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GLOBALIZING KUALA LUMPUR: INDONESIAN MIGRANT WORKERS, URBAN BORDERSCAPES AND THE PRODUCTION OF METROPOLITAN SPACES

Loïs Bastide

Introduction

In the early 1990s, the then prime minister Mahatir Mohamad sketched out the outlines of Malaysia's long-term development, stating that the country was to have a fully developed economy by 2020 (Sarji 1993). The development of the Kuala Lumpur greater metropolitan area was seen as critical to this objective, as it was to provide the country with a global gateway in order to enhance its position within an increasingly integrated global economy. Urban restructuring has thus been developed as a specific "worlding practice" (Ong 2011)¹ based on the fostering of strategic economic sectors, the upgrading of infrastructures and the construction of dramatic and recognizable urbanscapes as a means of enhancing global visibility (King 2008, 130; Bunnell, Barter and Morshidi 2002, 357; Fujita 2010).

However, economic restructuring and changing capital flows have also given rise to shifts in human mobilities across the region. Kuala Lumpur was one - of moderate significance - among a string of fast globalizing cities across East and Southeast Asia (e.g. Gipouloux 2011). As economic growth and capital inputs polarized around these rising metropolitan areas, new 'survival circuits' (Sassen 2004) emerged; since the 1990s, increasing numbers of migrants from lower-income countries and/or regions have been channeled toward the lower strata of labor markets in metropolitan areas such as greater Kuala Lumpur, as well as Singapore, Hong Kong Seoul or Taipei. As S. Sassen has extensively discussed elsewhere, these floating populations are as much part of the "global city fabric" as, say, finance and corporate elites (e.g. among others: Sassen 2001; Sassen 2002).

Kuala Lumpur's development has relied heavily on this foreign workforce, drawing migrant workers from all over greater Asia. However, this specific form of globalization has caused growing social and political anxiety in Malaysia. Migrant workers' participation in the making of a globalizing urbanscape has been largely

¹ "Worlding practices" are contextual practices which, in response to sited problems, develop in order to achieve visibility in a global cityscape. This approach provides for an ethnographic approach to the contexts of global city making. Global cities then appear less as multiple territorializations of a global model than as the emergence of plural, always contextualized, heterogeneous ways of "being global".

concealed and migrant workers have been relegated to invisibility within the urban order. Nevertheless, their labor is not all they contribute, since their daily practices—silently, clandestinely even, reshape urban spaces as they live and move across the city. However, their participation in the production of urban space on this specific level has been little discussed. Drawing on six months of ethnographic fieldwork among Indonesian workers – the largest migrant community –, this chapter aims to fill this gap by mapping in these discreet contributions to the making of shiny, globalizing Kuala Lumpur. As Malaysia's capital city attracts and is partially shaped by transnational capital, it is also being appropriated by its most destitute groups and diverted from its hegemonic proclamation as a capital and world city.

The chapter will be divided into four sections. In the first, we will show how migrant workers' contentious social and political location within Malaysian society entails their eviction from urban public spaces across Kuala Lumpur metropolitan area, as they are assigned to the workplace. Drawing on H. Lefebvre's work we will then move on to outline a theoretical framework that will enable us to map migrant workers' specific contribution to the production of urban space. A third section will then address more specifically the forms of everyday resistance migrant workers use to oppose their spatial immobilization. The subversive contents of their daily engagement with urban space, we will then contend, produce specific forms of urban appropriations which resituate the city within different sets of transnational practices, thereby displacing the dominant urban orders.

Foreign labor in Malaysia

Since the 1980s, Malaysia has mobilized transnational labor on an increasing scale and through increasingly formalized channels (Kaur 2007). Foreign workers were to push the country's endeavor to carve a position within globalizing economic geographies, and to support a lasting commitment by Malaysian political elites to arrange the body-politics along ethnic lines through affirmative action policies aimed at ensuring the social and economic upward mobility of the Malay majority, against the backdrop of Chinese economic prominence after independence (Jomo 1990; Drabble 2000, 197). The relation between the will to capture value in transnational economic circuits and domestic "ethnopolitics" (Rothschild 1981) has triggered lasting economic tensions in the country. From 1971, the New Economic Policy (NEP) (Jomo 1990) and its affirmative action policies drove Malays toward urban centers (Kassim 1985, 267; Pillai 1999, 179; Asis 2004, 206) and out of the lower strata of labor markets, whereas Malaysian women were entering the workforce in increasing numbers (Kaur 2004, 17; Chin 2005, 265) and, as Malaysia entered a strong economic

growth cycle² only marginally affected by occasional slowdowns (Drabble 2000, 186–187). Economic development has caused a growing discrepancy between natural demographic growth and a booming demand for labor (Kaur 2008, 7; Drabble 2000, 246–250). Since the 1980s, the influx of migrant labor has been used by the state to ease these tensions. Guest workers have been used to supply those segments of labor markets abandoned by Malaysians; they have been mobilized as a market-oriented solution to a new demand for labor in the domestic sphere, as Malaysian women entered the labor market; last, this transnational labor force has enabled Malaysia to retain its niche position within the "archipelago economy" (Veltz 1996) and offshore production by providing cheap labor for export-oriented corporations. Over the past 30 years, as this development model has become established, Malaysia's dependency upon transnational labor has grown steadily; in 2011, estimates put the total number of foreign workers in the country at anywhere between 2 and 4 million, or between 18 to 30 % of the total employed labor force of 12 million³.

Thus migrant labor has gradually become a centerpiece of state governmentality, as it provides a means of easing the social, political and economic tensions associated with the disjunctive and often conflicting needs of domestic ethnopolitics, on the one hand, and those related to the ongoing endeavor to secure a position within transnational economic circuits, on the other hand. Migrant workers have somehow absorbed most of what economists would describe as the "negative externalities" of Malaysia's development strategy, as they constitute the segment of the population most immediately exposed to neoliberal discipline through the working of transnational capital and, as non-citizens, to the harshest effects of the biopolitical ordering of the national body. In this specific position, guest workers are subjected to cross-cutting sets of contingent practices, more or less self-consciously designed, which intersect and result in their confinement within segregated physical, social and political spaces.

Politico-legal practices shape migrant workers as specific legal subjects. Most critically in this regard, their legal status is tied to the work pass. This leads to a situation of permanent threat as the pass can be withdrawn at any time, effectively depriving them of any rights and opening the way for deportation. The situation is even worse for transnational domestic workers who are not covered by labor laws. As their work conditions are left to private – and profoundly unequal – negotiations with their employer, employment relations frequently turn abusive, often to the point of confinement within the domestic space. More broadly, the accumulation of

² From Malaysia's independence in 1957 to the Asian economic crisis in 1997-1998, economic growth averaged 9% per year (Kassim 1997).

³ Yet, in certain economic sectors, the dependency rate is much higher. In 2005, foreign workers seem to have accounted for 95% of the workforce on the oil palm estates seems to have been composed up to 95% of foreign workers (Wawa 2005, 179).

discrete, more or less consistent legal measures targeted at migrant workers is indicative of a continuous political concern to reduce the spaces of interaction with Malaysian citizens. The fact that guest workers are forbidden to marry a Malaysian citizen is telling in this respect. Even more revealing, however, is a 2007 plan by the Home Ministry to review immigration laws in order to confine migrant workers to the workplace, thus effectively evicting them from public spaces (Asia Times Online, March 3, 2007).

This manufactured vulnerability is reinforced by politico-administrative practices. Among others, mention should be made of the systematic confiscation of workers' passports by employers, which has been widely tolerated and, in some cases, backed by the government⁴. At another level, police, together with DBKL officers⁵, immigration forces and RELA⁶, a state-sponsored civilian militia, find it easy to enhance their incomes by harassing these destitute populations, both through frequent crackdowns in public spaces and at administration desks.

Eventually, political and social practices converge in a mutually reinforcing manner within a highly ethnicized social and political context, as debasing social stereotypes are ascribed to foreign workers, within what could be termed a national ethnoscape (Appadurai 1996), through the strengthening of ethno-nationalist feelings in political arenas or in the media, and in everyday interactions. These overlapping practices converge to shape particular "figures of the human" (Ong 2008, 117), with reduced access to basic rights, targeted by specific and coercive administrative practices, socially and politically misrecognized and assigned to specific social and physical spaces where migrant workers' political and economic value is maximized and their perceived liability regarding national ethnopolitics is contained (for an in-depth discussion of this topic, see: Bastide 2011, 200–219). Thus foreign workers are socially and politically assigned to the workplace and confined to private spaces, be they domestic or corporate. In this context exiting the workplace is - and is perceived - as a hazardous venture, since it exposes foreign workers to possible physical and moral threats, whether in ordinary interactions with Malaysians or in confrontations with security forces.

⁴ Under the 2006 MoU signed between Indonesia and Malaysia, employers were formally authorized to retain their employee's documents, including passport, in contravention of international law.

⁵ For *Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur*, Kuala Lumpur City Hall.

⁶ RELA - *Relawan Ikatan Rakyat Malaysia* - for Malaysian People's Volunteers Corps - is a state-backed civilian militia which may have as many as 500 000 volunteers, which is more than the police and armed forces taken together. It was founded in the 1960s in a period of inter-communal troubles in order to undertake community surveillance and policing missions (Chin 2008, 294). With the rise of migration as a social and political issue, its missions have been rechanneled in 2005 toward the repression of irregular migrants. This move has caused rising concerns about RELA's numerous abuses of power, including sexual violence, murders, systematic extortions, and so on. In 2008, RELA has been put in charge of immigrant detention centers.

In Kuala Lumpur, popular gathering points for migrant workers, such as Kota Raya, the triangular piece of city space which runs between Pudu Raya inter-city bus station north-east to Petaling Street and then Central Market, a kilometer south-west, and north-west to Masjid Jamek urban Light Rail Transit station, is recurrently raided by RELA, immigration, police and municipal forces in search of irregular migrant workers. The same routine is observed in Chow Kit area, a known Indonesian hot spot up Tuanku Abdul Rahman Road, 1.5 kilometers north. Frequent raids also occur in areas where migrant workers are known to live and work, such as along jalan Nagasari (Nagasari street) and jalan Tingkat Tong Shin, in the Golden Triangle area - the city's modern center - and elsewhere.

Arbitrary arrests and extortion are commonplace, regardless of workers' legal situation. Since release from custody is often dependent on the goodwill of the employer, both regular workers and irregular migrants risk deportation when arrested. This weak protection together with widespread extortion practices by security forces and administrations produce a situation of continuous insecurity which greatly curtails migrant workers' mobility within the city, as their situation is overshadowed by a permanent threat of being deported (De Genova 2002), thus risking a winding and chaotic journey - especially for women - through "spaces of exception", such as immigration detention centers, where the rule of law is suspended and widespread interpersonal and institutional violence unleashed⁷. This weak position induces a permanent, stressful state of vigilance on the part of migrant workers, which contributes to their retreating toward the relative safety of the workplace.

Migrant workers and the production of urban space

Thus these cross-cutting constraints greatly curtail migrant workers' mobility across the city. Their specific experiences reveal the hierarchized and contentious nature of urban public spaces⁸ (Massey 2005), which are not equally open to all groups; the definition of public urban spaces within the Goffmanian tradition, as places related to a specific style of actions/interactions characterized by full visibility, full accessibility, impersonality and indeterminacy of interpersonal relations (Chanial 1992; Quéré 1992), is thus undermined. Instead, public spaces emerge as highly

⁷ Here I find G. Agamben's (Agamben 1998) description of the state of exception useful. Yet, it has to be reworked sociologically in order not to refer to a sovereign and unified conception of power expressed in the promulgation of the ban. These are spaces of exception as they shelter specific forms of life, disposable life, *bare life*.

⁸ I use the term in its most neutral axiological sense. I refer, following the Chicago school tradition of urban studies, to public urban spaces as spaces "related to the topological reality of places of actions and interactions specified by their public nature: full visibility and accessibility to others, impersonality and indetermination of interpersonal relations" (Chanial 1992, my translation).

fragmented. The impersonal rule of anonymity is breached by social ascriptions related to nationality, gender, ethnicity and class, which over-determine actions and interactions; full visibility works to the disadvantage of those most vulnerable, viewed as less legitimate groups within the urban scape. Thus a pragmatics of urban public spaces shows their emergence as the outcome of a complex process of spatial ordering and social stratification, which in turn is part of the process of production/reproduction of urban spaces. On the one hand, migrant workers' urban experiences and practices are deeply affected by these power relationships which work very much to their disadvantage. On the other hand, as actors – albeit weak ones – in this ongoing process, they also participate in the making of urban spaces. In order to capture this dynamic relationship, it is useful to turn to H. Lefèbvre and his conceptualization of the production of space (Lefèbvre 1991), which provides us with subtle analytical tools that can be deployed in this regard.

For Lefèbvre, space develops in conjunction with social practices, in the sense that it is an intrinsic dimension of sociality. In other words, space is a social device. The production of space, he posits, can be analyzed by splitting it along three different levels. "Spatial practices", in his terms, refer to 'networks of interaction and communication as they arise in daily life (e.g, daily connection of residence and workplace) or in the production process (production and exchange relations)' (quoted in: Schmid 2008, 36). They involve both material space and the perception thereof. Through the notion of "conceived space" – or the representation of space – Lefebvre aims to decipher space as an object of knowledge, as it is shaped through the production of dominant discourses – political or scientific –, as in urban planning or architecture. Last, lived space, which he equates with "space of representation", is concerned with the semiotic and symbolic dimension of space as it is imbued with heterogeneous meanings stemming from individual and collective daily engagements with/experiences of space. However, the analysis does not focus on each of these dimensions in themselves; rather, it hinges on the *multifarious relationships* (i.e. the dialectic) between these three terms, as they continuously reconnect with each other, thus framing the *production of space*.

Now what does this conceptual toolbox bring in terms of heuristic outcomes regarding migrant workers' participation in the making of Kuala Lumpur metropolitan area? Let me start by locating foreign workers' specific experience within this tripartite framework.

In Kuala Lumpur and, more broadly, throughout the Klang valley's fast sprawling conurbation which links new and older satellite towns westward, toward Port Klang, and southward, toward Kuala Lumpur's new international airport, urban planning has been brought under the close supervision of the federal state (Bunnell, Barter and Morshidi 2002) as the economic heartland of the country and the center of state

power and federal institutions. Urban policies and urban planning have thus been pursued along different lines, addressing both economic concerns and the necessary materialization of national symbols and of state authority in the urban environment, in the context of nation building processes (King 2008). Thus the metropolitan area combines various concerns, including the desire to craft a Malay landscape that speaks to the *bangsa*, the Malay nation, and affirms a politically crafted Malay identity (King 2008, 99–102; Bunnell 2002), the creation of a capitalist Islamic cosmopolitanism and an urban space oriented toward global capital with the aim of achieving visibility in global economic and financial circuits (Bunnell, Barter and Morshidi 2002) and the integration of the conurbation within a network of globalized and globalizing cities (Sassen 2001). However these different concerns are only partially overlapping; furthermore, they hinge on conflicting lived spaces, divided along class, ethnic and gender lines, as the struggle to make the city into a Malay space and the ethnicized redistribution of economic benefits related to urban development raise contentious issues (King 2008, 56–127).

In consequence, urban space must be considered as the outcome of a continuous process of negotiation, fragmented among plural and multi-scalar arenas (Gottdiener and Hutchison 2010, 19–20) where multifarious and hierarchized practices and actors are brought together and interact. The production of metropolitan space has to be understood in terms of the situated intersections between these actors and practices, related to hierarchized social segments, which point toward different and often conflicting relationships to the urban environment and which continuously displace and obviate the urban fabric. Governmental concerns with managing population - in the context of nation building -, the spatial logics of transnational capital⁹, and everyday social practices thus produce urban space as a highly differentiated milieu. In the process, actors and spatial practices are distributed across hierarchized "regimes of visibility" (Lévy and Lussault 2003)¹⁰, which entail unequal access to public spaces. Migrant workers' segregation within the urban order needs therefore to be put into perspective by locating their specific position within these productive configurations.

Guest workers have played a critical role in the economic growth of Kuala Lumpur metropolitan region, as they occupied the lower strata of a whole range of economic sectors in menial service and manufacturing jobs, thus contributing significantly both to the viability of small businesses, by securing reasonable return rates, and to the localization of foreign direct investments (FDIs). As for urban development, it is

⁹ On the relationship between neoliberal patterns of capital accumulation and biopolitical concerns in scaling differentiated spaces, see A. Ong, 2011.

¹⁰ "Through their spatiality, of an infinite variety, social substances become visible, their existence crystalizes: to speak of space is to invoke social substances' regime of visibility" (my translation). (Lévy and Lussault 2003)

worth noting that none of the mega projects that have dramatically changed Kuala Lumpur's urbanscape and international image since the early 1990s could have been undertaken without a massive input of foreign labor. The construction of Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA), for example, is said to have mobilized no fewer than 10,000 foreign workers (Wawa 2005, 177); tellingly as well, the construction of the new Istana Negara – national palace – located on Jalan Duta and home to the ruling king of Malaysia¹¹ is known to have mobilized at least a thousand irregular foreign workers, employed through contractor and subcontractor chains (The Malaysian Insider online, June 29 2010).

Fig.1: Selangor state, Greater Kuala Lumpur Region and Kuala Lumpur Municipality



¹¹ Malaysia is usually defined as a constitutional elective monarchy. The king, however, is elected for a five-year term by the nine sultans of Malaysia and not by universal suffrage.

Yet, this poor labor force does not fit neatly into the urban landscape as envisioned in terms of the struggle to craft a 'world class city' (KLCH, 2008). The high dependency on this exogenous work force conflicts as well with the arrangement of urban space as a manifestation of state power, and as a symbolic device aimed at articulating a national imaginary. Within the Malaysian population, migrants' spatial practices, as they enter public spaces, arouse a feeling of dispossession. Lastly, their confinement in the workplace contributes to the socio-political production of specific forms of labor, highly valued in the circuits of transnational capital for their low cost and high flexibility. As such, it contributes to Malaysia's competitiveness in attracting FDI. These disjunctive dynamics converge on migrants' bodies and shape their distribution across urban spaces and their confinement within specific social spaces (Bastide 2011), where they are subjected to specific forms of governmentality and assigned to a specific regime of (in)visibility within the urban order. Yet, even if they are politically and socially produced as the most deprived urban subjects, they participate in the making of urban space, as they develop discrete spatial practices.

The city as borderscape: the negotiation of spatial frontiers

If migrant workers are socially, politically and economically assigned to the workplace, this does not mean they are absent from public spaces. Rather, what these converging processes of eviction do is to make space a particularly scarce resource in migrant workers' position, and thus a site of intense struggle, not only for social or economic mobility but often for sheer survival. These struggles take different forms but they converge as they hinge on a shared endeavor to access spatial capital. Seclusion in the privatized spaces of workplaces, as it severs all social ties, hinders the mobilization of one's social capital, thus impeding access to the cumulative material and immaterial resources in circulation within local and transnational social networks. Yet, this formulation may be misleading if it results in migrant workers being regarded as a homogenous group as they struggle to negotiate their access to urban space. Indeed, their urban experiences are highly fragmented, most significantly along gender lines but also according to nationality and ethnicity. And struggles around space also oppose different social segments among migrant workers themselves¹². In this context, their presence produces new and multiple spatial frontiers in an urban fabric already deeply ethnicized due to the legacy of colonial urban planning and to post-colonial ethnopolitics (King 2008), thus contributing to the reconfiguration of urban space.

¹² For instance, Indonesian men often try to exert a degree of control over fellow countrywomen – which they often fail to achieve. The issue of mixed relationship with male workers from other countries is a particularly sensitive one in this respect.

However, spatial frontiers should not give rise to notions of fixity and isolation. Recent research has shed new light on frontiers as an object of ethnographic investigation, making it possible to capture their *productive* dimension. From an ethnographic point of view, they emerge as specific spaces of interaction and transaction rather than as abrupt demarcation lines. Frontiers can thus be viewed in terms of overlapping political and social "bordering practices", rather than clear spatial dividing lines. They form specific milieus - "borderscapes" (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2007)¹³ -, where identities intersect with spaces and policing practices. Borders, in this respect, are not to be found only on national fringes. Rather, bordering practices are part of state governmentality as a specific socio-political device which participates in distributing populations across space. As such, "(a) border can move inward and become a policy of denial of rights to migrants and refugees. Or it can fold outward and translate into a policy of intercepting refugee ships and forcing them to return to worlds of insecurity" (Soguk 2007, 285). Migrant workers' eviction from urban public spaces can thus be viewed as a specific type of bordering practice concerned with the integrity of the body politic. As these practices unfold, they shape specific contexts where social struggles coalesce. Among Indonesian migrant workers, these struggles take the form of individual and collective tactics and strategies, devised and shared in order, on the one hand, to ease their assignation to the workplace and, on the other, to mitigate the risks incurred while navigating through urban public spaces.

The confinement of guest workers to the workplace and their access to urban space are unevenly distributed. Generally speaking, many workers take advantage of their days off to venture into the city. A majority of domestic workers¹⁴, however, do not get any days off at all. Some of them have sufficient social and psychological resources to take advantage of work routines to steal bits of time and develop tiny spatial practices, gradually forging clandestine social ties outside of the employment relationship. Opportunities open up within the cracks of employers' scrutiny, while taking children to school or while sent to do the shopping, for instance, or with fellow workers in the neighborhood, while looking after children in parks or playgrounds, while hanging out laundry and so on.

In all cases, as spatial practices widen and diversify, migrants develop situated urban know-how, including knowledge of market opportunities; some of them choose to break free from their contractual employers in order to become what is often referred to among Indonesian workers as "self-employed" (*kerja swasta*), thereby gaining

¹³ 'Borderscape' borrows from A. Appadurai's use of the suffix 'scape' in order to signify the perspectivist aspect of borders, which are interwoven in multiple practical and subjective configurations (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2007, XXIX).

¹⁴ There were about 300 000 registered Indonesian domestic workers in Malaysia in 2010 (HRW, May 31, 2011). This does not include irregular migrants.

residential autonomy at the cost of becoming illegal aliens. Others pay "paper employers" in order to safeguard their legal status while they seek jobs as independent worker. Experienced actors are often able to combine local and transnational resources in order to avoid these situations altogether, by organizing their migration – travel and administrative procedures –, seeking an appropriate employer on their own initiative by mobilizing social networks and negotiating their work conditions, thus keeping away from the migration industry (Castles and Miller 2009, 202), be it official or irregular (Bastide 2011)¹⁵.

In the case of Indonesian migrants, this negotiation needs to be considered in a set of very specific circumstances. A shared majority religion, a common language as well as shared social and cultural patterns with Malaysian Malays make it easier for them to weave social ties beyond fellow nationals, and faster to develop a sense of familiarity with the urban environment¹⁶. An important share of Malaysian Malays are indeed of Indonesian descent, as the stretches of sea which now split Peninsular Malaysia from Sumatra and Borneo used, as late as the 1980's, to integrate a space of social, cultural and economic circulation rather than to act as a frontier (Fau 2000). Until today, many families spread on both shores of the Melaka Strait, thus providing interpersonal social networks and multifarious resources which can be mobilized for migration purpose.

This proximity renders the bordering processes between Malay Malaysians and Indonesian citizens all the more fluctuant and uncertain. A case in point is the use of Indonesian workers as a resource in election politics; local governments dominated by the predominantly Malay Barisan Nasional ruling coalition (National Front – BN), have been suspected of broadening their Malay electoral base by granting Indonesians – and sometimes Filipino Muslims – Malaysian citizenship during election periods, effectively turning them into Malay Malaysians (e.g. Jones 2000, 102; Ramasamy 2004, 290; Hildson 2007, 211; and for a recent occurrence: Theo 2011). It is also common knowledge among Indonesian workers in Malaysia that as late as the early 2000s permanent resident status could be easily obtained by bribery with the help of middlemen. In 2008, during fieldwork in Kuala Lumpur, migrant workers could still buy "real but forged" documents – known as *aspal*, a portmanteau word for *asli tapi palsu*, real but fake, which are original documents released by immigration services, based on a forged situation.

¹⁵ Migrant workers' position in Malaysia is for a good part an outcome of transnational processes which unfold during their journey, as migration routes are formed of different segments, controlled by different stakeholders where they experience drastic forms of disciplinarization. They produce psychological disorientation and social isolation (Bastide 2011, 260–276)

¹⁶ Although this commonality is reduced to language for Indonesian workers originating from certain parts of the archipelago such as East Nusa Tenggara.

This play with ethno-cultural commonality beyond the national divide is also used to blend into the urban landscape. Some Indonesian migrants are remarkably fast at catching a Malay accent, and skillful at emulating a credible Malaysian bodily *hexis* in order to conceal the social stigma that affect migrant beings. It should come as no surprise that women seem to be both the most willing and most able to endorse this attitude, due to the gendered quality of urban spaces and to the specific threat they are subjected to in public spaces, as migrant workers *and* as women, in a context where female migrants are widely perceived as sexually available bodies in the host society. Several of my informants in Kuala Lumpur had thus developed specific skills in order to navigate urban spaces, playing with different outfits and bodily attitudes according to places and situations, switching for instance between a willful display of Indonesian bearing – easily spotted as such by Malaysians –, trendy urban style and approved Malay Islamic outfits. These different tactics are developed, shared, morally valued and used more or less skillfully in order to negotiate situated bordering processes and patterns of spatial segregation.

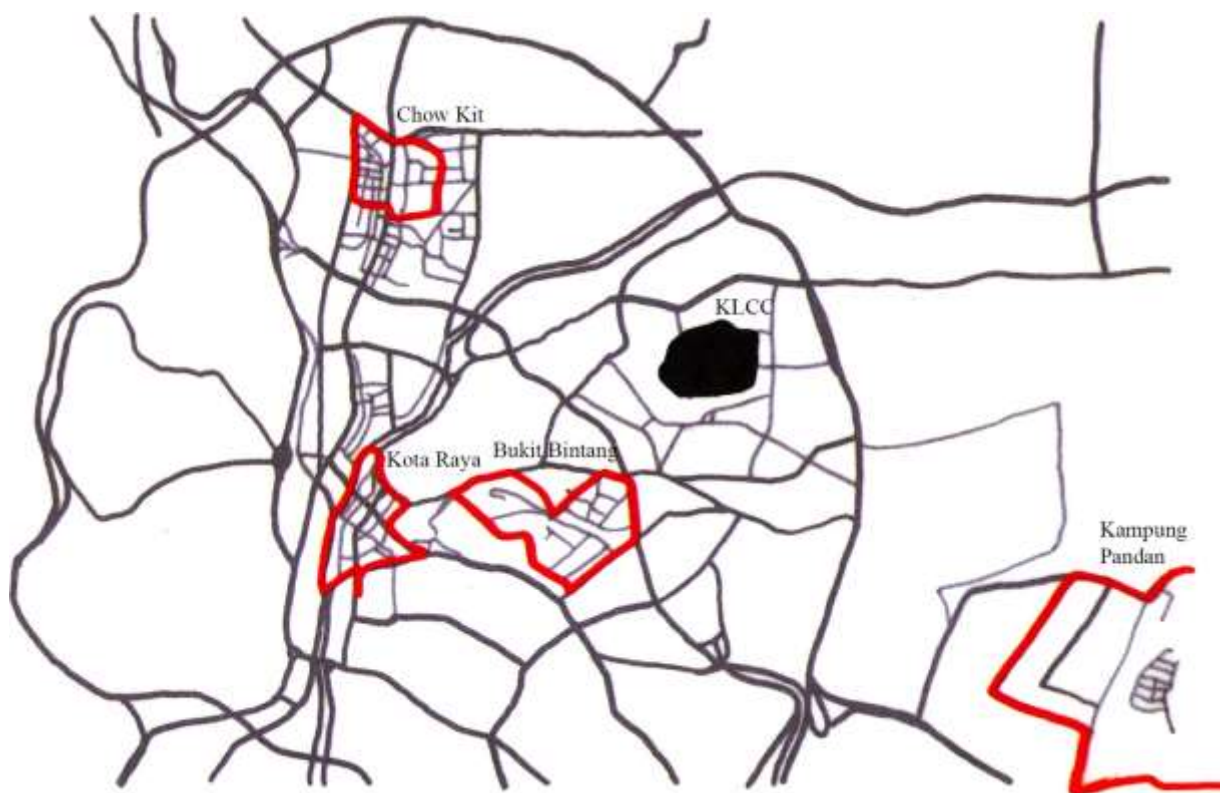
As they accumulate spatial capital and develop urban practices, migrant workers learn to attune to specific places, activities and social relationships according to their particular characteristics. They learn to "do with space" (Lussault and Stock 2009). This includes accurate knowledge of what to do, how, where and when. Indeed, as a social product, space is not inert. As a matter of fact, learning to circulate within the city involves more than taming space; it also requires a detailed understanding of the differentiated *space-times* which knit together the urban landscape. Known migrants' gathering points might, for example, be more often raided by security forces on Sundays, when migrant workers converge in numbers. Crackdowns on migrant workers also intensify during Ramadan, the Muslim fasting month, as Muslim security officers strive to offset the extra costs incurred by ritual and festive practices through extortion. Public urban spaces become less safe, and many workers restrict their movements to what is strictly necessary. Street-savvy migrants are, nevertheless, able to map their way accurately through these changing spatiotemporal configurations, showing a great deal of knowledge about urban rhythms, carving their way by decoding places according to specific circumstances, anticipating the fluctuating aspect – openness and closure – of the urban landscape across time.

These spatial practices subvert dominant spatial frontiers and bordering practices by providing the means to circulate across urban spaces and to move in between ethnopolitical identity grids. They are productive of new ways of doing with the city, which imprint the urban space in recognizable ways.

Migrant city

Migrant workers' spatial practices in this respect open up "spaces of urban creation" (Rouilleau-Berger 1991), where new socio-spatial forms are stitched together as new arrangements between migrant workers arise out of shared urban experiences and discrete moral economies aggregate as these experiences are collectively negotiated and attributed common values and meanings. If these spaces enmesh with dominant urban orders, through spatial practices, they do so in conflicting ways, as they are met with repression. And yet they undoubtedly leave their imprint on the urban landscape.

Fig. 2: Kuala Lumpur City Center and migrant workers' urban geography



First, residential patterns consolidate across the metropolitan area. Back in 1989, D. Amin counted 23 Indonesian settlements within Kuala Lumpur and in 1995 an official report listed 61 such establishments in the neighboring state of Selangor (both sources quoted in: Kassim 2000)¹⁷. In Selangor again, Kassim estimated that in 1997 32,400 Indonesian citizens were occupying 5,703 housing units. These settlements

¹⁷ I haven't been able to find newer accounts. Statistics on foreign workers and illegal migrants are scarce and unreliable as their number is a sensitive political issue.

were located mainly in squatter zones, in Malay settlements and in Malay Reservation Areas¹⁸.

As observed in 2008 and 2009, various forms of Indonesian dwelling are still distributed in and around the metropolitan area, from the most fragile and precarious to more stable and secure locations in the city. On the fringes of Kuala Lumpur, self-settled forest camps house irregular migrants who commute daily to the city to work or to seek jobs, while carefully keeping away from risky urban spaces. Within the city, migrant residential areas coalesce; neighborhoods can be produced through mobilization of a shared Indonesian citizenship, transnational ethnic resources and/or family ties. Thus ties between settled Indonesian migrants, frequently endorsed with permanent resident status, local Malays - through a shared experience within Malay enclaves, be it squatter settlements, Malay kampungs¹⁹ or Malay reservation areas - and newcomers have given rise to residential concentration in certain parts of the city.

Kampung Pandan, where fieldwork was conducted, is one of these residential areas, just about 1.5 kilometers east of Kuala Lumpur City Center (KLCC) and contiguous with the Royal Selangor Golf Club. It is well known for being home to many Javanese. Within Indonesian neighborhoods, social organization provides for collective protection. Safety is insured through communal alert systems put in place to protect those without proper documents; it often involves financial arrangements as well, with insiders within government departments providing information about imminent crackdowns. Large Indonesian settlements are to be found likewise in Bintang Selatan, Gombak and Segambut, north of the city center, east in Ampang and south in Kajang, among other places. These areas, as they coalesce into specific forms of locality, aggregate local and transnational, material and immaterial resources which migrant workers can tap into in order to arrange everyday life and to develop new urban practices.

Likewise, these daily practices leave their imprint on urban spaces, as migrant workers bend places to their own uses, in a context where they are not perceived as having a legitimate presence in the urban area.

I have mentioned already the area around Central Market, Pudu Raya bus station and Masjid Jamek LRT station and Petaling Street, which is a favorite venue for migrant workers on their days off, as they gather in Kota Raya Complex or Wisma Fui Chui, two shopping centers, in Maidin, a cheap supermarket, in the square in

¹⁸ Malay reservation areas are constituted of state pre-empted lands where only Malays can hold property rights. This legal clause, first implemented by the colonial administration in 1913, was incorporate into the 1957 federal constitution.

¹⁹ Malay villages.

front of Central Market and in the small streets which criss-cross the space between Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock and Jalan Tun Perak. This area is convenient because it is located in a bustling neighborhood in the old city center which lends itself to plenty of activities and is located at the very midpoint of the whole metropolitan transportation network. By gathering there, migrant workers save time - often an invaluable resource - and money as they avoid multiplying transportation fees.

In this area, migrants' practices intersect with dominant characterizations of space, in the heart of historical Kuala Lumpur, at the confluence of the Gombak and the Klang rivers, which give its name to the city²⁰. As such, it is a centerpiece in the city's identity narrative and a prominent trail in the touristic landscape, located between Little India, North, China Town, South and Taman Merdeka - Independence Square - a short walk west. Thus migrant workers' practices overlap both with places imbued with powerful symbols of identity and with the touristic landscape, silently displacing urban space.

Their consumption habits have opened up new market opportunities for local entrepreneurs. Foreign exchange and remittance offices have mushroomed, as have mailing services offices or mobile phone shops where cheap prepaid cards, dedicated to different international services, are clearly tailored to the needs of migrant workers. The streets are crowded with colorful advertisement banners targeting a migrant audience. Likewise, Kota Raya Komplex is oriented towards Filipino consumers, as Filipino migrants gather there after attending church service at St John Cathedral, a few blocks away: several shops sell Filipino products and cultural goods; food courts sell Filipino food, and 'karaoke boxes' are mainly attended by Filipinas.

Moreover, these market opportunities are also seized by migrant workers. Some venture into the 'worlds of small urban production' (Rouilleau-Berger 1999) as petty traders, street hawkers or craftsmen; others are employed illegally by Malaysian stall holders, as in Petaling Street. These intermingled economic patterns, where monetary and non-monetary, formal and informal, market and non-market economies (Rouilleau-Berger 2003) partly overlap, are even more obvious in and around Chow Kit market, adjoining the Malay reservation area of Kampung Baru, where many businesses are owned by Indonesian citizens or second-generation Malaysians originating from the archipelago. The area is well known as being an Indonesian town in the city, not only among Indonesian workers but also among Malaysians. Migrant spatial practices have contributed considerably to the framing of the material space in the area, creating a genuine Indonesian atmosphere in this large patch of urban space which, in turn, helps to attract foreign workers. Chow Kit

²⁰ Kuala Lumpur means "muddy confluence". It refers to the early tin mining town which was erected here in 1857.

is also an infamous prostitution and drug dealing hub, where migrants are active both as sex workers and drug dealers and as consumers. Malaysians, Indonesian permanent residents and Indonesian migrant workers thus share a single space as employers, self-employed petty traders or craftsmen, employees and consumers tied together by employment or commercial relationships.

In Chow Kit as in the Kota Raya area, migrant workers emerge in public urban spaces; both their visible presence, as they circulate within the city, and the reconfiguration of the physical landscape resulting from their spatial practices proclaim the emergence of a new urban public that is subverting the symbolic significance of urban space in dominant national social and political imaginaries and regards the definition of urban space as a field of (bio)political and economic intervention²¹. As such, they are highly contested spaces, where migrants' daily practices are met with frequent crackdowns by security forces. And the same type of appropriation of the urban environment can be observed in different neighborhoods across the metropolitan territory, as local places become focuses of migrant workers' social life and consumption habits. For instance, Ampang Point, a shopping center in Ampang area, becomes a Javanese space on Sundays, when migrant workers gather on their day off. Together with consolidated residential areas, they form the core and the most visible part of the 'migrant city', that is the city as it is appropriated through migrant workers' spatial practices, which doubles and connects with spaces conceived and inhabited by Malays through its visible and contested reshaping of the urban environment.

However, more discrete practices also need to be accounted for. Indeed, resourceful and streetwise migrant workers take pride in managing to circulate outside of this specific geography, as these places are sometimes scorned for being provincial and catering mainly to unpolished and rustic newcomers, freshly arrived from the countryside. A form of distinction, in Bourdieu's sense (Bourdieu 1984), is manifest in the ability to emulate and endorse a proclaimed urban ethos, lifestyle and bodily hexis. These practices might be deemed and are conceived of as more subversive, as actors become indistinguishable in the Malaysian crowd thus effectively neutralizing

²¹ Let us mention a short text by Chua Soi Lek, an ex-health minister among other political positions occupied, which is telling in this respect. In the context of a controversy surrounding the possibility to enforce a compulsory weekly day off for domestic workers, under growing pressure from Indonesia, he wrote :

"While it is a laudable act for the government to make it compulsory for the employers to give their maid one day off in a week, I am more worried about the implementation and the impact of it.

There are a total of 300, 000 foreign maids in Malaysia. If all of them are given a day off on Sunday, imagine what will happen to popular places like tourist spots, shopping malls and parks. A good example will be the crowd in Puduraya. If you go to Puduraya on Sunday, you will think that you're in Indonesia or in Bangladesh because all foreign construction workers are given the day off on that day and they crowded near Puduraya area, making the place not only very congested but also very unMalaysian in its crowd." (Chua Soi Lek, June 18 2009).

spatial bordering practices. Spatial practices then become less place-bound, as they are framed by a fine knowledge of urban rhythms in terms of the cyclical closure and openness of public spaces that is used to mitigate the risks of mobility.

Thus new urban forms emerge within metropolitan borderscapes out of the negotiation of bordering practices and urban frontiers. New "regimes of visibility" are configured as migrant workers surface in public spaces, subverting the dominant urban orders. These transnational spatialities, as Kuala Lumpur is increasingly located at a crossroads in the wider and expanding regional networks of 'migrations from below' (Portes 2000), double and displace both the vertical integration of the city within national economies of scale and its links with global economic circuits.

Conclusion

In order to account for Kuala Lumpur's globalizing trajectory it is necessary to retrieve these concealed transnational flows; as the city is partially disembedded from national economies of scale as it enters a growing network of globalizing cities, it is also becoming a part of a broadening regional field of transnational labor circulation. Whereas the world city narrative is staged and given high visibility, this inclusion within a transnational geography of survival circuits attracts far less attention.

Migration flows do make for labor inputs. Migrant workers' daily lives and spatial practices also give rise to specific ways of doing with urban space, hidden patterns of place making. Certain locations, such as Chow Kit, Kota Raya and migrant residential areas gradually split between disjunctive spatialities, both as urban locations within the context of the nation-state, as nodes in transnational economic and financial circuits and, for what has concerned us here, on region-wide and global migration fields (Simon 2008). After all, Kuala Lumpur is often used by Indonesian workers in order to accumulate economic capital, as a stepping stone within wider migration strategies, a first stage on the way to South Korea, Hong Kong or Taiwan.

These new migration patterns not only bring in labor inputs but also open the door to different sets of transnational dynamics. Thus the Indonesian authorities are now working to improve their citizens' rights abroad, under considerable public pressure in Indonesia. While the 2006 bilateral MoU on domestic work allowed employers to seize their employee's passport, a new MoU signed in 2011 entitles women to a day off a week and insures that their documents remain in their hands. The idea of imposing a "live out system" for transnational domestic workers is also making its way in the Indonesian government (e.g. BNP2TKI, August 22 2011), in order to prevent domestic workers from being confined within their employer's home.

Thus this "globalization from below" brings together new multi-scalar arenas, where the production/reproduction of urban space is being negotiated; they involve bilateral relations between nation states and a wide array of transnational actors such as NGOs and international organizations, who are putting increasing pressure on Malaysia to put in place a comprehensive legal framework that provides sufficient protection for migrant workers. These cross-cutting dynamics frame new regimes of visibility, as they enhance migrant workers' access to public spaces, thus displacing urban spatial frontiers and shaping new borderscapes where new spatial practices develop.

If the contentious development of a globalizing cityscape in Kuala Lumpur has already been stressed elsewhere, notably by examining the conflicting relationship between domestic identity politics and the development of a new urban "hyperspace" (King 2008; Bunnell 2002), it is important to bring into the picture these less visible transnational dynamics in our accounts of globalizing cities, in order to capture the multi-faceted production and fragmentation of urban space along disjunctive spatialities. It is even more important in the broader perspective of East-Asia fast-growing metropolises, as it constitutes a prominent feature not only of Kuala Lumpur's urban fabric but also of Taipei and more prominent globalizing cities such as Singapore and Hong Kong.

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