

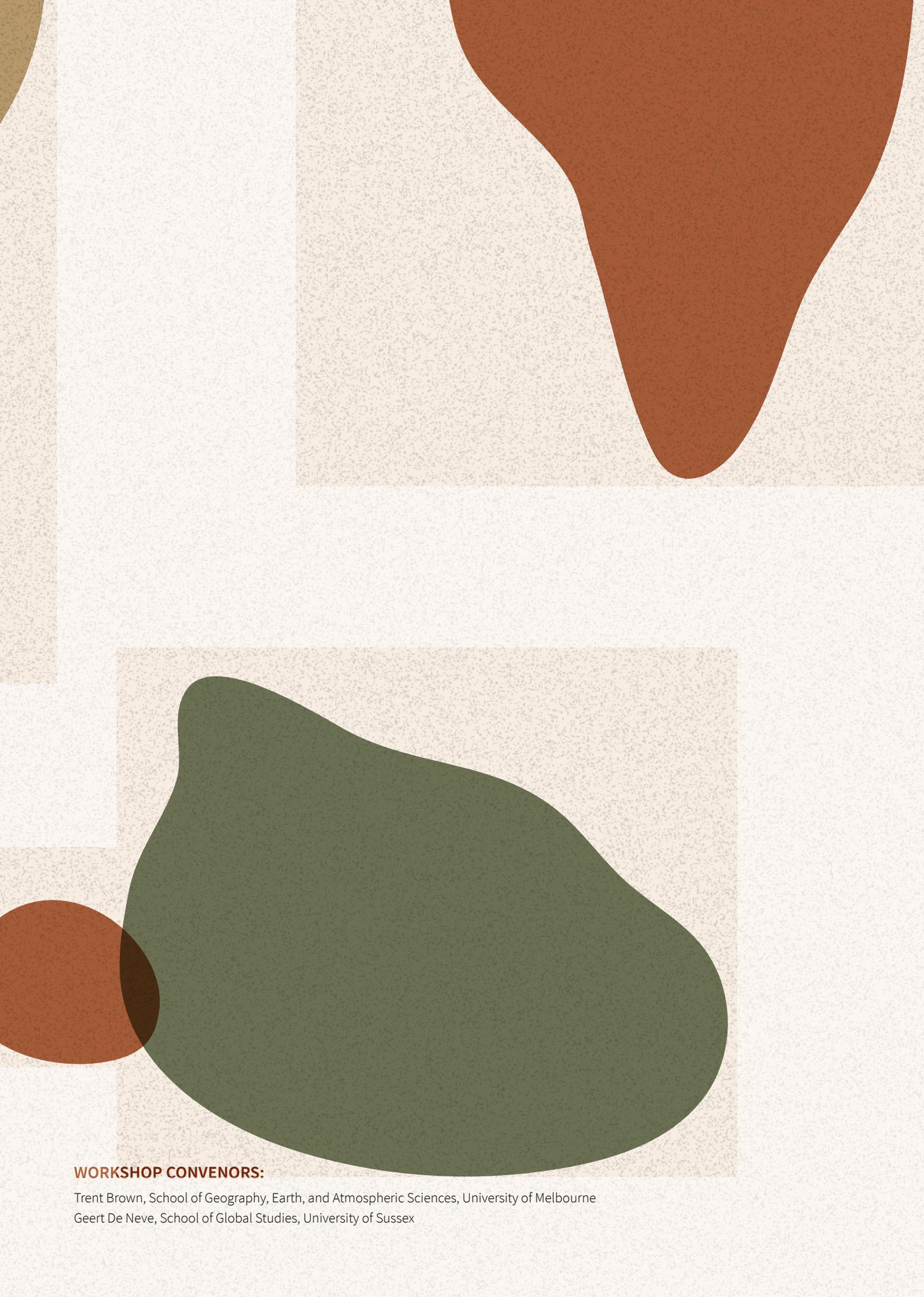


THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

The Social Life of Skills

ONLINE WORKSHOP

5th – 7th of July, 2021



WORKSHOP CONVENORS:

Trent Brown, School of Geography, Earth, and Atmospheric Sciences, University of Melbourne
Geert De Neve, School of Global Studies, University of Sussex

About the Workshop

Across the global South, governments are investing in skill development and vocational education in order to drive productivity increases and address chronic problems of youth unemployment. This emphasis on skills has been amplified recently, as hopes are being attached to ‘skills-led recoveries’ to the economic downturn associated with Covid-19.

Yet, skills are not merely ingredients in a formula to enhance economic growth – they are embedded in a social, cultural, and historical context and are often sources of deep personal meaning. This online workshop, jointly organized by the School of Geography, Earth, and Atmospheric Sciences at the University of Melbourne and the Australia India Institute, will bring together researchers from the social sciences to discuss recent research on the ‘social life of skills,’ with a special focus on the global South. Participants will consider the ways in which social and cultural context shapes the meanings and status invested in skills, the ways in which skills are utilized, and their potential to transform lives. Questions of inequality are paramount in this discussion and due consideration will be given to how skill acquisition and deployment are experienced differently on the basis of various axes of social difference, including gender, class, location, and ethnicity.

Carswell and De Neve (2018: 313) define ‘the social life of skills’ as ‘the social processes, relationships, and ideologies that enable (or constrain) people’s access to skills, and subsequently to employment, wages, satisfaction, and dignity.’ Such a perspective suggests a serious engagement with questions of inequality in both the acquisition and deployment of skills; as well as the meanings and values ascribed to skills within family and community contexts.

Papers presented at this workshop will represent a broad spectrum of disciplines across the social sciences (sociology, anthropology, human geography, development studies, political economy, etc.) related to the social aspects of skills and skill development, with a special focus on the global South.

PAPERS WILL ENGAGE WITH THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- How do debates in the social sciences on skills in the global North need to be re-thought to address the unique contexts and challenges of the global South?
- How do social inequalities affect access to skill development opportunities, as well as processes of skill acquisition and skill utilization?
- What is the potential of skills to inspire and empower individuals and communities, as well as to challenge social norms and stereotypes?
- How are skills assembled in particular contexts and disarticulated in others? How are we to understand processes of skilling and deskilling?
- What roles do skills play in social reproduction?
- What are the class-, gender-, and ethnicity-inflected meanings and values ascribed to skills and being skilled?
- How do skills and skill development intersect with the aspirations of youth and other sections of the community?
- What are the roles of informal, non-formal, and formal skill development in social, economic, and political life at various scales?
- What kind of ethical and normative frameworks are associated with particular skillsets – for example, normative dispositions associated with entrepreneurship or craftsmanship?
- How does social context shape the processes, meanings, and effectiveness of various pedagogical approaches to skill development, such as apprenticeships?
- How does social and economic power impinge upon the structures and practices of skill development, at local, regional, national, and international scales?
- Can skills foster more creative, sustainable, and inclusive societies?
- What is the potential role of skills in social responses to Covid-19, climate change, and other global challenges?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This workshop has been hosted by the School of Geography, Earth, and Atmospheric Sciences, and the Australia India Institute, both based at the University of Melbourne. The University of Melbourne is based on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nations. We acknowledge their elders, past, present, and future.

This workshop has been supported financially by a University of Melbourne DECRA Establishment Grant. We would like to thank Simone Traglia and Marianna Sarris at the Australia India Institute, as well as Febe De Geest from the School of Geography, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences at the University of Melbourne, for support in organising the event.



Brief Program

DAY 1: 5TH OF JULY 2021, 4:30 – 8:30 PM AEST

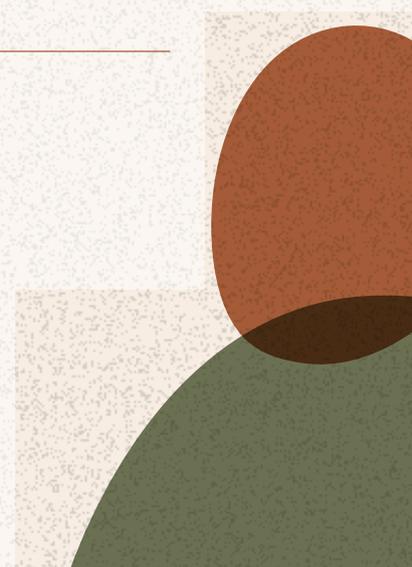
4:30-4:45 pm (AEST)	Welcome and Opening Remarks <i>Trent Brown, University of Melbourne</i> <i>Geert De Neve, University of Sussex</i>
Panel 1	Training the Nation: Social Lives of Skills Policies <i>Chair: Divya Nambiar, Oxford Policy Management</i>
4:45 – 5:00 pm	“Up-skilling” the nation: the Jokowi administration’s policies for vocational skills training and post-Covid job creation <i>Suzanne Naafs, Leiden University</i>
5:00 – 5:15 pm	Skill Development and Council-Sponsored Adult Training Programs in Istanbul <i>Banu Senay, Macquarie University</i> <i>Faik Gür, Özyeğin University</i>
5:15 – 5:40 pm	Discussion
Panel 2	Ethnographies of skills training, youth, and aspiration <i>Chair: Trent Brown, University of Melbourne</i>
5:40 – 5:55 pm	Creating the ‘Capacity to Aspire’: Mobilising Youth for Skill Training Programmes <i>Divya Nambiar, Oxford Policy Management</i>
5:55 – 6:10 pm	Examining social reproduction and skills development in the urban weaving economy in Ethiopia <i>Fasil Nigussie, Addis Ababa University</i>
6:10 – 6:35pm	Discussion
6:35 – 6:50 pm	Tea Break
Panel 3	TVET Systems in Social Context <i>Chair: Lesley Powell, Nelson Mandela University</i>
6:50 – 7:05 pm	Towards an African social skills ecosystems approach <i>Heila Lotz-Sistika, Rhodes University; Simon McGrath, University of Nottingham; Presha Ramsarup, University of the Witwatersrand; Jo-Anna Russon, University of Nottingham</i>
7:05 – 7:20 pm	Geographies of Practical Learning and India’s Agri-Skills Agenda <i>Trent Brown, University of Melbourne</i>
7:20 – 7:35	From Skill Training to Service Worker: Youth Aspirations, Inequalities and Precarity in Urban India <i>Carol Upadhyya, National Institute of Advanced Studies Bengaluru</i> <i>Supriya RoyChowdhury, National Institute of Advanced Studies Bengaluru</i>
7:35 – 7:50 pm	More than Language: The Work of an English Training Centre in Delhi <i>Abhishek Ranjan Datta, University of Oxford</i>
7:50 – 8:30 pm	Discussion

DAY 2: 6TH OF JULY 2021, 4:30 – 8 PM AEST

Panel 1	Gendering the skills landscape <i>Chair: Grace Carswell, University of Sussex</i>
4:30 – 4:45 pm	Gendering the Urban Skills Landscape: Gender, Youth and Skills Training in Sierra Leone and Cameroon <i>Ross Wignall, Oxford Brookes University</i> <i>Brigitte Piquard, Oxford Brookes University</i>
4:45 – 5:00 pm	Inclusive education and training is an issue to (re)think <i>AKM Nuruzzaman, Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF), Dhaka, Bangladesh</i>
5 – 5:15 pm	The gender divide in skilling and outcomes in rural India <i>Soundarya Iyer, French Institute of Pondicherry; Sarayu Srinivasan, French Institute of Pondicherry;</i> <i>Nitya Rao, University of East Anglia</i>
5:15 – 5:45 pm	Discussion
Panel 2	Crafts, artisans and skills <i>Chair: Andrew Sanchez, University of Cambridge</i>
5:45 – 6:00 pm	Apprenticeship, skill acquisition and social embeddedness among Indian Muslim artisans <i>Thomas Chambers, Oxford Brookes University</i>
6:00 – 6:15 pm	Of glass, skills and life; Craft consciousness among Firozabad's glass workers <i>Arnaud Kaba, Center for Modern Indian Studies, Göttingen</i>
6:15 – 6:30 pm	From the Making of Craft to Making of One's Life: Stories from carpentry apprentices in Brussels <i>Christine Moderbacher, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology</i>
6:30 – 7:00 pm	Discussion
7:00 – 7:15	Tea Break
Panel 3	Cultures of repair and creativity <i>Chair: Chantel Carr, University of Wollongong</i>
7:15 – 7:30 pm	From 'filmmaker' to 'content creator': promises and perils of the vulgarisation of audiovisual editing in the Brazilian context <i>Pedro Branco, Universidade de Brasília</i>
7:30 – 7:45 pm	Learning to Fix: Brazilian Lessons for an Obsolete World <i>Liliana Gil, The New School</i>
7:45 – 8:00 pm	Study Radio for Revolution: Skills and the Making of Amateur Technologists in Socialist China <i>Yingchuan Yang, Columbia University</i>
8:00 – 8:30 pm	Discussion

DAY 3: 7TH OF JULY 2021, 4:30 – 8 PM AEST

Panel 1	Skilling for employment <i>Chair: Andrew Deuchar, University of Melbourne</i>
4:30 – 4:45 pm	Mediating entrepreneurship for addressing unemployment in South Africa and India: A postcolonial approach for understanding entangled rationalities <i>Vrinda Chopra, University of Cape Town</i>
4:45 – 5:00 pm	From skills to employment, or the other way around? Skills, training, and social networks in the Tiruppur textile region, India <i>Geert De Neve, University of Sussex</i> <i>Grace Carswell, Department of Geography, University of Sussex</i>
5:00 – 5:30 pm	Discussion
Panel 2	Skills for stigmatised work <i>Chair: Geert de Neve, University of Sussex</i>
5:30 – 5:45 pm	The social life of skills in waste-work <i>Advaita Rajendra, Indian Institute of Management</i> <i>Barbara Harriss-White, Wolfson College</i>
5:45 – 6 pm	Questions of 'skill' in stigmatised work: Reflections from the history of leather tanning in India, c. 1900-1950 <i>Shahana Bhattacharya, University of Delhi</i>
6:00 – 6:30 pm	Discussion
6:30 – 6:45 pm	Tea break
Panel 3	Skill, language and identity <i>Chair: TBC</i>
6:45 – 7:00 pm	Professionalism as Skill? The Social Construction of Workers' Identity in India's Domestic New Services <i>Dr Aditya Ray, The Open University</i>
7:00 – 7:15 pm	Being 'Taleem-yafta': Schooling, Aspirations and Identity among Muslim women in Old Delhi <i>Dr. Madhulika Sonkar, University of Delhi</i>
7:15 – 7:30 pm	A Trip 'Down South': English Skills, Regional Identity and Cultural Capital in Chennai's Information Technology Industry <i>S. Shakthi, Indian Institute of Technology Madras</i>
7:30 – 8:00 pm	Discussion
8:00 – 8:30 pm	Wrap-Up and Next Steps



Detailed Program

DAY 1: 5TH OF JULY 2021, 4:30 – 8:30 PM AEST

WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS, 4:30 – 4:45 PM AEST

Geert De Neve, University of Sussex

Trent Brown, University of Melbourne

PANEL 1: TRAINING THE NATION: SOCIAL LIVES OF SKILLS POLICIES, 4:45 – 5:40 PM AEST

Chair: Divya Nambiar, Oxford Policy Management

PRESENTATION 1, 4:45 – 5:00 PM AEST

“Up-skilling” the Nation: the Jokowi Administration’s Policies for Vocational Skills Training and Post-Covid Job Creation

Suzanne Naafs, Leiden University

Abstract:

Amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, the administration of Indonesian President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) has doubled down on its ambitious but narrow agenda to stimulate economic growth and lift Indonesia from a middle- to higher income country. Key policies to support this goal include infrastructure development and the creation of a more favourable business environment through the controversial Omnibus Law that was hastily adopted in October 2020. Furthermore, the government is expanding vocational training for its workforce in anticipation of both a skills-led job recovery from the pandemic and a greater role for automation and digitalisation in the global economy (Dharma Negara and Ramayandi 2020:1). Drawing on analysis of recent government policies for skills and job creation (the Omnibus Law, the pre-employment card pilot and programme to invest in vocational training), this paper explores how skills are conceptualised and valued, who stands to benefit from skills acquisition and which parts of the workforce are prioritised in these programmes. I argue that the current emphasis on skill deficits and economic growth deflects attention from existing education hierarchies and labour market inequalities that shape families’ social and political evaluations of education credentials, skilled and unskilled labour and disregards broader questions about how skill acquisition enables young adults to access meaningful jobs and lead lives they value.

Biography of Presenting Author:

Suzanne Naafs is a Lecturer at the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology, Leiden University. Her research in Indonesia examines the repercussions of educational change and global labor market restructuring for young people’s futures and pathways into work, and their aspirations for middle class lifestyles and intergenerational mobility. She is co-editor of the edited volume *Realities and Aspirations of Asian Youth: Education, Training, Employment* (2019, Routledge) and has published several articles about her research on youth and labor market politics in a peri-urban industrial zone in Banten, Indonesia.

PRESENTATION 2, 5:00 – 5:15 PM AEST

Skill Development and Council-Sponsored Adult Training Programs in Istanbul

Banu Senay, Macquarie University

Faik Gür, Özyeğin University

Abstract:

The sponsoring of skill development through state-established adult education centres has been a defining characteristic of the Turkish Republic since its inception in 1923. A large body of scholarship has pointed out the importance of the People's Houses and Village Institutes as key pedagogical facilitators of the Kemalist regime's social-engineering project, which sought to inculcate in adult citizens skills, emotions, and aesthetic dispositions seen as compatible with its modernizing mission. Since then, under different governments, a range of institutional arrangements catering for non-formal adult education have been put into action.

From the mid-1990s onwards, with the coming into power of more Muslim-friendly governments, there has been a new turn in the state's investment in the enskilling and capacitating of citizens. A key element in this process has been local governments' institutionalizing of their own educational activities by fostering what has now come to be known as 'lifelong learning.'

This paper focuses on the core institution that carries out this mission in Istanbul, Turkey's cultural and economic centre: the Art and Vocational Training Courses of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (called ISMEK). Established in 1996, and having grown exponentially since then, today ISMEK offers skill-based training in more than 600 fields of activity. These canvass a wide spectrum of skilled practices, from music and visual arts lessons to vocational training in areas such as cooking, gardening, hairdressing, and accounting, etc. Offered free of charge, these educational opportunities are taken up by hundreds of thousands of Istanbul residents each year, both men and women.

What roles do these localised skill development initiatives play in social, economic, and political life in today's Istanbul? How is 'skill' conceptualized in them? And what potential efficacy do they have in empowering people in an environment marked by deep economic and social inequality, and insecure education conditions? In addressing these questions, I also consider where these public enskilling programmes might fit within the broader populist and neoliberalist political practice of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) Government.

Biography of Presenting Author:

Dr Banu Senay is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Anthropology at Macquarie University, Sydney. Her current research on Islamic art pedagogies in Istanbul engages with debates in anthropology around skilled-learning, ethics, and Islamic cultural politics. She is the author of *Beyond Turkey's Borders: Long-distance Kemalism, State Politics and the Turkish Diaspora* (I.B.Tauris, 2013) and *Musical Ethics and Islam: The Art of Playing the Ney* (University of Illinois Press, 2020).

DISCUSSION, 5:15 – 5:40 PM AEST



PANEL 2: ETHNOGRAPHIES OF SKILLS TRAINING, YOUTH AND ASPIRATION, 5:40 – 6:35 PM AEST

Chair: Trent Brown, University of Melbourne

PRESENTATION 1, 5:40 – 5:55 PM AEST

Creating the ‘Capacity to Aspire’: Mobilising Youth for Skill Training Programmes

Divya Nambiar, Oxford Policy Management

Abstract:

Skill training has emerged as a policy priority for the Government of India, since 2007. This paper explores how rural youth are ‘mobilized’ or recruited into Project SEAM, a short-term skill development programme for rural youth, funded by India’s Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) and implemented by a large private corporation. This was one of the first skills training programmes to be launched in public-private partnership mode.

Through an analysis of mobilization strategies and an ethnographic portrait of a job fair in Tamil Nadu, the paper illustrates how development programmes build on the aspirations of young people and seek to further enhance what Appadurai (2003) calls ‘the capacity to aspire’, to maximize enrolments into SEAM. By combining an analysis of the instruments and channels through which this capacity is instilled, with the perspectives of young people enrolled in SEAM, the paper explores deeper questions. What are the short-term and long-term effects of raising aspirations? Does this process truly provide new pathways for young people to seek skills to access new job opportunities, or does it burden young people with false expectations?

The paper answers these questions by drawing on material collected through participant observation, as a member of the programme implementation team organising the job fair (from 2009-2010), and highlights how creating and shaping youth aspirations is a fundamental part of the enrolment process into skills training programmes.

Biography of Presenting Author:

Dr Divya Nambiar is Senior Consultant at Oxford Policy Management (OPM), where she leads OPM’s global work in the area of Skills, Livelihoods and Education Systems.

Prior to joining OPM, Divya was Senior Consultant at the then newly created Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE). She was tasked with formulating and designing national policy and programme initiatives, managing international cooperation and key strategic partnerships, and providing evidence-based policy advisory support to the Ministry.

Divya holds Master of Philosophy (MPhil) and Doctor of Philosophy (DPhil) degrees in Development Studies from Oxford University. Her doctoral thesis entitled ‘Skill Development and Youth Aspirations in India’, was based on 16 months of ethnographic research in south India. It examined the changing aspirations of youth, particularly young women, as they enter new industrial workplaces for the first time. The thesis also provided insights into the changing role of the Indian state and documented the complex relationship between the state and private sector, as the two actors collaborate to deliver skills training programmes to India’s rural poor.

Divya has over fifteen years of work experience in the development sector, which includes consultancy for multilaterals, think-tanks and the private sector and teaching politics and area studies courses at the University of Oxford.

PRESENTATION 2, 5:55 – 6:10 PM AEST

Examining Social Reproduction and Skills Development in the Urban Weaving Economy in Ethiopia

Fasil Nigussie, Addis Ababa University

Abstract:

In urban Ethiopia, young peoples' struggles for hope and success develop from occupational and status hierarchies and class relations (Mains 2012: 25). This paper looks into how, and to what effect, relations of gender and generation shape the acquisition of weaving skills in young people's lives and the role of place in this in Urban Ethiopia. It furthermore explains the nature of weaving and illustrates the complexities associated with being a weaver. The findings of the paper are drawn from an ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in the year 2016, as part of a Ph.D. research project. By unpacking the gendered and intergenerational power relations in the urban weaving economy, the paper demonstrates that the weaving economy is not only about weaving but also about various activities and life-phase transitions in different skill strata. The paper, therefore, argues that by overlooking the life-phase transitions of workers across the different skill strata, anti-child labour programmes and campaigns in the urban Ethiopia will adversely affect labour reproduction processes in the weaving economy.

Biography of Presenting Author:

Dr. Fasil is currently an assistant professor of Social Work and Development at the Addis Ababa University. He obtained his Ph.D in development studies from the Erasmus University of Rotterdam, Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, The Netherlands. His research focuses on broad topics of social protection and social policy with particular emphasis on children and young people. His research integrates political economy and social cultural lenses to study young people's everyday lives with a specific focus on life-phase transitions of children and youth in the urban context.

DISCUSSION, 6:10 – 6:35 PM AEST

TEA BREAK, 6:35 – 6:50 PM AEST

PANEL 3: TVET SYSTEMS IN SOCIAL CONTEXT, 6:50 – 8:30 PM AEST

Chair: Lesley Powell, Nelson Mandela University

PRESENTATION 1, 6:50 – 7:05 PM AEST

Towards an African Social Skills Ecosystems Approach

Heila Lotz-Sistika, Rhodes University

Simon McGrath, University of Nottingham

Presha Ramsarup, University of the Witwatersrand

Jo-Anna Russon, University of Nottingham

Abstract:

Dominant approaches to thinking about and doing vocational education and training (VET) in Africa are flawed. Reflecting parallel governance turns in international development and VET policies in the 1990s, policy approaches focus on getting national skills systems “right” at the expense of thinking about local and regional labour markets and skills formation systems. At the theoretical level too, this focus on the nation-state has long been the key unit of analysis is the default position of the political economy of skills tradition, notwithstanding recent efforts to build a more multi-scalar account. Yet, there is a long-standing social science tradition, traceable back to at least the work of Alfred Marshall on industrial districts that has addressed the possibilities that arise from thinking about local and/or regional economic development.

We draw on a growing literature about skills ecosystems that appears to offer a new way forward for thinking about VET beyond the nation state. Whilst this is a literature of the Anglophone developed world and particularly of the most economically “advanced” regions therein, we argue that it is of some use in the very different contexts of two African countries (Uganda and South Africa), both colonised by the British but with very different political economies. Their worlds of work are characterised by large urban informal and rural subsistence economies (alongside a substantial formal sector, both urban and rural). The ways in which their states work also is distinct from each other and from those in the skills ecosystems home nations. Nonetheless, we judge that the model has analytical value.

We will draw particularly on the social skills ecosystem work of Hodgson and Spours and how we have applied and adapted it in exploring four cases, two urban, two rural, from South Africa and Uganda. We do this both as we have found it a useful analytical tool but also to start to test the wider applicability of the approach in thinking about local skills formation systems, both in theory and practice. We think that a more grounded Africanised version of the approach is possible, but there is space here only to point forward to this and to a move beyond the approach’s productivist underpinnings.

Biography of Presenting Author:

Simon McGrath is UNESCO Chair in International Education and Development at the University of Nottingham. He has worked extensively in both academic and policy spaces on questions of the relationship between education and development, particularly in Southern Africa. His current work is primarily concerned with skills for human flourishing and just transitions.

PRESENTATION 2, 7:05 – 7:20 PM AEST

Geographies of Practical Learning and India's Agri-Skills Agenda

Trent Brown, University of Melbourne

Abstract:

A commonly identified problem with India's vocational training and skill development systems is the dearth of opportunities provided for practical, 'hands-on' learning. This is despite the demonstrated benefits of practical pedagogies for the acquisition and consolidation of skills. Resolving this problem is not simple, since the provision of effective practical learning opportunities - particularly in the form of job placements - requires coordination between multiple actors whose interests do not always align. To explore this theme in greater depth, I present the findings of a short-term longitudinal study of rural people's engagement with an agricultural skill development scheme in the north Indian states of Punjab and Himachal Pradesh. I explore (a) the kinds of opportunities made available for practical learning as part of the scheme; (b) the kinds of practical classes and work placements that trainees themselves identified as useful or desirable; and (c) the social, environmental, and institutional factors that shaped opportunities for practical learning. Drawing on perspectives from the geography of skills and theories of communities of practice, I argue that while the weak capacity of training organisations was one factor that limited practical learning opportunities, equally important was the local agrarian structure in shaping trainee prospects for in-situ learning both during and after training. In Himachal Pradesh, where there is a long history of collective labour, prospects for meaningful, in-situ practical learning were somewhat better than in Punjab, where farmers have a more commercial oriented and hence tended to think of each other as competitors and not assist each other in acquiring new skills. Nonetheless, even in Punjab, there were notable cases of farmers forming communities of practice to consolidate new skills and this tended to be where there were strong incentives for economic cooperation.

Biography of Presenting Author:

Dr Trent Brown is an ARC DECRA Fellow in the School of Geography at the University of Melbourne. His research explores themes related to rural development, sustainability, youth, and skills with a focus on India. He is the author of *Farmers, Subalterns, and Activists: Social Politics of Sustainable Agriculture in India* (Cambridge University Press, 2018) and coauthor (with John Harriss and Craig Jeffrey) of *India: Continuity and Change in the Twenty-First Century* (Polity, 2020). Currently, he is working on a project exploring rural people's engagement with an agricultural skill development scheme in North India.

PRESENTATION 3, 7:20 – 7:35 PM AEST

From Skill Training to Service Worker: Youth Aspirations, Inequalities and Precarity in Urban India

Supriya Roy Chowdhury, National Institute of Advanced Studies Bengaluru

Carol Upadhy, National Institute of Advanced Studies Bengaluru

Abstract:

The introduction of a new national skill development policy in India in 2009 inaugurated a major shift from vocational education leading to industrial employment, to short-term skill training programmes that channel semi-educated youth from disadvantaged backgrounds into low-end urban service jobs. Based on two years of research in Bengaluru and Raichur district, Karnataka, the paper will examine the inter-connections and frictions between skill training, youth aspirations, and social and regional inequalities. We describe the processes of 'mobilisation' employed by Bengaluru training centres to recruit youth with 10th or 12th standard educations from rural and low-income urban households for short-term training, leading to low-end service jobs in sectors such as big retail, hospitality, transportation, beauty, and customer support services. For leaders of skill training centres, urban migration and urban employment - even in low-paid and short-term jobs - constitute a key strategy for poverty alleviation.

In contrast, many trainees articulated aspirations for more stable white-collar employment (such as government or bank jobs), and to that end had joined skill training to improve their English language and learn computer skills. Thus, we found a major disconnect between the goals and practices of skill training programmes and the expectations of trainees, who ended up in low-paying, insecure jobs with little opportunity for career growth. In this context, the notion of 'skill', and the prospects of mobility through skill training, carried very different social meanings for skill training agencies and for the youth who are the objects of training.

This disconnect reflects the larger structures of inequality within which skill training programmes operate in India - regional inequalities that draw youth from 'backward' rural districts such as Raichur to cities in search of employment; and caste/class inequalities (reproduced through the education system) that channel semi-educated young people into the precarious urban service workforce. By analysing the narratives and experiences of skill centre leaders, staff and trainees, the paper explores these disjunctures and conflicting visions of social mobility through skilling. We also reflect on the current skill paradigm as an ideological construct that misrecognises the roots of the unemployment

Biography of Presenting Author:

Carol Upadhy is Professor in the School of Social Sciences at the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), Bangalore, India, where she leads the Urban & Mobility Studies Programme. She is the author of *Reengineering India: Work, Capital, and Class in an Offshore Economy* (2016) and co-editor of *Provincial Globalization in India: Transregional Mobilities and Development Politics* (2018). Recently completed research projects include *Speculative Urbanism: Land, Livelihoods, and Finance Capital*, a comparative study of real estate-led urbanization in Jakarta and Bangalore and *India's Changing Cityscapes: Work, Migration and Livelihoods*, carried out in collaboration with Prof. Supriya RoyChowdhury, Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore.

PRESENTATION 4, 7:35 – 7:50 PM AEST

More than Language: The Work of an English Training Centre in Delhi

Abhishek Ranjan Datta, University of Oxford

Abstract:

Private English language training centres have become increasingly ubiquitous in urban India and are seen as the consequence of a renewed demand for English proficiency and ‘communication skills’ in the wake of the 1990s economic liberalisation. Such centres offer students not just the promise of fluency in the language but also a ticket to professional ‘success’ in the urban job-market. This comes at a time when the precariousness of employment in the urban service economy and the emergence of newer forms of embodied and aesthetic labour have profoundly altered the way English language acquisition is both conceptualised and experienced. This paper is based on an ethnographic case study of an English training centre in Delhi and highlights the convergence of post-liberalisation ideas of labour, skill and training at sites of English language acquisition, and the impact of such practices on emerging paradigms of language power and hierarchy in urban India. Two key findings from the case study are presented here, the first of which is the dialogic mobilisation of both ‘global’ and ‘local’ at such sites to produce a uniquely contemporary ‘ideology’ of English, marking a simultaneous break and renewal of past paradigms of mobility associated with the language. The second finding highlights the inadequacy of monolingual and strictly ‘hierarchical’ understandings of India’s unequal multilingualism by focussing on plurilingual practices in the training centre. This paper argues that it is through hybrid and strategic plurilingual practices, like the embedded uses of Hinglish found in this study, that language power is exercised and newer forms of linguistic inequality produced in the contemporary.

Biography of Presenting Author:

Abhishek is a DPhil (PhD) student in International Development at the Oxford Department of International Development (ODID). His research interests span intersectional studies of youth, education, language, media and politics in urban South Asia. His doctoral project explores practices of ‘self-making’ among urban youth in Delhi, focussing on how the discourse and infrastructure of ‘preparation’ (taiyari, in Hindi) in Delhi’s coaching centres shapes middle-class aspirations and propels rhizomatic practices of mobility and self-realisation. The project aims to revisit and unpack ‘self-making’ to highlight its hybridity, instability and discontinuities.

Abhishek holds a BA (with Honours) and MA in English from the University of Delhi, and an MSc in Modern South Asian Studies from the University of Oxford. A Clarendon and Lincoln-Kingsgate scholar at Lincoln College, he is presently serving as co-convenor of the South Asian Political Thought (SAPT) seminar series and as a Research Assistant for the Education.SouthAsia project at Oxford.

DISCUSSION, 7:50 – 8:30 PM AEST

Detailed Program

DAY 2: 6TH OF JULY 2021, 4:30 – 8:30 PM AEST

PANEL 4: GENDERING THE SKILLS LANDSCAPE, 4:30 – 5:45 PM AEST

Chair: Grace Carswell, University of Sussex

PRESENTATION 1, 4:30 – 4:45 PM AEST

Gendering the Urban Skills Landscape: Gender, Youth and Skills Training in Sierra Leone and Cameroon

Ross Wignall, Oxford Brookes University

Brigitte Piquard, Oxford Brookes University

Abstract:

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is a key component of the UN's 'decent work' agenda which seeks to align fair and secure working conditions with the aspirations of workers to meet Goal 8 of the Sustainable Development Goals. Drawing on qualitative findings from the collaborative, youth-led Gen-Up project this paper explores the persistent forms of gender and social stereotypes and inequalities which create barriers for young women to access skills-based 'decent work'. Based on research conducted with the largest network of skills providers in Africa, the Salesian Don Bosco TVET centres, in two rapidly expanding cities, Yaoundé in Cameroon and Freetown in Sierra Leone, during the global Covid-19 pandemic, this paper examines the relationship between urban inequality, gender and skills trainings in the lives of young women, whilst also advocating for a greater 'localisation' focus on community-based and faith-based organisations who are best placed to contextualise needs and aspirations and engage and empower young women through successful TVET programmes. The Don Bosco model is based on a strong, locally based pastoral, social and pedagogical project targeting harsh and resource limited areas and vulnerable groups, creating a worldwide network of expertise in skills training delivery that challenges traditional, top-down policy-driven skills agendas. It also relies on local understandings of skills and sustainable livelihoods which are rooted in local knowledge systems which may differ from universalised ideas of 'skills' being circulated by international development agencies. By tracing the everyday impact of urban and cultural inequality on young women's lives, the research investigates how skills training can enhance capabilities to thrive and which role skills training can play in challenging gender norms, stereotypes and inequality. It investigates as well the role TVET providers embedded in communities such as Don Bosco, plays in facilitating broader gender transformation through context-specific skills programmes. This paper asks for a deeper understanding of the notion of skills necessary for 'decent work' in the context of deepening urban inequality and gender discrimination, particularly in the shadow of the Covid-19 pandemic which has disproportionately impacted young women.

Biography of Presenting Author:

Brigitte Piquard has conducted research in conflict and post-conflict settings for 28 years. She is trained as an anthropologist but also in Islamic studies and has been working in Muslim countries with young people for over two decades. One of her research themes is resilience and adaptation mechanisms of displaced populations in conflict and post-conflict settings (Afghan refugees in Pakistan; Palestinian refugees in each UNRWA countries of operations, IDP in Colombia and in Central African Republic among others) for which she has developed different research protocols including use of life stories and other narratives as well as participatory action research process.

Ross Wignall is an experienced youth worker and researcher who currently works for the Social Anthropology dept at Oxford Brookes. His doctoral research focussed on the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), exploring the intersection of morality, faith and the gendered body as modes of youth self-actualisation in the UK and The Gambia, West Africa. More recently he has specialised in youth employment and education transitions in Sub-Saharan Africa with a particular focus on disenfranchised young women in Sierra Leone. He has used a variety of innovative methods including participatory and arts based methods, digital story-telling and action research.

PRESENTATION 2, 4:45 – 5:00 PM AEST

Inclusive Education and Training is an Issue to (Re)Think

AKM Nuruzzaman, Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF), Dhaka, Bangladesh

Abstract:

People need and often want to have marketable skills. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), and others, help to make it happen. TVETs are widely used both in developed and developing countries to extend skills for young people who want to join the job market after their high-school graduation and do not have an opportunity for higher studies. In developing countries, it is used as a tool for poverty alleviation too. In many instances, appropriate training contributes significantly to the poor's life and livelihoods as a ladder for improvement by helping their families with extended income - while contributing to overall economic growth. An outcome of TVET facilities, however, have some geographical and gender divides. It is also associated with demographic characteristics of trainees and social structural characteristics of where they live. Globally, it has been observed that the economic, social, and political empowerment of women is increasing. Yet, despite the advancement of women and extended opportunities of TVET facilities, women's ability to utilize these training, particularly converting those skills into real employment remains low. However, their experience and journey with TVET facilities are different than that of men. It is even more challenging for women who live in remote areas, away from the city or growth centres. The policymakers and TVET providers need to acknowledge those barriers to ensure inclusive education and training. This paper will share some empirical evidence and case studies from a developing country, Bangladesh in addressing the barriers of inclusive training, how these obstacles women face differ from those of other groups and strategies that are undertaken by the women for ensuring their effective engagement in employment sector.

Biography of Presenting Author:

I have 25 years of professional experience implementing donor-funded activities to advance economic policy reform, and poverty alleviation and social mobilization and inclusion initiatives; working collaboratively with the government of Bangladesh at various levels, international donors, e.g., EU, DFID, AusAID, World Bank, IFAD, GCF, ADB, SDC, JICA, and civil-society organisations; working with vulnerable populations to support the creation of jobs and incomes, particularly connecting extremely poor people to markets and employment opportunities, building productive capabilities and capacity; working on climate adaptation and disaster management; integrating gender equality and women's empowerment issues; and excellent interpersonal, communication and organizational skills and demonstrated leadership ability to work with diverse individuals and groups. I completed PhD in Social Vulnerability to Climate Change from the University of Melbourne and a Master of International and Community Development (MICD) from Deakin University. I have engaged in many skill-based training and community activities.



PRESENTATION 3, 5:00 – 5:15 PM AEST

The Gender Divide in Skilling and Outcomes in Rural India

Soundarya Iyer, French Institute of Pondicherry

Sarayu Srinivasan, French Institute of Pondicherry

Nitya Rao, University of East Anglia

Abstract:

Skill development is considered to be critically important to eradication of poverty and social inclusion in the Global South. The Indian government launched broad reforms under the Skill India Mission in 2015 to train 40 crore Indians by 2022. However, little is known about the gendered nature of skilling and outcomes in rural India. We use work-life course interviews conducted in 2020-21 with 60 men and women between the ages of 18-65 in a village in southern Karnataka to understand the social life of formal and informal skills as they intersect with gender, caste, and class. We find that women undertake formal skill training programmes within and outside agriculture yet only few translate their skills into livelihoods. Where the translation of skill training to livelihoods occurs, it is due to the work being an extension of the household, for example, veterinary training programmes. On the other hand, men do not undertake formal training programmes, but they are exemplars of 'learning by doing' on the job, or via social networks. This informal skilling extends across rural farm and non-farm occupations. While formal education of women exceeds that of men, women's skills are primarily used in the reproduction of the household, in the context of scarce jobs, patriarchal control over women's movement and the low status of agricultural work. We further find that meanings and value of skills are inflected by caste and class. Dalit men and women spend longer in formal education and skilling than peasant caste households. Dalits use education and skills to acquire government jobs, while peasant caste men and women diversify into self-employment in the non-farm sector while maintaining farming based livelihoods. When education fails to translate into government jobs, we also find pathways into farming which have been reinforced during the COVID-19 crisis. We show the role that formal and informal skills play in achieving aspirations of men and women.

Biography of Presenting Author:

Soundarya Iyer is an Affiliated Researcher at the French Institute of Pondicherry, Pondicherry, India. She is interested in interdisciplinary approaches to the study of agrarian change, gender, livelihoods, and urbanization in India. She was the Sir Ratan Tata Post-doctoral Fellow 2018-19 at the London School of Economics and Political Science, UK. She is currently Principal Investigator on a collaborative project with Prof. Nitya Rao funded by the Azim Premji University Research Funding Programme - 2019 which aims to understand the sociology of the decline in female labour force participation in rural Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

DISCUSSION, 5:15 – 5:45 PM AEST

PANEL 5: CRAFTS, ARTISANS AND SKILLS, 5:45 – 7:00 PM AEST

Chair: Andrew Sanchez, University of Cambridge

PRESENTATION 1, 5:45 – 6:00 PM AEST

Apprenticeship, Skill Acquisition and Social Embeddedness among Indian Muslim Artisans

Thomas Chambers, Oxford Brookes University

Abstract:

This paper focuses on the embedded, social, cultural, and historical context of skill acquisition and labour force reproduction in a Muslim-dominated artisanal woodworking industry located in the city of Saharanpur (North

India). The paper combines the author's embodied experience of undertaking an apprenticeship with reflections on the stories of those for whom artisan crafts provided a livelihood. Through these ethnographic insights, the paper illustrates how the ustaad-shaagird (master-apprentice) system was embedded in the broader political economy, labour force reproduction and forms of self-making. The paper argues that ustaad-shaagird systems are not relics of a pre-capitalist past, and nor are they static and unchanging within contemporary modalities of capitalist production and development. Rather, they are bound up in complex circulations shaped by the demands of the supply chain, shifting cultural practices, religious and other moral frameworks, reconfigurations in the status of younger men and contestations around knowledge.

Apprenticeship, the paper contends, is often not a cleanly defined space of skill acquisition and well-established hierarchical structures but a complex assemblage of forces which at times align and at others conflict. It is also a space of multifaceted emotions; from love, intimacy, care and respect to anger, betrayal, jealousy and distress. Additionally, the ustaad-shaagird system of the city's woodworking neighbourhoods cannot be detached from the broader urban spatial context or from national-level politics. Thus, forms of enclavement, bordering, marginalisation and ghettoization experienced by many Indian Muslims interplay with long-duration processes of craft labour reproduction. These constraints limit access to other pathways of knowledge acquisition, further feeding into the reproduction of the workforce. However, urban enclosure also creates a sense of identity and belonging for those entering wood trades, through which subjective and material forms of socio-economic marginalisation can, to a degree, be countered. Holistically, then, this draws the paper into attending to both disciplining and agentive aspects of apprenticeship as well as the variety of connections through which it is constituted and reconstituted.

BIOGRAPHY OF THE PRESENTING AUTHOR:

Thomas Chambers is a Senior Lecturer in Social/Cultural Anthropology at Oxford Brookes University. His research focuses on Muslim neighbourhoods in north-western Uttar Pradesh (India). Whilst geographically specific, his work engages with broad thematic areas including migration, labour, supply chains, gender, urban space, conviviality, state bureaucracies, digitisation, subjectivities, Islam, and artisanship. Thomas is the author of the ethnographic monograph, *Networks, Labour and Migration among Indian Muslim Artisans* published by UCL Press (see: <https://www.uclpress.co.uk/products/116906>).

(Please note that the submitted paper is based on pre-published material drawn from a monograph chapter, see: Chambers, T. (2020). *Networks, Labour and Migration among Indian Muslims Artisans*. London: UCL Press.)

PRESENTATION 2, 6:00 – 6:15 PM AEST

Of Glass, Skills and Life; Craft Consciousness among Firozabad's Glass Workers

Arnaud Kaba, Center for Modern Indian Studies

Abstract:

This paper is about work cultures in Firozabad, for Indian standards a medium-scale city with about 600 000 inhabitants situated in Uttar Pradesh, about 200 km Southeast from Delhi and 40 km East from Agra. Firozabad is the biggest Indian centre for glass production and harbours a century-old concentration on a single material which has connected different forms of labour by bridging gaps between the skills involved. For example, the bangles from Firozabad are melted in the factories, completed in the workers' houses and decorated in small-scale workshops, thus combining three distinct forms of labour.

This paper argues that the development of Firozabad as a glass centre by the colonial authorities, has created a strongly hybrid relationship between craftsmen and the industrial world as well as between different forms of labour, low tech and (rarely) high tech. I stress that in this context, the possession of skills remains essential for the development of hierarchies between workers, communities, castes and genders, defining one's position among the glass labour classes. Moreover, the cultures of glass mastery act as craft consciousness because they are mobilized as social forces to resist, building solidarities of oppositions, though these solidarities are often vertical, strongly mediated by communitarian and caste affinities, but not always. The relations to the capital owners, industrialists, and tradesmen, are shaping a world where a consciousness of common exploitation crosses the communities.

Biography of Presenting Author:

Dr Arnaud Kaba has a PhD of anthropology from the École des Hautes Études en Sciences sociales, and is specialized in labor studies, with a strong entry through skills, primarily on modern Indian contexts. He did his master's thesis on a tea plantation of Darjeeling, which was published as a book, then his PhD thesis on the metalworkers of Bhopal and their confrontation with uncertainty. He previously did a DAAD postdoctoral internship at CeMIS, a 7-month ICAS internship in Delhi, followed by a short follow-up fellowship at the Max-Weber Kolleg in Erfurt.



PRESENTATION 3, 6:15 – 6:30 PM AEST

From the Making of Craft to Making One's Life: Stories from Carpentry Apprentices in Brussels

Christine Moderbacher, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology

Abstract:

Based on long term field research with migrant carpentry apprentices in Europe's capital Belgium, the presentation traces my epistemological shift of attention from 'making craft' to 'crafting as an existential activity, carried out to make a living'.

Although the fascination with and longing for romantic imaginations of bodily craftwork seems to echo a sentiment many academics can identify with, the question of how craftwork is actually lived and what it means for people trying to make their living with it often remains unanswered. My presentation first points out this missing gap in (anthropological) research and second explores the possibilities of answering to this imbalance by moving away from the making of craft towards merging making with the maker's life trajectories. Through the stories of Hamuda Djerbi, Cise Ibrahima and other trainees - mostly with a migratory background - I will discuss the necessity to expand the notion of apprenticeship and craftwork beyond romantic images and the manipulation of physical materials and forms to a larger sense of the 'worker as seeking to shape the world in

particular ways that render him central than marginal', as Venkatasan has pointed out (2015: 305). With the carpentry training located in one of Brussel's most precarious neighbourhoods - Molenbeek - designed for people who have undergone forms of disruptions, sometimes-extensive years of waiting and unemployment, learning a skill symbolizes a big change for almost all the participants of the training that Bourdieu has referred to as the possibility and hope 'of existing in the eyes of others, of achieving a recognized form of social existence, or quite simply, of making something happen rather than nothing' (Bourdieu 2000: 222/223) that ultimately enables people to craft a life worth living.

Biography of Presenting Author:

Christine Moderbacher is a social anthropologist and documentary filmmaker, mainly focusing on migratory and marginal worlds as well as visual and textual storytelling. Having studied Social- (University of Vienna) and Visual Anthropology (University of Manchester), she participated in the Post-University Master Class SIC - Sound Image Culture in Brussels, engaging with artful ways of storytelling and challenging documentary conventions. Questioning the relation between artist/anthropologist, subject and viewer as well as reflecting on how "the other" is presented in contemporary media has become one of her main interests. Working as a filmmaker (e.g. "A Letter to Mohamed", 35 Min., 2013) and conducting narrative participatory projects (e.g. "Mots d'Enfant", 8 Min., 2015) the following years, she has taught workshops on the use of video in anthropology and human rights advocacy in and outside of academia. For her PhD thesis "Crafting Lives in Brussels: Making and Mobility on the Margins" at the University of Aberdeen (UK), she conducted a one-year apprenticeship in carpentry in Belgium's capital Brussels using audio-visual research tools. She is currently working as a post-doc within the Research Group "Alpine Histories" at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle, Germany.

DISCUSSION, 6:30 – 7:00 PM AEST

TEA BREAK, 7:00 – 7:15 PM AEST



PANEL 6: CULTURES OF REPAIR AND CREATIVITY, 7:15 – 8:30 PM AEST

Chair: Chantal Carr, University of Wollongong

PRESENTATION 1, 7:15 – 7:30 PM AEST

From ‘Filmmaker’ to ‘Content Creator’: Promises and Perils of the Vulgarisation of Audiovisual Editing in the Brazilian Context

Pedro Branco, Universidade de Brasília

Abstract:

The professions based on audiovisual editing, as we know them today, are indebted to the industrial mode of production of early XX Century American film industry and to its subsequent demise. With the dismantling of their production lines in favour of freelance work, production studios made a move that would ultimately sediment the film editor as a creative professional. Capitalising both on the need for technical expertise imposed

by synchronous sound technologies and on the need to nurture a distinctive reputation and to establish long-term partnerships with directors, film editors pushed for a higher valuing of intuition and style as cornerstones of the profession's skillset. The compartmentalisation of news rooms, combined with the need for technical expertise, kept these professions alive in the age of television. These and other conditions would radically change from the late 1990s onward, thanks to the growing ubiquitousness of broadband internet connection, the appearance of the smartphone and other mobile devices, the cheapening of semi-professional media-making equipment and the rise of social media platforms. The development of affordable and easy-to-use digital editing software and of a culture of consumption of low-value/high-turnover media via online platforms like YouTube are two factors contributing to the ramping of sociotechnical and economic pressures on the audiovisual editor. While the former can be more evidently linked to the cheapening of technical expertise, the latter is - more conspicuously - contributing to the erosion of the practical and symbolic values attached to audiovisual editor as a skillset and as a professional category. The editor, along with other occupations within the audiovisual production chain, is progressively merging into the figure of the all-round content creator. This shift in professional status trickles down from the self-employment model that characterises most YouTubers to other sectors of audiovisual employment, including publicity, journalism and semi-professional independent filmmaking. This paper casts a glance at the Brazilian audiovisual production context to identify some ways in which the vulgarisation (in a very specific etymological sense, more in line with “rendering common or ordinary” and with “knowledge divulgation”) of audiovisual editing as a skillset is reconfiguring related professions across different sectors.

BIOGRAPHY OF PRESENTING AUTHOR:

I am an award-winning filmmaker and anthropologist working at the intersection of artistic craftsmanship, social science scholarship and political advocacy. My filmography spans over a decade and comprises roughly a dozen documentary-cum-experimental films. They deal with, for instance, the conflicts of juridical sensibilities embedded in the process of “modernisation” of East Timor; the emergence of technique and personhood through lacustrine and coastal fishing in the Amazon; and the frictions between the fire-reliant modes of living of the Quilombola peoples of the Brazilian savanna and the State's racist and pyrophobic policies of environmental management and conservation. My research cuts across disciplines and is mostly concerned with maximising the extent to which the film editing process can be mobilised, by social scientists and filmmakers alike, as a crafted form of anthropological research. I was a founding member of IRIS, the University of Brasília's highly reputed Laboratory of Image and Recording of Social Interactions. Inaugurated in early 2011, IRIS was quickly rose to the national spotlight. IRIS was officially recognised by CAPES (the governmental agency responsible for regulating and evaluating higher education in Brazil) for having developed the best body of scholarly multimedia work nation-wide in 2013 (relative to the 2010-2012 period) and again in 2017 (for 2013-2016).

PRESENTATION 2, 7:30 – 7:45 PM AEST

Learning to Fix: Brazilian Lessons for an Obsolete World

Liliana Gil, The New School

Abstract:

Despite being a small neighborhood in the heart of São Paulo, the fame of Santa Efigenia as an electronics market spreads beyond regional and national borders. Bustling with electronics shops and repair businesses, and historically served by trains, roads, and ports, Santa Efigenia has been an important Latin American hub for buying and selling electronic parts and devices since at least the 1970s. This paper offers an ethnographic look

into one of the neighborhood's current central activities: cellphone repair. Building on participant observation at a repair school set up by a local entrepreneur, as well as interviews with electronic enthusiasts, immigrant repairers, and shop owners and customers, the paper delves into this much-overlooked incubator of technical skill. I am particularly interested in asking: why is the language of innovation and ingenuity attached to other spaces in the city such as fablabs, but not to Santa Efigenia? Focusing on repair work, the organized forms of knowledge production and exchange it entails, and the economic transactions that spin around it, the paper explores the formalization of repair knowledge; the class, gender, and ethnic aspects of skill recognition; and the normative dispositions associated with particular technical practices. Furthermore, it emphasizes the connectedness of Santa Efigenia, showing its links to, for instance, small shop owners throughout Brazil, transnational migratory flows and networks, Chinese-based supply chains, and global brands that pride themselves on sustainability and yet make their phones ever more difficult to fix. Contrary to seeing these practices of mending and repair as a predicament of Brazilian peripherality, I present Santa Efigenia as a generative place from where we can, perhaps, reimagine the futures of life with electronics.

Biography of Presenting Author:

I'm a Ph.D. candidate in Anthropology at The New School. My dissertation - provisionally titled 'Beyond Make-Do Innovation: Practices and Politics of Technological Improvisation in Brazil' - is an ethnographic and historical analysis of how improvisational abilities and techniques have been thought of, performed, and valued across a number of sites of technological production, from community fablabs in São Paulo to electronics factories in the Amazon. In this work, I analyze popular representations of innovation from the global South, as well as questions of labor and skill acquisition and recognition. My research has been supported by the National Science Foundation and Wenner-Gren Foundation, among others. I'm currently based in Singapore where I am affiliated with Yale-NUS College.

PRESENTATION 3, 7:45 – 8:00 PM AEST

Study Radio for Revolution: Skills and the Making of Amateur Technologists in Socialist China

Yingchuan Yang, Columbia University

Abstract:

In the 1950s and 1960s, the Chinese socialist state materially and discursively associated radio with national defense and industrialization, encouraging its subjects to master radio technology and purchase radio sets. Numerous radio manuals were published and widely read, and one technical journal, *Wuxiandian* (Radio), reached a circulation of 1.3 million. With a close reading of *Wuxiandian* and other technical publications, I highlight the central role of amateur (*yeyu*) technologists in the production and dissemination of scientific knowledge and technological expertise. *Wuxiandian* regularly published introductory knowledge on scientific

disciplines pertinent to radio technology. Millions of *Wuxiandian* readers thus got to learn the basics of physics, chemistry, and electronic engineering when formal education was deficient, if not entirely suspended. Moreover, unlike many other gadgets, radio can be self-assembled and self-modified. As readymade radio sets were usually expensive and of poor quality, radio users had to tinker with their gadgets for better performance

or even put together their own radio receivers. Many readers would share their tips on building and modifying radio sets on *Wuxiandian*. Based on previous works that have noticed the contributions made by non-professional actors to scientific development in socialist China, this essay further argues for the existence and importance of a distinctive amateur knowledge system with an emphasis on practical, inexpensive, and comprehensible skills of interacting with everyday technology such as radio. While some groups of rural artisans were “deskilled” as a result of agricultural collectivization, many others experienced a process of “skilling,” learning how to use, assemble, and modify radio sets. By helping each other acquire and cultivate their skills, amateur technologists underpinned the popularization of radio amid material scarcity with their unconventional ways of knowledge production. In regard to the availability of technical skills, a politically repressive era was technologically democratic for many.

Biography of Presenting Author:

Yingchuan Yang is a doctoral candidate in the History-East Asia Program at Columbia University. His dissertation, “Revolution on Air: Mass Technology and the Demise of Chinese Socialism,” reveals the unexpected and fateful consequences when the Chinese socialist state actually achieved one of its goals. With a state-sponsored cultural enterprise that associated radio technology with industrialization and national defense, the masses were mobilized to partake in the production and circulation of radio gadgets and know-how. Backed by a socialist open-source culture, amateur technologists got to acquire and widely share the knowledge of self-assembling and self-modifying radio sets. While these unconventional ways of industrial and knowledge production underpinned the popularization of radio amid material scarcity, such democratization of technology and expertise helped victims of political campaigns circumvent Maoist social control. The socialist state’s success in promoting mass technology, in other words, contributed to its own downfall. By redirecting the scholarly attention on Chinese socialism away from its institutional organizations to its material base, this dissertation offers fresh perspectives of socialist China with an emphasis on previously ignored actors and through a technological lens. Yingchuan received his B.A. in History from University of California, Los Angeles in 2016.

DISCUSSION, 8:00 – 8:30 PM AEST

Detailed Program

DAY 3: 7TH OF JULY 2021, 4:30 – 8:30 PM AEST

PANEL 7: SKILLING FOR EMPLOYMENT, 4:45 – 5:30 PM AEST

Chair: Andrew Deuchar, University of Melbourne

PRESENTATION 1, 4:30 – 4:45 PM AEST

Mediating Entrepreneurship for Addressing Unemployment in South Africa and India: A Postcolonial Approach for Understanding Entangled Rationalities

Vrinda Chopra, University of Cape Town

Abstract:

Skill development in entrepreneurship is a key strategy to address unemployment in countries of the global South like South Africa and India. Youth and marginalised groups are a prime target group of entrepreneurship interventions in the absence of formal employment opportunities. These strategies are endorsed within development policy and practice as practical solutions to challenges of unemployment and inequality. On the other hand, scholars in social sciences criticize entrepreneurship strategies as being neoliberal in character thereby producing stalemates in analysing the practice of entrepreneurial skill development in the global South (Amin, Cameron & Hudson, 2002; Bond, 2007; Sanyal, 2007).

In this paper, towards the aim of more generative analyses (Pollard, McEwan and Hughes, 2011), I draw on my doctoral research on mediating entrepreneurship to address development challenges like inequality and unemployment in South Africa and India. I interrogate the facilitative role played by intermediaries in furthering entrepreneurial skills through a postcolonial approach. Intermediaries at the meso, in-between scale (of macro policy and micro-enterprises and individuals) provide potential to view the power relations between social and economic logics, and their bearing on programs and processes. In particular, they offer commentaries on negotiations of nuances and tensions for addressing the contextually embedded needs and opportunities for entrepreneurial skill development.

Through the paper, I first situate entrepreneurship as a means for addressing development challenges within the postcolonial trajectories of South Africa and India. Second, I argue that the facilitative role played by intermediaries in furthering entrepreneurial skills in marginalized communities is a complex interplay between their social missions and financial considerations. I discuss that viewing intermediaries as solely neoliberal in character focussed on financial logics would be limited in the analysis. Finally drawing on the work of postcolonial economic geographers (Raghuram & Madge, 2006; Pollard, McEwan & Hughes, 2011; Zein-Alabdin, 2011; Sidaway, Woon & Jacobs, 2014) I demonstrate that seeing intermediaries as neoliberal in character reifies distinctions between social and economic logics. The reification of distinctions between social and economic logics contributes to projects of reinstating the discursive centrality of economic rationalities especially of markets and capital (Mitchell, 2008; Zein-Alabdin, 2011). The central position of markets and capital acts as a barrier for understanding the entangled trajectories of entrepreneurship where it is deployed for addressing development challenges of unemployment and inequality. Recognising the entangled trajectories of social and economic logics present opportunities to develop expansive normative frameworks for understanding entrepreneurship as a development response in the global South.

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Biography of Presenting Author:

Vrinda Chopra is a PhD Student at the Department of Environment and Geographical Science (EGS) at University of Cape Town (UCT), South Africa. In the final stages of writing, her thesis examines the rationalities of social entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial strategies for development in South Africa and India. She was awarded a fellowship by the Faculty of Science for her PhD research (2017-2019). She is also a recipient of UCT's International Student Bursary (2017-2019).

Alongside her PhD, since May 2019, Vrinda works part-time leading learning and knowledge development initiatives for a social innovation-driven entrepreneurship program at Development Alternatives in India. Her work focusses on understanding local complexities, shifts and narratives to support the building of enabling ecosystems for entrepreneurship at the grassroots. She is a co-author on the chapter titled 'India Needs to Move from Microenterprise schemes to building an inclusive entrepreneurship ecosystem' in the 2020 State of India's Livelihoods Report.

An interdisciplinary scholar, her research orientations are in economic geography, political economy and sociology. Vrinda has an MPhil in Development Studies from the University of Cambridge (2013-14). She is also an alumna of the London School of Economics (2007-08) and University of Delhi (2004-07).

PRESENTATION 2, 4:45 – 5:00 PM AEST

From Skills to Employment, or the Other Way Around? Skills, Training, and Social Networks in the Tiruppur Textile Region, India

Grace Carswell, Department of Geography, University of Sussex

Geert De Neve, University of Sussex

Abstract:

In this paper, we build on the concept of the 'social life of skills' in order to explore how people in the Tiruppur region of Tamil Nadu obtain relevant skills, gain access to garment and other forms of work, and move up within their sector. Drawing on a quantitative survey conducted in two villages in the hinterland of the city of Tiruppur as well as on a series of interviews with current and past workers, we explore the formal and informal ways in which skills are acquired by this rural-based labour force.

Focusing on garment work in particular, we argue for a critical unpacking of the assumed, linear linkages between skills training, skills acquisition and access to employment. Instead, we show how rather than formal training leading to skills acquisition and subsequent employment, the vast majority of garment workers gain largely unskilled employment first - primarily as helpers to tailors - and then learn the skills required for better paid and more rewarding jobs from friends, co-workers and contractors on the shop floor.

Indeed, central to skill and job acquisition processes are informal ways of learning that are located within social networks of kin, caste and friendship, and that are embedded in and shaped by the sphere of social reproduction. We therefore argue for an approach to skills that shifts the focus from formal training programmes to the social life of skills in society, where opportunities and exclusions are fashioned by a highly fragmented social and economic landscape.

Biography of Presenting Author:

Geert De Neve is Professor of Social Anthropology and South Asian Studies at the University of Sussex. He has carried out extensive field research in Tamil Nadu, south India, over the last 25 years, and has published on relations of labour, debt, unfreedom, caste and inequality under India's contemporary neoliberal regime. His research focuses primarily on the textile and garment sectors of the Tiruppur region in Tamil Nadu. His recent interests include the politics of inclusion, social protection and citizenship, with a focus on Dalits in Tamil Nadu. Over the last 10 years his research has been conducted in collaboration with Dr Grace Carswell, a Reader in Human Geography at the University of Sussex.

DISCUSSION, 5:00 – 5:30 PM AEST



PANEL 8: SKILLS FOR STIGMATISED WORK, 5:30 – 6:30 PM AEST

Chair: Geert De Neve, University of Sussex

PRESENTATION 1, 5:30 – 5:45 PM AEST

The Social Life of Skills in Waste-Work

Barbara Harriss-White, Wolfson College

Advaita Rajendra, Indian Institute of Management

Abstract:

Waste-work has been rendered 'natural' to or considered a responsibility of specific groups -- women within homes, specific castes like Dalits (Rodrigues, 2009), and other marginalised groups like minorities (Butt, 2019) and immigrants (Bonatti & Gille, 2019). Even as workers from non-traditional backgrounds, like Adivasis (Harriss-White, 2019) and other backward castes (Ingole, 2016), have now been involved in waste-work, much of the seeming 'cosmopolitisation' is in the form of "adverse incorporation" (Carswell & DeNeve, 2018). Skills in waste-work are mired in social stigma and caste and gendered notions of (im)purity, toxicities of waste (Harriss-White, 2017).

Skills in waste-work have received very little academic attention. Even the rich scholarship that documents skills of occupations traditionally done by Dalits, has ignored waste-work (Ilaiah, 2009). Documenting the social life of skills that are mediated by social and economic institutions, our paper explores the meanings associated with the skills. We draw on an analysis of policy documents and field work from two small towns in India in Tamil Nadu and Chattisgarh. The field work for the larger project involved interactions with over 200 respondents, of which 43 workers were specifically interviewed documenting skills from September - November, 2019.

Workers were involved in picking, sorting, cleaning, selling, and disposing materials that get categorised as waste - recyclables, food, animal carcasses and human faeces. Workers acquired intimate knowledge of the city - its lanes, infrastructure, learning how to work with different instruments made available, protecting oneself from the toxicities of waste, training their bodies for hard labour, and "getting used to" the work. The paper grapples with understanding skills in a form of work that is often a 'burden' on specific communities. We find that in the various types of waste-work, workers are very skilled entailing long periods of learning, yet their work remains underpaid and selectively recognised.

The example of skills in waste-work reveals how social institutions entangled in acquiring and transmitting skills is often ignored by formal institutions of skilling. The informal social institutions impede the possibilities of skills translating to better economic outcomes, opportunities and dignity reproducing extant societal inequalities (Carswell & DeNeve, 2018).

Biography of Presenting Author:

Advaita is a PhD student at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad in the Public Systems Group. Her doctoral research focusses on the governance of waste and waste-work in a small town in India. She is interested in issues at the intersection of environment, labour and social hierarchies. Her previous work and research interests include the issues of gender, caste that manifests in skewed sex ratios and in reproduction of social hierarchies in residential education.

PRESENTATION 2, 5:45 – 6:00 PM AEST

Questions of 'Skill' in Stigmatised Work: Reflections from the History of Leather Tanning in India, c. 1900-1950

Shahana Bhattacharya, University of Delhi

Abstract:

This paper explores questions of skill, and its meanings, in the context of the history of modern leather tanning in late colonial and early post-independence India. Based on historical evidence particularly from hides and skins processing clusters that emerged in Calcutta and across Madras province, especially between about 1900 and 1950, it examines how notions of 'skill' in this work came to be inflected through the dual prism of the extreme stigma of hides and skins traditionally mandated by caste in south Asia and their extreme profitability resulting from their integration within the capitalist colonial economy, and the growth of their exports. It examines these questions at different sites of labour, from the point of extraction of raw hides and skins from animal carcasses, to shop-floors of urban tanneries in which the nearly exclusively outcaste labour-force came to be deployed predominantly in 'pre-tanning' work that expanded in India. Their labour and skill was crucial to the production of the commodity - routinely denied the value ascribed to skill, owing to caste and 'untouchability.' Exploring further how colonial assessments of skill - or lack thereof - of Indian workmen also shaped the transnational commodity chain in leather, the paper goes on to probe the divergent modes and locations where skills were transmitted, inside tanneries and sites of production in leather clusters and in formal institutions where technical education in tanning and leather production was imparted. Through the use of different sources this paper historically examines these complex, shifting negotiations and convergences between stigma, caste and capital that came to define and shape the material and social life of skills in leather tanning in India.

Biography of Presenting Author:

Shahana Bhattacharya teaches History in Kirori Mal College, Delhi University. Her research has been broadly in the fields of social history and labour history. She has engaged with questions of stigma and caste, work, skills and identity in modern Indian history with a particular focus on the history of labour in the leather industry in India.

DISCUSSION, 6:00 – 6:30 PM AEST

TEA BREAK, 6:30 – 6:45 PM AEST



PANEL 9: SKILL, LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY, 6:45 – 8:00 PM AEST

Chair: Febe De Geest, University of Melbourne

PRESENTATION 1, 6:45 – 7:00 PM AEST

Professionalism as Skill? The Social Construction of Workers' Identity in India's Domestic New Services

Dr Aditya Ray, The Open University

Abstract:

India's 'western-facing' services outsourcing sectors have gathered significant attention over the past two decades, as key sites for interrogating contemporary processes of professionalization and professional identity construction in India's globalized 'corporate-Anglosphere' (Boussebaa et al. 2014). Here notions of professionalism have been framed in terms of the capacity of Indian workers to undertake 'identity management' to appear 'authentic' to their clientele and customer base located in western countries, undergoing in-house and third-party skills trainings to acquaint them with specific linguistic, affective and inter-cultural demands of transnational work. Overall, this literature had produced fascinating insights on the transmission and embodiment of notions of professionalism in 'India's corporate Anglosphere'.

That said, there are, as yet, few studies that have similarly explored professional identity construction, in context of low-paid 'domestic-facing' new services, where workers are trained to serve India's new rich middle classes, and their increasing demand for personalised services in a variety of customer-facing and back-office roles. These include roles in contemporary 'servicescapes' such as the modern coffee shops, retail stores, domestic call centres, gyms, salons etc.

Drawing on data collected from immersive ethnographic fieldwork in Pune city in Western India, which included 'observant participation' in a skills-training course for youth from relatively marginalised socio-economic backgrounds, this paper demonstrates the various 'identity-demands' and 'authenticity work' in India's domestic new services. These include the demands of functioning in new cosmopolitan (multi-lingual and multi cultural) servicescapes that mirror both the socio-economic plurality and disparity apparent in the local urban context, and which challenges standardised notions of professionalism as they are imparted to workers in both 'in-house' and 'third-party' skills trainings.

Overall findings demonstrate the different ways in which youth from non-elite social locations get introduced to and assimilated in the neoliberal project of professional identity through soft skills-development that promise to transform them into 'ideal workers' for the modern service economy. Nonetheless, in emphasizing a horizontal and socially-constructed understanding of professionalization, this chapter also reflect on the ways in which marginalised youth interpret, challenge and adapt these notions during skills training and everyday practice.

Biography of Presenting Author:

I am an ESRC postdoctoral research fellow in Geography at the Open University, UK. My research interests lie at the broad intersections of contemporary labour geography, urban studies and development in India and South Asia. For my PhD, I conducted an ethnographic research project, exploring the labour geographies of India's domestic-facing 'new services economy', focusing on the working lives of those who sustained the domestic services outsourcing sector through low-paying jobs in the Tier-2 city of Pune, in Western India. My research provided a rich representation of the diversity of workers associated with this sector, emphasising everyday work-life strategies - highlighting instances when they enabled upward social mobility in the social context, but also when they got locally constrained and fizzled out.

PRESENTATION 2, 7:00 – 7:15 PM AEST

Being 'Taleem-yafta': Schooling, Aspirations and Identity among Muslim women in Old Delhi

Dr. Madhulika Sonkar, University of Delhi

Abstract:

Skills and vocational training have received constant emphasis within the framework of curriculum in educational planning and policy-making in India. Even as skills have continuously become intertwined with the themes of employment and resource-building in the global South, such a discourse tends to overshadow the diverse contexts in which individuals make sense of their education. It is, therefore, critical to ask: what are the different meanings individuals associate with processes of schooling?

Deviating from the dominant narrative on skill education, this paper attempts to locate the shifting meanings of formal education for young Muslim women in an urban neighbourhood of Old Delhi, India. Based on the ethnographic study of a four-decade old English-medium, Muslim minority school for girls, this paper attempts to draw out the linkages between identity, marginalisation and educational choices among young Muslim women in the neighbourhood.

The paper examines the possibilities of the category 'taleem-yafta' or 'educated' as adolescent young Muslim women situate formal education as a process of skill-building for negotiating through social and personal world. For the women in this study, being 'taleem-yafta' is then viewed both as a source of mobility, as well as a strategic response to specific forms of gendered exclusion and communal violence. Through the structure-agency paradigm, I argue that the idea of 'skills' for women is not linked with immediate educational outcomes, but in equipping them with decision-making for marital aspirations, assuming responsibilities of the domestic world, higher education, and occupational choices.

Against the backdrop of persistent marginalisation and violence against Muslims in recent years, the meanings of education for women are enmeshed in the overarching structures of religious identity, class, gender, community and neighbourhood.

This kind of an approach towards understanding the social life of skills and mobility also underlines that everyday educational experiences of women are riddled with conflicts and dilemmas of security, survival, prestige, sustenance, and mobility. While the paper shifts away from the linear trajectories of deprivation of Muslim women, it attempts to go beyond the binary distinctions of educated-uneducated, employed-unemployed, and madrasa-western schooling that have constantly defined Muslim women in South Asia.

Biography of Presenting Author:

Dr. Madhulika Sonkar teaches sociology at Indraprastha College for Women, University of Delhi, India. Having completed her post-graduation and doctoral research work in sociology from Delhi School of Economics at the University of Delhi, her areas of interest are sociology of education, sociology of gender, and media studies. Her doctoral thesis is based on the study of educational journeys of young Muslim women in Old Delhi. Her M.Phil (Sociology) at the University of Delhi was focused on the process of curriculum development for Muslim women in colonial India. As a journalist, Madhulika has reported extensively on gender, public health and governance for the Hindustan Times, Indo-Asian News Service, and Khabar Lahariya (a newspaper run by Dalit women in rural Uttar Pradesh).

PRESENTATION 3, 7:15 – 7:30 PM AEST

A Trip ‘Down South’: English Skills, Regional Identity and Cultural Capital in Chennai’s Information Technology Industry

S. Shakthi, Indian Institute of Technology Madras

Abstract:

The English language has held deep significance in the socio-political life of the Indian nation since the time of British colonialism. Fluency in English is framed as a crucial skill for those aspiring to middle-class status in the country, and the importance of English for middle-class assertion has been highlighted repeatedly in scholarship on the region (Fernandes 2006; Fernandes and Heller 2006; Lakha 1999; Säävälä 2010). The Indian information technology (IT) industry, which is particularly reliant on English, is often considered emblematic of the country’s ‘new’ middle class. In the city of Chennai, the industry has attracted a number of migrants from other parts of the country, including from smaller cities and towns south of Chennai. Frequently referred to (and also self-identifying) as being from ‘down South’, many of these migrants have been provided new opportunities for social mobility through IT employment. However, in the context of the IT workplace, ‘down South’ has become a coded reference to their lack of cultural capital, and of fluency in English in particular.

In this context, this paper asks, how does English shape intra-regional identities in this transnational industry? Through a multi-scalar analysis, I examine the role of language in crafting narratives of skill, solidarity and resistance. Drawing on qualitative research conducted in Chennai’s IT industry, I unpack the translation of linguistic identity into workplace praxis in two ways. First, I interrogate the discursive registers of ‘down South’ to demonstrate how it is deployed to mark certain employees as less ‘skilled’ in this particular workplace milieu. Simultaneously, I consider how an emphasis on cosmopolitanism renders invisible institutional features that reward pre-existing cultural capital. Second, I move beyond the emphasis on fluency in English in existing literature on the Indian middle class to determine the role of regional languages, particularly Tamil, in forging context-specific personal and professional networks within the industry. By exploring how situated forms of identity both constitute and are influenced by the structures of the workplace, I demonstrate that language as ‘skill’ can follow complex and non-linear patterns, even as it remains embedded within wider systems of social inequality.

Biography of Presenting Author:

S. Shakthi is an Institute Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at the Indian Institute of Technology Madras. She completed her PhD in Development Studies from the University of Cambridge. She is currently working on expanding her doctoral research on labour, class and gender dynamics in Chennai’s information technology industry into a monograph. She has published in peer-reviewed journals that include *Gender, Place and Culture*, *Emotion, Space and Society* and the *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal*. As a feminist geographer, her research interests include globalisation, qualitative research methodologies and South Asian society and history.

DISCUSSION, 7:30 – 8:00 PM AEST

WRAP – UP AND NEXT STEPS, 8:00 – 8:30 PM AEST



"Balancing Act" by mattvaux7. www.flickr.com/photos/89301040@N06/24283446347

