



Public Lecture

—

Thursday, 13 December 2018

Entanglements: Passports, Migrant Workers, and the Question of Gender

—

Prof. Nicole Constable, Department of Anthropology, University of Pittsburgh

Discussant: Prof. Janine Dahinden, Laboratory for the Study of Social Processes, University of Neuchâtel

18:15 – 19:45 h

University of Neuchâtel, Rue Abram-Louis-Breguet 2, Room R.113.

Abstract

Passports are of central importance to migration and mobility. They play a key role in defining state borders and identities, and they determine the passport holder's right of entry. Passports are the main topic of this talk, which focuses on my book manuscript in progress entitled, *Entanglements: Passports, Identity Documents, and Migrant Workers*. This research project originated in 2015 when the Indonesian consulate in Hong Kong introduced a new biometric passport system. It is based on eleven months of ethnographic research, conducted in Hong Kong between 2015 and 2018, on the consequences of the passport policy. The central question of my research is why did the mandatory passport renewal system create anxiety and problems – ranging from inconvenience, to lost wages and lost jobs, to charges of immigration fraud and prison sentences – for many of the 150,000 Indonesian temporary migrant workers in Hong Kong?

I use “entanglements” as a concept to analyze the different dimensions of this problem. Specifically, I examine four pairs of seeming oppositions that are related to passports and migration: *care and control*, *real and fake*, *temporalities and scales*, *state and society*. These four pairings are often conceived of as dichotomous or as binary oppositions. However, as I argue, each pair reflects complex and subtle entanglements that reveal important insights about how care can involve surveillance and control; how identities can be real and fake; how past and present and global and local are entangled; and how, even when migrant workers protest outside the consulate, the dynamic cannot be reduced to “us and them.” Finally, this talk reexamines these four paired entanglements and asked how gender is interwoven with them. Positionality, as feminist scholars have long argued, is of central importance.

Curriculum Vitae

Nicole Constable is Professor of Anthropology and of Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies. She is Research Professor in the University Center for International Studies at the University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA. She was the J. Y. Pillay Chair of Social Sciences at Yale-NUS College in Singapore and was recently a Senior Visiting Scholar at the Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore. She is the author or editor of eight books and has authored numerous articles. The primary focus of her work is on global intimacies and gendered mobilities and immobilities in East and Southeast Asia. She is currently working on a book about passports called *Entanglements*.

Selected Publications

- Constable, Nicole (2018). Temporary Intimacies, Incipient Transnationalism, and Failed Cross-Border Marriages. In: *Intimate Mobilities: Sexual Economies, Marriage and Migration in a Disparate World*. Edited by Christian Groes and Nadine Fernandez, 52–73. New York: Berghahn.
- Constable, Nicole (2018). “Assemblages and Affect: Migrant Labour and the Varieties of Absent Children”. *Global Networks* 18(1): 168–185.
- Constable, Nicole (2016). “Reproductive Labor at the Intersection of Three Intimate Industries: Domestic Work, Sex Tourism, and Adoption.” *Positions: Asia Critique* 24(1): 45–69.
- Constable, Nicole (2015). “Migrant Motherhood, ‘Failed Migration’ and the Gendered Risks of Precarious Labour.” *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia*, 3(1): 135–151.
- Constable, Nicole (2014). *Born Out of Place: Migrant Mothers and the Politics of International Labor*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Constable, Nicole (2012). “International Marriage Brokers, Cross-Border Marriages, and the US Anti-Trafficking Campaign”. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 38(7): 1137–54.