Migrant life narratives as place-making in post-colonial Australia

27 October 2023, The Australian National University

Co-hosted by Centre for European Studies and

Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies

Venue: CAIS, Khalifa Bakhit Al-Falasi lecture theatre, 127 Ellery Crescent

8.30 – 9.00 – Welcome, meet and greet

9.00 – 10.30 Panel 1 – Refugee narratives

1. Niro Kandasamy (University of Sydney), Michael McDonnell (University of Sydney), Jordana Silverstein (University of Melbourne)- The Autobiographical turn in First Nations and Refugee Histories
2. Rebecca Surenthiraraj (University of Sydney)- Seeking refuge: Place-making strategies of Sri Lankan Tamil asylum seekers and refugees in Australia
3. Vannessa Hearman (Curtin University) - (Re)imagining Australia from Timor-Leste: Life narratives of East Timorese returnees after independence
4. Kim Huynh (ANU) - For us "Australia" rhymes with "failure": How a Vietnamese refugee family comes to grips with loss of place, status and memory

10.30 – 10.45 Morning Tea

10.45 – 12.15 Panel 2 – Creative narratives

1. Burcu Cevik-Compiegne (ANU) - Making sense of home in transnational narratives of sensory experiences
2. Francesco Ricatti (ANU) - Passato prossimo: old and new narratives of migrant embodiment
3. Hadeel Abdelhameed (La Trobe University) - Iraqi theatre makers in Australia: making theatre means making home
4. Ibrahim Abraham (Federation University) - "At the base of the pyramid": Cultural institutions of alienation and empowerment in migrant and ethnic minority life narratives in Australia

12.15 – 13.15 Lunch

13.30 – 15.00 Panel 3 – Political and racial narratives

1. Andonis Piperoglou (University of Melbourne) - "Dagoes" and diasporic poetics: reading slurs in Australian migrant vernaculars
2. Kawsar Ali (Macquarie University) - The Christchurch Massacre: anti-Muslim violence through settler colonial claims
3. Mei-fen Kuo (Macquarie University) - Narrative Identity and the Politics of Making Chinese Café and Restaurants in Sydney from Interwar Period to the Cold War Era
4. Zhengdao Ye, Shuyu Zhang, Janet Davey (ANU) - Chinese migrants' place-making in modern Australian society: Studying life narratives in China Post's 1994 series 'Australia, where is our place?'

15.00 – 15.15 Afternoon tea

15.15 – 16.30 Panel 4 – Narratives of professional lives

1. Alexandra Dellios (ANU) - Life narratives in oral histories: Greek-Australian women and welfare advocacy from the 1970s
2. Larysa Chybis (Curtin University) - A Long Traversal of Professional Transition: Ukrainian Migrant Teachers' Lived Experiences in Australia
3. Harshitha Peddireddy, Alexander Titus and Angela Paulson (ANU) - Agency in Exploitation: A Snapshot of Australian South-Asian Transport Workers

16.30 – 16.45 Coffee break

16.45 – 18.00 Panel 5 – Narratives of Indigenous-migrant connections

1. Gretel Evans (Monash University)- Migrant place-making through bushfires and floods in regional Australia
2. Jessie Liu (ANU) - A Territory with No (Asian) People: Asian Settlers and The Settler Colonial Imaginaries of Australia
3. Kasia Williams (ANU) - "Homing Desire": Narrating affinities between colonized nations as migrant home-making

18.00 – 18.30 Yiorgos Anagnostou (Ohio State Unviersity) – Closing remarks

19.00 – Drinks & dinner

Abstracts (in the alphabetical order by author)

Alexandra Dellios (ANU) - Life narratives in oral histories: Greek-Australian women and welfare advocacy from the 1970s

In the 1970s, the field of social welfare underwent dramatic changes—some of this change was propelled by the demands of migrant and ethnic-minority communities. Greek-Australian women played a key role in the migrant welfare and advocacy field, as welfare rights officers, health interpreters, welfare workers, and activists. They worked at the frontlines of multicultural service delivery, meeting the complex (and previously neglected) needs of migrant and non-English-speaking communities. This paper will explore the experiences of these women and their life narratives—as migrants and as the first 'ethnic' welfare workers in NSW. In addition to archival work and personal testimony, this paper draws on oral histories conducted with four women. It pays particular attention to the issues they themselves identified in their narration: the role of Anglo-Australian stereotypes from within the health, legal and social service systems and its impact on meeting their clients'/community's needs; and how they operated within the evolving bureaucratic and discursive context of multiculturalism, first proposed in the early 1970s. Through their personal narratives, they provide new perspectives on the history of migrant social service delivery and the welfare state in Australia.

Andonis Piperoglou (University of Melbourne) - "Dagoes" and diasporic poetics: reading slurs in Australian migrant vernaculars

During the early twentieth century migrants from the Mediterranean region – particularly from Greece, Italy, Spain and Malta – were frequently labelled as 'dagoes'. The term 'dago' was a prejudicial slur that situated male Mediterranean migrants as a dirty, vulgar, and violent presence within the settler colonial polity. This paper explores how the slur dago morphed from a racialist and gendered insult to a diasporic label of difference. Comparing past and contemporary poetic usages of the slur – from 1920s derogatory stanzas that circulated in newspaper articles and cartoons to the distinctive wordplays penned by Greek-born Australian poet Π.Ο. and the humorous combination of social commentary, autobiography, and farce performed by Greek-Australian poet Kominos Zervos –

I suggest that that the poetic usages of the racial slur dago can offer a rich terrain for understanding the historical formation and reformation of distinctive Greek diasporic constellations. Indeed, by exploring the usages of the slur "dago" in Greek Australian poetics I aim to show how Greek diaspora poets choose to situate their work at a critical distance from the national space within which they write, while simultaneously claiming belonging to an alternative Australianness.

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Burcu Cevik-Compiegne (ANU) - Making sense of home in transnational narratives of sensory experiences

Sensory experience is fundamental in recognising a place as home. Sensory discovery and readjustment, adding previously unfamiliar sounds, smells, tastes and sights into their repertoire is one of the most vividly described features of narratives of new migrant experiences. Migration studies often focus on this aspect of newness and discovery of the host country through senses and the comfort provided by sensory experiences associated with home, such as consumption of familiar food, music or other cultural artefacts. Focusing on a sample of fictional work and interviews with a Sydney-based Turkish-Australian author Saba Oymen, this paper will discuss how fictional narratives combine sensory memory of past and present selves and construct both places as being embodied by the migrant subject. Oymen's writing suggests simultaneous and continuous embodiment of both places and identities and challenges the chronological linearity between past and present places, homes and selves. This paper will examine how transnational identities are embodied through senses and performed through writing.

Francesco Ricatti (ANU) - Passato prossimo: old and new narratives of migrant embodiment

In this presentation, I aim to compare and contrast old narratives of Italian postwar migration to Australia, with new narratives emerging from the recent work of Australian play writers, filmmakers and visual artists of Italian background. While profoundly different in purpose, style, and historical context, when considered together these old and new stories suggest the stubborn persistence of two opposing narrative threads. The first thread aims at the establishment and maintenance of the Italian Australian community as a respectable social body within the Australian Nation - a imaginary social organism that is complacent and complicit with settler colonialism. The aim of these narratives is to construct an imaginary yet reassuring impression of white respectability built on hard work and upward socio-economic mobility. Conversely, the second narrative thread challenges such rhetorical narratives through the representation of sex, illness, violence and death – here the migrant body

comes to incarnate a much more complex and problematic history of racism, class exploitation, and violence. By arguing that these two threads are apparent in both old and new narratives, I want to challenge the traditional understanding of migrant narratives as evolving over time, and changing from generation to generation. Instead, I aim to demonstrate the persistence of a narrative struggle between those seeking disembodied respectability, and those seeking embodied agency.

Gretel Evans (Monash University)- Migrant place-making through bushfires and floods in regional Australia

Bushfires and floods are part of the past and present in Australia, yet have rarely been explored through migrant-eyes. The regional context unearths themes and reflections upon place and environment that are not always present within life-narratives that focus on the social and cultural experiences of migration. This regional context shapes the experiences and reflections of people who have chosen to make a home and narrate feelings of connection, belonging and environmental understandings within a disaster-prone location. Tensions between 'new' and 'ancient' Australia are evident in the way some people reflect upon their reading of the landscape and connection to place and environment. A longer presence of history encapsulated in the built environment in migrants' hometowns in Europe seems at odds with the timespan of history captured in Australian cities and towns. Yet other migrants articulate a sense of 'ancient' Australia and a spiritual feeling of connection to places that feel 'ancient' in a way their former homelands did not. Migrant's interviews identified national connotations ascribed to bushfires and floods, and the way this rhetoric contributed to some people's reflections on belonging within regional and disaster-prone Australia. People had an experience of something that seemed quintessentially Australian, that helped them to feel part of their community and indeed the nation. As a historian, I feel at times a compulsion to treat these reflections as final and fixed perspectives much like traditional written sources, but these life narratives are but one moment captured in an ongoing process of place-making and life narration in regional Australia.

Hadeel Abdelhameed (La Trobe University) - Iraqi theatre makers in Australia: making theatre means making home

This suggested paper will investigate the life narrative of Iraqi theatre makers migrants in Australia. Starting from the premise that Iraqi theatre practitioners, dramaturges, directors, and performers who migrated to Australia during the 1990s fled from the political and cultural oppression in Iraq, this paper argues that they aimed to land in a liberal country that would offer them a space for creative freedom. Art halls, places of worship and community centres housed live performances of Iraqi theatre makers who shared their life narratives with their cultural, religious, ethnic, and artistic communities. This paper argues that these plays articulated Iraqi theatre makers' stories of settlement, migration and artistic freedom through dramatic enactment in the (trans)national and cross-cultural context of Australia. I came to this conclusion through semi-structured interviews I did with a cohort of Iraqi theatre makers who are based in VIC, NSW, and QLD for a pilot project that I conducted in collaboration with the Australian Live Performance Database (AusStage). The ethnographic research was part of AusStage's Phase 7: International Breakthrough that aimed to archive international live performances produced in Australia. From June- December 2021, I archived nearly 44 Iraqi plays of 8 Iraqi theatre makers who provided experiences of artistic

belonging that are missing from the Australian modern migration history. The Iraqi community in Australia is one of the under- studied and least investigated within the Australian migration studies.

Harshitha Peddireddy, Alexander Titus and Angela Paulson (ANU) - Agency in Exploitation: A Snapshot of Australian South-Asian Transport Workers

Transnational migration is bound up in paradoxes; it is both a tool in the quest for upward mobility and also a great chain that binds communities into poverty. Migrants also become emblematic of these paradoxes, as they struggle between being typecast as victims or as opportunists. In the Australian South-Asian community there are none that epitomise this paradox more than workers in the rideshare or taxi industry whose stories remain misunderstood at best or misrepresented at worst. The key aim of this paper is to bring to light migrant life narratives, and centre the conversation around transnational migration on the South Asian experience in post-colonial Australia. Central to this lived experience, is the relationship that these migrants have with the Australian education system. With only 33% of permanent arrivals in Australia having their Tertiary education recognised (Rachwani, 2023), qualifications have become a defining feature of mobility and agency. We hope to investigate the impact this has had on migrants' ability to metaphorically 'drive their own narratives' with dignity and a sense of self respect. In short, this paper seeks to present a snapshot of Australian South-Asian transport workers, told by and through their lived experiences. Through encapsulating the personal stories of South Asian migrants, this paper re-examines the narratives of transnational migration and redefines the boundaries of the Australian experience.

Ibrahim Abraham (Federation University) - "At the base of the pyramid": Cultural institutions of alienation and empowerment in migrant and ethnic minority life narratives in Australia

A strong body of contemporary Lebanese-Australian literature casts light on the intersections of religion, race, ethnicity, and class in Australia. Primarily engaging with the ambiguously autobiographical work of Omar Sakr and Michael Mohammed Ahmad, this paper focuses on the role of cultural institutions, primarily universities, as sites of both alienation and empowerment, within and beyond the texts. For although Sakr and Ahmad draw upon insights gained during tertiary education, and find themselves enmeshed within Australia's (multi)culture industries, each depicts cultural institutions as sites of alienation for working-class Lebanese-Australian Muslims. Whereas Sakr depicts universities as sites of psychological or metaphorical torture, Ahmad theorizes cultural institutions as sites of exploitation. Revealingly, these approaches to cultural institutions are reminiscent of Les Murray, a privileged insider-outsider in Australian cultural institutions who similarly regarded universities and cultural institutions at odds with his identity group, Australia's rural, white working class. Reading contemporary Lebanese-Australian second-generation migrant writers alongside Murray reveals the ambiguity of cultural institutions in the lives of Australian writers, as well as returning our attention to the idea of the foundational modern migrant experience, from rural to urban life.

Jessie Liu (ANU) - A Territory with No (Asian) People: Asian Settlers and The Settler Colonial Imaginaries of Australia

In 2019, right-wing Australian politician Pauline Hanson claimed she was "Indigenous" because she was "born here" and thus "native to the land." Hanson's comments exemplified the positioning of whiteness as a form of 'native' belonging and ownership which occurred through violent processes of Indigenous dispossession and policies such as the White Australia policy. Further, this racial imaginary of 'whiteness as native', appropriates Indigeneity, which both naturalises and disguises the continued settler occupancy of the land.In this paper, I build on existing works by scholars interrogating settler colonialism to explore the continued presence and impact of these ideas in Australia. While existing research has focused on the reproduction of these ideas by white settlers, I will investigate how Asian settlers have become entangled in racial and settler colonial histories of whiteness. Specifically, by drawing on interviews with marginalized Chinese migrant women in Australia, I examine how the positionality of whiteness as 'native' can be reinforced and reproduced by non-White settlers such as Chinese migrant women. I argue that Asian settlers can become participants in the problematic 'indigenizing' of Whiteness in Australia through their constitution of white Australians as 'locals' and 'real Australians', a process that erases Indigenous histories and relationship to land. I highlight how these women export these ideas and shape Asian imaginaries of Australia, thereby reproducing settler colonial logics transnationally. However, I also argue that these discourses of whiteness ultimately harm marginalised migrant women and exacerbate their own feelings and experiences of alienation within Australia.

Kasia Williams (ANU) – "Homing Desire": Narrating affinities between colonized nations as migrant home-making

Majority of Polish migrants came to Australia as post-WW2 refugees and, to some extent, share some general characteristics of post-WW2 'European' migrants. However, in the 1980s, the Polish diaspora in Australia started to change substantially. In Poland this was the period of the formation of the independent trade union 'Solidarity' and, at the same time, of the tightening of the communist regime's control. As a result, between 1980 and 1991, more than 25,000 'Solidarity migrants' arrived in Australia. This second wave of Polish migrants was a very different cohort from the first wave: they were mostly young urban singles or families, mostly tertiary-educated and highly skilled. They often had good working knowledge of English and, thus, high expectations concerning the terms of their settlement and life in Australia. They benefited from the political shift of the 1970s from assimilation towards multiculturalism, in that they were able to retain their Polish cultural identity, without feeling the need to be particularly or exclusively attached to 'things Polish.' Their literary & autobiographical writing display diverse themes, but generally they are more focused on 'autobiography of place,' and seek to define themselves in relation to more than one context/world. The theme of Poland's struggle for freedom features clearly in their writings, particularly in texts dealing with the threat posed by the introduction of martial law in 1981 in Poland. Yet, equally evident is their strong interest in Aboriginal heritage and cultural perspectives. This interest in often justified by the perceived affinity between colonized nations and shared experiences of a struggle with an empire. This paper focuses on literature produced by 'Solidarity' migrants, in which the themes of colonialism, dependence and sovereignty provide a context for conceptualizing home in displacement.

Kawsar Ali (Macquiarie University) - The Christchurch Massacre: anti-Muslim violence through settler colonial claims

The contention of this presentation is to consider how the Christchurch Massacre may be understood as a case study of racial and anti-Muslim violence through the settler colonial contexts of both Aotearoa-New Zealand and Australia. On the 15th of March 2019 Australian gunman Brenton Tarrant entered two mosques in Aotearoa-New Zealand and killed 51 Muslims. Despite current embodiment as multicultural nations that are post-assimilationist policy, both Aotearoa-New Zealand and Australia are shaped by their colonial past and present as settler colonies. I will showcase how settler colonialism allows 'the logics of anti-Indigenous racism, genocide and orientalism' (Smith 2012, p. 64) to mark Muslim bodies as non-white and anti-white, generating violent effects and practices that target Muslims. As Randa Abdel Fattah (2017, p. 23) writes: multiculturalism, in all of its policy variants, has been formulated on the basis of the denial of Indigenous sovereignty, coupled with liberal democratic notions of individual liberty, equality and justice, based on a central white paradigm. This will allow an analysis that contextualises Tarrant's fixation on ethnic replacement and the growing birth rates of a Muslim population as rooted in settler colonialism by enacting the 'logics of extermination' (Wolfe 2006) to secure white settler possession (Moreton-Robinson 2004, p. 7). This ethical intervention seeks to acknowledge these past and current systemic genocide of traditional custodians of both occupied lands to ask the following questions: How might we understand anti-Muslim violence through the contexts of settler colonialism? How might we reconcile justice for the victims of racial violence through acknowledging macropolitical structures that also attack Indigenous, Black and racialised subjects?

Kim Huynh (ANU) - For us "Australia" rhymes with "failure": How a Vietnamese refugee family comes to grips with loss of place, status and memory

This paper examines the challenges, methods and value in writing a story about an elderly Vietnamese Australian refugee who has survived a stroke and is living with dementia. The narrator is the man's middle-aged son. After encountering a series of work and life failures, he returns to the family home to face his father, and to help care for him. Their caring relationship goes through stages of shock, adaptation and acceptance. Throughout these stages, the son diaries his own thoughts and fears while recording his father's accounts of what it was like to lose his homeland after the 1975 Fall of Saigon and to establish a new but never settled life in Australia. This semi-autobiographical project disrupts linear constructions of time, ideologies of progress, model migrant and happiest refugee stereotypes and top-down conceptions of care. It incorporates multiple forms of expression including prose, reportage, poetry, dialogues, translation and cultural analysis. The project explores intergenerational diasporic relationships, transnational identity and post-memory, while seeking ways for forced migrants and their descendants to move from trauma and dislocation to healing and belonging.

Larysa Chybis (Curtin University) - A Long Traversal of Professional Transition: Ukrainian Migrant Teachers' Lived Experiences in Australia

Although Australia has a long history of migration, migrants often confront significant impediments to their professional goals. Many new migrants are forced into employment which is below their qualifications. This inquiry aims to investigate Ukrainian migrant teachers' experiences of professional pathways in Australia for the purpose of better comprehending the problem and to facilitate migrant teachers' transition into the Australian professional environment. The project engages Ukrainian migrant teachers who obtained their master's or specialist degrees in Ukraine or

a post-Soviet country and whose main professional activity overseas comprised teaching in secondary or tertiary educational institutions. The study employs a qualitative narrative approach for the purpose of underscoring the personal stories of participants. Narrative interviews are used as the primary method of data collection as well as artefacts, documents and memos. The project seeks to highlight Ukrainian migrant teachers' professional transition in Australia by arguing that cultural diversity is critical in the pedagogical professional environment. Furthermore the research seeks to promote relevant policy changes regarding current and future migrant teachers' qualification validation and employment. The research will support other migrant communities facing similar professional challenges and will advise apposite organizations, such as the Education Department of Western Australia of the current situation in the field.

Mei-fen Kuo (Macquarie University) - Narrative Identity and the Politics of Making Chinese Café and Restaurants in Sydney from Interwar Period to the Cold War Era

Chinese cafés and restaurants evolved beyond their initial culinary function, emerging as cultural and community hubs in post-colonial Australia. This paper draws from an extensive range of sources, including newspaper articles, personal correspondence, memoirs, and oral histories, to examine narratives surrounding Chinese cafés and restaurants in Sydney. Spanning from the aftermath of World War I to the Cold War era, these narratives encapsulate transnational lives related to work, food, and family businesses of Chinese migration. These narratives illuminate the process of 'place-making' in the redefinition of Chineseness within the diaspora. The paper traces three distinct narrative threads in relation to the making of Chinese café in Sydney. The first narrative aligns cafes with bourgeois Chinese nationalism, aiming to counter racial discrimination through the lens of transnational modernity during the interwar period. The second narrative unfolds against the backdrop of WWII through the Cold War era, interweaving left-wing grassroots Chinese nationalism in Australia. This narrative form reflects the resistance of Chinese wartime migrants who utilised cafés as a space for solidarity in their fight for rights in Australia. The third narrative pertains to the 1960s, a period marked by a divided Chinese community in Sydney. The narratives surrounding Chinese cafés and restaurants also fostered an awareness of hierarchies within the communities. Throughout these narratives, Chinese cafés emerge as emotional spaces involving memories and a sense of unsettled identities. They often served as sanctuaries amid historical and social injustices intertwined with the process of identity formation and community development.

Niro Kandasamy (University of Sydney), Michael McDonnell (University of Sydney), Jordana Silverstein (University of Melbourne)- The Autobiographical turn in First Nations and Refugee Histories

First Nations and refugee autobiographies in settler-colonial Australia have proliferated in the last six decades, bringing the perspectives of racially minoritised communities into mainstream conversations about loss, trauma, survival, and resistance against abject policies and structures. First Nations autobiographies peaked during key developments, such as the Mabo judgement in 1992, the Bringing Them Home report in 1997, the 200-year anniversary of colonial invasion in 1988, and the Sydney Olympics in 2000. Similarly, refugee autobiographies coincided with the government's punitive refugee regimes during the same period, such as the legislation of mandatory detention in 1992 and the 'Pacific Solution' in 2001. Autobiographies provided an opportunity for First Nations and refugee survivors to try to make connections between the groups within the realm of Australian

politics that was largely closed to them. These autobiographies provided a unique space for self-reflection and for individuals and groups to describe their own on-the-ground realities. This paper traces key historical moments through the autobiographies of First Nations and refugee people. Their writings document and respond to wars of conquest, genocidal policies, assimilation efforts, formal and informal Removal of entire communities and nations, the removal of First Nations peoples from their homes and families, and the mass displacement of refugees to distant lands. The paper begins by examining the origins and diversity of autobiographical writing in the nineteenth-century. It then turns to the proliferation of autobiographies in a twentieth century marked by ongoing dispossession, displacement, and settler-colonial violence.

Rebecca Surenthiraraj (University of Sydney)- Seeking refuge: Place-making strategies of Sri Lankan Tamil asylum seekers and refugees in Australia

Stories of Sri Lankan Tamil individuals and families seeking asylum in Australia have featured in the Australian political landscape and continue to do so even today. While such narratives are primarily seen as tools of political advocacy, they also speak to strategies of place-making in Australia, similar yet different to other migrant writing. Narratives of Sri Lankan Tamil asylum seekers and refugees – and their advocates – occupy a range of positions, particularly in relation to the Australian state. They appeal to the Australian state as the legitimate authority to both provide asylum to those fleeing Sri Lanka and condemn the 'genocidal' actions of the Sri Lankan state. Yet, they are also critical of state policies on asylum seekers and refugees and seek solidarity with indigenous and other minority groups in challenging the Australian state's authority. Using selected narratives of Sri Lankan asylum seekers/refugees and institutions advocating on their behalf, I explore how this fraught relationship with the Australian state shapes Sri Lankan Tamil asylum seekers' efforts in place-making in Australia. In these narratives, their ideas of Australia as home are constructed through discourses on danger and safety, on legitimacy and belonging, on community and nation. Their engagement with Australia's settler colonial heritage too is complex, acknowledging the injustice of settler colonialism but often incognizant of their own complicity in ongoing colonialism in Australia. I contend that such narratives offer a unique perspective that contribute to and complicate discourses of migrant place-making in settler-colonial Australia.

Vannessa Hearman (Curtin University) - (Re)imagining Australia from Timor-Leste: Life narratives of East Timorese returnees after independence

This paper explores how East Timorese who have returned to Timor-Leste after independence reflect on their lives and the changing meanings of Australia for them. In 2002 when Timor-Leste became independent, it was estimated that those of East Timorese descent numbered around 20,000 in Australia. They first arrived as refugees from an internal civil conflict in 1975, followed by those fleeing the Indonesian occupation (December 1975 - September 1999). Independence led to the need for East Timorese to renegotiate their relationship with the homeland with some choosing to return to Timor-Leste. This paper discusses preliminary findings from several oral history interviews with those who have returned to live in Timor-Leste and examines the reasons for their return and their views and feelings about Australia since. It analyses the extent to which return has forced the interviewees to reassess their sense of identity and forged critical reflections of both countries. With these life narratives being recounted in the 'post-refugee' phase of the narrators' lives, Australia is no longer a country of refuge but a country of choice with

which to engage (or not). The interviews form part of the data gathered in a larger research project dealing with the history and remembrance of East Timorese migration to Australia.

Zhengdao Ye, Shuyu Zhang, Janet Davey (ANU) - Chinese migrants' place-making in modern Australian society: Studying life narratives in China Post's 1994 series 'Australia, where is our place?'

Between 1980 and 1995, tens of thousands of Chinese nationals settled in Australia, forming one of the largest waves of migration in modern Australian history. These new migrants from mainland China transformed not only the demographic makeup but also the multilingual landscape of Australia. Yet the experiences of this group of Chinese-Australians is little known to wider Australian society. What initially motivated them to come to Australia? What was their life like? How did they view their life in a new country? What beliefs and ideas sustained them? How did they see their place in Australian society? In this paper, we aim to answer some of these questions by offering a close reading of a collection of reader-submitted life narratives published in the Australian Chinese-language newspaper东方邮报 [Dōngfāng Yóubào, China Post]. In our exploration of life narratives included in China Post's 1994 series, '澳洲，我们的位置在哪里？[Àozhōu, wǒmen de wèizhì zài nǎlǐ?, (in) Australia, where is our place?]', we pay particular attention to the terms Chinese-Australian writers used to refer to themselves and others, and to Australia and China. This reveals the linguistic complexity involved in meaning construction across national, cultural and ideological boundaries. In addition, examining how these life writers described their world in their own terms highlights the 'impossible necessity of translation' (Ommundsen 2022), and we explore ways that the writers dealt with the untranslatability conundrum, as well as linguistic methods that researchers can potentially use to overcome the translatability problem.