



GlobalDivercities Workshop  
11-12 October 2012, Wits University

*“Negotiating, Transgressing or (Re)Asserting Boundaries of Difference”*





**Thursday 11 October**

08H45 Coffee

09H00 Session 1: Ethnicity, Religion and Belonging

Anna Cieslik (Max Planck): *Inclusion and Exclusion at Ethno-religious Festivals in Astoria, NY*

Lorena Nunez and Peter Kankonde (ACMS): *Negotiating belonging, migration and the construction of sacred spaces in Rosettenville, Johannesburg*

10H15 Session 2: Claiming Citizenship

Jia Ye (Max Planck): *Negotiating difference and diversity in Singapore*

Zoe Groves (Wiser): *The Politics of Belonging: Malawians in Post-Independent Urban Zimbabwe*

11H30 Coffee Break

11H40 Plenary 1: Community, Diversity and (violent) Conflict

*A conversation with Karl von Holdt (Sociology), Claire Benit-Gbaffou (CUBES) and Loren Landau (ACMS)*

13H00 Lunch

14H15 Session 3: Sites of Encounter, Sites of Conflict

Sofya Aptekar (Max Planck): *Claiming and Transgressing difference: a community garden in Astoria, NY*

Matthew Wilhelm-Solomon (ACMS): *title TBC*

15H40 Session 4: Destabilizing Difference

Laavi Kathiravelu (Max Planck): *Mutable Difference: everyday performances of social identity*

Raji Matshedisho (Max Planck): *Infinite Shades of Differences: How perceptions of difference change with circumstances of interactions*





**Friday 12 October**

08H45 Coffee

09H00 Plenary 2: “Risk and Entrepreneurialism among Migrant Communities in Johannesburg”

Tanya Zack, with a response by Prof. Robin Cohen

10H10 Round-table on Visual Ethnography

Juan Orrantia (WSOA): *Cocaine inscriptions. Photography as evocative documentary*

Terry Kurgan (Artist): *Public Art/Private Lives A.K.A Hotel Yeoville*

Anna Seegers-Krueckeberg (Max Planck): *title TBC*

Doerte Engelkes (Max Planck): *Filming GlobalDivercities*

12H00 Lunch

13H00 Session 5: Gender and Migrant Communities

Adeagbo Oluwafemi (Sociology, Wits): “We are not criminals, we are just victims of circumstances”: An exploration of experiences of Nigerian immigrants’ men that married South African women in Johannesburg

Alex Wafer (GloDiv): Drugs, Sex and Loitering: Immigrant Men in Public Space in Hillbrow

14H00 Closing summary by Prof Steve Vertovec



## List of Abstracts

### **Sofya Aptekar (Max Planck):** Claiming and Transgressing difference: a community garden in Astoria, NY

This paper investigates the claiming and transgressing of difference in a community garden in the neighborhood of Astoria in New York. It starts by considering the types of differences that are perceived and enacted, from ethnic and racial classification, immigrant status, life cycle, and class, to moral fault lines such as good/bad gardener. I argue for the significance of normative differences, and explain how their construction interacts with the more visual- and auditory- based categorical differences – and how the latter can be transgressed when emphasis is placed on moral judgments. When, for instance, immigration status or race become less important than a gardener's reputation as a giving, considerate, selfish, or neglectful person. While this may give hope to those who seek to identify conditions for meaningful interaction across axes of difference, I argue that it is not simply a matter of exchanging one system of classifying for another, less ascriptive one. I show that difference-based struggles within the garden are inextricably tied to power struggles in the neighborhood around the garden and the city at large. And these power struggles reflect the dominant structures of inequality in American society and diverse urban settings more generally.

### **Anna Cieslik (Max Planck):** Inclusion and Exclusion at Ethno-religious Festivals in Astoria, NY

This paper investigates the practices of inclusion and exclusion during four ethno-religious festivals in Astoria, New York. Festivals are events that are “public in nature, participatory in ethos, complex in structure, and multiple in voice, scene and purpose” (Stoeltje 1992). This research investigates in particular the participatory nature of festivals and inquires how the difference between the ethno-religious community and outside observers is constructed through spatial arrangements. It suggests that festivals tend to reinforce the internal social roles and community values, but their boundaries are permeable and porous. I claim that while festivals do serve as pillars of ethnic identity construction, they also allow for multiple participatory mechanisms.

### **Zoe Groves (Wiser):** The Politics of Belonging: Malawians in Post-Independent Urban Zimbabwe

The Politics of Belonging: Malawians in Post-Independent Urban Zimbabwe In 2002, the Zimbabwean government passed a new Citizenship Act disenfranchising people of foreign parentage. This Act affected people of Malawian, Mozambican and Zambian descent, many of whom were born in (Southern) Rhodesia to parents who came to the country as migrant labourers. In 2003 an amendment bill was passed exempting those with parents born in a SADC country from the Act's new provisions,



providing they renounced their claims to citizenship elsewhere. Despite the amendment, the status of 'Malawians' in Zimbabwe remains ambiguous; many still carry the status of 'alien' on their identity cards. Drawing from newspapers, human rights reports and fieldwork conducted between 2008 and 2012, this paper explores Malawian experiences of inclusion and exclusion in post-independence Zimbabwe. Close attention is paid to urban residents in Harare and the performance of the *gule wamkulu*, a Nyau society dance originating in rural Malawi. Following independence, people of Malawian descent were welcomed as citizens of Zimbabwe. Yet, since 2000 and the shift in Zimbabwean politics, from an inclusive 'civic nationalism' to a new form of exclusive nationalism shaped by ZANU-PF and its allies, selected categories of subjects have been excluded from national belonging, on the basis of cultural difference and political association. This paper considers several issues: how have 'Malawians' articulated their belonging to the city and the nation in light of these changes, and how they have responded to accusations of foreignness? Furthermore, what can be learnt from this example in terms of struggles over citizenship and belonging in contemporary southern Africa?

**Laavi Kathiravelu (Max Planck):** Mutable Difference: everyday performances of social identity

Much contemporary research has emphasized the continued salience of socio-political categorizations of race, ethnicity, class and immigration status that divide cities and its residents. However there has been less work done on how these categories can be mutable and are continually reconstituted in quotidian performances of social identity. Using the diverse city-state of Singapore with its multiethnic population and large migrant component as case study, this paper shows that in everyday interactions on the ground, difference is not always conceived of in the fixed and strict modes that the state prescribes. It therefore opens up possibilities for a transgression, transcending or challenging of top-down categorizations that institute divisions.

Drawing from Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "assemblage", this paper sees vectors of embodied difference as dynamic, contingent and heterogeneous. Using ethnographic examples drawn from 12 months of fieldwork, this paper shows how difference is variously read, embodied and challenged through the materiality of everyday performances and discourses. In doing so, it adds new perspectives to understandings of social identities and difference, especially in authoritarian regimes like Singapore, where state imposed classifications are often seen to exert extraordinary influence on everyday interactions.

**Terry Kurgan (Artist):** Public Art/Private Lives A.K.A Hotel Yeoville

*Hotel Yeoville* was an interactive art project, based online and in the new public library of the Johannesburg suburb of Yeoville.





It comprised a website ([www.hotelyeoville.co.za](http://www.hotelyeoville.co.za)), a photo wall, and a series of booths in which members of the public were invited document themselves, through mapping, video, photography and text, using different digital interfaces and social media applications. Yeoville is an old suburb on the eastern edge of the inner city of Johannesburg, most of whose estimated 40 000 inhabitants are migrants from every part of the African continent. Over the course of a year, *Hotel Yeoville* came to represent a multi-layered document of a segment of this diverse community, engaging with and confronting assumptions about representation and its relationship to truth, knowledge and power. *Hotel Yeoville* was hosted by the African Centre for Migration and Society at the University of the Witwatersrand, and developed in collaboration with a diverse group of people working in various disciplines. The project presented critical new perspectives on contemporary artistic research and practice, photography, performance and self-representation.

The presentation will retrospectively reflect upon what began as an interactive art project and evolved into a multiplatform archive of urban life. She will present aspects of the complex set of negotiations – between artists, residents, consultants and audience – that brought the work into being

**Raji Matshedisho (Max Planck):** Infinite Shades of Differences: How perceptions of difference change with circumstances of interactions

This paper argues that difference is vertically, horizontally and tactically perceived, mobilised and transgressed within a historical and current context. These perceptions, mobilisation and transgressions of difference remain largely hidden scripts and assumptions until they are enacted in daily encounters and interactions. However, these encounters themselves are fluid, flexible and change with circumstances of interactions. The implications of this arguments is that while interactions in public spaces can tell us how people perceive difference, the interactions in themselves don't tell the whole story, but rather the circumstances of the interactions provide a better understand thereof.

**Lorena Nunez and Peter Kankonde (ACMS):** Negotiating belonging, migration and the construction of sacred spaces in Rosettenville, Johannesburg

From their historical and contemporary uses, this work looks at the construction process of sacred spaces as a form of materialising the spiritual dimension and at the same time affirming identities, economic affiliations and belonging among migrants' communities. We explore how historically and contemporarily the spaces of churches in the Rosettenville Area -- in



old warehouses, in the veld, in re-appropriate religious sites – are places of intense social and spatial production. As new initiated churches compete for congregants, economic success in the city and spiritual well-being are imminent and necessary to one another.

**Adeagbo Oluwafemi (Sociology, UJ):** “We are not criminals, we are just victims of circumstances”: experiences of Nigerian immigrant men that married South African women in Johannesburg

The world is full of ethnic, racial and religious divisions and intermarriage between members of different groups can be seen as an important means of closing the divisions. Marriage is seen as a physical, mental and spiritual union of two souls irrespective of their backgrounds and race. Similarly, intermarriage is considered to be a major pointer of social distance among groups and cohesion of societies. In other words, intermarriage has been argued to be a channel through which members of different groups relate and interact with one another in a more positive way and see each group as being socially equal without any form of prejudice or discrimination. However, intermarriages between Nigerian men and South African women exist in South Africa amongst the institutionalised xenophobia and anti-Nigerian sentiments. It is on this note that this study examines how Nigerian-South African couples negotiate and adapt to the discriminations directed towards Nigerian husbands by their friends and families, and how this changed the perception of their friends and families overtime.

The study is based on data gathered from a 4-month ethnographic fieldwork in Johannesburg. The data was collected through participant observations and in-depth interviews of fifteen Nigerian-South African couples, friends and families. This study also uses Alba and Nee’s (2003) ‘intermarriage and assimilation theory’ in order to show how marriages between Nigerian men and South African women led to breakdown in xenophobic attitudes of wives’ families and friends.

**Juan Orrantia (WSOA):** Cocaine inscriptions. Photography as evocative documentary

Cocaine inscriptions is a work in progress that seeks to follow memories, unsettle representations and reflect on the ongoing consequences of the Colombian narcotics trade. I use this project in order to present the possibilities of a critical, evocative documentary practice that understands photography as a suggestive medium, with the potential to use imagination as a site of critique. I also explore the relationships of photography with other media.



**Alex Wafer (Max Planck):** Drugs, Sex and Loitering: Immigrant Men in Public Space in Hillbrow

**Jia Ye (Max Planck):** Negotiating difference and diversity in Singapore

Drawing upon ethnographic observations, interviews and visual narratives, I discuss the ways in which migrants and locals develop the capacity to deal with difference in the neighbourhood of Jurong West. I broadly divide my presentation into two parts. I first discuss how locals and migrants use abstract notions of citizenship to frame who can belong. I then follow by discussing how people manage their everyday encounters of difference in practice in public space. In other words, I show some of the key strategies that people adopt to co-exist in with people of different backgrounds. These strategies to deal with diversity are in turn refracted by intersections of social identities – here, I highlight language and nationality – to show the more complex ways in which banal encounters in diverse public spaces are approached. I seek to show that people adopt these strategies to create and manage spaces of co-existence despite the potential for conflict.





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