

# Disconnections with the host nation and the significance of international student communities: Asian international students in Australia

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# The Project

- ▶ Australian Research Council (DECRA) Fellowship and part of a broader study examining the self-perceived identities, social networks, and communication and media use of transient migrants in Australia and Singapore.

Face to face interviews: 201

Journal entries and follow-up interviews: 40

Online Survey: 385 respondents

Today however, I will be looking at 46 in-depth interviews I did with Asian students in Melbourne

**Findings?**

# Living in parallel societies

International students (like other transient migrants) exist in parallel societies to the host country despite ethnic or other markers of similarity.

Here they create spaces for themselves' in the receiver nation 'from their perspective, and so experience what the receiver nation has to offer on *their* terms' (Gomes 2017: 149-150).

In other words, international students are not integrating, even on a superficial level, with the local populace

- ▶ This is in spite of the presence of seemingly significant ethnic-cultural similarities within communities in Australia.
- ▶ Instead, international students form complex and self-serving parallel societies made up of other international students

# Why does this happen?

## ▶ PUSH Factors

e.g. perceived racism / non-acceptance from domestic students; lack of confidence dealing with local students

*I try to talk with them but maybe because my English very poor so I can't communicate very well. And also they maybe don't want to make the situation become too awkward so they just stop it to talking with us, so maybe I, just think I need to improve my English skill and try to talk with them and living to ... to feel [more] suited ... [to] Australia. – male Chinese pgrad student*

## ▶ PULL Factors

e.g. 'only other international students know what I am going through'

Leads to a phenomenon I call 'siloeed diversity'

# Introducing Siloed Diversity

- ▶ Siloed diversity takes place because (transient) migrants such as international students rely on a hierarchy of identities they possess while in transience to make connections and disconnections with people. The connections which they make are based on a combination of meaningful relationships (e.g. friendships) and useful and beneficial associations (e.g. with diasporas online). Siloed diversity thus happens when transient migrants form real and online networks, groups and communities based on identities that become distinct because of their transience. At the same time, these identities, some of which are strengthened (e.g. nationality) while others are formed (e.g. visa status), because of transience, also leads transient migrants to disconnect with people they would otherwise form networks, groups and communities with if they were not living overseas. The experience of transience, in other words, creates new relationships while relationships pre-transience, sometimes become stagnant, or not as significant or useful during the transient period. Moreover because the connections and disconnections made are based on the experience of transience, assumed identity markers (e.g. same ethnicity) that are assumed to allow for a facilitation of connectivity may instead become points of disconnectivity.

# Aspirations for cosmopolitan mobility

- ▶ With ambitions to live and work in the big cities of Europe, North America and Asia with a view to return to the home nation eventually or possibly in the future.

*I want to go back to Singapore and work, but it's mostly just experience, because I want to do my MBA in UK ... And then maybe, I had big notions of working in Germany or Korea ... I think in the end [I want to settle in] the long run at Singapore. Because I want my kids to experience the Singapore education. But like, before that – before I have kids and stuff, I think I want to live, in either Germany or Korea ... If I did get permanent residence [in these countries], it will just be because, it will make the paperwork and stuff easier. It wouldn't be because of any long-term plans and stuff. – female undergrad Singaporean student*

- ▶ See themselves as different from domestic students – but different in a non-negative way where they feel they are 'better' because they are cosmopolitan

# Transnational (and transient) mobility despite permanent residence

- ▶ Gaining permanent residence in Australia was not necessarily equated with a desire for staying in these countries for the rest of their lives. Instead, respondents generally noted that despite successfully gaining permanent residence, they saw themselves working and living elsewhere other than the host or even home nation.

*Mobility is the stuff that dreams are made of. The word mobility evokes powerful images that downplay the value of stationary life and spatially bounded routines while simultaneously providing a promise of a different life – life dissociated from the insularity of the local and parochial. For young, middle-class people in developed countries, mobility is a given not a privilege ... (Skrbis, Woodward and Bean, 2013)*



# Cosmopolitan mobility is encouraged by their lived experiences in Australia

- ▶ Self-perceived identity as Global Citizen
- ▶ The significance of English as a marker of cosmopolitanism

# Cosmopolitan mobility is encouraged by their lived experiences in Australia

- ▶ part of being a global citizen was about having 'global friends' – friends from nations other than their own or the host nation

*So I mean, having international friends around, you can sort of have a global network ... I'm sure that they will, we can interact with each other. It's important to me, of course. – ethnic Chinese NZ ugrad student*

*Like when I'm with the Chinese [in Australia] I'm a Chinese person but when I'm with Australians ... I'm more like an outsider. That's when I'm with other people from other countries I'm an international person ... I've studied in both Adelaide and Melbourne so I think people in Adelaide ... are more friendly towards ... people [in general] but they might be more conservative towards internationals. Yep and most of them don't talk to internationals, whereas in Melbourne people are used to internationals. So when they see me they see me as a person not as an international who speaks poor English. So they would talk to me. They'd be friendly as well. – female Chinese undergraduate*

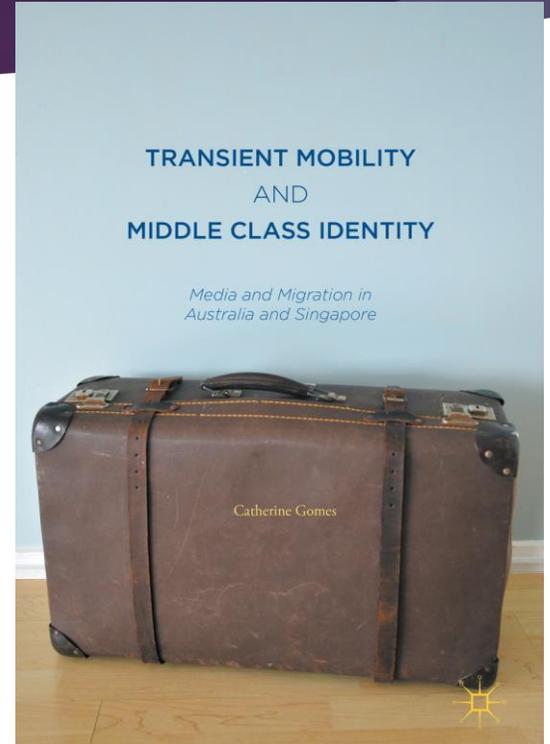
# Cosmopolitan mobility is encouraged by their lived experiences in Australia

- ▶ Connecting to home through communication technology

*The use of social media to stay in contact with friends and family from the home nation may assist students with forming imaginary bonds with their homelands. Doing so provides international students with virtual home-based support networks, which then allow them the opportunity to pursue and form local social networks with students other than those who come from their countries of birth - (Gomes, Berry, Alzougool & Chang, 2014: 13).*

# Thank you

► Further reading



# References

- ▶ Gomes, C, 2015, 'Negotiating Everyday Life in Australia: Unpacking the Parallel Society Inhabited by Asian 2015, International Students through their Social Networks and Entertainment Media Use', *Journal of Youth Studies*, no. 18, pp. 515 – 536.
- ▶ Gomes, C, Berry, M, Alzougool, B & Chang, S, 2014, 'Home Away From Home: International Students and their Identity-Based Social Networks in Australia', *Journal of International Students*, vol 4, no. 1, <https://jistudents.files.wordpress.com/2013/02/1-home-away-home.pdf>.
- ▶ Skrbiš, Z, Woodward, I & Bean, C, 2013, 'Seeds of Cosmopolitan Future? Young People and their Aspirations for Future Mobility', *Journal of Youth Studies*, vol. 17, no. 5, pp.614-625.