

# Arrival cities and the mobility of concepts

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## Abstract

The status of any arrival city is far from stable, being continuously reworked by state policy, geopolitics, economic fluctuations or localised events that rupture or destabilise what came before. The diversifications and differential inclusions that are examined in this special issue attest to the complexities of arrival cities, where the very nature of ‘arrival’ is open to interpretation and subject to diverse temporal experiences and migration regimes. By approaching the concept of ‘arrival city’ as a heuristic and moving between the literal and figurative realms of mobility, I draw out some of the core contributions of *Migrant-led Diversification and Differential Inclusion in Arrival Cities Across Asia-Pacific*. This includes: the notion of arrival; temporal geographies and the experience of transience and non-linearity; and the geographies of intimacy and encounter.

## Keywords

differential inclusion, encounter, intimacy, migration, temporality

## 摘要

任何到达城市的情况都很不稳定，不断受到会打破或破坏之前稳定局面的国家政策、地缘政治、经济波动或地方性事件的影响。本文所研究的多样性和差异包容，可证明到达城市的复杂性，在这里，“到达”的本质是可以有多种解释的，并受到不同的时间经验和移民制度的影响。通过将“到达城市”的概念作为一种启发式的概念，并在流动性的字面意思和比喻意思之间穿梭，我得出了“亚太地区到达城市移民主导的多元化和差异包容”方面的一些核心结论。这些核心结论包括到达的概念、时间地理、短暂和非线性的体验，以及亲密和遭遇的地理环境。

## 关键词

差异包容、冲突、亲密、迁移、暂时性

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## Introduction: The turn to arrival

The status of any arrival city is far from stable, being continuously reworked by state policy, geopolitics, economic fluctuations or

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localised events that rupture or destabilise what came before. My own engagement with arrival cities was through the western city of Birmingham, UK, where I grew up. Birmingham has a long history of migration. It has been described as characteristic of the 'new urban condition' in which difference and plurality prevail (Sandercock, 2003), but where drives to tolerance and pluralisation also repeatedly encounter their 'dialectical opposites'. One of the city's so-called 'transitional zones' was the site for one of the earliest studies on the experiences of post-war labour migrants, the relationship between structural racism and housing inequality, and the consequences of public housing discrimination for social and spatial segregation (Phillips, 2015; Rex and Moore, 1967). While the city is still marked by residential segregation and ethnic inequality, greater generational diversity and a super-diversity of new migrant flows have substantially altered the experiences and complexity of migration and settlement in the city, producing new forms of community-building, flourishing ethnic minority economies and complex urban geographies of local identity, differential inclusion and encounter (Dudrah, 2007; Henry et al., 2002; Karner and Parker, 2011; Moran, 2010; Nasser, 2005).

My research into the politics of encounter in a city defined by migration (Wilson, 2011, 2013, 2015) occurred before the popularisation of Saunders' 'arrival city'. In Saunders' (2011) terms, the 'arrival city' is a product of migration and a term that unites all those places that 'propel' new arrivals into urban life. More specifically, arrival cities function as important 'entry mechanisms' that provide a path to social mobility for those migrating to the city from rural areas as part of what Saunders calls 'the largest migration in human history' (p. 20). As an umbrella term, 'arrival city' draws together diverse places: the migrant neighbourhoods, districts and suburbs of western cities like

Birmingham, but also the favelas of South America, *kampungs* of Jakarta and the informal settlements of cities like Mumbai. Despite the diversity that it endeavours to cover, 'arrival city' is intended to capture something held in common – places that are often on the margins yet serve a set of crucial transitory functions for new arrivals.

Cities like Birmingham have featured heavily in work on urban diversity and migration. In the 2000s, much of the research on multicultural in the UK critically responded to a policy context concerned with 'community cohesion', which followed disturbances in 2001 between white and Asian youths in Northern mill towns that were blamed on self-segregation, while the role of material deprivation and socio-economic inequalities was overlooked (Amin, 2002). Despite emerging from a very particular socio-cultural context, this research contributed to a growing literature around everyday multiculturalism that had diverse roots. Drawing on a range of previous studies that had concerned the negotiation of cultural difference and the ordinary people involved in 'boundary work' on a day-to-day basis (Ang, 2001; Hage, 1998; Watson, 2006), early work on 'everyday multiculturalism' drew inspiration from diverse places: the suburbs of Sydney, migrant enclaves in Singapore, the food cultures and markets of London, community organising in Auckland, coffee shops in Malaysia and the shopping streets of Montréal, to name just a few (see Wise and Velayutham, 2009). These studies were developed with an eye for the context specific 'textures' of (urban) space, the national and international events that shaped ordinary encounter, and the policy contexts and socio-economic histories that came to bear on urban diversity (Wise and Velayutham, 2009).

Studies and concepts of urban diversity criss-crossed and coalesced around shared

concerns, while drawing inspiration from theories as diverse as Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis and Bhabha's (1994) third space. But, as Ye (2019) and Yeoh and Lam (2022) note, work on migrant-led diversification has nevertheless tended to focus on western examples, where a focus on migration, settlement and questions of social integration hinder consideration of contexts that are shaped by temporary migration regimes (although there remains a considerable gap between newly arriving, highly skilled elites and low-skilled migrants and asylum seekers who continue to experience the sharp-end of differential inclusion (see e.g. Darling, 2022).

In addition to foregrounding the experience of Asian-Pacific arrival cities and the spatial formations that have been obviated by the privileging of western contexts, this special issue poses a challenge to a range of other concepts and approaches, including the neglect of island geographies in urban studies – especially archipelagic territories in the Global South (Ortega, 2022); the North American formulation of the 'ethno-burb' (Robertson et al., 2022); the tendency for migration work to focus on large urban centres to the detriment of smaller ones (Collins and Friesen, 2022) and the predominance of the residential within studies of enclave urbanisms (Koh, 2022) to name just a few. At the same time, while never explicitly discussed, the issue forces a reflection on the varied meanings and uses of 'arrival', demonstrating the political potentials of mobile concepts that take on different meanings in very different contexts. Across the remainder of the commentary, I draw out some of the core contributions of *Migrant-led Diversification and Differential Inclusion in Arrival Cities Across Asia-Pacific*. This includes: the notion of arrival; temporal geographies and the experience of transience and non-linearity; and the geographies of intimacy and encounter.

## Arrival

The notion of arrival can summon many things and move between the literal, spatial sense of mobility and the figurative realm of aspirations. Figuratively, arrival can signal the emergence of something new or, more straightforwardly, it can be used to describe a person who has arrived at a place, or an instance in which something is brought or conveyed to a place, historically by boat or ship. When taken to be the point at which one reaches a journey's destination or a specified place, arrival appears as a terminus, much like it does when used to describe the point at which one reaches or achieves a goal. However, arrivals can also mark a starting point – only the beginning of another journey.

In many ways *Migrant-led Diversification and Differential Inclusion in Arrival Cities Across Asia-Pacific* deploys 'arrival cities' as a heuristic, working across and between very different cities, forms of migration and (non)settlement. This includes a city-state with sustained migration-led demographic growth, transient labour migration and institutionalised differential inclusion (Bork-Hüffer, 2022; Goh and Lee, 2022; Yeoh and Lam, 2022; Ye et al., 2022); a post-earthquake city undergoing unexpected forms of migrant-driven diversification (Collins and Friesen, 2022) and cities shaped by the specificities of education-based migration, deterritorialisations and cross-border mobilities (Koh, 2022; Leung and Waters, 2022). It also covers the affective hospitality of forced migrants who may or may not be offered permanent settlement to remain (Sidhu and Rossi-Sackey, 2022); the complex reconfiguration of suburban spaces by new settlements and generational diversity (Robertson et al., 2022); the elite transnational migrants that are shaping the socio-spatialities of a city haunted by the myth

of homogeneity (Yamamura, 2022) and the urban transformations of island archipelagos that are facilitated by the interracial relationships of foreign investors (Ortega, 2022).

As many of the papers show, the very status of any arrival city is continuously under revision. This includes historic turns in migration policies that respond to labour shortages or weakened economies such as those seen in Japan (Yamamura, 2022); close relations between national elites who pave the way for deterritorialised higher education spaces as seen in Malaysia (Koh, 2022), or national policies for attracting foreign investment through tourism and retirement visas as in the Philippines (Ortega, 2022). Economic downturns and uplifts, whether global or industry-specific, changes to labour policies, state imaginaries and public cultures of negotiating difference – whether fragile or progressive – all play a role in the lived and fluctuating experiences of the arrival city, as do global events such as the recent pandemic. COVID-19 closed borders and changed the standing of arrival cities and international mobility, leading to the break-down of ‘friction-reducing infrastructures’ that had previously facilitated cross-border education (Leung and Waters, 2022); the rise of racism and stigmatisation; and new forms of migration management. Yet, there were also unexpected political potentials. In Singapore, Goh and Lee (2022) describe the mobilisation of grass-roots politics that developed around the high-profile transmission rates in worker dormitories where migrant workers were segregated, while in New Zealand it resulted in new residence pathways for migrant workers who had previously had no route to settlement (Collins and Friesen, 2022).

Much like the social unrest in England that prompted a raft of policies on community cohesion and a flurry of work on everyday multicultural, localised ‘rupture’ events

with very different consequences are important to the accounts of differential exclusion examined in the collection. For example, in 2013, social unrest following the death of a worker in Singapore’s Little India prompted new forms of migrant management, segregation and securitisation (Goh and Lee, 2022), while Collins and Friesen’s (2022) account of post-earthquake Christchurch demonstrates how the historical legacies of cities can be disrupted by disasters that ‘literally destroy urban life’ (p. 4) as it is known. As they demonstrate, such events warrant attention to the historically situated conditions of rupture and the unanticipated mobilities and opportunities that pave the grounds for rapid migrant-led urban growth of the kind that would have been unimaginable before.

### **Temporal geographies and the experience of transience**

The opportunity for residency is available for some of the migrants considered in this issue (an opportunity that, in some cases, has arisen unexpectedly), but a considerable number address the differential inclusions experienced by migrants on short-term labour contracts or assignments, who have restricted rights and temporally constrained or non-existent pathways to inclusion. It is for this reason that temporality features heavily as a theme throughout the collection of papers and should be taken as a core contribution to research on migrant-led diversification and differential inclusion in arrival cities.

The notion of transience – of passing through – is a consistent feature of the issue and captures a state of impermanence at the same time as it alludes to mobility, whether it be in relation to the ‘ephemeral hold’ that non-residential migrants have on public spaces in Singapore, where they are bound to low-waged, temporary contracts and regimes (Goh and Lee, 2022; Yeoh and

Lam, 2022); the temporal constraints on residence experienced by low-waged labourers in Christchurch, where they are frequently reminded of their temporariness (Collins and Friesen, 2022); the asylum seekers that are refused leave to remain (Sidhu and Rossi-Sackey, 2022); or even the highly mobile, transnational migrants who undertake short-term overseas assignments, or find themselves unexpectedly redundant following an economic downturn (Yamamura, 2022).

Transience is significant because it disrupts the narrative or assumption of 'transition' that appears at the centre of some formulations of the arrival city. As Saunders argues, a city's function as a place of arrival should see it understood first and foremost as a place of transition, where 'everything changes' (Saunders, 2010: 1). While transience is certainly a characteristic of dynamic places, transition implies a progressive, linear journey or a passage (Amin, 2013; Ramakrishnan, 2014). In Saunders' case, his is an account that is predominantly concerned with the movement of rural migrants into the (urban) middle classes (albeit deferred by a generation), making the arrival city a celebratory story of resourcefulness, entrepreneurialism and the formation of urban subjectivities. While this notion of arrival has been critiqued for its circular logic in placing emphasis on the ability of capitalism to become the answer to the very problems that it created (Peake, 2016), it also offers a very limited account of arrival. Indeed, as Saunders (2010) suggests, any so-called arrival-city that fails to provide the conditions for transition might be considered a place of *failed arrival*.

The distinction between failure and success that is central to Saunders' notion of arrival, maps onto the kinds of binaries that work on differential inclusions seeks to unsettle (Ye, 2017). The differential inclusions that are central to this special issue attest to the complexities of arrival cities,

where it is possible for 'failure' and 'success' to coexist and where the very nature of 'success' and 'arrival' is open to interpretation and different forms of power.

In disrupting the temporal logics of arrival, the collection demonstrates how transience – or the threat of transience – becomes significant to understanding the lived experience of differential inclusions and the 'different temporal experiences of people and places' (Collins and Friesen, 2022: 4). This can be seen in the intolerable, emotionally exhausting situations in which asylum seekers find themselves, where aspirations for the future are shrouded in doubt and shaped by precarity and the continual threat of deportation (Sidhu and Rossi-Sackey, 2022), or in the mechanisms through which migrant workers continue to attach to urban futures despite their marginalisation and attempts by the state to proactively manage their aspirations (Collins and Friesen, 2022). Of course, the feeling of transience can also be found in seemingly banal decisions such as those made about what social media platforms to invest time in (Bork-Hüffer, 2022), where transience is less of a threat and more of a condition of transnational mobility.

In considering how transience becomes significant to critical interrogations of differential inclusion, contributions across the collection are careful to draw out contradictions. For instance, while migrant workers might have a temporary hold on the urban spaces in which they reside (Yeoh and Lam, 2022), their impact on urban life and development is long-lasting, while the gathering grounds and enclaves that they reside in attest to a 'temporary–permanent conundrum' for migrant workers as a whole (Yeoh and Lam, 2022). In the case of Collins and Friesen's (2022) account of urban future-making in Christchurch, while migrant workers are unevenly included in temporal horizons, with detrimental impacts on their aspirations, they are nonetheless fundamental to urban future-

making and the realisation of alternative visions for the city. Therefore, as Goh and Lee (2022) argue, it becomes important to ask how migrants disrupt and shape the constitution of urban life even in contexts of non-acceptance and temporariness.

If transience unsettles the notion of transition and better foregrounds temporary migration, then non-linear accounts of migrant-led diversification and differential inclusions offer a further complication to the progressive logic of arrival. For some, this appears as a form of limbo or enforced 'stuckness', such as that experienced by students following the disruption of cross-border education as a result of COVID-19 (Leung and Waters, 2022) or those awaiting leave to remain (Sidhu and Rossi-Sackey, 2022). Beyond the non-linearities of *subjective feelings* of arrival and inclusion (Bork-Hüffer, 2022), Robertson et al. (2022) challenge some of the linear accounts of physical passage through arrival places. By attending to the diversity of Sydney's 'Sinoburbs' and their spatial and cultural hybridity, they demonstrate how suburbs commonly considered ports of entry are places that are not only profoundly shaped by new arrivals, but second and third generations and diverse diasporic branches that have produced complex layers of 'evolving diversification'. While some Sinoburbs are characterised by greater transience (such as those defined by short term rentals) the notion that places of arrival are necessarily 'zones of transition' through which people move is drawn into question.

## Intimacy and encounter

A number of contributions to the collection foreground the intimacies of desire, marriage, family and friendship along with the intimate spheres of the household. Whether the ambivalent role of digital friendships in supporting connections across difference

(Bork-Hüffer, 2022); the management of borders through the regulation of marriage, family formation or spousal residency (Leung and Waters, 2022; Yeoh and Lam, 2022); the interracial relationships at the forefront of urban transformations (Ortega, 2022); or the familial desires that drive aspiration (Collins and Friesen, 2022), they demonstrate how varied intimacies (and their restrictions) become important for the manifestation of differential inclusions. Alongside the state policies and economic conditions that shape these intimacies are an extraordinary array of actors that play a pivotal role in their formation. This includes: the dating agencies and holiday resorts that facilitate encounters between Filipinas and would-be foreign investors (Ortega, 2022); the nannies that escort border-crossing children and support their socialisation and the flows of information (Leung and Waters, 2022); the personalised, domestic support offered by real estate agents to transnational migrants and the spouses of co-workers who provide them with advice and connections (Yamamura, 2022); and the employers who shape worker mobilities and socialities through the adoption of disciplinary tactics (Goh and Lee, 2022; Yeoh and Lam, 2022).

While mostly focusing on the 'intimate sphere' of sexual, reproductive or household relations, the global conditions of their production are never far from view, while the global, historical intimacies that laid the groundwork for differential inclusions are palpable. What is important here is that intimacy and intimate encounters are not only a site of cultural production and affective belonging and/or citizenship (Berlant, 1997; Faier, 2009; Lowe, 2015) but produce distinctly *urban* geographies of accumulation, change and diversification. As Ortega's account of transnational island urbanism makes clear, far from being confined to the sphere of the so-called 'domestic', intimate encounters underpin urban transformation.

In centring Filipina women who are in interracial relationships with foreign men that invest in island properties and tourist resorts in the Philippines, Ortega demonstrates how women have been instrumental to the development of major sites of urban accumulation and related forms of demographic diversification. Where tourist resorts have transformed islands and livelihoods through the economic growth associated with tourism – including the arrival of tourists, migrant workers and further foreign investors – the explication of how interracial relationships ‘interface’ with island urbanisations becomes a critical task, which draws out the entanglements of desire, care, domestic abuse, patriarchy and stereotypes.

Throughout the collection, the focus on intimacy dovetails with a concern for the geographies, potentials and estrangements of encounter. As a concept, encounter deals with and in contradictions. It draws attention to the stubbornness of categories and the potential to become otherwise, while foregrounding the simultaneity of proximity and distance, inclusion and exclusion (Ahmed, 2013; Carter, 2013; Fincher et al., 2019; Wilson, 2017). Encounter is frequently defined by opposition and conflict, whilst concurrently placed in the realm of the fleeting and the unexpected as a key constituent of urban life and experience. As a concept, then, encounter lends itself to an examination of differential inclusions, given its tendency to open up analysis to the ambivalences and contradictions of urban belonging and experience (Darling and Wilson, 2016; Fincher et al., 2019).

In Christchurch, encounters with migrants generated ideas about how the city could be different (Collins and Friesen, 2022). Yet, as Sidhu and Rossi-Sackey (2022) demonstrate so well, while encounters can undermine the hegemony of the state by providing a form of community, they can also reveal the ‘hollowness’ of performed

cosmopolitanisms. As Ye et al.’s (2022) analysis of metrolingual multitasking as praxis details, encounters can both disrupt and support the sense of ordinary conviviality that arises from the daily use of language scripts in Singapore’s shared spaces of friction and fluidity. It is unsurprising, then, that across *Migrant-led Diversification and Differential Inclusion in Arrival Cities Across Asia-Pacific*, there are diverse examples of state policies, segregation and bubbles that enable or prohibit encounters as an important part of the story of differential inclusions.

As Yeoh and Lam (2022) underline, segregated spaces or spatial and temporal curtailments reduce the psychological discomforts of proximity and the possibility for embodied interaction (of course, whose discomfort is prioritised is a core question). Yet, like Leung and Waters (2022), Goh and Lee (2022) deploy the concept of the contact zone to demonstrate how state-provisioned recreation centres, designed to function as a means of segregation following the Little India riots in 2013, have become *accidental* sites of encounter between migrants, locals and state-linked agencies. In focusing on the students who live in mainland China and cross the border to reach Hong Kong, Leung and Waters (2022) similarly note how spaces of propinquity such as school gates and mobile spaces not only destabilise binaries but become *accidental* sites of encounter that are shaped by ambivalence – both negotiation and discrimination. As such, across these papers is an argument for attending to ordinary spaces of encounter alongside the regulatory powers, migration regimes and differential inclusions that are crafted in elite spaces (Collins and Friesen, 2022; Sidhu and Rossi-Sackey, 2022).

While some migrants are segregated and contained, others choose to limit their encounters to ‘bubbles’, such as the so-called ‘expat bubbles’ of Tokyo (Yamamura, 2022). Here, social mingling between transnational

professionals is common but encounters with local residents are limited. (This is contrasted with those migrants – Pro-Tokyoites who demonstrate a desire for bicultural curriculums, an openness to the development of competencies, and very different forms of social interaction.) Elsewhere, while research has demonstrated that educational spaces, such as those of the university campus, can provide important spaces for encounter across difference, as Koh (2022) demonstrates in the context of deterritorialised spaces of education in Malaysia, they can also foster social bubbles and function as spaces of segmentation that impact micro-socialities. Different infrastructures of arrival, imported foods, the prevalence of Mandarin and the relegation of Muslim needs on campus create bubbles and effectively suspend state-led multi-ethnic coexistence.

Finally, the role of the digital and digitally mediated encounters is evident in several contributions, which complicate notions of proximity, distance and intimacy and challenge the privileging of co-presence and face-to-face encounter in work on urban diversity and differential inclusions (see e.g. Koch and Miles, 2021; Nash and Gorman-Murray, 2019). At the same time, while COVID-19 brought the political potentials of the digital into sharp relief (Lobo et al., 2021), Leung and Waters' (2022) account of cross-border education offers a stark reminder of some of the limitations, demonstrating how students were excluded from digital spaces of encounter, school chatrooms, lessons and content because platforms that were available in Hong Kong were not available in Mainland China. Indeed, even in instances where social media was shown to enhance contact across difference and facilitate connections for migrant workers (Bork-Hüffer, 2022), its use in the maintenance of digital diasporas, familial relations and

ambient co-presence also saw it strongly associated with homophily, thus granting it a somewhat ambivalent role.

## Conclusion

It is impossible to do justice to the diversity of cases examined in *Migrant-led Diversification and Differential Inclusion in Arrival Cities Across Asia-Pacific* and I have only touched upon a few of the conceptual and empirical threads that run through it. In dealing with arrival as a heuristic, the papers not only deal with the ambivalences and contradictions of differential inclusions but unsettle what it means to arrive. In so doing, they complexify and push beyond common understandings of 'arrival' and lay the foundations for drawing out the ongoing tensions and opportunities that exist around shared, yet often diverse vocabularies that land differently and enable different forms of political work in markedly diverse contexts.

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