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Gender, Mobility Regimes, and Social Transformation in Asia

Fran Martin and Ana Dragojlovic

This special issue, which grows out of an international symposium that the editors hosted at the University of Melbourne in November 2016, explores the inter-relations among gender, human mobilities, and power across selected sites in East and Southeast Asia, where today an intensification and acceleration in spatial movements of all kinds is reconfiguring the ways in which gender relations are lived and imagined. Gender, sexuality, intimacy, and family are taking on new expressions, shaped by political and economic demands for participation in geographic mobilities, flexible labour, intimate markets, and social reproduction. The articles gathered here explore how contemporary regimes of governance in Singapore, Indonesia, China, Taiwan and beyond impact on the spatial and social movements of people, and interrogate the economic, political, affective, and especially gendered dimensions of these emergent forms of mobility. Bringing together scholars from across gender studies, anthropology, and cultural studies, this issue explores how interdisciplinary methods and theories can productively engage the operations of mobility regimes in the making and un-making of gender relations in the Asian region.

The articles collected in this issue share a number of thematic commonalities. First, while in the wider field of what has been called "mobilities studies," mobility may refer to geographic movements across a number of registers—including those of people, media, technologies, capital, infrastructure, ideologies and more (Appadurai 1996; Sheller and Urry 2006; Urry 2007)—the articles in this issue focus largely on human mobilities: mid- to long-range movements of people, including both their transnational movements and their movements from rural-to-urban and poorer-to-wealthier locations within nations. Second and more particularly, the papers share a focus on the mobilities of subjects who are marginal to or minoritized by intersections of economic, racial, gendered and sexual power structures in dominant local cultures: unskilled migrant labourers (Ang, Sun), male sex workers (Hegarty), marriage migrants (Lan), and Asia-to-Europe adoptees (Van Wichelen). This focus links closely to our third theme: a preoccupation with how both gendered and mobility practices are fundamentally conditioned by—indeed may often be seen as quite direct expressions of—formations of social power and inequality. Moving far beyond the too-easy assumption that mobility equates unilaterally to empowerment (Hanson 2010; Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013; Penttinen and Kynsilehto 2017), this collection is concerned instead with tracing the operations of power that braid complexly and integrally into people's experiences of

im/mobility. Fourth, the papers share a bifocal approach that blends ethnographic methods, with their emphasis on everyday, affective, and subjective experiences of mobility at the micro-level, with attention to the macro-level regulation of human mobilities by state and supra-state actors. In different ways, all of the authors interrogate the juncture of these two levels; in particular, how the structural, regulatory demands made by mobility regimes are experienced individually and affectively by those who are subjected to them. Finally, as our title suggests, the articles share a common concern with illuminating how social, economic, and political transformations are impacting on gendered mobilities in the contemporary moment. Individual papers focus, for example, on the intensification of both domestic and transnational-outbound labour flows in and from post-reforms China, and transnational-inbound labour mobilities to Singapore (Sun, Ang), each of which is spurred by particular phases of post-socialist or neo-developmentalist capitalist expansion in the context of economic globalization; on intra-Asian economic differentials driving increasing inbound marriage migration to ex-"tiger economy" Taiwan from nearby Southeast Asia and China (Lan); on intensifying contradictions between neo-religious moralities and consumer desires reflected in available scripts for desirable masculinities in post-authoritarian Indonesia (Hegarty); and on the lived effects for transnational adoptees from Indonesia of the United Nations agreement on adoptees' "right to know" their biological parents and ethnic, religious and cultural background (Van Wichelen). In these ways, the issue offers important new insights into the relationships among mobility regimes, gender and social transformations in Asia and beyond today.

Gender and mobility

A key project for this issue is to advance our understanding of the relationship between gender, as a set of ideological formations and embodied practices, and mobility, as a type of human experience that tends both to intensify and to transform qualitatively in the contemporary period. In her overview of the state of the field of gender and mobility studies, feminist geographer Susan Hanson usefully observes a distinction between two main approaches to this relationship in the research to date (Hanson 2010). One group of studies asks *how mobility shapes gendered power*, *meanings and practices*; tends to focus on the micro-level of lived experience; and is carried out predominantly through qualitative case studies. The second group asks *how gender shapes practices of mobility*; tends to focus on the meso-level of culture and pay attention to the specificity of particular mobility practices; and is carried out through quantitative studies with large samples (Hanson 2010: 9-14). On

the whole, the papers collected in this issue have more in common with Hanson's first group than her second, concerned as they principally are with how mid- and long-range geographic mobilities shape people's gendered experience.

This question can be approached from a number of angles which are useful to separate out as an initial step in our exploration. First, at the ideological level, just as feminist geographers have long insisted that space itself, as a social product, is gendered (Massey 1994), so capacities for, and practices of, movement across and between places are habitually understood, in most cultures, in gendered terms. We think perhaps most obviously here of the gendered distinction between private (feminine) and public (masculine) spheres, in the western European tradition (Cresswell and Uteng 2008:2); or again of the inside (feminine) versus the outside (masculine) of the family household, in the Chinese tradition, captured in the old adage *nan zhu wai, nü zhu nei* (the man's sphere is the exterior; the woman's, the interior). This is to observe, in Hanson's words:

> the familiar dualism that on one side equates women and femininity with the home, the private, with domestic spaces and restricted movement (which translates into interactions that are routine, quotidian, familiar), and on the other, equates men and masculinity with the not-home, the public, with urban spaces and expansive movement (which translates into interactions that bring excitement, challenges, new experiences, encounters with the unknown). (Hanson 2010: 9)

Such an association between femininity and spatial confinement and between masculinity and movement across space has exercised ideological hegemony in many different cultural contexts. This is, of course, not "mere" ideology, but has also frequently been reflected in mobility practices at a range of scales, from the gendered corporeal training of young girls in restricted movement in and through space (Young 1990) to the statistically male-dominated character of international migration up until the mid-twentieth century (Donato et al 2006).

At the level of practice, however, the gendering of mobility is far more complex than these somewhat predictable formulations may imply. This is so, first, because although in many situations, mobility or the potential to become mobile—what Kaufmann and co-authors term *motility*, or mobility capital (Kaufmann, Bergman and Joye 2004)—indeed translates into increased opportunity and empowerment (Shamir 2005), this is not necessarily or always the case. We see this most obviously in the case of refugees, exiles, and other forcibly displaced peoples; but also, for example, in unskilled labour migrants pushed by economic

circumstance to travel long distances for work (Lan 2006; Ang this issue; Sun this issue; Hegarty this issue); or in women tied to routines of family carework that see them spending a large proportion of their time traversing urban and suburban space for the benefit of children (Hanson 2010: 11).

Second, gendered mobility patterns are shifting in ways that undercut the old association of women with spatial confinement. Both globally and in Asia, our area of focus in this issue, women make up an increasing proportion of transnational migrants (Yinger 2006; Amrith 2011: 171-176). Moreover, the reasons for their mobility are changing. Since the mid-1980s, there has been a worldwide increase in women travelling alone to seek educational and career- advancement opportunities, rather than as legal appendages of husbands (Jones 2008). In East Asia this trend is particularly marked, which is reflected in the fact that a majority of international students from countries including China, Japan and South Korea are now women (Kim 2011: 1). As Martin has argued elsewhere with reference to Chinese women students in Australia (Martin 2014), like the labour migrants who are the focus of most contemporary studies of female migration in this region (Oishi 2005; Ahsan Ullah 2010: 43-72), these newly mobile students can be seen to exemplify the rise of "portable personhood" beyond the "rich north" (Elliott & Urry 2010: 3). Anthony Elliott and John Urry observe that "the rise of an intensively mobile society *reshapes the self* – its everyday activities, interpersonal relations with others, as well as connections with the wider world. [...]. Identity becomes [...] fundamentally recast in terms of capacities for movement" (2010: 3, emphasis added). Mobility's potential to reconfigure gendered identities is particularly significant, since the rise in women's transnational travel for work, education and professional development challenges older associations of women with family, home and the private sphere.

If in these ways, at the levels of *ideology* and *practice*, gender and mobility can be seen as constitutively inter-linked, then a third aspect that is useful to delineate is what we might call the *geo-cultural* dimension. This is to understand gender as bundles of meanings and practices that are produced and engaged collectively by cultural groups that are often linked, at least to some degree, with geographic localities or spatially delimited contexts. The point here is certainly not to fall back on the civilizationist essentialism of classical views of "cultures" as discrete, singular wholes rooted ineluctably to geography. Rather, what is most interesting about thinking through gender, location and mobility in the way we intend is precisely the tendency of gendered concepts, systems, norms and practices that are hegemonic in one geo-cultural context to become unsettled, dislocated, and remade when

people move. An example can be found in Martin's work with educational migrants from the People's Republic of China (PRC) in Australian cities. Martin found that among the young women who participated in her ethnographic study, time spent studying and living abroad functioned as a "zone of suspension," in which normative meanings of youth, feminine gender, and intimate relationships in the Chinese society into which they had been socialized sometimes became partially, temporarily, and unevenly suspended, as geographic distance from hometown social surveillance enabled them to elaborate new ways of being and interacting that would have been difficult or impossible at home (Martin 2018). In effect, educational mobility allowed these students collectively to fashion a new kind of sex-gender culture; not really as a result of osmotic absorption of local mores, but in fact more directly as a result of socio-spatial displacement in itself. In this way, international mobility can be fertile ground for the reconsideration and remaking of individual gender identities. However, while such challenges might be welcomed by those who felt marginalized in their countries of birth, they might also cause rapid downward social mobility. For example, many Pakistani men who migrate to Britain to marry British-Pakistani women face loss of social and economic privilege when they move to Britain due to inadequate language proficiency, as well as limited social networks, lack of recognition of skills from their home countries, and ethnic and racial discrimination in the job market (Charsley 2005). Similarly, As Dragojlovic has shown, due to a lack of language proficiency and recognisable skills on the labour market, many Balinese men who marry Dutch women or men become the main source of domestic labour in their families. This is a dramatic change from the patriarchal gender order in the men's home countries, where domestic labour is a female domain (Dragojlovic 2008). Those articles in this issue that focus on how masculine and feminine sexualities are reconfigured through labour mobilities are concerned with related processes, revealing the imbrications of gender, sexuality and intimacy with mobility at this geo-cultural level (Ang; Hegarty; Sun).

Mobility regimes

The conceptual framework we have employed in developing this issue, however, does not assume an undifferentiated concept of mobility, but rather relies on the more specific concept of mobility regimes. This reflects the fact that our foregrounding of intensifying mobilities in the contemporary period is not a claim about increasing freedoms or a celebration of supposedly unrestricted, frictionless "flows" in globalization (Bude & Dürrschmidt, 2010). Instead, the mobility regimes concept highlights the increasing structural

regulation of mobilities that is concomitant with their increasing prevalence and intensity, and the fact that mobilities are always attended by forces of immobilization. The concept of the mobility regime was first theorized by sociologist of globalization Ronen Shamir, who proposed that alongside the increased potential for trans-border flows, globalization is also a moment of growing closure, containment, and restrictions on movement (Shamir 2005). Shamir writes:

> I […] conceive processes of globalization as also producing "their own" […] principles of closure. I posit that […] we are witnessing the emergence of a new cultural/normative global principle that operates as a counterbalance to the normative principle of global human rights. We are witnessing the emergence of a global mobility regime, oriented to closure and to the blocking of access, premised not only on "old" national or local grounds but on a principle of perceived universal dangerous personhoods (hereinafter referred to as "a paradigm of suspicion"). The analytical framework [proposed] is that the mobility regime is constructed to maintain high levels of inequality in a relatively normatively homogenized world. In practice, this means that local, national, and regional boundaries are now being rebuilt and consolidated under the increased normative pressure of, and as a counterbalance to, the universal human rights regime. (Shamir 2005: 199)

In developing this counter-theory of globalization-as-immobilization, Shamir makes a strong claim for the link between motility and advantage: "the differential ability to move in space––and even more so to have access to opportunities for movement—has become a major stratifying force in the global social hierarchy" (Shamir 2005: 200). This differential ability and access he calls the mobility gap.

In developing the conceptual framework for this issue, we draw from Shamir's theorization of mobility regime and mobility gap an emphasis on the constitutive entanglement of intensifying mobilities in globalization with intensifying experiences of spatial restriction and immobilization. Where we differ somewhat, however, is in the scale of application. As the quote above illustrates, Shamir proposes the "global mobility regime" and its core logic, the "paradigm of suspicion," as constituting the basic structure of globalization conceived as a singular, more or less unitary worldwide process. In contrast—necessarily, perhaps, given their ethnographic method and consequent close attention to fine-grained analysis of concrete phenomena "on the ground" of culture life—the articles collected in this

issue attend to mobility regime*s* understood as plural and contingent, enacted at a range of local, national, and regional scales, and not necessarily adding up to any unitary global logic. In this regard, our approach has more in common with that of Nina Glick Schiller and Noel B. Salazar in their special issue of the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* on "Regimes of Mobility: Imaginaries and Relationalities of Power," in which they "postulate that there are *several different intersecting regimes of mobility* that normalise the movements of some travellers while criminalising and entrapping the ventures of others." (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013: 189; emphasis added). The articles in this issue bear this out in numerous and complex ways. Like Glick Schiller and Salazar, too, we find the regimes-of-mobility approach particularly useful for its capacity to focus our attention on the constitutive interweaving, rather than categorical opposition, of mobility and containment in people's lived experience; and to follow the lines of power in any given case study in ways that make clear (as we touched on above) that increased geographic mobility need not, in practice, *always* equate straightforwardly with increased freedom (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2019: 189-194).

Mobilities in and of Asia

Asia as a geo-cultural region provides a particularly interesting vantage point from which to consider how intensifying human mobilities may affect social gender relations because since the latter part of the twentieth century, in many parts of the region, both mobility and gender regimes have undergone especially quick and thoroughgoing transformations. In the 1980s, rapid changes in the global economy caused a marked shift in patterns of gendered mobility in Asia, leading to a move away from the model of mobile male breadwinners and stationary women. The rise of multinational corporations and their manufacturing- and assembly-oriented industries dramatically increased migration within Asian nations. Unlike in previous decades, when labour mobility had been more associated with men, the 1980s began to see primarily young, single women migrate from rural areas into the cities to work as low-paid assembly workers in developing countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand (Ong, 1987, Wolf 1992, Mills, 1999). The intensification and acceleration of the global economy also caused a dramatic increase in demand for female workers to move from poorer to richer countries, both within Asia and from Asia to North America, Europe and the Middle East. The migration of educated Filipinas to regions outside of Asia is a particularly significant example of this. Women from the Philippines would migrate to North America, Europe and the Middle East to take up

positions as nurses and care workers, whether in hospitals or nursing homes, or in the domestic sphere of private homes. Similarly to other care workers from other Asian countries, aspiring Filipina domestic workers were subjected to homogenizing training prior to their departures that was aimed at producing hard-working and obedient domestic help, echoing the colonial categories of subservient Asian femininity (Constable, 1997). Such a rapid increase in the number of women migrating for work prompted scholars to argue that global carework had been feminized, but critics warned against a unilateral equation between care work and the biologically maternal gender, pointing out that care labour also includes workers of male and other genders (Manalansan 2008, Sarti and Scrinzi 2010).

With rapid globalization in the late twentieth century came a rise in opportunities for the formation of intimate relationships across ethnic and national borders. These intimacies are enabled by physical movement across ethnic, class, racial, and national borders, and are variously defined as 'cross-cultural', 'transcultural', or 'cross-border' (Constable 2009, Faier 2009). These novel forms of intimacy brought with them the negotiation of individual gender identities as well as of practices of gender relations more broadly. Intimate relationships formed across national borders are not only a matter of individual choice but are also subject to state regulation. State regulatory regimes often rely on gendered and cultural stereotypes when allowing or disallowing foreign nationals to become citizens on the basis of marriage or de-facto relationships. As Dragojlovic (2016) found in her work on family reunification migration from Bali to the Netherlands, Balinese women and gay men tended to encounter no difficulties in obtaining residency permits, while heterosexual Balinese men were subjected to suspicious scrutiny by both immigration officers and their Dutch partner's families. Such experiences are suggestive of the persistence of colonial categorisations of people and places along the lines of racialized and gendered hierarchies. Across various colonial and imperial contexts, it tended to be white, Euro-American men were able to maintain intimate reproductive relationships with local women, while white women's potential intimacies with local men were morally and legally proscribed.

The rapid intensification and acceleration of global mobility has also brought with it a reconfiguration of individual identities in relation to parenting. With the dramatic increase in female labour migration from the Philippines, Indonesia, and China to other parts of the world, many women leave their children in their countries of citizenship, to be cared for by different kin relations. Female mobility through labour migration has the potential to allow women in Asia economic independence and the acquisition of cultural capital that might be unavailable to them in their home countries, but can also place constraints on everyday

practices of motherhood. Many mothers arrange for alternative forms of child-rearing in order to accommodate temporal and spatial separation from their children (Parreñas, 2006). The transformation of family formations brought about by globalization is also characterized by transnational adoption, mainly but not exclusively from Korea, China, Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, the Philippines, Taiwan, Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, primarily to the countries of North America and the European Union. Beginning in the 1960s against the backdrop of declining birth rates in the United States and Western Europe, transnational adoption became a common way of forming a family for involuntarily infertile couples. In the following decades, involuntary infertility stopped being the main criteria for adoptions, and over the last three decades, transnational adoption has become a global phenomenon with particular ramifications for women and families in the Asian region. Families formed through transnational adoption have emerged as one of the many manifestations of the transformation of the traditional, nuclear family, consisting of parents and their biological children (De Graeve, 2015, van Wichelen this issue).

The articles collected in this issue each focus on different aspects of these broad trends concerning gender and im/mobility in contemporary Asian societies. But the common themes of marginal subjects, social inequality, and the interface between top-down regulatory structures and subjective human experience run through all of the papers to provide an overarching framework for the issue as a whole.

The articles

Sylvia Ang's article presents an ethnographic study of male Chinese migrant labourers' negotiations of heterosexual intimacy in Singapore. In the context of the intensifying transnational labour regime linking these two nations, Ang focusses our attention on the everyday, affective level of these mobile, low-waged workers' experience. Importantly, her complex account of the cultural and economic logics that underlie these men's heterosexual practices problematizes heterosexuality rather than presuming its naturalness; indeed, the article provides an exemplary illustration of the intersections of class, mobility, gender, and sexuality. Since these labourers' low-earning status means they are blocked from attaining the form of normative masculinity most privileged in the dominant culture of post-socialist China—one based in men's economic power—Ang shows how they must therefore rework their understandings and performances of masculinity. Already socially and symbolically subordinated in China as a result of their low socio-economic status—in particular, struggling to fulfil their patriarchal roles as sons, husbands and fathers–

–the workers experience a further status drop on moving to Singapore, where they suffer social exclusion as a result of co-ethnic discrimination and their stigmatized identity as migrant labourers. Under these conditions, Ang shows, they develop an alternative script for respectable manhood that is based on thrift, which allows them to take pride in scrimping and saving in order to send money home and hence symbolically fulfil the patriarchal role of family provider. On the other hand, Ang demonstrates, an unreconstructed form of hegemonic masculinity is reinforced in the migrant labourers' heterosexual dating practices while in Singapore, which are highly gendered and carry over the normative expectation that men will pay for their dates and be willing and able to protect and care for them. The workers must thus negotiate a tension between the masculinity-as-thrift and the masculinity-as-economic-provision models to which they simultaneously subscribe, in the process of which, Ang shows, they demonstrate a certain creative agency despite also reproducing patriarchal values and being complicit in their own subordination to hegemonic masculinity as defined by economic power.

Wanning Sun's contribution, meanwhile, focusses on negotiations of intimacy and sexuality by China's female internal labour migrants: young, principally unmarried women who move from economically underdeveloped rural areas to industrial Shenzhen on the prosperous south-east coast in search of factory work. The article draws on Sun's longitudinal ethnographic research with these workers at Foxconn, a major supplier to Apple and the world's biggest electronics manufacturer. Focusing on the individual stories of three of these deeply marginalised subjects, Sun explores the links among labour mobility, intimacy, emotion and inequality in postsocialist China's industrial capitalist regime. Like Ang's, Sun's study focusses on ideological contradictions that the workers must navigate in the process of their labour mobility: in this case, the contradiction between their own valorization of romantic love as the most important consideration in choosing a partner, and their parents' criteria based on material gains, social relations, and kinship connections. In particular, the parents pressure their daughters to engage in neo-traditional perimarital rituals of *caili* (negotiation for and exchange of bridewealth) and *xiangqin* (matchmaking by elders), and to choose a husband whose family lives in geographic proximity to their own natal village. On one hand, Sun shows, the migrant women workers chafe against these demands and in some cases resist them, to a degree, during their time in Shenzhen. On the other hand, however, with increased life precarity under the postsocialist regime, these poor rural youth must rely more than ever on family support networks; hence their intimate lives and desires are shaped at a fundamental level by compromises with the needs and preferences of their

parents. The same regime of economic and social governance that both "frees" and compels them to become geographically mobile in the search for work also pushes them into heightened attachment to their natal families, which is most likely to entail them becoming (re)tied to their hometown environs after marriage. Thus, Sun shows, despite the young women's desires for a more autonomous form of marriage based on romantic love, which are intensified by their experience of labour mobility, nevertheless due to the structural necessity to rely on family networks for social support, such mobility does not necessarily enable them to realize their desires for more individualised forms of marriage and intimacy.

Pei-Chia Lan's article extends the theme of marriage and mobility in the transnational Chinese world, but shifts the focus to female marriage migrants in Taiwan, who tend to come from economically less developed areas in China and Southeast Asia. Whereas both Ang's and Sun's approaches centre ethnographic analysis, Lan mixes analysis of fieldwork data with a stronger emphasis on the state's discursive and policy frameworks. In a context where extreme uncertainty about Taiwan's national future vis-à-vis China's expansionist ambitions leads to a collective imaginative conflation of national with biological reproduction, symbolized in anxieties over the Taiwanese child, Lan traces a history of discursive transformations in the state's representation and interpellation of immigrant mothers and children for its own nation-building purposes. She shows how the state has moved through three stages in its discursive regulation of maternal citizenship. First, a discourse of "reproductive assimilation" dominated in the 1990s and early 2000s, aiming to manage the risk that "foreign brides" supposedly posed to population quality. Next, a discourse of "new residents" emerged after 2003 in response to pressure from state feminists, along with a program providing "family education" for immigrant mothers in intensive mothering and neoliberal-style self-governing motherhood. Finally, from 2016, in the context of President Tsai Ing-wen's New Southbound Policy encouraging Taiwan's prioritization of economic links with Southeast Asia, there emerged a discourse of "neoliberal multiculturalism" which reframes the ethnic difference of the "new second generation" as a market asset for national development. While this latest discourse appears superficially to take a more liberal stance toward cultural diversity than the previous frameworks, Lan argues that this form of neoliberal multiculturalism is more utilitarian than genuinely progressive, demonstrating through her interviews with immigrant mothers and children the pressures and limitations they are subjected to as a result of the new normative expectation that they should act as "southbound soldiers" leading Taiwan's economic advancement on Southeast Asia.

Benjamin Hegarty's article contributes to the theme of transforming intimacies through mobility by focusing on the contradictory and ambivalent ways in which young migrant men in postauthoritarian Indonesia negotiate their masculinities. The article draws on Hegarty's ethnographic data with young men aged 18 to 25 who migrated to the nation's capital Jakarta to engage in transactional sex. Situating his analysis within the accelerated social and economic transformation of the early twenty-first century Indonesia, Hegarty shows how these economic exchanges are perceived by these young men as a transitional moment in life, which will ultimately lead to achievement of normative, middleclass lifestyle in the future. He argues that the young men's understanding of transactional sex as a choice is complicated by mobility in two main ways. First, geographical mobility is seen as a necessary aspect of becoming an adult man independent of his natal family. These claims echo earlier scholarship on manhood in New Order Indonesia, wherein young men's claims to adulthood were in some regions associated with social mobility perceived to be achievable through temporary migration. Second, following the normative patterns of gender relations in Indonesia, these young men engage in non-normative economies of transactional sex hoping to achieve heteronormative, consumer oriented middle-class lifestyle in the future. Thus, in the narratives of the young men, transactional sex becomes a vehicle through which to achieve socially acceptable forms of masculinity. Hegarty argues that these young men's subjective sense of being and becoming a man is generated through open-ended liminality amidst acute economic precarity and perpetual flexible employment. The detailed ethnographic accounts of these liminal forms of masculine becoming reveal the complex intersections of global economic forces, local expectations of masculinity, and increased anxieties about moral decay in contemporary Indonesia.

Sonja van Wichelen's contribution explores how transnational adoption practices that accelerated in the second part of the twentieth century generate transformations of family relationships and personal identity. Focusing her analysis of in-depth interviews, photographic collections, and autobiographical reflections by a Dutch adoptee, Tino Djumini, and his "return journeys" to Indonesia, the country of his birth, van Wichelen explores the gendered dimensions of kinship economies. Detailed accounts of the affective management of "return" show how the kind of "knowing" produced by such journeys affects subjectivity. Van Wichelen argues that the "knowing" generated is deeply racialized, while the complexities of "returns" make the exchangeability of the adoptee body more visible and affectively complex. More specifically, acquiring knowledge about the complexities of gender ideologies and national histories in the country of birth provides more information on

why children are abandoned or placed for adoption in the first place. Van Wichelen charts how through "return journeys" adoptees become implicated into the moral economy of social belonging that is often found among transnational migrants who feel indebted to their communities in the country of birth. Yet, for adoptees, the "return journeys" do not always translate into a sense of social and national belonging but may equally lead to conflicting claims to interdependency and contradictory cultural ideas about motherhood, gender, and family duties. The detailed discussion about kinship economies in South-North adoption, van Wichelen argues, needs to be analysed through the gendered dimension between the birthmother and child, and the crucial role that the birth mother occupies in these kinship economies.

In these ways, all five papers in this issue provide insights into how complex dynamics of gendered power and inequality are integral to peoples' experiences of im/mobility. Contributing to studies that argue against an easy equation between mobility and empowerment, this special issue broadens our understanding of how intensified spatial mobilities often necessitate a reconfiguration in how the gendered self and gender relations are lived and imagined: subjectively, within families, in labour relations, and in intimate relationships. Focusing on the mobility of subjects that are marginalized at the intersections of economic, political, racial, gendered and sexual power structures, the issue both illuminates current and emerging formations of social and institutional power in Asia, and illustrates how people find ways of living both with and against the gender and mobility regimes to which they are subject.

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