



Global Humanities Institutes (GHI) 2019-2022:
"Migration, Logistics and Unequal Citizens in Contemporary Global Context"

E-Pamphlet I :
Borders, Logistics and Unequal Lives

INTRODUCTION

“Migration, Logistics and Unequal Citizens in Contemporary Global Context” is the Global Humanities Institutes (GHI) 2019-2022 supported by the Consortium of Humanities Centre and Institutes (CHCI) and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Rapidly increasing international migrations have radically changed the outlook of contemporary 21st century societies, producing cases of massive displaced and precarious lives, and bringing various impacts upon local communities. These emerging phenomena have attracted critical scholarship both in the humanities and social sciences in recent years.

The CHCI-Mellon Global Humanities Institutes (GHI) on “Migration, Logistics and Unequal Citizens in Contemporary Global Context” invites applications from early career researchers and advanced graduate students from the interdisciplinary humanities and social science studies, including but not limited to literature, history, philosophy, film, audio-visual arts, performing arts, law, anthropology, sociology, journalism, social media, digital platform, and other forms of practitioners.

Through the analysis of documentaries, films, literature, interviews, archives, governmental policies, and cooperation with NGOs/CBOs and artist groups, this intensive program foregrounds the subjective experiences and perspectives of migrants, the violation of the migrants’ fundamental human rights, the citizen’s attitude against them, as well as the government malfunctioning in dealing with these migrants.

The issues of migration and unequal citizens highlight the logistical continuum of biopolitics and governmentality from the colonial to the post-colonial state, from the Cold War Era to the post-Cold War Era, as well as the operation of geo-political and geo-economic apparatus and zoning politics. Critical logistics can orient the inquiry by emphasizing how the governance of populations reaches beyond statistical measure to make new connections between life and work, technology and mobility, and politics and economy in and beyond any region. Logistics organises the movement of people and goods and asserts its logic across the entire circuit of production, distribution, and consumption. Logistics has also remade the domain of global space and territory, through the operation of zoning politics, such as corridors, digital networks, extraction enclaves, financial districts, and other areas of transfer and exchange. Examining the nexus of migration and logistics offers ways of rethinking the politics of human mobility and the question of unequal citizens that not only reach beyond the logic of integration and identity but also question the standard analysis of post-war area studies.

LINES OF RESEARCH

Conditions of Migration and Precarious Lives

Our GHI encourages researchers to study and analyse the reality of the forms of life of the international migrants, refugees, and stateless people in contemporary societies. We welcome analytic inquiries and theoretical engagements of cases of documentaries, films, literature, interviews, archives, governmental policies, NGOs/CBOs, and artist groups, in but not limited to Asia, on the following issues:

The experience and the emotions of migrant workers, refugees or stateless people in their working and living environments in the receiving societies;

The role of social identities such as gender, sexuality, religion, nationality, legal status in conditioning migrant workers' precarious lives;

How states manage labour migration imports and repatriation/deportation as part of the development projects of the state, requiring explicit legal exclusion from residency and citizenship and migrant labour exploitation in the context of different countries, including the national evolution of legal framework concerning this issue:

- The operations of the broker agency, the development of workforce agencies, regimes of brokerage that commodifies migrants into healthy bodies that are labour ready to be supplied abroad;
- The support system offered by trade unions, local NGOs/CBOs, shelters, migrant centres, or resettlement plans at host societies; alliance-making among different groups (e.g. different migrant groups from different countries, women's groups, labour unions, etc.) as well as the internal support system within the migrant communities;
- How the increase in the numbers, relative visibility, and designation as an abject foreigner of migrant workers has led to new forms of Asian racism and xenophobia;
- Ambiguities of migrant entrepreneurship: self-employment as a low-paid activity, forced self-employment ("quasi-self-employment"), and self-employment as an opportunity for professional advancement;
- International student mobility/unpaid labour and its regulation through visa regimes, market mechanisms, university rankings, and labour statuses;
- Transnational human trafficking of women and children for prostitution and forced marriage and labour.

Logistics, Geo-economics, Zoning Politics, and Local Infrastructure Initiatives

Our GHI encourages research projects on politico-economic logistics and the logic of migration. We welcome analytic inquiries and theoretical engagements on the following issues:

- Whether and how the colonial past and the Cold War regime still leave their traces on the countries in and beyond Asia in the 21st century, such as the ASEAN regional policies of trade agreements and economic security control, the US-China trade war, and so on?
- How can we use critical thought on logistics to rethink issues of labour and migration particularly in the Asian region (or in what ways is migration increasingly functioning logistically)?
- How do foreign direct investment, labour, and migration in the Asian region link to logistical initiatives such as zoning, China's Belt and Road Initiative, etc.?
- How do global and local logistical initiatives impact directly or indirectly on local societies, such as governmental corruptions, public xenophobic reactions, extraction by dispossession, and so on?
- How is digitalisation transforming labour and mobility, including questions of virtual migration, platform labour, and the use of digital technologies for migration control and freedom of movement?
- How do logistics and migration in and beyond Asia reorganise relations of reproduction of labour power and society?
- The transformation of the land question, the military-industrial complex, and mobility regime.

Regarding the historical processes, ruptures and continuities in the organisation and practice of migration in and beyond Asia, do logistics offer a means of understanding historical migration, or is it specific to the present moment? How do layered histories of migration continue to shape present movements?

The nexus of logistics, displacement, and violence. The discourse of who is "native" and who is "migrant" is prevalent in many countries; at the extreme, this discourse can lead to communal fissures and even violence. Can a logistical approach help us productively think through ideas of "indigeneity/native" VS "migrants/foreigner" and unpack this socially constructed dichotomy?

Questions of Unequal Citizens

The upsurge of migrant workers, refugees, and human trafficking have changed the composition of the social space and worsen the inequality among the people who live and work in the same social space but do not share equal access to the cities nor exercise political subjectivities they spent in their daily life. While Giorgio Agamben's concept of the 'bare life' has been much cited in Refugee Studies in recent years, there has also been a call by scholars to focus on the agency and political life of the refugees grounded in their lived realities. Our GHI also wants to draw researchers' attention to the newly emerging forms of neo-racism, neo-slavery, and new colonialism. We welcome analytic inquiries and theoretical engagements on the following issues:

- How do new forms of exclusion through citizenship and residency rights facilitate in today's formation of uneven late capitalism?
- How do traditional colonialism and ongoing forms of new colonialism or internal colonialism shape citizenship regimes in diverse local contexts in Asia and beyond? How did the colonial histories, the process of the post-colonial independent nation through Citizenship Acts, and the current immigrant/migrant worker regulations co-figure the politics of inclusive exclusion and trigger the reality of unequal citizens in contemporary societies?
- How do we analyse the structural violence of the statist division between citizen and non-citizen, or differentiated citizens, that causes the violation of fundamental human rights against a particular population?
- How do we problematise the concept of the "illegal migrant workers"? How is the illegal social space of the precarious bodies produced legally by governmental sectors and other transnational agencies?
- How do we further understand the fear of the transient—the homeless, migrants, refugees? What is the nature of the local xenophobic reactions toward the migrant labour and refugees?
- How do theoretical and empirical investigations of citizenship influence understandings of migration in ways different to analytical approaches that stress other kinds of political subjectivity—e.g. social class, the lived experiences or agency of the refugees and stateless people?
- To what extent do patterns of migration in the Asian region disarticulate the figure of the citizen from the figure of the worker? What are new and emerging ways of theorising citizenship and migration that are relevant in various contexts?

In what ways can we theorise the 'indentured' as a poetics of relation, for example, through Mauritian poet Khal Torabully's notion of the 'coolitude,' or Martinique philosopher Edouard Glissant's concept of opacity, or alliance-building against what Laura Ann Stoler characterises as the persisting imperial durabilities of our time?

What forms of agency and belonging do migrant possess despite legal exclusions, including political participation, economic belonging, trade unionism and migrant/refugee organisations? What forms of differentiated citizenship, exclusion, and belonging shape contemporary migration experiences e.g. indenture, statelessness, residential registration, denizenship, plural citizenships, war and violence?

How do migrants resist exclusionary citizenship regimes and enact new claims—locally and nationally, and transnationally?

New Forms of Knowledge Production

Our GHI encourages colleagues and students to conduct various forms of knowledge production to explore the issues of migration, logistics, and unequal citizens through academic papers, artistic works, and digital approaches, to bridge universities and societies, and to link scholars with migrant workers, refugee communities, trans-local NGOs/CBOs, artist groups, filmmakers and journalists. We will create occasions for trans-local advocates and artists groups working for migrants, refugees, and stateless communities to meet and exchange ideas on common concerns and share the tactics from different groups. We will create space to reflect on the various strategies and create new conversations. We hope to facilitate productive discussions and foster knowledge sharing across disciplines and modalities. Also, we will establish a shared transnational online resource documenting innovative approaches in addressing migrant and refugee issues. Some suggested area of focus, but not limited to, are as the following:

- Storytelling can be a powerful tool humanising "the other." What are the existing innovative projects working with migrants and refugees, using storytelling in different forms—such as theatre, poetry recitals, music festival, writing workshops, photography, and film making? What is the impact of these initiatives for the migrant communities and the audience/readers?
- Artists have pushed the envelope of artistic forms that paralleled their commitment to discussing the experiences of this global movement of people and the power dynamics engendered by this large-scale mobility. In what ways were modern and contemporary arts a vital avenue for new forms of knowledge production to address issues of unequal citizens and cross-boundary imaginations?

- What are new institutional forms created by the interface of migration knowledge practices with formal gallery spaces and museums?
- What is the role of digitalisation in generating knowledge and strategies to address issues of migration and unequal citizenship?
- How are civil conversations and alliance building facilitated across communities? What are some new conversations and narratives that are being shaped in these processes?

Borders, Logistics and Unequal Lives

“Borders, Logistics and Unequal Lives” was the first webinar and a part of our online program. We began with the issue of “borders, logistics, and unequal lives” in the time of COVID-19 as an introduction to the series of events we plan to initiate from 2020 to 2021, by offering reflections and thoughts on the research lines we need to engage concerning the precarity of migrant lives in the pandemic and the operation of logistics behind the flow of capital.

About the Speakers

Distinguished scholars from different parts of the world will virtually mark their presence and present their research (ongoing and conducted) to the audience. The forum will host four distinguished academicians:

Prof. Joyce C.H. Liu: Professor Liu is the Director at the International Center for Cultural Studies and International Graduate Institute for Inter-Asia Cultural Studies and Professor at the Institute of Social research and cultural studies, National Chiao Tung University. Her research covers the critique of East-Asian modernity, Chinese political thoughts in the 20th century, focusing on issues related to the questions of bio-politics, border politics, unequal citizenship, civic exclusion, and internal coloniality.

Prof. Brett Neilson: Professor Neilson is a Professor and Research Director at the Institute for Culture and Society, Western Sydney University. His research and writings aim to provide alternative ways of conceiving globalization, emphasizing its social and cultural dimensions. His work has derived original and provocative means for rethinking the significance of globalization for a wide range of contemporary problems and predicaments, including the proliferation of borders, the ascendancy of financial markets, the pressures of population aging, the governance of logistical chains, and the role of digital infrastructures.

Dr. Ranabir Samaddar: Dr. Samaddar is the Director of the Calcutta Research Group, and belongs to the school of critical thinking. He has pioneered along with others peace studies programs in South Asia. He has worked extensively on issues of justice and rights in the context of conflicts in South Asia. His particular research has been on migration and refugee studies, the theory and practices of dialogue, nationalism, and postcolonial statehood in South Asia, and new regimes of technological restructuring and labor control.

Prof. Sandro Mezzadra: Prof. Mezzadra is Associate Professor of political theory at the University of Bologna and is an adjunct fellow at the Institute for Culture and Society of the Western Sydney University. His recent work has centered on the relations between globalization, migration, and capitalism as well as on postcolonial criticism.

(Im)mobilites in time of the pandemic

Sandro Mezzadra

Listen to a podcast of Sandro Mezzadra's talk here.



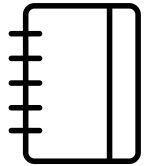
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Introduction to the Talk

Logistical Rationality Of Migration Management: Forced Human Mobility And Immobility In The Age Of Pandemic

Lo Chun Yat, Timothy (SRCS, NYCU)

Focusing on the issues of migration and borders, especially in the context of Europe and Mediterranean, Professor Sandro Mezzadra from the University of Bologna has been sharing with the seminar attendees significant ideas and insights on such matters in the age of COVID-19 pandemic. With his experience in participating the humanitarian rescue movement in the Mediterranean, he delves deep into the protocols of human mobility as well as immobility, and analyses on how the logistical rationality changes its management of the humans when it is critically disturbed during the global age of economic slump due to coronavirus. He also draws attention to the possibilities of resistance against the border regimes in such a dire condition, with examples sourced around the world, including the “Black Lives Matter” movement in the US, and the strikes pushed forward by the Mediterranean migrants and refugees in European context, leaving an open end question of crisis/possibility to the participants to think further about.

LOGISTICAL RATIONALITY IN THE AGE OF PANDEMIC

To start with, Mezzadra continues the discussion of Neilson’s idea of “logistification” of migration, and makes a hypothesis of what he calls the “logistical rationality” behind the management of migration and border management. Through the angle of Movement Studies, he has spotted the politisation concerning the management movement of workers and staff, contributing to shape a more and more standardized protocol of human mobility. This so-called “logistical make-machine” according to Mezzadra is in a way merging with contemporary capitalism in the wave of globalisation.

Seemingly in the age of pandemic, the “great logistics machine” (as quoted by Mezzadra from New York Times) has been slowed down, if not stopped as the first sector to get struck. However, it is far away from the end of logistics. Instead, it opens up another form of mobility and immobility, especially those involved in migrant workers as well as refugees.

The most adversely affected people by the situation would be those suffering from governments of the nation-states. He mentions in the seminar that tens of thousands of migrants from Central America are stuck, and there is a severe situation of forced immobility in the Libyan detention camps in the South shore of the Mediterranean. They have been in the face of double insults, when they are being excluded due to ethnic on one hand, and suspected “criminal characters” on the other. Not only is forced immobility witnessed in the process, forced mobility is also causing problems when the fear of pandemic spreads across the globe. Mezzadra borrowed the concept of “Shock Mobility” by the Chinese anthropologist Xiang Biao from Oxford University, describing “degrees of forced migration, distress migration, ‘acute refugee movement’, and migration induced by ‘acute changes’” (Xiang, 2020) and so on. The case in India in the early stage of the COVID-19 outbreak is a perfect illustration for the turmoil, and such a situation further shows the fierce reorganisation of the global economy on mobility and migration, which consequently leads to the “subjective experience of domination and exploitation” of the migrant workers according to Mezzadra.

UNEQUAL SPREAD OF THE VIRUS ITSELF

What Mezzadra observes is not only confined to the migration and logistics of the people, but also the movement of the virus itself that proposes a sense of inequality of the population management system that has been embedded with colonial traits until now in the contemporary context. With the COVID-19 coronavirus spreading quick and smooth, such sudden emergence of a global crisis and the panoplies of reactions for the governments are exposing the colonial legacies, especially with what Neilson has mentioned in the previous talk about internal border hardening. What he describes is that the borders “move between countless individuals and within them,” suggesting a tendency of separationist acts within national borders. For instance, he mentions the example of the US, where African Americans and Latinos have been disproportionately affected by the spread of COVID-19 than the whites. The blacks, the poor and the indigenous people in Brazil have also experienced the same situation, seemingly excluded from the safety net of medical care in the age of such a crisis with this highly contagious virus spreading around. He also suggests a cross-field observation of this situation together with the dynamics of how the “Black Lives Matter” movement in the period was maintained and sustained. Here Mezzadra provides us another

angle to decipher a seemingly scientific “public health” issue into a highly political one.

POSSIBILITY OF RESISTANCE IN THE AGE OF DEGLOBALIZATION

Facing such a global crisis, the world is sliding towards what Mezzadra describes as “global processing of de-globalization,” with a combination of conflicting features of homogeneity and heterogeneity in the migration, logistics and border constructions. Though as tough as it may sound, he witnesses that the most affected population is striving their best to develop a set of counter forms of struggles and resistance, to fight against the colonial-featured management and governance within the pandemic period. What he has witnessed in the current stage of the US “Black Lives Matter” movement seems to be an insight for people who are struggling against the border regime in the age of pandemic.

In his concluding remarks, Mezzadra combines the discussion of the above topic together with his experience in the rescue ship project for the migrants and passengers in the central Mediterranean, which he describes as “the most lethal border in the world.” Such humanitarian actions are stuck in a stagnant quagmire when the fear for the spread of virus becomes a manipulable excuse to deter the rescue projects, including the adoption of strict medical protocols on the rescue ships, and request of the quarantine measures for the rescued migrants in the region. While there are managerial hindrances in excuse of containing the spread of the pandemic, political ventures are saving no bullets to attack and blame migrants for bringing and spreading the virus inside their nation-states without any probable scientific evidence. However, even under such dire conditions the migrants and refugees continue to keep challenging the border regimes in the Mediterranean, and it seems to have an increasing level of awareness in the area for the sake of the equality for migrant workers and refugees, who have been long oppressed under the border regimes.

Mezzadra leaves his discussion on migration, border and logistics with a hopeful tail, paying a tribute to the continuous efforts of struggle against the unequal systems of the border regimes. He especially emphasises that “lives deemed as unequal or even unworthy continue their struggle even in the time of pandemic.” It is also inspiring not only for the activists to tackle the increasingly inhumane tendencies exacerbated by the global crisis, thus the deglobalisation and rationalisation process all at once, it is also suggesting the best and the worst of times for the scholars and academics to actively intervene in the reality of politics. Theorisation of the contemporary phenomena is of utmost importance for a further remedy to the speedy deterioration concerning the oppressed around the globe.

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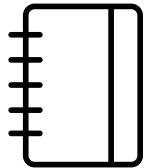
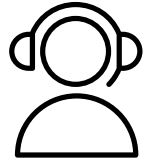
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Border of an Epidemic

Ranabir Samaddar

Listen to a podcast of Ranabir Samaddar's talk here.



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Introduction to the Talk

How do people respond to the epidemic of today?

Chan Man Ching, Nenki (IACS-UST, NCU)

At the beginning of the talk, Dr. Ranabir Samaddar shared with the webinar attendees that it is overwhelming for him to investigate the migrant experiences in the pandemic, although he has studied histories of the epidemics in the colonial era. He thought it would be important not only to research on the impact of the border, but also on how the epidemic creates. As Dr. Samaddar argued (Samaddar, 2020), “the emerging economics of COVID-19 tells us in stark terms the inability of the current neoliberal global regime to secure life. It can only arbitrate death.” To further illustrate, he raised Foucault’s idea of biopolitics, that bio-power becomes an extension of neoliberalism governance to criticise the way how the epidemiological crisis was treated within the political structure from colonial period to contemporary time. Nonetheless, the ideas of Foucaultian are limited, when it comes to the experiences of India. Thus, he borrowed the concept of “neo-Malthusian,” which is based on the ideas of Thomas Malthus, an English political economist in his *Essay on The Principle of Population*. According to Dr. Samaddar’s understanding of the neo-Malthusian rule, it always decides people who are productive and non-productive based on neoliberalism governance, for people who are seen as non-productive, they would have to be sacrificed, to ensure the productive sections of the population. He argued that it is dangerous for government policies concerning the productivity of people more than their health as priority. He also investigated that it was continued to be extended in the noble government’s policies to build up Social Darwinism during the pandemic. At that period, “everywhere the rulers toyed with the idea of a utilitarian calculation that economically it would be more efficient to let 40,000 to 80,000 people die rather than to disrupt the economy through massive costly state measure including lockdown.” (Samaddar, 2020) As he claimed that, “exclusion, separation, identification, confinement - all have to be deployed interchangeably or all at one time to immobilise a city to gain control over all individual bodies because this is how the Coronavirus spread will stop.” (Samaddar, 2020)

With Dr. Samaddar’s experiences of studying the migrant returns during

COVID-19, he focuses on the reason why migrants become invisible in the government records in India. When all the countries want to protect themselves from the epidemiological crisis, the borders are closed, and they also isolated the migrant workers from their home countries. According to the survey done by Economic Survey in India in 2018-2019, there are 93% of workers constituted in the informal economy and there are 450 million internal migrants in India. (Census, 2019) Most of the workers who come from rural areas to urban areas are desperate to go back to rural areas because of the emerging pandemic. It is called “reverse migration” as a form of forced mobility back to their original states due to unemployment. While someone who died on their way home is neglected. There is no government record mentioning how many migrant workers tried to return to India. For Calcutta Research Group’s calculation from different sources, there are probably 300 people who died on roads and around 96 people died in the railway compartments with no daily supply. There is even another estimate saying that almost 800 to 850 died on the train route. It is obvious that the problems of visibility and invisibility are extremely important to the webinar’s focus on the “migrants-logistic-unequal citizen.” “What made the migrants visible?”, Dr. Samaddar answered, “they are visible in economics, but in the economy, also ensures or guarantees that you will be politically invisible.” Although India has an Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act of 1979 which aims to maintain the working environment among the inter-state migrant workers, the government concerned about their productivity more than humans themselves. He then returned to his conversation with Foucault, whose concept of biopolitics is a question of life itself. According to Dr. Samaddar’s critique of Western countries’ behaviour towards China (Samaddar, 2020), science becomes a tool for liberal governments to discredit China, in which they care about the economy, rather than human life. It shows the failure of neoliberal governance which tends to favour governance by experts and elites while at the same time threatening individual access to health care.

How do people respond to the epidemic of today? Although only 400 to 500 people survived on their way home, almost 1 million refugees from all parts of India decided to tread nearly 1200 kilometres to head home. It shows the way how fear of disease and danger forced people to protect themselves and it has become common sense. They have been facing so many difficulties during the lockdown while the company are not willing to hire them because of COVID-19. The lockdowns and policy of “work from home” made thousands of informal workers lose their job and led to poverty. Since the government paid more attention to maintaining the economy than caring for the citizen’s health. They refused to “mitigating the medical aspects of the epidemic, changing public health priorities and bringing about public health solutions.” (Samaddar, 2020) Although the condition is difficult, thousands

upon thousands of migrants still try to reach home desperately. Some of them may lose their way in the middle and die without any record. According to the report of Indian Express on 30 March 2020, in the Indian city of Surat, the militaries stopped people from leaving by firing tear gas. However, migrant workers still tried to reach their way home because of their anxiety to death. The government chose to be silent because they have no way to protect the migrant workers. When the media acting as government propaganda tried to “blame” the individuals, it created the exclusion and separation of power structure within the communities, in which everyone is under surveillance by others, to prevent themselves from the coronavirus. In this case, it returns to Dr. Samaddar’s analysis on the border between visibility and invisibility of the migrant workers, in which he argued that it is a war against the epidemic. (Samaddar, 2020) Thus, migrant workers are always invisible and excluded from the neoliberal governments’ politics and coronavirus exposed these failures of the policies.

Although people understand the way how to access medical services, they are anxious about the facilities. In Dr. Samaddar’s article on the Border of Epidemic, he reminds that (Samaddar, 2020), people have to build trust in their state while the state has to give back their self-confidence to solve this epidemiological crisis. In response to Professor Liu’s argument, it is important to reconceptualise the “common sense” of governance and citizenship. At the end of his speech, he mentioned that he would continue his work with the Calcutta Research Group, working on the issues related to borders, governance, autonomy and migration.

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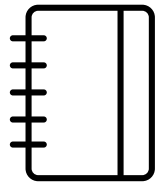
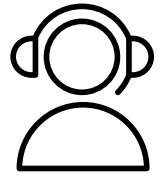
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Border Struggles beyond the Pandemic

Brett Neilson

Listen to a podcast of Brett Neilson's talk here.



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Introduction to the Talk

The “New Normal” of whom? Critical thinking on border hardening and

(re)nationalism in the age of COVID-19 Pandemic

Lo Chun Yat, Timothy (SRCS, NYCU)

Since 2020 when COVID-19 has become the global pandemic, there has been severe changes, if not reshaping of the global flow of labour and migrants. For what we have been enjoying from the age of globalization with free entry and exit of states, it is but a mere fantasy when the fear of the virus is winning over the long-cherished freedom of mobility. In the webinar, Professor Brett Neilson from Institute for Culture and Society, Western Sydney University, tries to deal with the problematic “New Normal” of increasing immobility of migrants, the “logistification” of migration, and the phenomenon of “renationalisation” in the age of pandemic year of 2020. With his observation and examples in Australia and beyond, he also echoes his argument with Professor Joyce C.H. Liu on the colonial traits of the governmental techniques and technologies imposed by various nation-states during the era.

ON “NEW NORMAL” OF AUSTRALIA

Professor Neilson starts with sharing the case of Australia, which, under his observation, has been regarded as “an example of countries that had taken determined action to end the spread of the virus”, with determined enactment of border closure, lockdown of cities and towns and so on (2021:1). And such an unusual, if not unprecedented situation has been described by the media as the problematic term of “New Normal”. Neilson critically and undoubtedly said: “don’t accept any ‘New Normal’,” and always bear in mind the questions below: (1) Whose “normal” is it? (2) Is it really “new”?

Such easy use of terminologies of course raises his concerns, as the

“normalities” according to Neilson are always in strong conflicts, especially from the perspectives of the migrants who are used to border crossing, in contrast to the Australian citizens who are relatively stable and without urgent needs for mobility. Also, there is an “exacerbated tendency”, as he quoted from Professor Liu’s speech, for the Australian government to cling to the policies with strict control on borders, not only the national one, but also the internal ones. Such strong limitations, or we would even say deprivation of freedom of mobility, is actually nothing new when we examine the global history of colonialism. It has an uncanny resonance with the pre-pandemic period, as if those techniques and technologies of governance upheld before are the rehearsals paving the way for such an age of global crisis.

ON BORDER HARDENING AND RENATIONALISATION

Further developing his argument against the policy of border hardening, Neilson draws his discussion on such together with the concept of nationalism. In the current age of crisis and “society at struck” (as quoted from Neilson’s colleague, Dr. Cecilia Cmielewski), he witnesses the relations of border policies with the process of “renationalisation”, concerning its impacts on different fields of economy, culture and society. Here, according to Neilson’s argument, the concept of border does “not only [act] as devices of exclusion, but also as complex sets of mediating techniques and technologies that filter the passage of people and things” (2021:2). Such a border hardening process creates a severe turmoil towards the situation of the migrants, placing or displacing them into the state of precariousness. Also, internal border hardening is also witnessed to bar the internal circulation of people, even among states within the Australian national border. It is particularly obvious in the urban spaces, usually at the expense of “controlling the spread of virus” with the rhetoric of the state of emergency.

But how does border hardening relate to the process of renationalisation? Neilson states that we need to be aware of the context before the pandemic, and to trace back a little bit in the times when border hardening is not a new tactic especially for containing the virus. In other words, it is only the right moment to impose such radical changes with a legitimate excuse, for the sake of “Zero COVID call” and national security. However, it would be easy for us to simply jump to the conclusion that this situation would only be applicable to the nation-states with severe divisions, like for the case of the post-Trump US and the UK after Brexit. Neilson states that such divisions are not his most concerned ones, but those nation-states beyond these cases, for example, Australia. He also made a heavy criticism, stating that the renationalization process may lead to “kind of exploding the nation.” In his viewpoint, nationalism under the age of crisis may be dangerous to the nation-states themselves, not only providing a possible rise of populism, but

also further imposition and application of colonial governmentality.

ON “LOGISTIFICATION” OF MIGRATION

Another discussion by Neilson is on the concept of “logistification” of migration. To the habitual understanding, logistics always refers to the passage and mobility of objects around the world while migration is about the mobility of labour power. Here the professor combines the concepts with a Marxist line of analysis, recognizing labour power as “embodied commodity.” Such “logistification” of migration thus makes so much sense when labour is commodified and objectified through the practices of technologies of governance in border politics, especially in the age of COVID-19 pandemic. To Neilson, it is not a new thing to show its appearance, when he mentions that the so-called “Summer of migration” in Europe was being discussed in academia. Also, this is not uncommon in the Eastern and Southeast Asian context, when we witness nation-states upholding the power of controls to turn people back to their original states. Such a phenomenon in governmentality also shows the coloniality invisible in the shadow of the border policies.

Under such a “logistification” process, the workers are being moved from point to point in insulated ways, from places where they are residing to places where they perform their labour. They are also at risk to be exposed to contagion and vulnerable positions under the pandemic period, when “lockdown” is represented as “New Normal” based on the exploitation of the migrant workers with precarious citizenship. Neilson uses the example of the Singaporean work permit system to illustrate such separationist and exclusive ideology embedded in that specific governmental technology. Black and white contracts determine the migrant workers’ “temporary identities” in the nation-state, under the risk of being moved out of the territory when their contractual obligations are complete. Such ready-made models and governmental policies are further exploited during the age of pandemic, especially when it is related to the migrant workers’ stigmatization of being the “contagious” community from outside the country.

RETHINKING RESISTANCE TO MIGRATION REGIME?

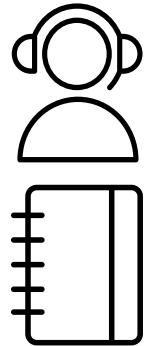
Neilson at the end moves the discussion from the migration regime to the “uninhabitable”, if not “unliveable” space to talk about the hustle for the existence of migrants. Under such a circumstance of global pandemic of course we can easily relate the urgency of the “survival” problems, not to mention the migrant workers being marginalized under the domination and exploitation of the migration regime. But here Neilson suggests a radical yet interesting approach to work with the condition he called “hustle, survival and struggle.” He takes the concept of “contagion” in—while it is often seen as

justification for border hardening, thus renationalization in the current stage, he suggests to think otherwise, that is to politicise the “temporal contagion” to push further the act for survival, and turn such acts against the governance that echoes with coloniality. Under such “New Normal,” it is not only for the academics to investigate and research to theorise the phenomena, but more importantly, we should push it further to be a practice, if not praxis for an intervention to the state that should be challenged and changed, especially under such a globe at struck.

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What Comes After the Lockdown?



Joyce C. H. Liu

Listen to a podcast of Professor Joyce C.H. Liu's talk here.

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Introduction to the Talk

What Comes After The Lockdown?

Chan Man Ching, Nenki (IACS-UST, NCU)

The CHCI Global Humanities Institutes 2020 has implemented different webinar series on the topic of “Migration, Logistics and Unequal Citizens in the Global context,” with the tripartite structure, “migration, logistics and unequal citizens,” being the pressing question that our institute would like to address. In the webinar, Professor Liu Chi-hui, Joyce tried to address the geopolitical and historical conditions behind the practice of the lockdown during COVID-19. She separated her focuses into four parts, including “exacerbation as a keyword,” “the distribution of life zone versus death zone,” “the cases of Southeast Asia” and lastly, “lines of future research.” To further illustrate her ideas, she used Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia and Singapore to raise her arguments on the political control behind the lockdown concerning colonial history among these countries.

First of all, exacerbation as a keyword is widely used in different news reports which we heard every day. “Not only the exacerbation of asthma, the infection, the death, but also the increasing number of unemployment, the faility of the public health system, the militarisation of border control, and lockdown policy. Furthermore, the intensification of xenophobic antagonism and social conflict, social unrest and so on.” The confirmed cases increased rapidly in more than 227 countries. As people could see on the global map, the concentration area of death zones shows that this natural crisis is actually determined violently by the social-economic political structure. Professor Liu borrowed Balibar’s argument on the topography of cruelty, about the way how “the global and enmity line produce within the boundaries of a single country or a city.” She further developed her ideas on the effect of this pandemic in relation to geopolitical and colonial governmentality, focusing on the fault lines of the structure of migration-logistics-unequal citizens or unequal lives. For the cases in Indonesia in March 2020, the government refused to admit that coronavirus existed in Indonesia to sustain the economic incomes. Although the government claimed that the death toll has reached up to 720 people, the Jakarta government confirmed that it has buried more than 1000 bodies due to COVID-19, which shows that there are undocumented casualties in the pandemic. Regarding the governments’ responses, economic development is always the priority for the government’s political policy while the public’s

vulnerability and protection of citizens are neglected.

Professor Liu then moved to the situation of the Philippines, where It has the second-highest in death cases in Southeast Asia by almost 5000 death and the highest confirmed cases of 280,000 people. The government's restriction rule is ridiculous that 76,000 people are arrested for breaching the lockdown and the polices are allowed to shoot people who resisted the lockdown policy through President Duterte's practice in the "War on Drugs." "This practice of martial law in the Philippines was actually initiated in the Spanish colonial rule in 1871. It was the practice during different colonial governments including also later on Japanese, American and of course, the Marcos administration." There is also similar measures of military intervention in Malaysia on 20th September, 2021. Although the confirmed cases are 10,130 people, which is understood as the spread of the invisible virus is under control by the government, Professor Liu argued that "the militarise movement, control order and enhanced movement control reveal the controversial aspect of this pandemic control." There are around 2 million registered and 3 million undocumented migrant workers in the Philippines, mostly staying in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, where has the largest number of confirmed cases. Regarding the documentary made by Al Jazeera, "Icoked up in Malaysia's Lockdown" showed the way how the un-registered foreign workers have been locked up in the name of protecting the "citizens."

In the documentary, most of the foreign workers are forced to be undocumented because of the lockdown policies, in which migration departments are closed during COVID-19. However, Ismail Sabri Yaakob argued that, "they have no rights to be in our country because they entered illegally." Nonetheless, in the other speech, he claimed that "we will not focus on their documents but rather on whether they are COVID-19 positive. We only want to vet them. The most extreme case that could happen is only that we quarantine them, that is all.' The reality is, mentioned at the beginning of the documentary, many foreign workers are unfairly treated, as an animal and rounded behind the barbed wire. Professor Liu presented that, "from 1948 to 1960, under the British colonial rule, the large scale of militarised raid and lockdown in an uncanny way, echoed the new village policy during the state of emergency in Malaysia." Moreover, the Sedition Act, which was initiated by the British colonial government in 1948, putting the reporters under surveillance and deported all the Bangladesh foreign workers for being interviewed and sent them back to their home countries. It is argued that the government used the pandemic as a rescue to lock up the unregistered migrant workers.

With reference to Professor Liu's notes on the cases in Singapore, the number of confirmed cases increased extremely from 618 up to 57,022

people within a few weeks, many of them are foreign workers. In the video of CBC News, the infection of migrant workers exposed the mistreatment in dormitories among them, in which 100 men share a toilet and 10 to 20 men stayed in the same room. It also pointed out that racism are spread within the Singaporean community for a long time, which becomes more serious because of the infection of migrant workers. The interview, also concerned about the problem of the tracking app, named "Trace Together" for "surveillance governance" by the Singapore government because the information could be sent to the police and army. Nonetheless, for the situation in Hong Kong, the government leads to spread the discrimination among migrant domestic workers during COVID-19 while the actual infection cases are low. The government repeatedly emphasised that the migrant workers are at high risk to be infected by the coronavirus and they urged the domestic helpers to stay home on their rest day. They neglected the needs of the migrant domestic workers to have a good rest by leaving their employers' families on holidays. With reference to the survey done by Hong Kong Free Press, the numbers of migrant workers suffering physical abuse have increased rapidly within the COVID-19 pandemic restriction period. The research done by Asian Migrants' Coordinating Body (AMCB), shows that almost 40,000 foreign domestic workers in Hong Kong were given no rest days in the pandemic and 20,000 were given only two days off per month. The employers are rationally supported by the government, to trap the domestic workers working 24hours a day in the name of health care and safety, although domestic workers are entitled to one day off every week as well as on labour holidays under the protection of the law (Chapter 57).

In the last part of the webinar, Professor Liu raised a question: how do we view these policies of preventive lockdown or refusal to lockdown as symptomatic indexes of the governmental technology? In relation to "the politics of denial, the enforced militarisation, the Sedition Act, the repression of dissident voices and the racial segregation." People's fear of the highly contagious but invisible virus has led to the feeling of hate, targeting at the refugee and migrant workers in the society, with xeno-racism. Professor Liu further argued: "the radicalised outsiders, or social stratification, are the residues of the colonial history, but in a reverse way." With Balibar's idea of "enmity line," Professor Liu claimed that "it is actually super border embedded in people's minds." It becomes a great tool for the government to do surveillance and control among the people who constitute a threat to society. "The need to hunt down the internal enemies and cleansing the civic space make it a new global civil war within the city so this process echo the past colonial time." Thus, "what comes with the lockdown?" is the radicalised line of division and separation with the emotion of "love" and "hate" raised by Sara Ahmed, about the "hate group" who believe non-citizens are threatening

to society.

Chasing back to the history, the state of the migrant workers are used to be neighbouring countries in the same kingdom during the C commerce period, now become excluded and separated as “enemies” or “slaves”. Since “the citizenship could be differentiated in a post-colonial state-building process,” Professor Liu suggested that it is necessary to push forward for new concepts or reconceptualize the common sense of citizenship, to protect the people who live and work there and they should enjoy equal access to essential space. Furthermore, she reminds us that we need to expose the colonial power and theoretical produce behind the lockdown and the civil war mentality. Last but not least, the notion of common needs to be reinvented with the alternative logistics for the common.

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Reflection

Documenting Visibility: Representation and Exclusion across Borders

Pallavi Narayan (GHI participant/ Associate Professor, Jindal School of Liberal Arts and Humanities, India)

The first webinar of the CHCI-Global Humanities Institute 2019–2022 began with the GHI participants, speakers, and researchers from the partner institutes across time zones. Post a round of introductions by the GHI organizing team at National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University, Taiwan, Sara Guyer, President of the CHCI and Professor, Department of English, University of Wisconsin-Madison, presented the vision and mission behind the program—that of multilingual, cross-institutional, and truly interdisciplinary research—remarking that was being fulfilled in this pivotal moment online. Stating that she admires the work that has been ongoing across generations, she was pleased to see both early-career scholars and senior scholars working on a challenge bigger than any of us can tackle individually.

Joyce C.H. Liu, as Director of the host institution, introduced the organization of this GHI in 2018 with her team and co-PIs from different universities, and presented the rationale behind the theme: that migrants' and refugees' condition is the most precarious in the 21st century, and that the tripartite structure of migration, logistics and unequal citizens could help articulate the complexity of the problem. She explained how the 2020 summer school was planned with speakers and recommended reading lists for the participants, that due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the summer school has been postponed to 2021; and the monthly webinars will keep participants; and speakers connected. Mentioning how this pandemic has exacerbated migrant and refugee workers' vulnerable conditions, and exposed local governments' frailty and malfunctioning in different countries, she elaborated on the formation of groups based on projects to have an ongoing research team in a broad sense, and that collaborations and support systems between the participants may be the outcome.

Liu's presentation, titled "Global Governance + Global Civil War?: What Comes after the Lockdown?" unpacked the key concerns of the webinar:

exacerbation; life zone versus death zone; the recurrence of colonial governance paradigms; and lines of future research. Taking the case of Southeast Asia, she utilized a map that served as a visual and spatial index, pointing to the vulnerable hotspots with specific numbers of COVID-19 cases from Indonesia, The Philippines, Malaysia, Bangladesh, and Singapore. She considered the politico-geographical conditions of the lockdown to discuss how this pandemic exposed the recurrence of this colonial government mentality, taking into account the frailty of the public care system, militarisation of border control and lockdown policy, intensification of xenophobic antagonism and social conflict, and social congress. On the surface, she noted that it seems that there is no engineering mechanism or logistics chain that guides the path of the contagion; the invisible virus crosses almost all borders, and the vulnerable areas display a poverty gap within a country, particularly in the metropolis. She pointed to a need to look into the effect of this pandemic on societies with regard to a politics of denial in a historical context, such as the practice of martial law initiated in Spanish colonial rule in 1871 in The Philippines, for example, or British colonial rule in Malaysia. Liu further observed that the racial segregation of migrant workers in Southeast Asian countries is symptomatic of government technology to repress dissident voices, and have a racialized plan of division and mechanism of society security. She concluded by asserting that social stratification is a residue of colonialism in a reverse manner, and activates the community censor system and stranger effect, resulting in a new global civil war and emerging divide between citizens and non-citizens within the city. Ultimately, she called for an alternative logistics of the common.

Brett Neilson, building on Liu's arguments, added a key phrase that is now in the global lexicon: the "new normal," asserting that this pandemic showcases the techniques and technologies of a strange colonial government that are being experimented with in heterogeneous ways across the world's diverse geographies. He asked the audience to think about this phrase in correlation with "exacerbation," in the sense of tendencies that have already been unfolding in the contemporary world system, particularly in the case of migration and conflictual normalities and norms around border crossing. Border hardening and softening, re- and de-nationalization, border mobility and fixity, in terms of territorial borders between nation-states, but also internal borders in urban space, and a rethinking of nation and nationalism were concepts he brought into play in his lecture. Analysing the perspective of logistics, he mentioned that it seems to be a cold approach as regards questions of capital, migration and labour in the last decades. Bringing to the audience's notice the Marxist view of labour power as an embodied commodity, he introduced the concept of logistification of migration—the controls and abilities to turn back workers exposed to forms of contagion

and vulnerability—that has been exacerbated in the pandemic and is part of colonial governmentality developing in different directions. Recognizing that the pandemic has created situations that would have been termed uninhabitable but are now unlivable is imperative, as is the hustle for survival and struggle in these unlivable spaces. Neilson asked for a re-imagination of the central trope of contagion in alternative ways: as temporal contagions, political resistances, and acts from previous struggles and actions of survival from the vast archive of colonial resistance.

Next, Ranabir Samaddar brought forward the idea of the borders of an epidemic: how the epidemic is not only accentuating and reinforcing certain borders but is creating borders that we are not ready for (e.g., in neoliberal economy, politics, etc.). He observed that the notion of public health developed alongside the idea of urban governance, and that the general liberal idea is to strengthen public health to cope with the pandemic. However, this leaves out the enormity of undocumented, illegal migrants who are not perceived as forming a part of the public. Invoking Foucault, the epidemic of 1918, and administrative memory from colonial times, he raised the question of biopolitics of an epidemic that combines both its borders and burdens: deciding on categories of productive and non-productive populations, and deciding whom of the non-productive would be jettisoned or sacrificed to ensure the productive sections of population, thus strengthening continuity of neo-Malthusian rule. He ended his talk by asserting the necessity of noticing migrant visibility and invisibility, i.e., differential visibility in a study of migrants, logistics and unequal citizens, and that the borders, burdens and biopolitics of an epidemic are three distinct trajectories to carry out research on.

Sandro Mezzadra brought into discussion logistical and delivery rationality that increasingly shades the way in which migration borders are managed. He remarked that the pandemic has brought about a new economy of mobility and demobility that challenges established political frameworks while dealing with the entrenchment of existing processes. Commenting on how migrants, the most mobile subjects, have been often compelled to forced mobility, Mezzadra mentioned the slowdown of the logistics machine, which has opened up a field of experimentation and transformations that deserve close analysis. He pointed to unequal lives in context of the violently selective impact of the pandemic in many parts of the world. The dissemination of the coronavirus has been rapid, prompting the sudden emergence of global crisis and shedding light on a panoply of borders, both internal and external. He too mentioned that colonial legacy has shaped the effect of the virus disproportionately across communities, and that this combination of homogeneity and heterogeneity is an aspect of global processes. The most affected populations have also managed to display the most striking cases of

resistance against existing and newly introduced structures alike.

A productive discussion between the speakers followed the lectures, after which the floor was open for questions from the GHI participants. The lectures were rich in building on concepts and ideas, and added to my reflections on the reading material. The questions that arose in my mind revolved around representation and alienation. I was curious about modes of exclusion in the solidarities emerging during the pandemic—both in neighbourhoods as well as city communities—and the exclusion of workers, for instance, many of whom would be migrants. This tied in with Samaddar’s comments on differential visibility in urban areas. In parallel, I wondered about the politics of inclusion at play in the highlighting of certain migrants as representative of “their communities,” and consequently receiving individual assistance, media attention, and networking opportunities while there appears to be an invisibilization of the vast number of migrant labour. The discussion had me curious about the maladies and treatment of female migrant workers and those with disabilities, and recalled for me an exhibit at the Aga Khan Museum, Toronto on the freedom that female migrants can experience in their new community or sub-communities. Similarly, the implications of herding migrant labour into dormitories or ships recalled for me the story of Kunta Kinte in *Roots* by Alex Haley (1976), as well as mixed-media paintings of slave ships in the Museum of Goa, India. Reflecting on the “proliferation of borders,” as Mezzadra and Neilson term it, and viewing it in the context of migrants crossing internal borders, they experience alienation not only from the place of origin but also from temporary homes they have precariously created and alienated from in their own country. It would be important to contemplate the psychological borders and territorial delimitations of migration, and how these evolve throughout the migrant’s life as it develops in a “new” country—which could refer to a place within the nation-state or without. The webinar left me negotiating my own space within the cultural imaginaries that I inhabit, and the politics of the privileges that I have facilitated or been enabled to facilitate, and how strongly the governance of economics enters the picture. With the webinar concluding on a note of hope for collaborative research along the themes that the speakers engaged with, I look forward to deliberating on such concerns as the GHI proceeds.

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