

# Cultures of (Im)mobile Entanglements: Doing Research on Digital Media and Migration in and beyond Pandemic Times



Visualization adapted from Mark U Sunger

July 16 2021



**DEAKIN**  
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ALFRED DEAKIN INSTITUTE FOR  
CITIZENSHIP AND GLOBALISATION



**Utrecht University**

DIGITAL MIGRATION SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP  
GOVERNING THE DIGITAL SOCIETY FOCUS AREA

## CULTURES OF (IM)MOBILE ENTANGLEMENTS: DOING RESEARCH ON DIGITAL MEDIA AND MIGRATION IN AND BEYOND PANDEMIC TIMES

The onset of the global health pandemic has triggered a series of spatial and temporal mobilities and immobilities. People were forced to race before time in finding refuge in COVID-safe and secure places. At the same time, people's stasis were produced by COVID-19 restrictions, including lockdowns, travel bans, and cross-border shutdowns. To date, we know little about how scholars and their research on investigating the lives of transient migrants and their support networks have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the current research landscape, researchers must navigate 'mobility regimes' (Turner 2010) or policies that operationalise limited movements or containment in various places. Notably, researchers must also confront their own challenges in navigating the global health crisis, particularly in juggling professional, personal and familial lives. These multiple worlds are entangled and being negotiated.

In response to this dilemma, this one-day workshop invites scholars of digital media and migration to share and critically reflect upon their experiences of conducting research while navigating the various spatial and temporal constraints during and beyond pandemic times. And as the global pandemic continues to affect countries across the world, researchers can be physically immobilised in certain time and location yet also being mobilised through virtual and digital connections. As such, such landscape warrants a critical inquiry. Importantly, the practices and environments of researchers that facilitate the deployment of research methods reflect the politics of movements (Cresswell, 2010), potentially exposing individuals who struggle, suffer, and are excluded despite being afforded with virtual connectivity.

The proposition is guided by the following aims:

- Map approaches in conducting research on digital media and migration during the pandemic.
- Determine the opportunities and barriers in doing research while navigating spatial and temporal constraints stirred by mobility restrictions.
- Interrogate research methods as key sites in rethinking the politics of movement in the context of digital media and migration research.
- Rethink future research methods and directions on digital media and migration in post-pandemic times.

The workshop will take place in in collaboration between the Mobilities, Diversity Multiculturalism Stream, Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation and the Digital Migration Special Interest Group, part of the Governing the Digital Society research focus area at Utrecht University.

### **Convenors**

Dr Earvin Charles Cabalquinto  
Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation

Professor Anita Harris  
Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation

Dr Koen Leurs  
Graduate Gender Programme, Utrecht University

# FULL PROGRAM

FRIDAY, 16 JULY 2021


- 1:00 – 1:15**            **WELCOME AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY**  
Earvin Charles Cabalquinto  
Professor Anita Harris
- 1:15 – 1:45**            **KEYNOTE ADDRESS 1**  
Chairperson: Earvin Charles Cabalquinto
- 1:15                      ‘Apps, Mobilities, and Migration in the COVID-19 Pandemic’  
Professor Gerard Goggin, Nanyang University of Technology
- 1:35                      Question and Answer
- 1:45 – 2:50**            **PANEL 1**  
Chairperson: Monika Winarnita
- 1:45                      Indonesian PhD students (temporary migrants) in Australia: Digital media – limiting or  
enabling research during a pandemic?  
Citra Amelia, Deakin University  
Alistair Welsh, Deakin University  
Monika Winarnita, Deakin University  
Ramon Lopez Castellano, Deakin University
- 1:57                      Letters and postcards: Materialising and digitising (im)mobile entanglements  
Michele Lobo, Deakin University  
Kaya Barry, Aalborg University  
Michelle Duffy, University of Newcastle
- 2:09                      (Im)mobilities in the field: Deconstructing researcher-participant dynamics in a  
remote interview setting  
Earvin Cabalquinto, Deakin University
- 2:21                      Relationality and online interpersonal research: ethical, methodological and  
pragmatic extensions  
Jay Marlowe, University of Auckland  
Jemma Allen, University of Auckland
- 2:33                      Q &A
- 2:50 – 3:05**            **BREAK**
- 3:05 – 3:35**            **KEYNOTE ADDRESS II**  
Chairperson: Earvin Cabalquinto
- 3:05                      Historicising the technopolitics of (im)mobilities  
Dr Koen Leurs, Utrecht University
- 3:25                      Q & A

<b>3:35 – 4:40</b>	<b>PANEL 2</b> Chairperson: Michele Lobo
3:35	Field events: Engaging with digital technologies in Ethnographic Fieldwork Tanja Ahlin, University of Amsterdam
3:47	Digitalization and New Knowledge Geographies: How the Pandemic Affects Migration Policy Research Charles Martin-Shields, German Development Institute
3:59	Using WhatsApp groups in media and migration research: opportunities, challenges and lessons learned from participatory fieldwork with refugees before and during the COVID-19 pandemic Amanda Palencar, Erasmus University Rotterdam
4:11	Q & A
<b>4:30 – 4.45</b>	<b>BREAK</b>
<b>4:45 – 5:15</b>	<b>KEYNOTE ADDRESS III</b> Chairperson: Koen Leurs
4:45	Loops of Immobility and Methodological Choices During States of Exception Associate Professor Saskia Witteborn, Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK)
5:05	Q & A
<b>5:15 – 6:05</b>	<b>PANEL 3</b> Chairperson: Koen Leurs
5:15	Filipino migrants in Germany and their (ironic) space-time constructions of their home and host societies in Facebook Audris Umel, Bremen International Graduate School of Social Sciences (BIGSSS)
5:27	Faith and digital infrastructure: Cultural responses to blockchain in aid Margie Cheesman, Oxford Internet Institute
5:39	Covid, Mobile Patients and Healthcare Inequalities: Some Notes on Returning to the Field Luca Follis, Lancaster University Karolina Follis, Lancaster University
5:51	Q & A
<b>6:10</b>	<b>CLOSING</b>

Please note: All times listed are local Melbourne time, 8 hours ahead of CEST, 9 hours ahead of UK



### Gerard Goggin

Wee Kim Wee Professor of  
Communication Studies  
Nanyang Technological University,  
Singapore  
 @ggoggin

## ‘Apps, Mobilities, and Migration in the COVID-19 Pandemic’

Digital media has been highly visible in the COVID-19 pandemic in a wide variety of ways that are still unfolding. In this presentation, I discuss doing research on mobile phone apps – a topic itself that has generated a rich body of rapid-response research across many disciplines since early 2020. Mobile apps have been a leading feature of everyday pandemic digital media – most notably in the case of contact tracing apps, using QR check-in codes, Bluetooth, and other technologies. Many countries, states, or provinces have devised their own contact tracing apps for population-wise use. These vary in their design, implementation, governance, and contexts of use. However, there are other apps for specific groups, such as workers (especially migrant workers) – to provide surveillance, control, and management of their health. In my talk, I will discuss these mobile apps in relation to logics of mobilities, and migration in relation to Singapore. I will also look at the case of disability in relation to mobile apps and mobilities – as an emerging area with important insights and implications for researching digital media and migration in COVID times.

**Gerard Goggin** is Wee Kim Wee Professor of Communication Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. Gerard is widely published on mobile media and communication, with his most recent books being *App: From Mobile Phones to Digital Lives* (Polity, 2021) and the co-edited volumes *Oxford Handbook of Mobile Communication & Society* (2020), and *Location Technologies in International Context* (2019). Gerard has longstanding research interests and collaborations in disability, digital technology, and social justice, with books including the co-edited *Routledge Companion to Disability and Media* (2020), *Disability and the Media* (2015; with Katie Ellis), and *Digital Disability* (2003; with Christopher Newell). Gerard also is a founding co-editor of the journal *Internet Histories*, and with Mark McLelland edited the 2017 volume *Routledge Companion to Global Internet Histories*.



**Citra Amelia**

Doctoral candidate, School of Humanities and Social Sciences Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia



**Monika Winarnita**

Lecturer, School of Humanities and Social Sciences Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia  
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**Alistair Welsh**

Senior Lecturer, School of Humanities and Social Sciences Deakin University

**Ramon Lopez Castellano**

Lecturer, School of Humanities and Social Sciences Deakin University

**Indonesian PhD students (temporary migrants) in Australia:  
 Digital media – limiting or enabling research during a pandemic?**

This study focuses on the Indonesian PhD students' experiences as temporary migrants in Australia and their research activities throughout 2020. Drawing on positioning theory, this study adds a novel approach to the 'new mobility' paradigm during the COVID-19 pandemic from the perspective of researchers who are also research participants. As scholarship recipients, these international students have limited time to complete their study depending on their scholarship and visa duration. Even though they could apply for an extension, the chances to be approved are very rare. This constraint has forced them to be creative and adaptable in their data collection methods relying only on online digital media to overcome the disruption and negotiate their precarious position caused by COVID-19. The findings from mixed methods research through an online survey and follow-up interviews reveal that the timing of data collection has significantly changed the participants' responses on the impact of COVID-19 on their research progress. They responded negatively to the open-ended questions about their position as a researcher at the start of the global pandemic in the online survey that has been distributed one month after the Australian border was closed. Interestingly, findings from the in-depth follow-up interviews conducted online four to seven months after the initial online survey show that some participants changed their responses and were more positive about their experience as an international student conducting research during the pandemic. They found that digital media offers unforeseen benefits in terms of savings on the cost of travel, more time and family balance while collecting data. The findings indicate that these participants were able to overcome initial challenges posed by the global pandemic and successfully managed their data collection through positioning themselves strategically in the new mobilities paradigm.

**Citra Amelia\*** is a doctoral candidate in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Deakin University in Australia. Her doctoral research is focused on the factors affecting PhD completion progress.  
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**Alistair Welsh** is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Deakin University in Australia. His interdisciplinary interests relate to socio-linguistic research into identity, culture and discourse.

**Monika Winarnita** is a Lecturer in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Deakin University in Australia. Her research interest includes understanding the experiences of Indonesians in Australia. Twitter handle: @MonikaWinarnita

**Ramon Lopez Castellano** is a Lecturer in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Deakin University in Australia. His research interests include a wide range of topics related to cultures, society and identity.



**Michelle Lobo**

Lecturer in Human Geography  
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**Kaya Barry**

Associate Professor in Tourism and  
Mobility at Aalborg University,  
Denmark; Research Fellow at the  
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**Michelle Duffy**

Associate Professor in Human  
Geography, University of Newcastle,  
Newcastle, Australia

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## Letters and postcards: Materialising and digitising (im)mobile entanglements

While 2020 has closed down metropolitan, state and international borders, the materials we send and receive appear to be more mobile than ever before. We wait eagerly and impatiently for parcels, take-away and online orders to arrive on our doorstep. Yet, this ‘contact free’ drop-off, express and ‘next day’ delivery in the midst of our im/mobilities intensifies ongoing extraction, exploitation, carbon-intensive industrial practices, extinction and ecological crises that have outcomes for migrant lives in the many Global Souths of the world. This paper seeks to trouble the taken-for-granted temporalities and im/mobilities that contribute to socio-ecological injustices. In this performative paper, we experiment with intensities of temporality that entangle, knot, braid, flow or are stilled as letters and postcards arrive at our homes. To explore this in a quotidian way, we use the materiality of letters and postcards exchanged over four months in four Australian cities (Newcastle, Melbourne, Warragul South and Brisbane) as a means to seed plural imaginations about the entanglement of temporality, materiality and im/mobility.


**Michele Lobo** is a cultural geographer who explores race, affect, belonging and ecological intimacies in more-than-human worlds. She is a lecturer in Human Geography, Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia.

**Kaya Barry** is an Associate Professor in Tourism and Mobility at Aalborg University, Denmark, and a Research Fellow at the Griffith Centre for Social and Cultural Research at Griffith University, Australia. Kaya’s research combines cultural geography and creative methods to study the intersections of mobilities, migration, tourism, and environmental aesthetics.

**Michelle Duffy** is an Associate Professor in Human Geography, University of Newcastle, Newcastle, Australia. Her research explores sound, music, affect, emotion and movement as ways to consider how our relations with human and non-human worlds bring about notions of community, resilience and wellbeing.



### **Earvin Charles Cabalquinto**

Lecturer in Communication  
School of Communication and Creative  
Arts, Deakin University, Melbourne  
Australia  
Member, Alfred Deakin Institute for  
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 @earvsc

## **(Im)mobilities in the field: Deconstructing researcher-participant dynamics in a remote interview setting**

Qualitative interviewing often necessitates an in-person visit to collect and analyse data. However, the past months have shown how the COVID-19 pandemic has derailed in-person interviewing, compelling many scholars and researchers to reconfigure research methodologies such as shifting face-to-face interactions to physically distant or digitalised engagements. In this provocation, I highlight how modern communication technologies were utilised for 'remote' interviewing in response to overcoming the spatial immobility generated by a lockdown in Melbourne, Australia. The study interviewed fifteen older adults from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) people in Melbourne via Zoom or a phone call in 2020. The goal of the study was to critically investigate how this cohort of people use a range of digital media and online channels for civic participation in the digital world. In this paper, I approach my analysis of the researcher-participant dynamic through a mediated mobilities perspective, noting how mediated interactions are structured by social and technological factors. To begin with, I highlight how the process of interviewing at a distance was produced through a string of 'mundane' mobile and immobile practices in a digital environment, demonstrating a fieldwork characterised by assemblage of social, material and affective dimensions. Furthermore, I unlock how mobile interviewing revealed a new set of data, including uneven mobile access and competencies, affective (im)mobilities, and enactments of informal care practices. Nevertheless, a deep dive into the intricacies and fusion of mobilities and immobilities in mediated interactions unlocks a fresh insight into deconstructing the possibilities and limits of enacting remote and digitally mediated interviews.

**Earvin Charles Cabalquinto** is a Lecturer in Communication in the School of Communication and Creative Arts (SCCA) at Deakin University. He is also a member of the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation. He was recently awarded funding for a Visiting Fellowship in the Centre of Excellence in Research on Ageing and Care (CoE AgeCare) in the University of Jyväskylä at Finland. His research works critically unpacks how mobilities and immobilities are engendered, curtailed and negotiated through the use of modern communication technologies. His works have appeared in top-tiered international journal publications and edited book collections. He has a forthcoming book entitled "*(Im)mobile Homes: Family life at a distance*" under the Studies in Mobile Communication Series of Oxford University Press. He is currently working on investigating how ageing migrants in Australia use mobile devices and networked communication platforms for civic participation in an increasingly digital world.





### **Jay Marlowe**

Associate professor of social work at the University of Auckland  
Co-director for the Centre for Asia Pacific Refugee Studies  
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### **Jemma Allen**

Doctoral candidate, School of Counselling, Human Services and Social Work, University of Auckland

## **Relationality and online interpersonal research: ethical, methodological and pragmatic extensions**

The availability, affordability, and usability of communication technologies have created new ways to conduct interpersonal research across time, space, and place. As access to digital communications remains uneven, the online environment requires acknowledgement of its constraints alongside the affordances it provides. At times, these digital interactions provide an alternative, and potentially a preferable and safer, research space. As Covid-19 has interrupted and disrupted the assumption that qualitative research must be conducted in person, this paper outlines possibilities and reservations of online interpersonal methods. Though the standard ethical considerations of qualitative research hold true, we argue that these are necessary, but often inadequate, in the contexts of conducting online synchronous interpersonal research. Through centring relational and reflexive practice, we consider associated pragmatic, methodological, and ethical domains from feminist and virtual–material positional perspectives. Unpacking the complexities and possibilities of researching digital environments, we present six guiding principles to inform ethically responsive, methodologically robust and pragmatically feasible approaches to conducting online interpersonal qualitative research in the field of migration studies.

**Jay Marlowe** (PhD) is an associate professor of social work at the University of Auckland and co-director for the Centre for Asia Pacific Refugee Studies. He is a current Rutherford Discovery Fellow, pursuing a 5-year research programme related to refugee settlement trajectories within New Zealand and transnationally. He has written more than 80 publications in relation to this work and his most recent book (open access), *Belonging and Transnational Refugee Settlement*, is published with Routledge.

**Jemma Allen** is a doctoral candidate within the School of Counselling, Human Services and Social Work at the University of Auckland. Her research examines the virtual-material positional aspects of engaging in online spaces, particularly as it interfaces with professional encounters.



### Koen Leurs

Assistant professor, Media, Gender and Postcolonial Studies, Graduate Gender Programme, Department of Media and Culture, Utrecht University, the Netherlands

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## Historicising the technopolitics of (im)mobilities

Over the last decade I have engaged in ethnographic fieldwork, participatory action research and interviews involving over 275 migrants, refugees and expatriates. Partly resulting from the challenges in being forced to conduct fieldwork remotely and digitally during the Covid-19 Health Pandemic period through digital channels, I changed my focus towards archival research on elite and subaltern migration in the Dutch colonial era. Drawing on ongoing research on public and hidden transcripts in the archives of migration, media and technology in the Dutch colonial era from the turn of the 20th century onwards, this talk will challenge firstist assumptions of exceptionality and uniqueness underpinning many critical analyses of the technopolitics of contemporary migration.


The talk will explore historical genealogies of migration technopolitics in two interrelated ways: First, the racialized colonial politics of representation of (im)mobility is addressed on the basis of a case study of the encounters between the West Indian Filmfoundation (Filmstichting West Indië) and the Association Our Surinam (Vereniging Ons Suriname). Secondly, gendered and racialized imaginaries and infrastructures of (im)mobility are scrutinized by studying the introduction and distribution of the radio in Indonesia. Radio broadcast from the Netherlands produced a sense of connected presence between the colony and colonial center, important to sustain mobility. Simultaneously, competing commercial, political and indigenous interests rendered colonial radio airwaves into an intense site of diasporic and local exchange, contestation and conflict.

**Koen Leurs** is an Assistant professor in Media, Gender and Postcolonial Studies, in the Graduate Gender Programme of the Department of Media and Culture, Utrecht University, the Netherlands. Leurs' research lines revolve around digital technologies, migration, youth, gender and innovative digital and participatory methods. Recently won the Evens Foundation award for his project 'Critical Media Literacy Through Making Media: A Key to Participation for Young Migrants', a participatory action research project which involved 250+ young newcomers and their teachers from '17-'19. He co-edited the *Sage Handbook of Media and Migration* ('20) and journal special issues on digital migration in *Popular Communication* ('18) and *Social Media + Society* ('18). In 2015 he published *Digital Passages. Migrant Youth 2.0* (Amsterdam University Press), his second monograph, *Digital Migration Studies* is forthcoming with Sage ('22).



**Tanja Ahlin**

Lecturer, University of Amsterdam

 @TanjaAhlin

## Field events: Engaging with digital technologies in Ethnographic Fieldwork

What impact does including digital technologies in research methods have on the understanding and practice of the "field site"? This presentation is a reflection on ethnographic methods in a world where digital technologies have become essentially intertwined in the lives of ethnographers and study participants. I draw on an article, co-authored with Fangfang Li, in which we describe our individual research projects that have one common point: we both worked with migrants and included digital technologies in the practice of fieldwork. I introduce the notion of 'field events' as an alternative to 'field sites' to explore how digital technologies co-create the field together with ethnographers and study participants. What consequences does that have on the quality of data gathered, and on the rapport between the researcher and her interlocutors? If it is possible to conduct interviews and participant observation via ICTs with study participants who are scattered across numerous geographic locations, does it still make sense to visit those locations in person?

**Tanja Ahlin** is a lecturer at the University of Amsterdam, where she also completed her doctoral thesis on elder care through digital technologies in Indian transnational families. She works across anthropology and science and technology studies. Her major interests revolve around health and technology, particularly in the area of family care at a distance e/m-health and telemedicine, as well as migration, gender and aging. During her studies, she has conducted fieldwork in North and South India, Oman and Slovenia. She has published in *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, *Gender, Place and Culture*, and elsewhere.



**Charles Martin-Shields**

Senior Researcher at the German Development Institute in Bonn, Germany Lecturer, University of Amsterdam

 @cmartinshields

## Digitalization and New Knowledge Geographies: How the Pandemic Affects Migration Policy Research

How does the pandemic influence research that is meant to inform migration policy, and how does digitalization fit into the production of this knowledge? Does pandemic-affected research change perceptions of the quality of policy advice, and how does digitalization affect the liminal space between migrant communities, researchers, and development agencies? These questions have become central to the operations and cultures of think tanks and research centers that do policy-oriented scientific research. For many think tank-based migration and development researchers in the Global North, physical travel has played a central role in empirical research. These institutions often have healthy travel budgets for research and networking, and since the research outputs have to speak to the faster timelines of policy making, ‘getting on a plane’ was often the go-to strategy for developing and sharing knowledge on migration and displacement. For many Northern researchers, the pandemic took them out of the center of the data collection process and forced them to work with partners in the Global South digitally. This shift put a new type of power in the hands of researchers in the Global South, and the migrant communities that policy makers view as the recipients of development policy goods. However, this decentering also means that policy makers are dealing a knowledge geography that is not driven by their traditional think tank-based interlocutors. Using interviews with think tank-based researchers, researchers in the Global South, and policy makers, this paper will explore how knowledge that is collected digitally and without Northern researchers as the central conveyor of information affects how development policy makers view and place value on these research products.

**Charles Martin-Shields** is a Senior Researcher at the German Development Institute in Bonn, Germany. His research focuses on digitalization and new technologies in development cooperation and humanitarian response. During the last four years, he has focused on digitalization in the lives of displaced people, exploring the gaps between how development and aid organizations imagine technology in displaced peoples’ lives and these peoples’ lived experiences of digitalization in Colombia, Kenya, and Malaysia. Outside academia, he has advised and consulted with organizations including the World Bank, German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, and UNHCR.



**Amanda Alencar**

Associate Professor, Department of Media & Communication, Erasmus University Rotterdam

 @MandyPazAlencar

## Using WhatsApp groups in media and migration research: opportunities, challenges and lessons learned from participatory fieldwork with refugees before and during the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic and the effects of lockdown around the world have configured dynamic trajectories for research with migrant populations. Messaging apps such as WhatsApp enable the collapse of time and space distances and facilitate communication within groups. In pandemic times, WhatsApp groups have become a platform for enhancing a sense of belonging to group members while serving as coping mechanisms for physical and mental well-being. For researchers, the immediacy of communication in WhatsApp groups is critical when trying to carry out research amid travel restrictions and constraints on physical contact and distancing because of COVID-19. In this presentation, I build on my experience of using WhatsApp groups within two studies with refugees in two countries to reflect on the role that WhatsApp can play in media and migration research. WhatsApp groups parallel participatory research's premises of facilitation of relationships and reduction of power imbalances between "researcher" and "participant" – all core elements to recognize specialized migrant knowledge and experiences in the co-production of solutions for community development. In line with previous research, my experience show that the communicative affordances of WhatsApp groups can help improve communication within research teams not only regarding the provision of feedback and support, but also in creating a friendly and safe environment and a sense of belonging between researchers and refugee collaborators. However, my analysis outlines several important challenges and lessons. Issues related to management of work-life boundaries, information overload, context collapse, and confidentiality of data require continuous negotiations among WhatsApp group members through a practice-based ethics approach shaped by personal reflection and deep appreciation for context. Despite these challenges, I contend that WhatsApp groups prompt effective ways to keep track of the research process and have the potential to mitigate the uncertain conditions of doing research on/with migrants in (post-) pandemic times.

**Amanda Alencar** is a digital migration scholar specialized in the study of media and social media in Europe and Latin America, with a focus on how communication technologies are shaping mobility and sociocultural integration processes of (forced) migrants. She is an Associate Professor in the Department of Media & Communication at Erasmus University Rotterdam and Vice Chair of the Intercultural Communication Division within the International Communication Association (ICA). Amanda was a Research Fellow at the Refugee Studies Centre (Oxford University) and Marie Curie Fellow at the University of Amsterdam. She has guest edited two special issues in the (open-access) peer-reviewed journals *International Communication Gazette* and *Media and Communication* on the intersections between media, communication and forced migration processes. Alongside her academic work, she coordinates a digital training programme for students with a refugee background as part of their preparatory 1-year program at Erasmus University Rotterdam. Amanda has recently joined The Migration Podcast team as Associate Producer.

## Loops of Immobility and Methodological Choices During States of Exception

This talk engages with digital methods/ologies as key sites for research on migration and technologies during the Covid-19 pandemic. Starting with a discussion of a project on transnational migration from China to Europe and the United States, the talk outlines variations of immobility encountered throughout the process, requiring productive combinations of ethnographic and digital methods. The talk introduces the tension between “sensing” and “seeing” data and the analytical challenge for qualitative researchers when working with datasets collected through digital methods. The talk closes with the argument that the mobility restriction for researchers during the pandemic is only one iteration of research scenarios in which personal and collective freedoms are curtailed.



**Saskia Witteborn**

Associate Professor, School of  
Journalism and Communication, The  
Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK)

**Saskia Witteborn** is Associate Professor in the School of Journalism and Communication at The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK). She specializes in transnational migration and technologies and has worked with migrants in the United States, Europe, and East Asia. She has contributed to the political economy of mobility, technology and space, data privacy, and AI and ethics in theoretical and applied ways. Her research has appeared in leading journals and in edited collections. She is co-editor of the *SAGE Handbook of Media and Migration* (2020).



**Audris Umel,**

PhD candidate, Bremen International Graduate School of Social Sciences (BIGSSS)

### **Filipino migrants in Germany and their (ironic) space-time constructions of their home and host societies in Facebook**

The rise of social media has changed many facets of diasporic life, making it easier for migrants and other diasporic communities to both integrate in their host countries and remain connected to their homelands. This article aims to emphasize further this social media affordance of facilitating migrants' navigation of the relational dynamics of space and time. By adapting Peeren's (2006) spatio-temporal lens to diaspora combined with a social psychological approach, this study explores the ways migrant communities negotiate diasporic chronotopes—or timespace constructions of the homeland (i.e., home chronotope) and hostland (i.e., host chronotope)—within social media. Specifically, I conducted focused group discussions and digital ethnography with Filipino migrants in Germany to examine the role of Facebook, especially its group platform, in their diasporic community life. Using a combined online ethnography and discursive psychological analysis, findings illustrate how the Filipino migrants dynamically appropriate Facebook to “import” and re-enact yet also challenge communal timespace constructions especially originating from home, not only in relation to fellow migrants in Germany but especially with co-ethnics back home and with members of the host society. Additionally, Facebook group platform facilitates the emergence and interaction of seemingly contradictory spatio-temporal realities and constructions—what I propose be called ‘irony chronotopes’—that traverse and impact both offline and online dimensions of migrant relations, not just with their communities in Germany but also with their country of origin. Being able to capture such spatio-temporal interplays of migrant realities facilitated by new media provides a more nuanced and dialogical view into migrants' shared experiences, looks beyond the communication role that new media such as Facebook play therein, and contributes to the ‘temporal turn’ in migration studies.

**Audris Umel** is a PhD candidate at the Bremen International Graduate School of Social Sciences (BIGSSS). She worked as an HR consultant and lectured in the Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines prior to working towards a PhD degree. Her research interests focus on social and political issues, particularly those topics elaborated within media and public spheres. Her approach is informed by, but not limited to, theories of social representations, positioning and discourse, qualitative and mixed methods, computational social science methods, digital ethnography and new media approaches. Her PhD project now centers on the topics of social media and migration.



**Margie Cheesman,**  
Digital anthropologist based at the  
Oxford Internet Institute  
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## Faith and digital infrastructure: Cultural responses to blockchain in aid

Proponents of the decentralised database technology blockchain suggest it will revolutionise the aid sector by allowing money and data to be exchanged more efficiently, equitably, transparently, and securely. In particular, blockchain is expected to replace many trusted human intermediaries, organisations and social processes with trusted code, technocratic consensus and governance by algorithms. The technology is being applied to refugee identification, cross-border remittances, humanitarian supply chain management and more. However, there is a lack of critical scholarship on how the promises for blockchain are playing out in practice from the perspectives of refugees. This contribution presents close-up research in women's centres in Jordan's carceral refugee camps, where blockchain technology is being used to deliver financial aid. Foregrounding Syrian women's everyday financial practices and priorities, I examine how the Islamic concept *baraka*—with various cultural meanings, including blessed, consistent, substantial and dependable—is the central lens through which they evaluate the new digital system. The religious concept *baraka* opens up blockchain to new realms of critique as a system that restructures the rhythm and materiality of aid. While trust is the dominant concept in scholarly and policy debates surrounding blockchain, and digital infrastructures more broadly, I argue that faith is a more pertinent term. Trust has become enrolled in the vocabulary of technocrats, seen through the lens of the *homo economicus* as something to be automated and, ultimately, dispensed with. By contrast, faith gets at the unexpected ways in which digital infrastructures interface with humans and their principles, choices, and systems of belief. Overall, the contribution aims to address the neglected subject of religion in cultural responses to digital humanitarianism and re-centre discussion around the spirit of humanitarian giving.

**Margie Cheesman** is a digital anthropologist based at the Oxford Internet Institute. Margie works with communities using and making digitalisation projects. Her DPhil research examines the intervention of decentralised digital infrastructures (blockchains) in humanitarianism, and involves fieldwork in Jordan's refugee camps. She is interested in new money and identity infrastructures and how they connect with longstanding socio-economic inequalities and rights. Margie has worked for the civil liberties initiative, Open Migration, and the ESRC Centre for Research on Socio-cultural Change (CRiSC). She has conducted research with international organisations such as InfoMigrants, GSMA Mobile for Development, and United Nations agencies. Margie is Assistant Editor of the journal *Big Data & Society*, and her editorial work includes *Data Politics: Worlds, Subjects and Rights* (Routledge, 2019) and *Data Practices* (forthcoming).






**Luca Follis**

Senior Lecturer in Law and Society  
Law School, Lancaster University

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## Covid, Mobile Patients and Healthcare Inequalities: Some Notes on Returning to the Field

The story of globalization thus far has been one of accelerated mobilities of capital, objects, data and humans. And yet, as we well know, mobility is a resource that is not universally distributed. The capabilities it engenders are rooted in race, gender and disability inequalities.

Covid-19 exposed and exacerbated these discrepancies. It illustrated how inequalities in mobility, interwoven in different sites and at different scales – local, national, international – can generate cascades of systemic failure that limit the effectiveness of states and their health systems to respond to medical crises. The interaction of these scales produced a pattern of health disparities affecting a particular mobile population: migrants.

Indeed, even as the pandemic revealed the extent to which national health systems are predicated on the mobility of capital, objects, data and humans it also buttressed plans to shut down movement at the border (now asserted on public health grounds rather than economic or security). In this sense, COVID has revealed the (im)mobilities of national health systems and the contingent character of the encounters, connections, contexts and practices that together structure the trajectory of migrant patients through it. This paper asks, how do we map this vast mobile assemblage? How might we follow research participants as they move through these differential scales and infrastructures? And what digital and mobile methods might we employ to chart their trajectories?

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