

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis as: **Meredith L. Weiss & Michele Ford (2011) Temporary Transnationals: Southeast Asian Students in Australia**, *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 41:2, 229-248, available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00472336.2011.553042>

## **Temporary Transnationals: Southeast Asian Students in Australia**

Meredith L. Weiss & Michele Ford

### **Abstract**

Despite rapidly increasing global flows of international students, research to date has paid little heed to how students abroad identify and mobilise. Focusing on the experience of Indonesians, Malaysians and Singaporeans in Australia – a primary hub for international education – we explore the ways in which our informants understand their place and potential as students. We find international students to comprise a distinct sort of diaspora. With their liminal status, these – for the most part – only temporary transnationals do internalise new norms and agency in a personal sense. However, they tend to identify increasingly as national citizens and to be disinclined to mobilise politically, at least during the course of their studies. These findings add to our understanding both of collective identity and action among students, and of the broader implications of globalisation and internationalisation for social and political activism.

**Keywords:** Higher education, globalisation, migration, mobilisation, Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore

Contemporary globalisation is a complex of ever-faster flows and ever-broader networks, encompassing everything from ideas and cultural forms to money, resources and people. Or, as David Held describes it, globalisation “is about the stretching of connections, relations, and networks between human communities, an increase in the intensity of these, and a general speeding up of all these phenomena,” on both transcontinental and inter-regional levels (cited in Guibernau, 2001: 427).<sup>1</sup> All this transpires in a context of internationalisation, or the increasing horizontal density of relations among state and non-state actors, increasing vertical links from the subnational to international levels, and enhanced transnational structures, both formal and informal. Elaborating on this distinction, Tarrow (2005: 8, 19) adds that whereas globalisation, “a source of interest, ideology, and grievances,” is what “produces the flows and transactions of an interwoven international capitalist economy,” internationalisation creates “the institutional and informal framework within which transnational activism – some of it aimed at globalisation but much of it independent of that process – takes shape.”

Most studies of globalisation and higher education focus on institutions, cultures and outputs, or conceptualise the human components in terms either of how international students experience the educational process, or of brain drain, gain and circulation (see Robertson, 2006). Few studies on how students internalise their experience while abroad or how they participate beyond their studies in their host culture examine their engagement with social and political issues, how their identities shift, or their potential as activists. Such questions fall within the ambit of studies of diaspora and transnationalism, fields dominated by works on long-term migrant communities, activist networks, occupational categories or steps toward a supranational civil society and strangely silent on the issue of students as transnationals.

Students present an unusual form of diaspora. Technically bounded by the conditions of student visas, bonds or stipulations attached to scholarships and institutional regulations, international students are also, like all students, temporary occupants of that niche. Intrinsic to being a student is the pursuit of mobility, both occupational and social. International students may choose to study elsewhere specifically to augment such mobility in their own society. For example, a survey of Malaysian undergraduates in Australia found that nearly all felt their overseas education would boost their employment prospects, both globally and locally, compared with having studied at home (Sin, 2006: 249).<sup>2</sup> However, many also seek longer-term geographical mobility, as they have a high propensity to remain (or attempt to remain) in the host country. These flows are shaped at least in part by inequities in power and social inequalities between generally wealthier host countries and less advantaged sending countries (Kell and Vogl, 2007: 19), and affect both those migrating for academic purposes and the education systems they join or leave. Mitchell (2001), for instance, describes the implications for schools in a community in British Columbia, Canada of steeply rising migration from Hong Kong, and the ways in which educational styles and objectives, particularly with regard to promotion of democratic national citizenship, have been pressed to adapt to newcomers' cultural norms, expectations and position *vis-à-vis* the nation-state.

At the same time, the category "student" has been expanding world-wide, as mass higher education becomes the norm. Enabling such growth is not just the possibility of overseas study, but the development of new sorts of institutions (for instance, advanced vocationally orientated ones), private sector initiatives, distance learning and the professionalisation of higher education administration (Altbach, 1999). These new options render higher education accessible to an ever-growing range of students, from diverse class, regional, ethnic, gender and religious backgrounds. As a result, universities in particular have grown all the more heterogeneous and potent as what Mary Louise Pratt describes as "contact zones" – "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination" – that open new possibilities for intercultural mixing and identification (cited in Kenway and Bullen, 2003: 9).

We seek in this paper to address several aspects of transnational student identity and mobilisation: the form and focus of their social practices; the issues that excite them; the extent to which their level of activism in Australia mirrors their level of activism at home; and the extent to which home country governments seek to control the activities of their citizens abroad. In order to do so, we focus on Indonesian, Malaysian and Singaporean

students in Australia, cohorts with distinct national identities but key similarities in culture and home context. We have chosen to study these national groups, rather than the mainland Chinese and Indian students who now dominate the overseas student population, not only because Southeast Asians have a much longer history of studying in Australia but also because that history includes a demonstrated tendency for engagement in political activism while doing so.<sup>3</sup>

Our approach combines close examination of circumstances and statistics of international student flows into Australia, particularly amid shifting funding and immigration regimes, and a series of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with 30 students in a sub-set of universities in three Australian cities. While other studies have used large-scale survey methodologies to explore the experiences and attitudes of international students, a qualitative approach focusing in depth on a relatively small number of students fits our research objectives better. We selected students in each university using a purposive sampling technique that took into account the demographic spread of the target nationalities and level of study in those universities, and targeted students who were likely to be socially and/or politically active. Interviews, which lasted up to two hours, were conducted in Indonesian, Malay or English by one or both of the authors in 2008 and 2009. In Sydney, we focus on the metropolitan universities of Sydney and New South Wales, the former with a long and distinctive history of student activism and the latter at the forefront of the internationalisation drive, with international students – many of them from Southeast Asia – comprising 14.4% of its total student body as early as 1988 (Shu and Hawthorne, 1995: 119). For comparison, we interviewed students also at the highly internationalised Australian National University (ANU) in the national capital, Canberra, and at the Flinders University of South Australia in Adelaide, which experienced a surge in international enrolments after immigration rules were changed to favour graduates from campuses in regional and low-growth metropolitan centres from July 2003. This combination of methods and field sites couples a broad perspective on the theoretical issues at stake with a more nuanced exploration of individual-level dynamics.

In our analysis, we explore the organisations and networks that international students join or form, the transnational links entailed (with their home country or otherwise), the identities around which students mobilise and the repertoires and frames they employ.<sup>4</sup> Overarching these dimensions is the question of how students fit along a continuum from local to cosmopolitan; whether they are merely transnational, truly internationalist or something in between; and how that placement affects their capacity for activism. We argue that international students negotiate national and international identities in complex ways. They may best be described as “cosmopolitan locals” for their mix of agency as (upwardly) mobile, educated citizens and liminality in inherently temporary, subject positions, clearly identified with a nation-state in which they choose not to reside presently. Products of a particular stage in global economic neo-liberalism, the rapidly expanding ranks of international students present a distinctive diasporic community, important not just for education and employment markets, but for their particular mobilisational potential – a potential that is not, however, at least for Southeast Asians studying in Australia, necessarily always reached.

## **Overseas students in Australia**

Australia is one of the world's leading destinations for overseas students, notwithstanding its comparatively small size. Anglophone developed countries are the primary recipients of international student flows at all levels of education, a market dominated by the USA, the UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, in that order. Within Australian higher education, the lion's share of students are – and have always been – from Asia, not least because of the legacy of Anglo-American colonialism, which left English the established language of global commerce and of early educational aid programmes, designed to produce a pro-Western, acculturated elite among former colonies (Matthews and Sidhu, 2005). Australia's ongoing surge in international student enrolments started with early post-war "trade and aid" policies when, alongside more powerful Western countries like the USA and the UK, Australia cultivated Cold War allies and economic partners in the developing world through scholarships, textbook subsidies, institutional grants and more (Altbach, 2004: 3, 9). Most notable in Australia's case was the Colombo Plan, established in January 1950 by the Commonwealth foreign ministers with the aim of channelling bilateral aid, including scholarships and training, to the developing countries of South and Southeast Asia. The Colombo Plan's Technical Co-operation Scheme alone either sponsored or subsidised around 17,000 South and Southeast Asian students to Australia, the majority of them Malaysians and Indonesians (Oakman, 2002). These were among a total of 40,000 Asians who came to study in Australia under the Plan, which remained in place for 35 years (Kell and Vogl, 2007: 14). Before the Colombo Plan, in 1948, there had been only 300 non-European students in Australia. While the Colombo Plan provided a boost to the number of foreign students in Australia, the number of private students greatly outstripped the number of Colombo Plan students in the 1950s and 1960s (Megarrity, 2005: 32-8). Although ideological pressures have shifted since the end of the Cold War, academic norms, institutional forms, texts and systems for assessment continue to flow across national boundaries, along with students and staff. An estimated 80% of these students travel from poorer countries to study in wealthier ones (Altbach, 2004: 12).

Internationalisation is neither an automatic nor value-free process. Stier (2004: 88-92) identifies three key ideologies – simultaneously in play, even when at cross-purposes – underlying state pursuit of transborder academic flows and linkages. The first is "idealism," or the belief that international co-operation will allow higher education to "contribute to the creation of a more democratic, fair and equal world." Through (largely one-way) internationalisation, students from less-developed countries access knowledge and competence; their more privileged peers gain an understanding of cultural relativism and global variation in lives, values and ideas. The second is "instrumentalism," or the alignment of educational systems and norms to facilitate cross-border labour force mobility in a multicultural but uniformly capitalist world or (as in the case of the European Union) to foster supranational identities. Last is "educationalism," or the academic value for teachers and students alike of exposure to unfamiliar academic settings and norms – the principle that underpins the ever-increasing demand for student exchange. All three of these ideologies undergird aspects of the contemporary wave of internationalisation of Australian higher education.

In Australia, the pace of internationalisation picked up particularly after the mid- 1980s, when the federal government deregulated the education sector and introduced new incentives for educational institutions to enter international markets (Shu and Hawthorne, 1995: 113-15). The most notable aspect of this restructuring was the introduction of a deregulated full-fee-paying system for international students in 1989, in line with a reframing of education as a source of “export” income rather than a form of development aid (Sin, 2006: 243). Expansion of international higher education has been a conscious state policy in Australia ever since, focusing both on attracting students to the country and accessing less mobile student markets overseas. The latter practice accounts for around one-third of all international students, the majority of them enrolled in Australian offshore campuses and the rest enrolled as external students of institutions within Australia (for details, see Healey, 2008). Attracting international students raises revenue through tuition and other monies spent in-country and creates jobs by expanding education and related service markets in Australia. Indeed, education has been Australia’s third highest value export since 2006 and the only one in the top three sources of export revenue not dependent on natural resources. In the 2008-09 financial year, international educational services contributed A\$17.2 billion to the Australian economy, A\$9.5 billion of which was generated by the higher education sector (AEI, 2009a).

Spurring the flows into Australia have been steps especially since 2001 to streamline, facilitate and clarify student visa application procedures. Under changes introduced in the late 2000s, students were no longer required to apply for a new visa if, for instance, they changed education providers or courses; both they and their family members could work for the duration of the course without an additional work visa; and new mechanisms made it easier for students from “higher immigration risk” countries (such as Indonesia) to prove their financial capacity (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2009b).<sup>5</sup> The increase in international enrolments was spectacular, growing 123% between 1997 and 2002; in comparison, domestic student numbers grew by only 8% over the same period. The number of international students residing in Australia doubled in that period, while those residing overseas increased by 186% (DEEWR, 2004). In 2006, there was a 51% increase over the previous year in all student visas issued, the largest proportion of them (44%) for higher education. By October 2009, international student numbers had increased 129% on the 2002 levels to a total of 610,442 students, 200,909 of whom were enrolled in higher education (Table 1). This growth has been largely consistent despite fluctuations in rankings and absolute numbers among sending countries and temporary changes in response to shifts in Australian education policies, for instance with regard to scholarships and funding. Student numbers have been periodically affected by regulations on other funding sources, for instance, the recalibration of Malaysian government scholarship eligibility rules and priorities, while financial and political crises in source countries have caused slowdowns at times. The student profile has also shifted in response to policy changes in the Australian and Commonwealth scholarships. For example, the policy of gender equity implemented by the Australian International Development Assistance Bureau (AIDAB) announced in 1976, which aimed to award half of all scholarships to female students by 1997. Rates of female AIDAB scholars surged: from 1989-91, women’s share of AIDAB scholarships increased

from 27% to 39%, while the number of women supported for PhD studies increased fivefold (Shu and Hawthorne, 1995: 124).

**Table 1.** Top ten countries of origin for foreign students, 2002-09

Country of origin	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
China	15,971	22,265	30,375	40,239	46,453	49,377	53,057	63,741
India	8712	11,656	16,970	21,070	23,855	25,348	26,083	26,690
Malaysia	13,463	15,354	15,819	15,269	14,763	15,009	15,572	17,268
Singapore	10,384	10,136	9174	8285	7796	7415	7445	7957
Indonesia	11,276	11,251	10,410	9469	8573	7795	7347	7878
South Korea	3602	4382	4903	5214	5414	5778	6241	6966
Hong Kong	8136	9813	10,438	9813	8214	6767	6159	6080
Vietnam	1708	1985	2146	2343	2552	2912	3811	5648
Thailand	4836	5552	5600	5136	4788	4632	4173	4033
Nepal	934	808	652	626	847	2281	3108	3624

*Source:* Data from AEI (2009b).

Australian policies on international students are also tied explicitly to those on skilled migration, with close co-operation between the relevant ministries. Australia is not alone in finding in international students a ready source of skilled workers; such schemes are common among developed countries. Over half of the international students awarded doctorates in the USA in 1996, for instance, remained in the USA five years later, including the vast majority of those from China and India, the top two source countries. Australia has adopted particularly proactive policies on this front. Amendments since the late 1990s have made it easier for overseas students who earn qualifications in Australia to apply for General Skilled Migration visas (Ziguras and Law, 2006: 61-5). These measures open up a ready pool of skilled migrants, at the start of their working lives, with proven fluency in English and readily recognised qualifications, and who are already familiar with local life and culture – a resource especially important given Australia's aging local population (Ziguras and Law, 2006). In addition, although the Department of Immigration emphasises that students should not base their educational choices solely on hopes for migration, the points system for applications for permanent resident (PR) status has been amended to privilege those with Australian tertiary qualifications, particularly if they have skills in demand (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2009a).

Graduates of Australian higher education institutions and, in particular, those who have studied in-country for at least two years and/or at the doctoral level, are accorded additional points toward their application, even without a family sponsor in Australia. From 2003, those who had studied outside the major metropolitan areas for at least two years gained yet more points, on the presumption that they would be more likely to settle in those areas, thus helping to redistribute the skilled labour force and disperse students away from the major metropolitan universities (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2009a).<sup>6</sup> Also, from 2001, overseas students under 45 years of age were able to apply for PR status while still in Australia (rather than returning home first), and were eligible for an 18-month temporary visa to allow them to gain skilled work experience, improve their English language skills or

undertake a professional year – all of which increased their chances for a General Skilled Migration visa if they did not yet meet the criteria. Holders of this class of temporary visa could apply under the General Skilled Migration scheme at any time (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2010a). Reflecting these adjustments, the rates of students applying for and receiving PR status increased. For example, most of the 5101 Malaysians who obtained PR status in 2003-04 had Australian qualifications – meaning that a large proportion of local Malaysian graduates had successfully sought to remain in Australia (Ziguras and Law, 2006: 66).

Individuals excluded from these opportunities to settle in Australia include recipients of particular scholarship schemes, such as the Australian Development Scholarships and Asian Leadership Awards administered by AusAID, which are open only to citizens of countries in which Australia has a significant aid programme. As the goals of these scholarships are to foster economic and social development in those countries, as well as to foster partnerships and linkages between Asia-Pacific countries and Australia, recipients of these awards are required to return to their country of citizenship for at least two years after graduation. Students who violate the terms of the award must repay the full amount of their scholarship.<sup>7</sup> Importantly, also, graduates of Australian offshore programmes do not receive the same preference in applications for skilled migration to Australia as those who studied in Australia (Ziguras and Law, 2006: 69). Overall, these policies demonstrate a clear expectation that studying in Australia will foster some degree of affinity for the country – that international students will want to become “Australian” and will understand the content of that identity.

### *Student demographics*

Despite ongoing restrictions on some groups of students from the region, Asians now constitute well over 80% of international student enrolments in Australia at the tertiary level. Students from mainland China have come to dominate the source country profile, more than quadrupling in number since 2002 and, in 2009, representing almost 32% of a total of 200,909 international students enrolled at Australian tertiary education institutions (AEI, 2009b). India, consistently the second largest source country since 2004, accounted for a further 13% of international enrolments in that year; its share has grown rapidly since 1991, when only 378 Indians were enrolled at any level of the education system (Gillan et al., 2003: 1396). Southeast Asia, historically the most important source of international students, also continues to factor significantly in the higher education sector, accounting for approximately 22% of all enrolments, with the overwhelming majority coming from Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia.

These three countries have long been a core component of international education in Australia. More Malaysians study in Australia than in any other foreign country, including in the USA and UK combined, with an estimated 250,000 Malaysians having graduated from Australian institutions since the 1950s (AEI, 2007). Among Malaysians, Colombo Plan grants were especially attractive to ethnic minorities, who were increasingly squeezed out of local universities through the 1970s and 1980s. Many Malaysians remained in Australia upon completion of their studies and, as a result, the local Malaysian population (overwhelmingly non-Malay) more than doubled each decade from the 1950s to the 1980s, before economic

growth in Malaysia by the 1990s helped stem the tide. Migration levels then increased again, reaching new highs with the skilled migration scheme. Australia is also the top overseas destination for Singaporean higher education students, while approximately one-third of Indonesian overseas students choose to study in Australia. Either Singapore or Malaysia sent the highest number of students of any country to Australia throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s. In addition, they rank number one and two respectively in hosting offshore programmes of Australian universities, together accounting for well over half of all such programmes (Universities Australia, 2005: table D.10).<sup>8</sup> Though neither Anglophone like Singapore nor so wealthy even as Malaysia, Indonesia held the number 4 spot until 2002, until outpaced by China (Universities Australia, 2005: table D.2). Numbers have, of course, fluctuated, for instance dipping noticeably in 1998 and 1999 for Indonesians and Malaysians alike in the wake of the Asian Economic Crisis, as well as in 1995, when Indonesian enrolments fell by more than half for no discernable reason (Universities Australia, 2005: table D.7). Numbers of Indonesian and Singaporean students have declined significantly from the early 2000s (AEI, 2009b), although IDP Education (2007) maintains that enrolments of the former are predicted to more than double by 2025.

Despite these fluctuations, in 2009, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia represented the third, fourth and fifth largest source countries for the Australian higher education system, behind relative newcomers China and India, with 17,268 Malaysians, 7957 Singaporeans and 7878 Indonesians enrolled in the Australian higher education system. Among other Southeast Asian countries, only Vietnam and Thailand were among the top ten source countries in 2009 and at dramatically lower levels (see Table 1). Patterns vary by state and territory: the greatest proportion of Indonesian higher education students attended institutions in Victoria and New South Wales, while Singaporeans and Malaysians were concentrated in Victoria, Western Australia and New South Wales. In addition, although Chinese students consistently represented the highest number of overseas students in any Australian state or territory in 2009, Malaysians were the second largest group in South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and the third largest group in Victoria and Queensland, while Indonesians constituted the fourth largest group in Victoria and the fifth largest group in New South Wales, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. Despite its tiny size, Singapore was the third largest source country for international tertiary students in Western Australia and Tasmania, the fourth largest for the ACT and the fifth largest for South Australia and Victoria (AEI, 2009b). Students from all three states have some access to scholarships, though an increasing number (a majority of Singaporeans and many non-Malay Malaysians and Chinese Indonesians) are self-funded, driven both by the better opportunities offered by an Australian education and by scarce comparable options at home.

### ***Student organisations and affiliations***

As Melucci (1995: 42, 51) asserts, collective identity is best understood as a self-reflexive, constructed process, which he dubs *identization*: how social actors come to recognise themselves as part of a collective, maintain that collective and see collective action as sensible. Put differently, “[t]he empirical unity of a social movement should be considered as



a result rather than a starting point, a fact to be explained rather than evidence” (Melucci, 1995: 43). Melucci (1995: 44) defines the resultant collective identity as “an interactive and shared definition produced by several individuals (or groups at a more complex level) and concerned with the orientations of action and the field of opportunities and constraints in which the action takes place.”

Historically, the ranks of activists in the home countries considered here have swelled with returning graduates, not least from Australia, who developed both ideological leanings and practical expertise through issue- or religion-based student activism overseas. In the past, too, Southeast Asian students in Australia have played important supporting roles in social movement campaigns in their home countries. For instance, Singaporeans involved with the Network of Overseas Students’ Collective in Australia (NOSCA) rallied to co-ordinate protest activities in support of a group of Singaporean activists detained under the Internal Security Act in 1987 (Rerceretnam, 2005). Similarly, Indonesian students in Australia were politically active in the mid-1990s, sometimes very radically, with a home country or regional focus – aided not only by the fact that student unionism was then compulsory, so facilities and forums were always available, but also by the Australian government’s offering scholarships at that time not only to academics and government officials but also to other qualified applicants, a number of whom worked for NGOs in Indonesia. As one of our respondents explained, in the mid- 1990s, when he first came to Australia to study, Indonesian students circulated papers on a wide range of political topics, organised discussion groups, and more. He went on to note that there is a preponderance of his then-peers among those now active in local politics in Indonesia (in Malaysia, see Weiss, 2011: ch. 5).

However, politics is “no longer cool” among the current generation of Indonesian students. Changes in Indonesian politics since the late 1990s undoubtedly play a role: the level of political freedom students experience in Australia is no longer so starkly different from back home, nor – since the fall of Soeharto – is regime change so pressing. Moreover, Southeast Asian students now have little opportunity or desire to engage with the host culture, including through their student unions. Most of those we spoke to in 2008 and 2009 spent the bulk of their social life outside class with fellow international students, particularly co-nationals and secondarily, other Asians. Indeed, a sense of being “Asian,” associating with fellow Asians (for instance, sitting with them for meals) and being seen as “Asian” by Australians and others was marked among informants. These findings echo those for the secondary school level, where the everyday experiences of international students “were marked by separation and disconnection from local students” and a “heightened awareness of national, cultural, ethnic and racial difference influenced their choice of friends,” even if cross-national linkages developed among international students (Matthews and Sidhu, 2005: 59-60). Some studies suggest that if not overt racism, then at least institutional shortcomings in truly accommodating overseas students, are responsible for international students’ isolation, in Australia as elsewhere. Efforts at internationalisation within Australian universities and schools tend to focus on relatively tokenistic steps, such as holding an annual International Fiesta or providing *halal* food, rather than pedagogical initiatives to bring a more global perspective to university curricula (see, for example, Sidhu, 2004: 58). Reflecting the

findings of other studies, our interviewees' reasons for not spending more time with Australians ranged from a simple lack of time, to discomfort with colloquial Australian English, to their inability (for religious reasons) to hang out drinking in pubs. Few of our informants had had bad experiences with Australians, for instance, racial slurs, though a number of informants – particularly, but not only, Muslim women who wear headscarves – mentioned some personal or a friend's experience of harassment, while a small number felt themselves to be the target of Australians' frustration with Asian immigration, as seen in a series of violent attacks against Indians in Australia in 2009 (*The Australian*, 5 January 2009). Several people also noted marginalisation among Muslims, having experienced discrimination, for instance by the students of Middle Eastern origin who dominate Sydney University's Muslim Students' Association. However, there is commonly also a simple comfort factor, as well, in finding a critical mass of co-nationals.

It is not necessarily the case that students identify collectively as “students” in any sense that is more meaningful (say in terms of an activist identity) than the functional category of people who study. Nor is it a given that a cluster of individuals would identify in terms of citizenship – or of geopolitical region, for that matter – when overseas. Among our informants, however, most did identify quite strongly along national lines. Just as most Indonesians, regardless of background, insisted they identify first and foremost as “Indonesian,” then perhaps as “Indonesian” and “Muslim,” most Malaysians claimed to identify as “Malaysian” and most Singaporeans as “Singaporean,” rather than primarily by ethnicity. Our Indonesian informants, in particular, took pride in being open-minded and displayed a high degree of tolerance for ethnic and religious difference. For instance, one Chinese Indonesian student described the Indonesian community at her Australian university as “much more open” than communities in Indonesia. Another student, a Sundanese from West Java, described relationships between Indonesians in Australia as “less polarised” and more empathetic. A third, of mixed Chinese and Javanese background, felt that other Indonesians were “more accepting” abroad than at home. A fourth, a Buginese, noted the lack of groups based on ethnicity among Indonesian students in Australia and described relations as “harmonious” and “inclusive.” These tendencies held, even though several non-Javanese and Chinese Indonesians described experiences of discrimination at home, and despite the fact that both Chinese and non-Chinese Indonesians observed that Chinese Indonesians tend to form their own communities where numbers permit. Some non-Javanese also expressed a degree of frustration at the prevalence of Javanese language use in their presence or with Jakartans' perceived sense of superiority, and some non-Muslim students at times felt excluded by the social focus on prayer meetings and other religious activities, as opposed to secular social activities, amongst their Muslim compatriots. Regardless of these and other minor tensions, however, Indonesian students reported living, eating and socialising with Indonesians of other ethnic groups, with whom they communicated primarily in the national language, and having friends from across religions. In short, in the Indonesian case, being part of a small community abroad brought a greater awareness of the shared culture of different groups of co-nationals.

By contrast, despite granting discursive priority to their national (Malaysian) identity, Malays in our sample did not tend to mix with Malaysians of other ethnic backgrounds while abroad.

Many had more friends across community lines than they had had in Malaysia but these remained a relatively small part of their social world. Non-Malays in particular noted Malay/non-Malay divisions, echoing patterns at home. These divisions are reflected in language use. Although Malays do speak Malay among themselves, and are likely to speak Malay with Chinese and Indians at home, they tend to use English with Malaysians of Chinese and Indian background while in Australia. This preference may be presumed to reflect longstanding divisions in Malaysia where, however much a national language and lingua franca, Malay remains to a large extent an ethnic language, unlike Indonesian in Indonesia. Speaking English thus subtly reinforces the sense, carried over from Malaysia, of the “otherness” of non-Malays. The fact that Malaysian students were less likely than their Indonesian peers to subordinate subnational identities confirms the fungibility of these identity patterns.

Perhaps, more surprisingly, although some Malaysians of Malay ethnicity did have Indonesian friends and vice versa, such friendships were not present to a substantially greater degree than with Asians of other nationalities. Moreover, despite the fact that Indonesian and Malay are mutually-intelligible variants on the same language, many Malaysians – including ethnic Malays – tend to speak English with Indonesians. These linguistic practices prompted some of our Indonesian informants to describe Malaysians as “stand-offish,” though the latter insisted they were just trying to improve their language skills. Indeed, despite linguistic and ethnic proximity, Malay and Indonesian students professed little special closeness; most scoffed at the notion of being *bangsa serumpun* (peoples from a single root, a common idiom for the nations’ cultural proximity). Political squabbles between Indonesia and Malaysia, for example, a spat over “ownership” of common folk songs, also loomed large among Indonesian students, at least at a superficial level.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, Singaporean students, nearly all of whom primarily speak English while at home or abroad, generally keep their distance from Indonesian and Malaysian students, with whom they feel they have little in common, even while identifying broadly as “Asian.”

It is not surprising, then, that to the extent that these students do mobilise, they tend to join country-specific organisations, encouraged further by the fact that each Australian university has a network of clubs for students of different nationalities. For Indonesians, these clubs are generally within the Indonesian government-sanctioned Australian Indonesian Student Association (*Persatuan Pelajar Indonesia Australia*, PPIA) network, while Malaysians usually have a Malaysian Student Association (though names vary). Singaporeans may have their own organisations or, less commonly, have a joint association with Malaysians. Members of these associations are generally international students, but some members are Permanent Residents who have come from those countries. The strength of these clubs varies by campus with enrolments of that particular category of students, but also based on the history of the specific organisation. However, it is clear that Indonesians tend to be better organised and more tightly knit overall than Malaysians and especially Singaporeans. Broader Southeast Asian groups are scarce, and Indonesian and Malaysian student groups seldom collaborate other than in events like multicultural days organised by the Student Union. Indonesian student groups, for example, are more likely to associate with the

Indonesian Student Association network world-wide, as well as maintaining ties with peers back in Indonesia.

Apart from these country-specific organisations, the most common groups with which our informants were involved were religious ones. In particular, most Muslim students mentioned at least casual participation in Islamic study groups. Although most prayed on campus, among Muslim students from across nationalities, the organisations with which they were most closely associated, such as weekly prayer groups, again tended to follow national lines. A few students were involved in interfaith activities and some – generally Christians – joined (and made friends in) outside congregations, whether dominated by co-nationals or not. Postgraduate or undergraduate student engagement in extracurricular activities varies by campus. For instance, PPIA in Victoria and New South Wales is run primarily by undergraduates, while, in South Australia, postgraduates dominate.

But what of student activism? Many of our contemporary informants from Malaysia and Indonesia had been activists of some kind in their home country – and might have been expected to bring those earlier experiences to their new campus life, informing continued engagement (Melucci, 1996: 298). However, unlike many in previous generations of students from the region, our interviewees' lack of a political perspective or agenda, even among those who had a history of being politically engaged, was striking.<sup>10</sup>

There were, nevertheless, significant variations among our informants by nationality. Most students from Indonesia kept up assiduously with the politics of their home country, although they generally paid far less heed to Australian or other international politics. By contrast, the quite dramatic Malaysian elections of 2008 attracted little interest among Malaysian students in Australia. The fact that most ethnic Malay students are on Malaysian government scholarships and subject to persistent scrutiny no doubt helps to deter political engagement, but even our non-Malay informants from Malaysia seemed not politically inclined. Likewise, trained from young not to engage politically and to take an instrumental approach to their school years, Singaporean students generally had little interest in politics. For example, one student observed that books on Singapore restricted at home were available for her to read in Australia. Yet, while being in Australia sharpened her perspective, distance also made engagement seem implausible. To a large extent, these variations parallel differences in the space available for mobilisation and recent history of political involvement among students in the informants' respective home countries – with the greatest recent student activity in Indonesia and the least in Singapore – even when students abroad are not subject to the same legal constraints as those at domestic universities.

Reflecting their greater engagement at home, it was the Indonesians who were most involved in politically oriented activities while in Australia. Most Indonesian students nevertheless chose to align themselves primarily with groups formed overwhelmingly for purposes of association and sociability rather than resistance or contention of any sort. In particular, the PPIA's links with the Indonesian Department of Foreign Affairs severely limits its members' ability to pursue political ambitions. As a result, those who engage politically most commonly do so through politically orientated religious groups, such as *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU, lit. the awakening of the religious scholars) or the Prosperous Justice Party (*Partai*

*Keadilan Sejahtera*, PKS), organisations with which some of these students had already been engaged prior to arriving in Australia.<sup>11</sup> These allegiances sometimes spill over into ostensibly apolitical activities, as occurred with tensions between PKS and NU factions at the ANU, which affected activities run by the PPIA. However, apart from the occasional politically charged incident – for instance, seminars on the conflict in Papua – hardly any Indonesian students claimed any significant secular political involvement themselves, nor mentioned others from their cohort so engaged. Indeed, when one focus group participant mentioned that she was a member of the Australian leftist organisation, Socialist Alternative, the other students present were extremely surprised.

Southeast Asian students' lack of engagement in part reflects the fact that only a small subset of their number engage with “mainstream” campus groups or campaigns – the primary outlets for activism available on Australian campuses. Indeed, the principal non-nationally or ethnically based groups with which our informants mentioned involvement were the student union (primarily its international student and multicultural committees or initiatives) and religious groups, both on and off campus. Several students participate, too, in “mainstream” campus-wide sporting groups, albeit mostly in sports popular in Asia like badminton and table tennis, or in residence hall-level activities (though in the case of Toad Hall at the ANU, where almost half the resident population is Indonesian, Asian students' engagement in residence-based activities need not signal broader integration). Others, particularly postgraduates, are engaged at the school or faculty level, though again, certain parts of the university are heavily international, for instance, Sydney's Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, or specifically Indonesian-dominated, such as the ANU's Public Policy programme. Still other students are in transnational networks, such as the business-orientated AIESEC (*Association Internationale des Etudiants en Sciences Economiques et Commerciales*).

Their lack of political engagement also reflects the particular character of the students themselves and their specific situation. Some informants noted that they could learn more about their country from afar than from within, but were neither willing nor able to respond – as was the case of the Singaporean student described above. Discouraging activism among Malaysians, too, at least for holders of Malaysian government scholarships (as is the case for most ethnic Malay students in Australia) is a compulsory pre-departure citizenship course and the requirement to submit biannual progress reports, covering both academic matters and extracurricular involvement, to the government. In contrast, Malay students at home have been heavily mobilised in Islamist student groups, many with a distinct political – and in many cases, oppositional – slant, since at least the 1970s, even when non-Malay students have been less engaged (for instance, Zainah, 1987). Intriguingly, also, a collective identity as students appears to be most poorly defined among postgraduate informants. The latter were more likely to imagine themselves beyond nationality as current or future public servants, with a duty to help society not now (especially given their far remove while in Australia), but after graduation. In addition, many postgraduates are funded either by their own or their host government, perhaps increasing their sense that protest would be “ungrateful.” Seen from another perspective, short-term students, especially busy postgraduates, often in Australia with their spouses and children,<sup>12</sup> are more likely to avoid recalibrating their identity to fit a new circumstance, even if that means downplaying a potentially empowering student identity

that lends itself to mobilisation in preference for maintaining a familiar, home-away-from-home ethno-nationalist niche.

### **Temporary Transnationals**

Students across Asia have long histories both of activism and of studying abroad, yet little is known about how these two tendencies converge. Our exploration of Indonesian, Malaysian and Singaporean students in a host country in which large numbers of their co-nationals have long studied allows us to broach that question. Students from these three states vary in their recent national histories of student activism and in their experience of nationhood; the very students we met displayed corresponding proclivities. And yet these patterns shifted overseas, notwithstanding the relatively brief duration of these students' time as migrants. The orientations of our informants were clearly influenced by place: many Indonesians and Malaysians had been more active *as* students in their home country settings and most claimed they identified less keenly in national terms prior to coming to Australia. It is, therefore, worth taking a step back to consider the presumed effects of international education, understood in terms of citizenship, outlook and identity, on questions of activism. Importantly, these findings are not unique to Australia or to students from these particular home countries; Australia's strong external orientation and the long-term clustering of these specific students simply make for a particularly revealing case study of a larger phenomenon.

Critics and cheerleaders of globalisation alike tend to presume shifts in subjectivity among those subject to its flows, but as our exploration of international students' collective identities suggests, such changes are far from automatic. Australia has been at the forefront globally of efforts to promote a more cosmopolitan outlook through international education, starting below the tertiary level. Yet, one study of international education efforts at the secondary school level in Queensland, for instance, found not only pervasive and persistent discourses of nationality and identity that reinforced old affiliations and even spurred new "racial" ones, but also a firmly neo-liberal, instrumental bent to the ideas of global citizenship. Augmenting the presence of international students in schools, in other words, does not automatically trigger "globally oriented subjectivities" – a concept that aligns with Tarrow's (2005: 42-3) presentation of "rooted cosmopolitanism," though with an emphasis more on humanist moral obligations than transnational activism *per se* – among either those students or their local classmates (Matthews and Sidhu, 2005). The current project reaffirms the real disjuncture between studying abroad or amidst/about other cultures and identifying in "global" terms.

As this contrast suggests, a distinction can be made between open, encompassing "cosmopolitans" (who may still be nationalistic even if identifying also as citizens of the world) and closed, defensive "locals" – though in reality, many or most fall somewhere in between. Importantly, however, even one exposed daily to other cultures, media and people may not be cosmopolitan in posture (Roudometof, 2005: 69-70). As Roudometof (2005: 65) explains,

the creation of transnational social spaces leads to a bifurcation of attitudes... expressed in terms of a continuum with cosmopolitanism at the one end and

localism at the other end. Overall, the relationship between transnationalism and the cosmopolitan-local continuum cannot be predetermined in theoretical terms.

Tarrow (2005: 42-3) offers a further refinement in elaborating on the concept of “rooted cosmopolitans,” or “individuals whose primary ties are domestic but who are part of the complex international society,” a concept popularised in the 1990s. Some, but not all, rooted cosmopolitans are transnational activists, “who mobilize domestic and international resources and opportunities to advance claims on behalf of external actors, against external opponents, or in favour of goals they hold in common with transnational allies.” Most in this sub-set emerge from and return to domestic activism, are better educated and better connected than the average citizen, travel more and speak more languages, allowing them to shift among levels and activities in a complex international society. These criteria suggest that overseas students would seem likely candidates for this status and, yet, our informants privilege their roots over a supranational identity, even while acknowledging their changed perspectives, and are less prone to activism than many of their host or home country peers.

Our research emphasises the high degree of agency among students in mediating the local and the global, but also the real constraints on their choices. What we seem to find are temporarily uprooted locals, who do develop a global sensibility and outsider’s perspective on their home country, but not necessarily coupled to any real sense of cosmopolitan efficacy. Nor are these students “flexible citizens,” as described by Aihwa Ong (1999). They *do* take advantage of chances to, in Ong’s terms (1996: 6), “accumulate capital and social prestige in the global arena,” via “flexibility, mobility, and repositioning in relation to markets... and cultural regimes,” but their pursuit of economic opportunities actually refines, rather than attenuates, their sense of patriotic attachment. Students not only recognise a time limit to their stint overseas, notwithstanding the possibility (which a number of our informants planned to pursue) of obtaining PR status, but occupy a liminal space of an increasingly “universal” university. It is not uncommon for international students, imbued with their host country’s academic culture, to “return home with a desire to transform their universities in ways that often prove to be both unrealistic and unattainable” (Altbach, 2004: 12). A large number of the students in our sample shared these sorts of ideals, though most fully expected difficulties upon their return. Moreover, while most hoped to maintain the sort of openness and tolerance common and cultivated in Australia, others had doubts as to how well that could or would be sustained.

Our informants overwhelmingly identified as what we might term “cosmopolitan locals.” They *are* aware of their broader place in the world, are familiar and generally comfortable with being outside their own country and community and have a sense of themselves as “Asian” and “international” (though not, for the most part, as “Southeast Asian”). Several used terms such as “glocalised” to describe their perspective. At the same time, even most of those who seem likely to seek Australian PR status were both patriotic for their home country and clearly prone to surround themselves with co-nationals. Several mentioned efforts to be especially virtuous (religiously or otherwise) while overseas, not least to counter negative impressions of their country, but also out of a new-found interest in their heritage and customs. Theirs is, perhaps, a form of “long-distance nationalism” (identities and behaviours

that connect diasporic individuals with their home country), but less actively engaged than Anderson's (1983) formulation suggests. Rather, what seems at play is simply the effect of isolation and distance – exile, however voluntary or temporary – in heightening the students' sense of their own difference and, hence, identity.

Our data suggest that international education does heighten students' sense of perspective on their home country and culture and exposes them – in the case of our informants, overwhelmingly favourably – to other normative and institutional environments. Yet, perhaps because international education is a clearly bounded stage in students' lives, these temporary transnationals appear less likely than other diasporic communities to engage politically, whether in relation to their home country or their place of study. Being an international student, especially among a large cluster of co-nationals, seems likely to heighten rather than diminish national identity. In the process, their sojourn overseas accords students new agency to mould their *own* sensibilities and career and life paths, and does appear to erode subnational or ethnic affinities, at least to some extent, although possibly only in the short term. Even as students, our respondents generally displayed little faith in the durability of their new-found sensibilities and commitments, however aware they were of a change in their mindset since going abroad. At the same time, too, contemporary modes of international education appear to reduce individuals' sense of immediate political agency rather than promoting political activism – although the general decline in student activism on Australian campuses as domestic students struggle to pay fees and study while earning a living clearly also contributes here.

These findings are significant for our understanding both of the place of collective identity in processes of mobilisation and of concrete processes of globalisation and internationalisation. In terms of identity and mobilisation, the “cosmopolitan local” traits we note held regardless of students' prior educational or activist background, religious or ethnic identity, or position within the university and its organisations. That consistency suggests the ways in which aspects of student status overrides other dimensions of identity, eliding, for instance, the differences across national subgroups in terms of their predilection for activism in the case of Malaysia. Student activists from the home countries in question may not be able to count on the support of co-nationals abroad to the same extent as they did in the past, nor are the latter likely to identify sufficiently with host country causes to mobilise there. These tendencies should temper our expectations of the idealist potential of the internationalisation of higher education (Stier, 2004: 88-92). Rather, instrumentalist and educationalist frames seem more germane, at least on the individual level, notwithstanding planners' manifest expectations as reflected in changing immigration rules, of a real identity shift through higher education.

More broadly, we see in this case study both the mutability of collective identity and the parameters beyond which identity categories will not easily shift. Subsequent studies might trace what does happen to these students once they return home after graduation: are those who are most pessimistic as students about the odds of sustaining their new affiliations and perspectives long term, indeed the ones most likely to revert to old forms, or does perhaps heightened self-awareness prompt especial vigilance? Longitudinal analysis – again, beyond the scope of the current study – could likewise track students' self-assessments for



cosmopolitanism, then assess the relative scores of those international students who do engage politically, when such engagement happens. And further research could compare students with other temporary transnationals – with the caveat that few other forms of migration are so definitively bounded and unrepeatable, let alone vested with so widely embraced an alternative collective identity as that of “student.” For now, though, our purposefully modest scope is revealing in terms of understanding how students’ identity overseas, given changing patterns of migration and immigration regimes, affects their socio-political sensibilities and levels of engagement – findings that speak to scholarship and policies relating to international students and their organisations, but also to scholars of collective action and mobilisation broadly, particularly as migratory flows swirl ever faster and with ever greater differentiation.

## References

- AEI (2007) “Malaysia. Market Data Snapshot,” Australian Education International, [http://www.aei.gov.au/AEI/PublicationsAndResearch/MarketDataSnapshots/MDS\\_No21\\_Malaysia\\_pdf.pdf](http://www.aei.gov.au/AEI/PublicationsAndResearch/MarketDataSnapshots/MDS_No21_Malaysia_pdf.pdf) (downloaded 18 April 2008).
- AEI (2009a) “Export Income,” Australian Education International, [http://www.aei.gov.au/AEI/PublicationsAndResearch/Snapshots/20091110\\_pdf.pdf](http://www.aei.gov.au/AEI/PublicationsAndResearch/Snapshots/20091110_pdf.pdf) (downloaded 28 December 2009).
- AEI (2009b) “Pivot Monthly October Data, Australian Education International <http://aei.gov.au/AEI/MIP/Statistics/StudentEnrolmentAndVisaStatistics/2009/Default.htm#Pivot> (downloaded 28 December 2009).
- Altbach, P. (1999) “The Logic of Mass Higher Education,” *Tertiary Education and Management*, 5, 2, pp. 107-24.
- Altbach, P. (2004) “Globalisation and the University: Myths and Realities in an Unequal World,” *Tertiary Education and Management*, 10, 1, pp. 3-25.
- Anderson, B. (1983) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso.
- AusAID (2009) “Scholarships,” <http://www.ausaid.gov.au/scholar/> (downloaded 28 December 2009).
- DEEWR (2004) “International Higher Education Students: How Do They Differ from Other Higher Education Students?” Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, [http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/international\\_education/publications\\_resources/profiles/international\\_higher\\_education\\_students.htm](http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/international_education/publications_resources/profiles/international_higher_education_students.htm) (downloaded 18 April 2008).
- Department of Immigration and Citizenship (2009a) “Professionals and Other Skilled Migrants,” <http://www.immi.gov.au/skilled/general-skilled-migration/visa-options-inside.htm> (downloaded 28 December 2009).
- Department of Immigration and Citizenship (2009b) “Visa Conditions for Student Visa Holders,” <http://www.immi.gov.au/students/visa-conditions.htm> (downloaded 28 December 2009).

- Department of Immigration and Citizenship (2010a) "Skilled – Graduate (Temporary) Visa (subclass 485), <http://www.immi.gov.au/skilled/general-skilled-migration/485/> (downloaded 2 April 2010).
- Department of Immigration and Citizenship (2010b) "Overseas Student Program – Assessment Levels," <http://www.immi.gov.au/students/student-visa-assessment-levels.htm> (downloaded 2 April 2010).
- Gillan, M., B. Demachis and J. McGuire (2003) "Australia in India: Commodification and Internationalisation of Higher Education," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38, 14, pp.1395-1403.
- Guibernau, M. (2001) "Globalization, Cosmopolitanism, and Democracy: An Interview with David Held," *Constellations* 8, 4, pp. 427-41.
- Healey, N. (2008) "Is Higher Education Really 'Internationalising'?" *Higher Education*, 55, pp. 533-55.
- IDP Education (2007) *Global Student Mobility: An Australian Perspective Five Years On*. <http://www.thecie.com.au/publication.asp?pID¼112> (downloaded 28 December 2009)
- Kell, P. and G. Vogl (2007) "Internationalisation, National Development and Markets: Key Dilemmas for Leadership in Higher Education in Australia," in P. Kell and G. Vogl (eds), *Higher Education in the Asia Pacific: Challenges for the Future*, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 12-28.
- Kenway, J. and E. Bullen (2003) "Self-representations of International Women Postgraduate Students in the Global University 'Contact Zone,'" *Gender and Education*, 15, 1, pp. 5-20.
- Marginson, S. and E. Sawir (2005) "Interrogating Global Flows in Higher Education," *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 3, 3, pp. 281-309.
- Matthews, J. and R. Sidhu (2005) "Desperately Seeking the Global Subject: International Education, Citizenship and Cosmopolitanism," *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 3, 1, pp. 49-66.
- Megarrity, L. (2005) "Under the Shadow of the White Australia Policy: Commonwealth Policies on Private Overseas Students 1945-1972," *Change: Transformations in Education*, 8, 2, pp. 31-51.
- Melucci, A. (1995) "The Process of Collective Identity," in H. Johnston and B. Klandermans (eds), *Social Movements and Culture*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 41-63.
- Melucci, A. (1996) *Challenging Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Mitchell, K. (2001) "Education for Democratic Citizenship: Transnationalism, Multiculturalism, and the Limits of Liberalism," *Harvard Educational Review*, 71, 1, pp. 51-78.
- Oakman, D. (2002) "Young Asians in our Homes: Colombo Plan Students and White Australia," *Journal of Australian Studies*, 72, pp.89-98.
- Ong, A. (1999) *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*, Durham: Duke University Press.

- Rerceretnam, M. (2005) "The 1987 ISA Arrests and International Civil Society Responses to Political Repression in Singapore. Review of Reviewed Item," *AsiaRights*, [http://rspas.anu.edu.au/asiarightsjournal/rerceretnam\\_Article.htm](http://rspas.anu.edu.au/asiarightsjournal/rerceretnam_Article.htm) (downloaded 30 August 2008).
- Rizvi, F. (2005) "International Education and the Production of Cosmopolitan Identities," Paper presented at the Transnational Seminar Series, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 4 March.
- Robertson, S. (2006) "Brain Drain, Brain Gain and Brain Circulation," *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 4, 1, pp. 1-5.
- Roudometof, V. (2005) "Transnationalism and Cosmopolitanism: Errors of Globalism," in R. Appelbaum and W. Robinson (eds), *Critical Globalization Studies*, New York: Routledge, pp. 65-74.
- Shu, J. and L. Hawthorne (1995) "Asian Female Students in Australia: Temporary Movements and Student Migration," *Journal of the Australian Population Association*, 12, 2, pp. 113-30.
- Sidhu, R. (2004) "Governing International Education in Australia," *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 2, 1, pp. 47-66.
- Sin, I. L. (2006) "Malaysian Students in Australia: The Pursuit of Upward Mobility," *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, 15, 2, pp. 239-66.
- Stier, J. (2004) "Taking a Critical Stance toward Internationalization Ideologies in Higher Education: Idealism, Instrumentalism and Educationalism," *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 2, 1, pp. 83-97.
- Tarrow, S. (2005) *The New Transnational Activism*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Universities Australia (2005) "Key Statistics: Internationalisation," <http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/documents/publications/stats/International.pdf> (downloaded 18 April 2008).
- Weiss, M. (2011) *Universities and Students in Malaysia: Crucible, Mirror, Sideshow*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications and Singapore: National University of Singapore Press.
- Zainah, A. (1987) *Islamic Revivalism in Malaysia: Dakwah among the Students*, Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk.
- Ziguras, C. and S. Law (2006) "Recruiting International Students as Skilled Migrants: The Global 'Skills Race' as Viewed from Australia and Malaysia," *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 4, 1, pp. 59-76.

## Acknowledgements

This research collaboration was made possible by a University of Sydney International Visiting Research Fellowship. The authors would like to thank Wayne Palmer for assistance with the initial literature review on foreign student demographics in Australia.

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> There is a very involved literature on precisely what globalisation encompasses, how best to understand and describe it, and how much agency is implicit in these processes. Those works are largely outside the scope of the

---

current study. For a useful exercise in testing theories of globalisation as applied to higher education, however, including a comparison of Indonesian and Australian institutions' understandings and experiences, see Marginson and Sawir (2005). For a focus specifically on how universities of the developing world experience globalisation, see Altbach (2004).

<sup>2</sup> On Chinese and Indian students, see Rizvi (2005).

<sup>3</sup> The dominance of Southeast Asians did not reflect a lack of demand from India or China, but rather was a product of the politics of Australia's restrictive immigration policy. In 1948, for example, Francis Stuart, the political secretary at the Australian Commission in Singapore, urged the government to encourage Indonesian, Thai and Burmese students because Southeast Asians were unlikely to want to stay permanently, unlike Indians and the Chinese. In a communication to McMahon Ball in that year, Stuart commented that "If we are honest we will admit that the White Australia policy is really a Chinese-and-Indian-restriction policy" (cited in Megarrity, 2005: 33).

<sup>4</sup> The prior question of who chooses to study in Australia and why is beyond the scope of this work, though we do touch on the push and pull factors encouraging students from our target countries to pursue an Australian undergraduate or postgraduate degree. Instead, we emphasise what these students do while overseas.

<sup>5</sup> In March 2010, Malaysians and Singaporeans are deemed minimal risk (level 1 of 5); Indonesian students are rated a slightly higher risk (level 2 of 5) (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2010b: 2-3).

<sup>6</sup> The points test (under which Australian graduates are privileged, particularly if they have attended a regional institution) was revised in 2010, considerably changing the conditions for Australian-educated applicants. At the end of that year, the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship and the Minister for Tertiary Education announced a review of the student visa programme, along with the package of measures for the international education sector.

<sup>7</sup> The more widely-available Endeavour Programme scholarships, administered by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEST), on the other hand, are to bolster education and sciences, in particular, featuring Australia's strengths in these areas and fostering transnational links. See AusAID (2009) for details.

<sup>8</sup> Many of Australia's overseas campuses have been either marginal or unsuccessful. The University of New South Wales' decision to abort its ambitious plan to establish a Singaporean campus in 2007 has been described as "one of the Australian higher education sector's worst business failures" (*The Australian*, 27 June 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Some Indonesian members of a traditional dance group at the ANU were reluctant even to let Malaysians join, in light of this controversy.

<sup>10</sup> There are exceptions, however. Kell and Vogl (2007: 25) mention a threatened hunger strike over university services and fees among international students at the Melbourne campus of the University of Queensland in 2006 and increasing resentment among international students who feel themselves to be "cash cows" for a struggling system.

<sup>11</sup> These organisations actively seek support among students, as had the Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals (*Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia*, ICMI) in the 1990s

<sup>12</sup> While other studies suggest women are particularly prone to feel constrained by family obligations during overseas studies (for instance, Shu and Hawthorne, 1995), we noted little difference in male and female informants' experience of such pressures. Male students, for instance, were as likely to schedule interviews around child-minding duties, and women in Australia with their families participated actively in PPIA and other organisations – or, if they did not, they expressed reasons similar to those of male peers. Some Muslim women did report, though, pressure to dress or comport themselves in particular ways, to a far greater degree than they experienced at home.