappilas, the well-known figure of commercial brokers and social networks are not mutually exclusive; rather, they interact synergistically, suggesting the existence of different modes of connectedness among brokers, migrants, and their larger social circle. The paper contends that the pragmatic blend of brokerage and social networks operating among the Mappilas is better captured using a moral economic lens. In other words, a distinct moral economy shapes the Mappila migration – in Malabar, there is a community-level understanding of what is right and wrong as well as what is allowed and what is not in the larger context of Gulf migration. This article contributes to the limited literature exploring the dynamic interaction between brokerage and social networks in India's migration landscape.

Mufsin Puthan Purayil is Assistant Professor at Jindal Global Business School, O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonapat, Haryana. He holds a PhD in Public Policy and Management from the Indian Institute of Management Calcutta, India. His doctoral research focuses on the Mappila community's job search and international labour migration in Kerala, India. Additionally, he has qualified for the UGC Junior Research Fellowship and was a DAAD PhD exchange fellow (2019-2020) at the Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, Germany. Mufsin's work has been published in various journals, including *Global Change, Peace & Security, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, Economic & Political Weekly, Journal of the Anthropological Survey of India, Sociological Bulletin, and Decision*. His research interests include labour migration, social networks, immigrant entrepreneurship, philanthropy, and public policy in contemporary India and the Persian Gulf.

From Worker to Broker and Back Again: Precarity Cycles and Fluid Migration Brokerage

Sallie YEA

La Trobe University

s.yea@latrobe.edu.au; salliellao@gmail.com

Migrant workers often become informal brokers mediating and facilitating the placement of fellow workers into jobs in the migration destination. This brokerage role emerges in the context of the various conditions associated with migrant labour, including financial arrangements relating to debt, salary, costs and savings. Where these arrangements lead to precarity amongst workers, one common strategy to alleviate this revolves around the adoption of informal brokerage. In this paper I elaborate some of the contours of informal brokerage involving migrant workers as key actors. Whilst informal brokerage has been examined within the home country of migrant workers (for example, Lindquist, 2012), there has been little detailed examination of such arrangements within the migrant destination country, including its relational unfolding through structures of precarity, its transnational dimensions, and the ways it is both situated within and transcends the formal migration industry.

In elaborating the contours of this 'fluid brokerage' I draw on conceptual insight offered by continuum thinking in studies of migration and unfree labour. These arguments posit a 'continuum of exploitation' in which a range of situations of worker precarity should be considered in understanding the dynamics of unfree labour (for example, Barrientos et al 2013). Extending the insights from these discussions, this paper's arguments rest on the assertion that worker precarity produces a range of embodied positionalities that disrupt static and ossified notions of 'broker' and 'worker' as distinct categories operating within labour markets. The paper seeks to build an initial characterization of 'fluid brokerage' by outlining why migrant workers take on brokerage roles and how these roles emulate (and depart from) those of formal labour brokers.

The paper's discussion draws on insights from ongoing research on migrant labour precarity in Southeast Asia. I draw on detailed interviews with migrants to examine the experiences of two groups of workers involved in informal brokerage: migrant construction workers and migrant fishing crew. Both groups experience various degrees of precarity in their labour sojourns which compel their involvement in labour brokerage.

Sallie Yea is the 2021 Tracey Banivanua Mar Fellow at La Trobe University, based in the Department of Social Inquiry. She has research interests which span human trafficking and modern slavery, vulnerable migrations, and transnationalism. She has published widely on these subjects in journals that including *Geoforum*, *Gender, Place & Culture*, *Work, Progress in Human Geography*, *Environment & Planning D*, and *Political Geography*. Her current research projects examine issues around geographies of transnational justice and return migration for transient migrant workers and victims of trafficking. She recently commenced a project examining climate change as a driver of modern slavery in Southeast Asia. Her second monograph, *Paved with Good Intentions? Human Trafficking and the Anti-Trafficking Movement in Singapore*, was published with Palgrave MacMillan in 2019.

Channeling Exploitation? The Role of Co-ethnic Agents in the Global Recruitment of Temporary Migrants to Australia

Yao-Tai Li

University of New South Wales
yaotai.li@unsw.edu.au

In migration research on the exploitation of temporary migrant workers, there is an emphasis on the role of the government, the employers, and the employees. Although studies have revealed the negative side of ethnic networks (e.g., co-ethnic exploitation), an area that remains understudied is how co-ethnic agents are involved in global recruitment and exploitation, as well as the intersection of ethnicity, nationality, culture, visa status, and the migration/integration experience. To gain a full picture of whether co-ethnic networks differ among different ethnic groups and how and why they matter in reproducing migrant precarity across borders, this paper compares four temporary migrant groups in Australia (Chinese, Korean, British, and Indian workers) who found their jobs through co-ethnic agents. I argue that co-ethnic networks reflect not only the availability of options (due to, for example, social capital and language barriers) and familiarity with the local society's system, but also reveal how temporary migrants and co-ethnic agents see each other culturally. This paper examines the role of co-ethnic agents in the global recruitment of temporary visa holders to Australia, as well as how diverse cultural logics of the moral economy facilitate migrants' integration or exploitation, thus providing a more nuanced understanding of global co-ethnic hiring networks. At the policy level, this paper provides an opportunity to investigate the insufficiencies of formal regulations and the influence of informal obligations and expectations.

Yao-Tai Li is Senior Lecturer of Sociology and Social Policy in the School of Social Sciences at University of New South Wales, Australia. He holds a PhD in Sociology from the University of California, San Diego. His research interests include international migration, race and ethnicity, work and labor, and identity. His work has been published in several scholarly journals including *British Journal of Sociology*, *International Migration Review*, *World Development*, *New Media and Society*, *The Sociological Review*, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *Current Sociology*, *Identities*, *Work, Employment and Society*, *International Sociology*, among others.

Migration Brokers and the Overlapping Regimes of Labour Migration Governance

Yuk Wah CHAN

City University of Hong Kong

yukchan@cityu.edu.hk

The governance of labour migration is subject to multiple parties and forces, including various government departments (in both the sending and receiving places), private companies (e.g., recruitment agencies in both places), local brokers and even household/village heads. Few studies have explored this cluster supply chain of migrant labour and how the elements of it relate to one another and to varied but overlapping power regimes. To date, studies in this area have mainly focused on recruitment agenciesⁱ and seen them in a negative light. Some consider them “black boxes” operating against workers’ interests; others point out that employment agencies (EAs), which are given the responsibility of regulating the transfer and flow of workers, occupy the “middle space” of migration governance.

This study explores the EAs dispatching Indonesian domestic workers to Hong Kong (HK) to examine how EAs are regulated by two government systems—a situation that inevitably produces both symbiotic relationships and tensions between governments and the EAs. It also provides a historical analysis of changes in the market for Indonesian domestic workers—changes which continually affect the relationship between the EAs at both ends. While in the 1990s, Indonesian recruitment agencies had to pay HK EAs a few thousand HK dollars to secure an employer for the worker, today, HK EAs pay a few thousand dollars to *maai mui*ⁱⁱ (“buy a sister”). Drawing on our field work in HK and Indonesia, this paper suggests that the operation of EAs is subject to changing regulation and policies, shifting market forces, and subtly changing local cultural norms and gender relations. We argue for a more dynamic analysis of the roles of the various agents of the migration management and the varying relations between different migration actors. This research opens a new avenue for the discussion of the overlapping regimes of labour migration governance.

Yuk Wah Chan is Associate Professor in the Department of Public and International Affairs at City University of Hong Kong. She is the editor of *Routledge Series on Migration*. Her research interests cover international migration and mobility, overseas Chinese studies, and food and identity.

Contracted Life: Migrant Domestic Work in a Malaysian Ethical Recruitment Agency

Jing Hao LIONG
Duke University
jinghao.liong@duke.edu

In the past decade or so, multinational corporations and UN agencies have promoted ethical recruitment initiatives as a market-friendly solution to ending forced labor and the human trafficking of migrant workers. Central to ethical recruitment is the enforcement of the employment contract in order to ensure legal compliance across the recruitment pipeline. This paper examines the implementation of ethical recruitment practices in the specific context of migrant domestic work. What happens when migrant domestic work is taken seriously as contractually mediated employment as opposed to “service and servitude” (Chin 1998)? Does this new understanding of migrant domestic work in Malaysia engender new conditions of life? Drawing from ethnographic research conducted at Hire with Dignity, an ethical recruitment agency in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, I offer the concept of “contracted life” to theorize conditions of migrant domestic work mediated by ethical recruitment. Contracted life focuses our attention on the multiple and competing ways that recruitment agents, employers, migrant workers, and even worker organization representatives invoke the employment contract to further their particular interests. At the same time, it also contracts (as in to shrink, to diminish) migrant domestic workers’ social worlds along with the identities and affective attachments that anchor them to those worlds, all in the name of professionalism and contract completion.

Jing Hao Liong is a third-year PhD student in the Department of Cultural Anthropology at Duke University. His dissertation project explores Malaysia’s ongoing efforts to eliminate forced labor as it is undertaken by various actors across the migration infrastructure such as ethical recruitment agencies, NGO workers, employers, lobbyists, and bureaucrats. By paying attention to how they attend to the problem of forced labor, he hopes to track the reconfigurations of race, citizenship, and work that are being articulated in these disparate sites. More broadly, Jing is interested in issues of labor migration, forced labor, and racial capitalism in contemporary Malaysia and Southeast Asia.

Institutional Embeddedness of Migration Brokerage: The Case of Run-Away Migrants in Nepal-Malaysia Corridor

Sandhya A.S.

Bielefeld University
sandhya.as@uni-due.de

Migration brokerage is often studied from the perspective of the actions brokers take to facilitate or regulate the mobility of migrants. Brokers play various roles within migration infrastructures, ranging from recruiting, placing, and shaping 'ideal' workers in alignment with employer expectations and state regulations, to categorizing and evaluating workers' skills, as well as managing the direction and movement of migrant workers. Furthermore, they navigate through different types of boundaries, including legal, bureaucratic, and linguistic, in order to facilitate mobility. Moving beyond mere descriptions of brokerage practices, this paper contextualizes brokerage within specific institutional frameworks and raises the question of what factors enable or limit the scope of commercial brokerage in contemporary migration landscape. Using the case of Nepal-Malaysia migration corridor and using ethnographically informed qualitative methods to seek answer to the question raised, the findings of this paper suggests that much of how Nepali brokers within this corridor act is a result of their interaction with the Nepalese state and the existing framework of rules and regulations that they negotiate on an everyday basis. Combining insights from sociology and migration studies, this paper demonstrates that studying the socio-structural location of brokers, vis-à-vis state interventions around the 'management' of migration, illustrates the unique positionality of migration brokers that can generate opportunities for migrant workers, but also create systemic vulnerabilities. Using the empirical example of run-away migrants within the Nepal-Malaysia corridor, I show how brokers occupy a contradictory socio-structural location that acts as the source of both exploitation and protection of workers on the move. In so doing, the paper is able to draw a conceptualization of how brokerage as a practice is a product of an underlying institutional space, and not a result of an arbitrary distribution of 'interlinked human and non-human actors', as has been claimed by recent migration scholars.

Sandhya A.S. is a postdoctoral researcher in the German Research Foundation (DFG) funded Research Training Group (RTG) called 'Cross-border Labour Markets', based at the Faculty of Sociology, Bielefeld University, Germany. Her current research project investigates the social construction of migrant contracts and studies Nepal-Malaysia and Nepal-Japan migration corridors. She finished her doctoral project within the International Max Planck Research School and the project used an economic sociological framework to study migration brokerage in Nepal-Malaysia migration corridor. Her latest work, published in *ASIEN – The German Journal on Contemporary Asia*, explores the social meanings of waiting among prospective and returnee migrants in Nepal. Her research interests and teachings revolve around labor migration, transnational labour markets, migrant subjectivities, and the role of affective behaviour and emotions in the framing of global events and crises.

ABOUT THE ORGANISERS & CHAIRPERSONS

Bernice Loh is Research Fellow at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. She currently works on an interdisciplinary project on cross-national families and youth in Singapore, focusing on their integration, identity and social resilience. Her research interests include transnational families, mixed marriages, youth and youth identities and social inequalities. She has published on marriage migrants, cross-national families, youth, girlhood and young femininities in Singapore.

E | berniceloh@nus.edu.sg

Brenda S.A. Yeoh, FBA is Raffles Professor of Social Sciences, Department of Geography, National University of Singapore. She is also the Research Leader of the Asian Migration Cluster in the Asia Research Institute (ARI). She was recently awarded the prestigious Vautrin Lud Prize (2021) for her outstanding achievements in the field of Geography, and was also elected to the Fellowship of the British Academy as a Corresponding Fellow. Her research interests include the politics of space in colonial and postcolonial cities, and she also 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.

E | geoyasa@nus.edu.sg

Jacob Rinck is an anthropologist studying global inequality through the lens of migration, agrarian change and development economics as storytelling in Nepal. He is currently Postdoctoral Fellow in the Asia Research Institute (ARI) at National University of Singapore. Before joining ARI, Jacob was a visiting scholar and lecturer at George Washington University. He has a PhD in Anthropology from Yale University (May 2020), and an MSc (Violence, Conflict and Development) from SOAS, University of London. In a professional capacity, Jacob has worked for the International Crisis Group, and as a consultant for DFID and the World Bank among others. He is currently working on a book manuscript and articles on his research on transnational migration, agrarian change, and histories of developmental thought in Nepal, with an article in *Journal of Peasant Studies* forthcoming. His new research focuses on the emergence of new transnational publics around a 2018 bilateral labor agreement between Nepal and Malaysia.

E | jrinck@nus.edu.sg

Katharine Jones is Professor of Migration and Social Justice in the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University in the UK. She has been writing about migration intermediaries for over a decade and conducting research on migration for over 20 years. Professor Jones has had a long career outside of academia, previously working as a consultant for the UN, managing a grant-making foundation and working for the UK government. Katharine is active in supporting migrants' rights outside her day job and is currently a trustee for Scottish Refugee Council and for JRS, Scotland's leading law centre for migrants.

E | ac0136@coventry.ac.uk

Kris Hyesoo Lee is Research Fellow with the Asian Migration Cluster at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. Her research focuses on the intersection of migration and education, transnationalism, inward and outward mobilities in Asia, and critical approaches to migration. Dr Lee is currently working on the Belt and Road Initiative and Student-Mobilities in China-Southeast Asia (BRISM) project to better understand how BRI is (re)shaping the knowledge spaces and circuits of educational mobilities in Southeast Asia.

E | k.lee@nus.edu.sg

Lois Bastide is Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of French Polynesia, and currently, Visiting Senior Research Fellow at the Asia Research Institute (ARI) of National University of Singapore and Statutory Researcher at IRASEC. At ARI, he is developing a research project on the politicization processes of Indonesian migrant workers, with fieldworks in Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia. This work draws upon and extends the research initiated during his PhD, which investigated the constitution of a transnational social space between the three neighbouring countries, through the cross-border mobilities of Indonesian workers. During his research stay at ARI, Dr Bastide also continues coordinating an ongoing, wide-ranging research program on social change in French Polynesia.

E | lbastide@nus.edu.sg

Pragna Rugunanan is Vice-Dean of Research in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Johannesburg. She was invited as a Scholar of Excellence by the Canadian Excellence Research Chair in Migration at Toronto Metropolitan University in 2022. Pragna's research focuses on southern perspectives of migration and integration with a specific focus on the construction of African and South Asian migrant communities to South Africa and migration in the Global South. She led a Sociology of Migration initiative for a community of migration scholars in South Africa which resulted in a co-edited book, *Migration in Southern Africa*. Her research interests include the sociology of migration, labour studies, changing patterns of work, social networks, and community studies. She has published on migration, gender, xenophobia, education and citizenship. Her current research is titled 'Migration, Identities and Trans-continental Linkages: Studying the South Indian Diaspora in South Africa'.

E | prugunanan@uj.ac.za

Yang Wang is Research Fellow in Asia Research Institute at National University of Singapore (NUS). She received her PhD in Communications and New Media from NUS, and master's degree in Mass Communication from Peking University. Her research interest lies at the intersection of information and communication technologies (ICTs), migration, family and gender. She has been doing research on transnational communication and transnational householding, mediated intimacy, household ICT domestication, gender positionality of Chinese migrant mothers, mobile parenting, education and skilled migration, as well as workplace digital transformation and digital organising. Her research integrates insights from multiple disciplines, including media and technology study, sociology, anthropology, human geography and migration study, cultural study, psychology, social work, and organizational and management study. She has published in leading international journals including *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *New Media and Society*, *Journal of Children and Media*, and *Frontiers in Psychology*.

E | yangwang@nus.edu.sg

Yi'En Cheng is Lecturer at NUS College and Associate with the Asian Migration Cluster at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. His research is on the social geographies of education and youth, specialising in transnational education, student migrations, and young people's citizenship in Asia. He serves on the editorial boards of *Global Networks* and *Children's Geographies*. For more information, please visit <https://linktr.ee/chengyien>.

E | ycheng@nus.edu.sg

Secretariat

Ms Minghua TAY

Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore

E | minghua.tay@nus.edu.sg

ⁱ In this article, recruitment agency, employment agency and placement agency are used interchangeably.

ⁱⁱ The Cantonese term for “buying a sister”. All Cantonese terms in the paper are Romanized according to linguist Wong Shik-ling’s “A Chinese Syllabary Pronounced according to the Dialect of Canton”.