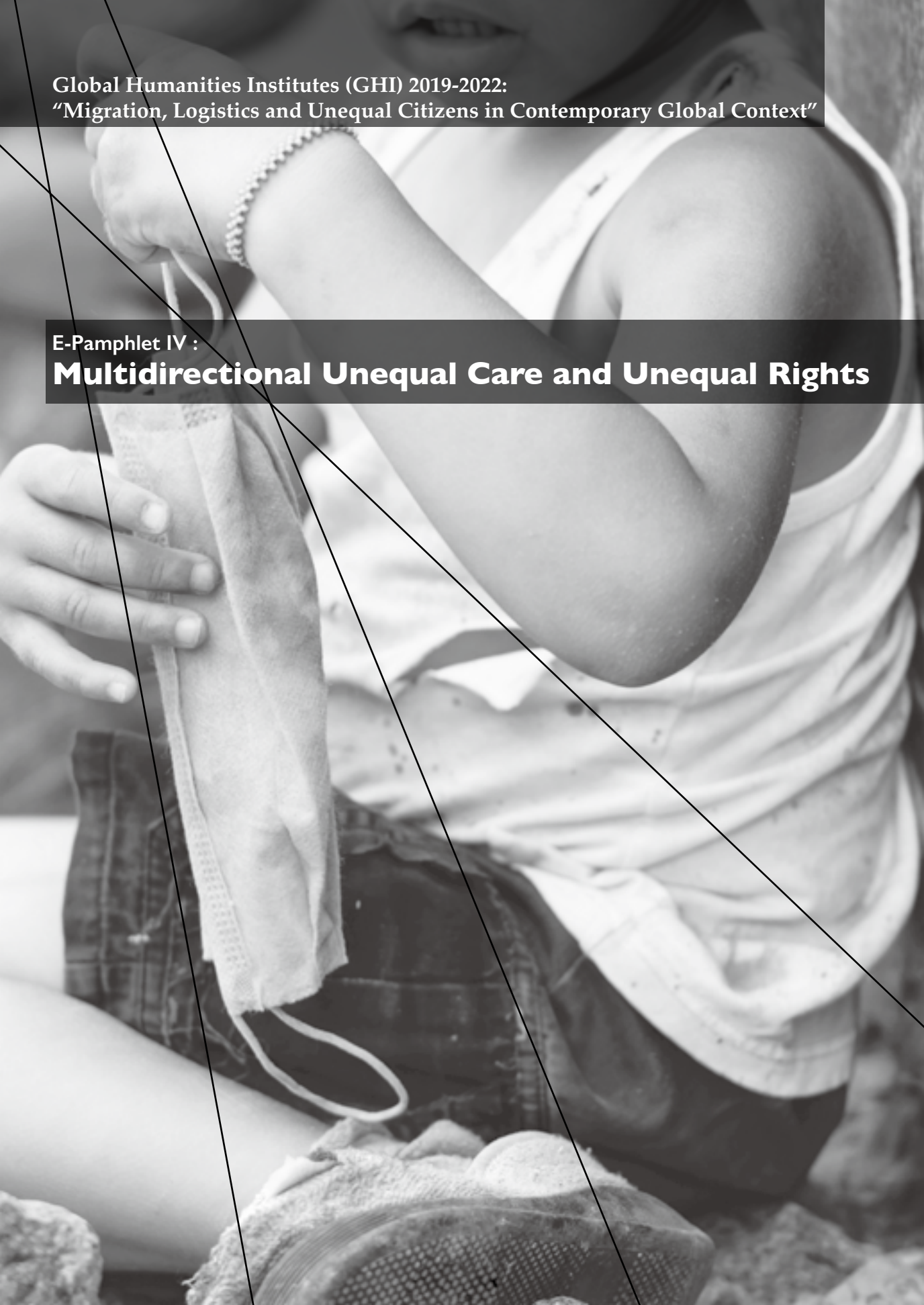


Global Humanities Institutes (GHI) 2019-2022:
"Migration, Logistics and Unequal Citizens in Contemporary Global Context"

E-Pamphlet IV :

Multidirectional Unequal Care and Unequal Rights

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?

Multidirectional Unequal Care and Unequal Rights

These talks were parts of the webinar "Interventions from the South: Theoretical Perspectives and Pragmatic Issues of Migration, Logistics and Unequal Citizens in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic," as an integral part of multiple events organised by the CHCI-Global Humanities Institutes 2019-2022: Migration, Logistics and Unequal Citizens in Contemporary Global Context.

Migration has become a critical field of study for social scientists due to the harsh realities and rising inequality migrants are subject to. Asia, though hosting a substantial portion of the world's migrants, provides the poorest protection and fewest policies for advancing migrants' rights and livelihoods. The GHI presented an interdisciplinary platform where Asia-based migrant rights activists and NGOs talked about their research and professional observations of the complexities of migrant issues in the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

About NGOs

Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2, Singapore) promotes fair treatment for migrant workers. We envision a society that recognizes and values the important contribution they make to our households, economy and country.

We believe that all labour is dignified and should be treated with respect and consideration. Ethnicity, colour, gender, language, religion or class are irrelevant – no worker should be subjected to inhumane or degrading treatment.

We argue that employers should conduct their business honourably, responsibly and compensate their staff promptly and fairly.

Buku Jalanan Chow Kit (BJCK, Malaysia) is an NGO that is working to provide equal education opportunities to all the children in the Chow Kit catchment area. We firmly believe that education is the right for everyone, regardless of their circumstances. Education should be holistic and it is more than what happens inside the classroom. How our students spend their time and who they interact with forms the foundation of their character. In order for them to become responsible and contributing members of the society, we believe that at risk youths need a safe environment to spend their time.

To accomplish this, we have set up a safe space and resource centre where the children of Chow Kit can have a safe and stimulating refuge to

play,hang around, read and interact with positive role models. It is also a venue for our community tuition initiatives and home-schooling programme for stateless/displaced children who did not have access to public school.

Introduction to the Talks

What Does Pandemic Bring To The Migrant?

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

This seminar invited two guests, Siti Rahayu (Co-founder of Buku Jalanan Chow Kit) and Debbie Fordyce (President of Transient Workers Count Too) to discuss the difficulties the migrants are facing during the pandemic, and they also shared their organisation's observations and experiences with the migrants in their communities. Their visions of the organisations are significantly presented within the seminar: the migrants deserve to be well-treated and respected by the local communities.

Organisation's Mission

Siti Rahayu is the co-founder of the organisation, Buku Jalanan Chow Kit. Chow Kit is Rahayu's hometown in Malaysia and there are many migrant workers working in the market. Buku represents book while Jalanan represents street. The reason why they implement Buku Jalanan Chow Kit is that they believe all children deserve to receive good education. According to Rahayu's observation, many migrant's children in Malaysia are stateless and displaced because they could not be registered in the government system, thus they wish to provide a platform for the stateless children to learn and afterwards integrate into the country as human capital. They believe that these children have the potential to be a valuable citizen of the country, instead of being forgotten and leftover by the country. Therefore, they aim to provide equitable education and encourage students to build up their authority and talent. In the seminar, we have another speaker, Debbie Fordyce is the current president of Transient Workers Count Too (TWC Too). TWC Too is a non-profit, non-denominational organisation implemented in 2004, which aims to assist migrant workers who are in need and to advocate for better policies for them. As Ms. Fordyce argued, the situation of the migrant workers in Singapore is extremely difficult and they are not fairly treated by the government. Thus, the organisation highly engaged in the communities to provide support for the migrant workers in difficulty during the pandemic. Before the pandemic, they regularly provide free meals, financial support with transport, medical care and other legal expenses. Their sharing in the seminar shows the power of the NGOs that are passionate to help the

communities to build a better living environment.

Forced to be invisible

As stated by Ms. Fordyce, Bangladeshi and Indian migrant workers have the lowest salaries among the foreign labour force in Singapore. That makes them the most vulnerable labour to the employers who wish to earn many profits as they can. It is easier for the workers suffering from the loopholes of the legislation, with which the supervisors and employers take kickbacks from their workers and extract illegal deductions from the salary. Nevertheless, because of family burdens, they often remain silent towards their employers. According to Ms. Fordyce, the workers often request help from TWC Too about their injury claims, salary non-payment, recruitment fees and scams even before the pandemic. The employers who promised to pay high salaries with good environments, often pay far less than the agreed salaries to the migrant workers. Although some of the employers may end up in jail, most of them are willing to take the risks. Since the start of the pandemic, TWC Too has kept receiving their request online and they were still concerned about switching jobs with a higher salary.

During COVID-19, it is obvious that there is a huge discrepancy between migrant workers and Singaporeans. Ms. Fordyce argued that low-wage migrant workers have been overlooked because of Singapore's policy to prevent the spread of the COVID virus. While Singaporeans are expected to enjoy well-paid work, subsidised education. health care and good housing, the migrant workers are suffering from virus infection, lack of health and medical support and poverty. Nonetheless, many Singaporeans did not aware of the severe situations migrant workers have been experiencing. According to the statics provided by Ms. Fordyce, there are over 95% of all cases in Singapore happened in the workers' dormitories since mid-December 2020 and at least 47% of workers in dormitories have tested positive for COVID-19. It enlarges the gap between migrant workers and local communities because of the high infection rate. The local communities assumed that the migrant workers are too ignorant to work out the numbers or they would be able to avoid the mistreatment if they noticed their rights as a worker. However, it is a naive thought because the migrant workers always have great sacrifices to work overseas, and they are unable to take care of their families in their home countries if they lose their jobs. Furthermore, the Work Permit policy has become a threatening tool for the companies and employers to mistreat the workers, for instance, lowering the wages, assigning overwork, or even conducting physical and mental abuse. Most of the host countries implemented different policies to avoid migrant workers from getting citizenship and starting a new living with their families there because they need the low-wages labour, instead of citizens who are being

protected by the government with the benefits of neoliberalism. According to the research conducted by TWC Too in 2016, there had been a decrease of about 20% after adjusting for inflation in the average basic salaries for first time workers from Bangladesh and India in the past 10 years. It shows that the salaries that companies are able to give to the workers are much lower because of the financial stress among companies in Singapore. Nevertheless, it is ridiculous that migrant workers are often required to pay a huge amount of agency fees before they arrive at the foreign countries to work. As argued by Ms. Fordyce, it is hard to imagine that someone is willing to work at low wages if he has to paid 10000 or more to get the job. Some of them even have to borrow money from families, friends, relatives, banks or money lenders. It exposes that the agency companies cheated to the workers, saying that they will earn high salaries enough to feed their parents and children. The agents also forced them to sign agreements as another tool to threaten the workers to remain silent. With low wages and in debt for a long period of time, the workers lost their bargaining power when they faced discrimination, mistreatment or abuse in work. Even if they are injured during work times, there will be no suitable medical support, but instead be repatriated, meaning that they will be unable to fulfil their responsibilities of being a breadwinner of their families. As Ms. Fordyce mentioned, " the threat of deportation is quite successful in preventing complaints and claims against the employers." The situations become even worse when they were trapped in the dormitory during the initial lockdown. They are directly transferred from the dormitories to the worksite by the employers. Other than work, they are not allowed to get out of it. Although some people did aware of their needs and donated money to TWC Too, they criticised that the public are not aware of the darkness behind them and thought that they are suffering only because of COVID. Thus, after they are able to go back to work, people simply stop paying attention to the cases. As Ms. Fordyce reminded, "real social change starts with knowledge and understanding."

The citizenship policies are always a problem for migrant workers in most of the host countries. Even though migrant workers are imported for more than twenty years, and a strong community has been built, it does not mean they are able to own citizenship, thus, certain benefits there. Through the observation of Ms. Rahayu in Malaysia, most of the migrant workers in Chow Kit are undocumented and the children are stateless, displaced and even excluded from the educational system, although they are born in Malaysia. They are born in this country, but they are being invisible in the governance. Ms. Rahayu was angry because she believes that these children deserve to receive great education like other students no matter what cultural background they are from. She therefore implemented Buku Jalanan Chow Kit with her partners who share the same visions. As Ms. Rahayu complained,

Chow Kit is never a suitable place for living, with no housing area and no playground for children. Before they had a place to teach, they brought books and study materials to the street for the children. However, they were not allowed to use the public space as the Malaysian government wanted to show a good image of the street. Fortunately, organisations like Julie's Biscuits and ThinkCity are willing to pay rental fees for them. Afterwards, they have a safe and multi-functional place for children to learn and explore their own interests. Although it is only 2,000 square feet, it can offer crucial changes the children's lives. It obviously provides autonomy for children to imagine.

Helping Hands

Baring their vision of helping the stateless children, Buku Jalanan Chow Kit encourages children to explore their own life. They aim to provide as many as resources to help the children. During the pandemic, they delivered cushions, steppingstones and grocery baskets in the name of their children's passionate participation in class. 60 families, whose children have good performances, are able to get assistance from the organisation. It is inspiring and powerful that Ms. Rahayu is not just providing support to the kids, but giving a message to the children that your families are being supported because of your talent and hard work. Ms. Rahayu further illustrates her ideas with the children's performance in class. Most of the children who have stayed in Buku Jalanan Chow Kit for two years can learn to code and create their own apps already. In the last two years, they have joined the National School Competition Level Coding in five teams and two of them received silver awards while two groups received bronze awards. Ms. Rahayu was proud to announce that it is the way how they want to prove to the Malaysian government: these students are also valuable and talented if they are able to receive proper education. They can become great human capital to the country. After being inspired by the situations of the pandemic, they have run a program called Suara Generasi COVID, a voice program with project-based approach so that the students are able to get access to the internet like other children. They also asked questions through WhatsApp every day and had a great conversation with the students. Students took the origin of COVID-19 virus as a study topic, and they investigate it with the knowledge of mathematics, geography, history, circulation, data collection and even analysis. Lastly, they would present their reflections in front of others. It is ironic that this project is also used within different schools, which usually reject stateless children to access education. Again, it proves to the public that, they are deserved to be well-treated by the country. Buka Jalanan Chow Kit further develop their project Raspberry Pi, which provides opportunities for children to design and think to solve the problems that they are facing now.

They do not only care about learning but also encourage students to implement it. Entrepreneurship is run to open-source digital tools to the students, in which they will learn a passing digital and entrepreneur skill. The students are required to do research projects and analyse existing businesses to set up their own ideas. Moreover, they are building a rooftop garden and play-space for children, who are users and designers at the same time. They run their own kitchen and implement a cookie business including all the design of stickers and branding. Even the websites of Buku Jalanan Chow Kit and the marketing tools are designed by the students. It significantly shows the way how stateless children can learn by themselves and perform their best when they have the opportunity to receive education, which should not be overlooked by the government, excluding them from society or even send them to the concentration camp. Right now, in Malaysia, there are around 3,000 children being in detention centre because of undocumented. Nonetheless, as Ms. Rahayu kept mentioning in the whole seminar, their students are resilient, smart and brilliant, and deserve to be seen. With the sharing of Ms. Fordyce and Ms. Rahayu, we have noticed that migrants' situation is tough in both Malaysia and Singapore. As Ms. Fordyce emphasised at last, "we derive pleasure in a comfortable lifestyle from migrant labour so we need to be mindful not only of their sacrifice but ensure that they are treated as expected of an economically successful country like Singapore." We not only need to be aware of their situations but also speak out and be willing to take action to get closer to the migrants, which means walking together with them, instead of just helping them.

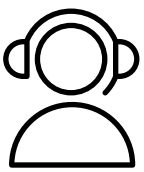
Male Migrant Workers in Singapore, before and during the Pandemic

Debbie Fordyce (President, Transient Worker Count Too)

Transient Workers Count Too or TWC2 advocates fair working conditions for migrant workers. The COVID pandemic has resulted in massive transmission in the worker dormitories: one in six were infected. This has brought much-needed attention to this separate community. While dormitory plans have improved, some conditions have remained the same and others have further restricted their movements.

Among the issues that TWC2 has highlighted for years are high recruitment costs, contract substitution, salary entitlements during COVID-19, curtailed freedom of movement, insufficient wage protection, and restricted job mobility. These are ongoing concerns and issues that we have researched and continue to bring to the attention of the government. The COVID-19, however, has caused a distraction from these long-term concerns to the more immediate issues of food, general necessities, medical care, internet connectivity, and care for the workers' families during the months that the workers were not able to work and confined to dormitories or other isolation facilities.

In the months following the COVID-19 outbreak, Singapore witnessed a small number of new groups offering support for migrant workers. Cash donations and volunteer numbers emerged, and ground-up efforts delivered meals and a variety of other goods and services confined workers, as almost all foreign workers were simultaneously prevented from accessing public spaces. This generosity and compassion was welcomed in Singapore but may have resulted in a sense of complacency as new dormitories are built with improved specifications, and workers are further restricted from interaction with the resident community. This segregation from public spaces and an inability to engage in normal social interaction has helped to reinforce the idea that migrant workers are a social disamenity, and best kept segregated. Housing them in dedicated facilities and restricting employment to specific sectors with dismally low salaries has encouraged fear of contact or proximity with these foreigners. The further removed they are from the resident community, the more difficulty they and NGOs face in raising their concerns and easier it becomes to remain ignorant of their needs and accepting of their unjust treatment.



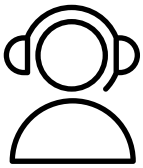
Listen to a podcast of Debbie Fordyce's talk here.

Pandemic accommodate to the possibility of better education for the stateless and displaced communities and how to capture this in reality

Siti Rahayu (Co-Founder)

The existing gap of education inequalities widen and billions of children have been affected by school closure – the results of Covid-19 pandemic. Children poverty increases out of the widening of this education inequalities. However, Buku Jalanan Chow Kit (BJCK) is taking a step forward in trying to learn the lesson brought by the pandemic and bringing the best to our stateless children who for all this while have been denied entry to the formal education system in Malaysia. This school closure somehow created an equal playing field in a form that now all of the children are all studying from home. It created a radical inclusion for those children who have been denied access to formal education. Therefore, we are taking this situation as an opportunity to design a similar learning experience for our children at BJCK. We created a more inclusive and comprehensive project-based learning for our BJCK children while also equipping them with necessary tools that help them to learn effectively from home. Education now can be more agile, cross borders and more collaboration can be done from almost everywhere. This also created more access to education for every child regardless of their citizenship status. In creating this better normal for the future of education, we do address there are problems and inequalities created by school closure to marginalized children in regards to online learning shortcomings. Hence, we worked within all these possibilities and capturing this into the reality of better access to education for our stateless and displaced children.

Listen to a podcast of Siti Rahayu's talk here.



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Graphic Designer: Wally Liu

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Published and Organised by International Center for Cultural Studies, National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University
Sponsored by Consortium of Humanities Center and Institutes (CHCI) & Andrew. W. Mellon Foundation