ENCOUNTERING AUCKLAND AND SEOUL: YOUTH, TRAVEL AND MICRO-POLITICS OF KOREA-NEW ZEALAND RELATIONS

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Travel and mobility form an increasingly important dimension of the lives of young people in many parts of the world.[1] Whether for study, career or migration there is a certain ubiquity to the discourses, if not always the reality, of travel and mobility and the benefits of experience as part of the process of growing up. The increased mobility that goes with such an emphasis also presents multiple opportunities for encounters across national borders and cultural differences that will contribute to future relations between individuals, communities and nation-states.[2] This article examines these propositions in the context of mobility between South Korea and New Zealand, focusing on the mobility of young Koreans to New Zealand for language study, and the mobility of young New Zealanders to South Korea to teach English.[3] The article examines in particular the different sorts of encounters that these mobile young people have in the cities of Auckland and Seoul and considers what sort of contribution the micro-politics of these experiences are likely to have for the future of Korea-New Zealand relations.

Youth, Travel and Encounter

Travel is taking on increasing importance in the lifecourse of many young people around the world. Indeed, as Conradson and Latham note, for "an increasingly diverse mix of people, a period spent abroad – whether to study, develop a career, as part of travelling, or as an experimentation with the possibility of emigrating permanently – is becoming a normal and almost taken-for-granted part of the life cycle".[4] There are, for example, rapidly growing numbers of students choosing to study outside their countries

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1   Thomson, Rachel, and Rebecca Taylor. "Between cosmopolitanism and the locals Mobility as a resource in the transition to adulthood." *Young* 13, no. 4 (2005): 327-342.

2   Nayak, Anoop. *Race, place and globalization: Youth cultures in a changing world*. Berg, 2003.

3   This chapter draws on findings from two research projects focusing on (a) South Korean international students in Auckland and (b) foreign English teachers in Seoul. Both projects were broadly qualitative, relying on a combination of interviews, ethnographic observation and other research encounters. For the purposes of this chapter I have only included findings from English language students from project (a) and New Zealand teachers in project (b).

4   Conradson, David, and Alan Latham. "Friendship, networks and transnationality in a world city: Antipodean transmigrants in London." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 31, no. 2 (2005): 287-305.(p.288).

of citizenship and residence – some 4.1 million university level students studied abroad in 2010.[5] Working holiday and volunteering programmes are also becoming an increasingly important part of individual trajectories – mixing travel and work in a way that supports the accumulation of important social and cultural capital for personal and career development alongside economic imperatives.[6] For others, travel as part of migration offers opportunities to enhance individual and familial positions, to provide livelihood support for families, communities and nations in the form of remittances.[7]

In addition to their importance in the life trajectories of individuals these diverse emergent patterns of international mobility also present opportunities for encountering other peoples and places that can inform views of the world around us. Indeed, following Ang, I argue that in the places where such flows are concentrated "groups of different backgrounds, ethnic and otherwise, cannot help but enter into relations with each other, no matter how great the desire for separateness and the attempt to maintain cultural purity".[8] This clearly has huge significance for our understanding of the changing nature of society and the textures of multicultural life in contemporary society.[9]

At the same time, however, in a context of enhanced temporality in international mobility,[10] where most migration is not conceived as permanent, there are also significant implications for inter-societal relations emerging from the growing normalization of travel and mobility amongst youth. There are at least two dimensions to this. On the one hand we live in an era of rapid communications where encounters in place can be quickly translated into the virtual realms of facebook, twitter and other forms of social media. The significance of such circulations should not be underestimated, for as Sun notes, "In the same way that railways, planes, or dirt roads […] transport people from one place to another, media technologies such as the Internet, new video technologies, and television allow images to travel, thereby figuratively transporting people from one space to another".[11] The Internet, and in particular emergent forms of

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5   Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development. *Education at a Glance.* Paris, 2012.

6   Ansell, Nicola. "Third World gap year projects: youth transitions and the mediation of risk." *Environment and planning. D, Society and space* 26, no. 2 (2008): 218.

7   Chant, Sylvia, and Gareth A. Jones. "Youth, gender and livelihoods in West Africa: Perspectives from Ghana and the Gambia." *Children's Geographies* 3, no. 2 (2005): 185-199.

8   Ang, Ien. *On not speaking Chinese: Living between Asia and the West*. Routledge, 2001, pp.89-90.

9   Wise, Amanda. "Sensuous multiculturalism: emotional landscapes of inter-ethnic living in Australian suburbia." *Journal of ethnic and migration studies* 36, no. 6 (2010): 917-937.

10 Collins, Francis L. "Transnational mobilities and urban spatialities Notes from the Asia-Pacific." *Progress in Human Geography* 36, no. 3 (2012): 316-335.

11 Sun, Wanning. *Leaving China: Media, migration, and transnational imagination*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2002, p.159.

social media, literally have the capacity to connect "here" with "home".[12] In addition to influencing experiences in place and with "others", encounters through travel might also then contribute to more collective notions of place as temporary migrants of all sorts – travellers, backpackers, volunteers, students and guest-workers – make their way back to their point of departure, circulating ideas and images about places of migration amongst friends, families and communities.

In this respect, there are also important linkages between forms of international mobility, particularly that associated with the transitional movements of youth, and questions of international relations. Given the extent of transnational mobility in the contemporary era youth migration also contributes to a broader set of "other diplomacies"[13] that shifts the focus of international relations beyond state actors to incorporate individuals and communities that operate across borders.[14] Certainly there has been substantial reflection on the role of migrant communities for enhancing relations between places – for example in the case of Vancouver's efforts to attract highly skilled migrants from Hong Kong as part of an effort to position itself as the gateway to Asia.[15] In New Zealand, similar efforts to attract migrants from Asia in the 1990s were also driven in part by imaginaries of globalization that saw new markets in Asia as the key to this country's economic future.[16]

These are clearly important examples, but they also focus on longer-term migration patterns and the establishment of political and economic relations. In this chapter, I want to focus instead on much more prosaic examples of "cheek by jowl" encounters with others[17] and the significance that these might have for relations between countries. In this regard, I am focused here on what might be called a "contact perspective"[18] that

12 Collins, Francis L. "Connecting 'home' with 'here': personal homepages in everyday transnational lives." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35, no. 6 (2009): 839-859.

13 Young, Mary M., and Susan J. Henders. ""Other diplomacies" and the making of Canada–Asia relations." *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 18, no. 3 (2012): 375-388.

14 Germann Molz, Jennie. "Getting a "flexible eye": Round-the-world travel and scales of cosmopolitan citizenship." *Citizenship studies* 9, no. 5 (2005): 517-531.

15 Ley, David. *Millionaire migrants: trans-Pacific life lines*. Wiley, 2011.

16 Larner, Wendy. "Hitching a ride on the tiger's back: globalisation and spatial imaginaries in New Zealand." *Environment and Planning D* 16 (1998): 599-614.

17 Sennett, Richard. *Flesh and stone: The body and the city in Western civilization*. WW Norton & Company, 1996.

18 Amin, Ash. "Ethnicity and the multicultural city: living with diversity." *Environment and planning A* 34, no. 6 (2002): 959-980.

Valentine, Gill. "Living with difference: reflections on geographies of encounter." *Progress in Human Geography* 32, no. 3 (2008): 323-337.

Yeoh, Brenda SA, and Katie Willis. "Singaporean and British transmigrants in China and the cultural politics of 'contact zones'." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 31, no. 2 (2005): 269-285.

highlights the significance of cultural "contact-zones" as part of the constitution of the micro-politics of relations between people and places. As Pratt notes in her account of colonial spaces, this approach draws attention to "the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures […] A 'contact' perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other." [19] In this regard, this approach examines social interactions in ways that eschew both a celebratory appreciation of difference and more defensive positions that are based on essentialised or assimilatory responses to difference. Rather, as Lawson and Elwood argue, "interactions within contact zones are the difficult, often halting or tentative work of relating across difference to reach new insights about one's own class/race positions, as well as troubling widely held assumptions about poverty, class, race and place." [20]

Transnational Mobilities between South Korea and New Zealand

The shared history of South Korea and New Zealand, particularly in the last twenty years, has been characterized by significant flows of people. These include the mobility of tourists in both directions, international migrants, international students, short-term work as working-holiday-makers or English teachers, as well as business people, diplomats and academics. While both countries clearly have a broader trade and diplomatic relationship it is possible to argue that these flows have constituted the bulk of the human connection between these two countries in recent years. In recent years these different connections have cumulatively added to population arrivals and departures in New Zealand in excess of 100,000 annually. This chapter focuses on the lives of two distinct groups of nominally temporary international migrants travelling between South Korea and New Zealand: international students and English language teachers. These two groups constitute an important element of the short to medium term populations in each country: there are around 10,000 international students from South Korea in New Zealand currently (2013) and around 1000 New Zealand English teachers in South Korea. (Numbers that reflect ongoing declines in both groups that may reflect amongst other things the increasing value of the New Zealand dollar[21]). Figure 1 provides an overview of recent trends for these two groups.

In order to examine these different but related patterns of youth mobility I discuss narratives that have emerged across two ethnographically grounded qualitative research projects. The first project, conducted between 2004 and 2006, examined the movement of South Korean international students to Auckland, New Zealand. The focus was on the transnational connections that facilitated the mobility of students and their situated encounters within the different urban spaces of Auckland. During two

19 Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial eyes: Travel writing and transculturation*. Routledge, 2007, p.7.

20 Lawson, Victoria, and Sarah Elwood. "Encountering Poverty: Space, Class, and Poverty Politics." *Antipode* (2013).

21 International Education Division, *Exchange Rates and International Student Enrolments in New Zealand 2003-2011*, (Wellington: Ministry of Education, 2012).
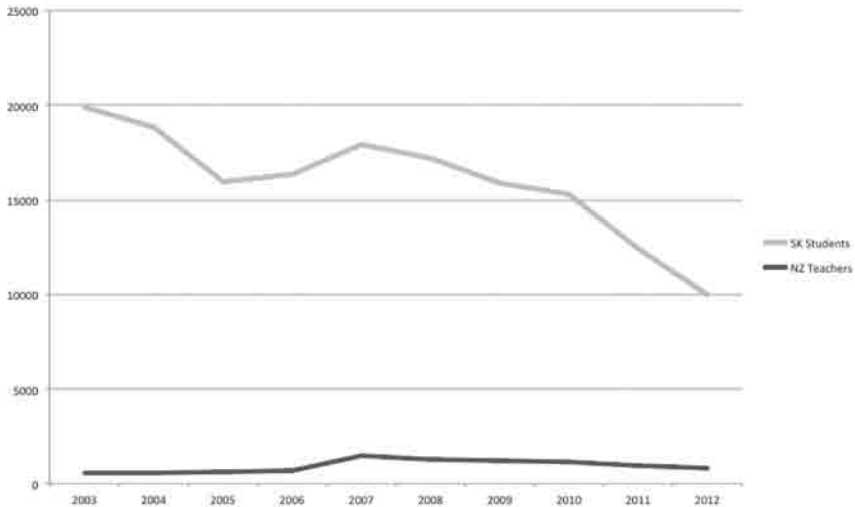
Figure 1. South Korean international students in New Zealand; New Zealand English teachers in South Korea. Source: New Zealand Export Education Levy Statistics and Korean Immigration Service.

years of fieldwork multiple biographical interviews were conducted with 29 students in Auckland and 15 returnees in South Korea; during the broader conduct of the research and my personal involvement in student life and activities I had informal contact with well over 100 students that provided valuable insights into the dynamics of their migration to and incorporation in Auckland. The second project, conducted between 2009 and 2011, examined the lives of two groups of temporary migrants living in the Seoul Metropolitan Region – "foreign English teachers" and "migrant workers" form South East Asia. The project drew on biographical interviews with 41 English teachers and 40 migrant workers in addition to a descriptive survey of living conditions and migration trajectories of both groups. The overall aim of the project was to investigate contemporary processes and outcomes of labour migration into South Korea. There was also a particular emphasis on the ways that patterns of transnational mobility and the constitution of social difference are involved in experiences of and contributions to urban life in the Seoul Metropolitan Region.

In this paper I focus on two sub-groups within these research projects: short-term language students from South Korea in Auckland (who number approximately 3000)[22] and New Zealand English teachers in Seoul (the projects above included samples of 20 language students and 5 New Zealand teachers respectively). My aim

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22 International Education Division, *Export Education Levy Statistics: Full Year 2003-2012*, (Wellington: Ministry of Education, 2013)

here is not to engage in explicit comparison of these groups but rather to explore the manner in which youth mobility is articulated through the spatialities of everyday life, an approach that encourages us to consider carefully the politics of encounter that characterize contemporary patterns of transnational mobility. While both groups are young, at least relatively well educated and come from a range of socio-economic backgrounds, it is important to pay critical attention to the manner in which their different mobilities are constituted. Indeed, as Gogia notes, "corporeality plays a major role in the ways in which people make [transnational] journeys and the roles they are inscribed within these travels."[23] In this regard, then, travel needs to be understood in relation to complex articulations of power relations that require both fixed locations and mobile circulations.[24] This kind of approach encourages us to think carefully about the connections between different kinds of migrations, particularly those that occur through similar origins and destinations.[25] Even divergent mobilities can be generated through similar processes that operate through and across multiple scales and involve different state and capital actors, as well as individual, familial and community aspirations.

International students and English teachers have quite complex identities emerging from their involvement in transnational mobility. Individuals in both groups often construct self-narratives that promote an identity as global travellers and cultural adventurers, seeking out experience as part of the "transition" from youth to adulthood. Yet, their position in the processes discussed here suggests that they are also perceived in a range of other ways. International students are most clearly viewed as consumers of educational product by both the New Zealand state and the education industry.[26] Representations of students as "Asian" are also highly racialised and their impact on specific localities is often perceived in generally negative ways as impacting upon safety, meaning and quality of life of the places they inhabit.[27] In a like manner, English teachers are the object of both desire and derision in the South Korean context. On the one hand they represent a form of embodied cultural capital that is central in individual and societal aspirations for global success.[28] Yet, at the same time, it is largely

23 Gogia, Nupur. "Unpacking corporeal mobilities: the global voyages of labour and leisure." *Environment and Planning A* 38, no. 2 (2006): 359-375, p.373.

24 Massey, Doreen. *Space, place, and gender*. U of Minnesota Press, 1994.

25 Kaplan, Caren. "Transporting the subject: technologies of mobility and location in an era of globalization." *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* (2002): 32-42, p.41

26 Lewis, Nicolas. "Code of practice for the pastoral care of international students: making a globalising industry in New Zealand." *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 3, no. 1 (2005): 5-47.

27 Collins, Francis L. "Making Asian students, making students Asian: The racialisation of export education in Auckland, New Zealand." *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 47, no. 2 (2006): 217-234.

28 Park, Jin-Kyu. "'English fever'in South Korea: its history and symptoms." *English Today* 25, no. 01 (2009): 50-57.

    Park, So Jin, and Nancy Abelmann. "Class and cosmopolitan striving: Mothers' management of English education in South Korea." *Anthropological Quarterly* 77, no. 4 (2004): 645-672.

recognized that most English teachers are relatively unqualified for the jobs they do and representations of them have often emphasized stereotypes of drug use, criminal activity, and other impropriety.[29] These identities play an important role in the experiences and encounters of both international students and English teachers that I now turn to.

English Teachers in Seoul

Among New Zealand English teachers (and indeed a broader sample of teachers of other nationalities), narratives of coming to South Korea were often articulated as an escape from reality. As Lauren's narrative below suggest, these decisions can represent an immediate response to current conditions rather than a more calculated or intentional type of life-planning:

> "I had a job at the National Museum briefly - Te Papa, and that was going okay. Wasn't used to full-time work [laughs] […] and then went to live with my mum for three months in Hamilton where there was no museum job for me; I had worked at a liquour store for 3 months. And then, I said to [my friend] "that's it I'm going to South Korea". I looked on the internet, I thought 'Alright, I wanted to travel' […] and so then I came up with this idea of Korea. They offered the best packet for someone with my lack of experience really. And so I told [my friend] I was going, and then, eventually I invited her to come too."

<div align="right">Lauren, 1st year of teaching</div>

There was a confluence of different factors that contributed to decisions to teach in South Korea. Some appeared to be motivated by the possibility of travel, or had heard of teaching English from friends, while others faced immediate financial situations or were running away from relationship difficulties. Looming in the background for nearly all participants was the personal implications of the massification of higher education. Many participants spoke about the pressure to pay off student loans or other debts, or found themselves in jobs that neither offered them sufficient remuneration or fulfillment. These situations reflect the increased level of participation in higher education,[30] the "qualification inflation"[31] that has occurred as a result and the uneven outcomes of degrees in terms of employment.[32] Alongside the burden of debt, these factors contribute

29 Collins, Francis L, "Teaching English in South Korea: mobility norms and higher education outcomes in emerging forms of youth migration." *Children's Geographies*, (forthcoming).

30 Altbach, Philip G., Liz Reisberg, and Laura E. Rumbley. "Trends in global higher education: Tracking an academic revolution." (2009).

31 Furlong, A., and F. Cartmel. "Youth and Social Change. Individualization and Risk in Late Modernity." *Open University, Milton Keynes* (1997).

32 Coulon, Allana. "Underemployment Amongst New Zealand Graduates: reflections from the lived experience." *New Zealand Journal of Industrial Relations* 27, no. 3 (2002): 283-298.

to the decision by some graduates to take an opportunity to teach English abroad – a choice that ties economic uncertainty to cultural norms about the value of travel and experience for young people. As Lan notes, this means that English teachers need to be understood at least in part as "economic migrants marginalised by a shrunken labour market in the West as a result of capital outflow and global outsourcing."[33]

South Korea is then encountered not as a part of a "planful" migration trajectory[34] but rather as a place where people pass through before moving on to other opportunities. This is reflected in the normal structure of English teaching, where employment contracts and visas are always twelve months in duration and there is significant turnover of staff. Even for teachers who remain longer, like Simon below, this general atmosphere of transience amongst teachers creates a sense of what might be called "permanent temporariness"[35] where individuals remain long-term but live lives that lack attachment to place and are oriented around imminent departure:

> To be honest, as much as I love Korea and have lived here for 5 years, it is a means to an end. What that end is at the moment is just finishing my MA. It is a very enjoyable means to an end. I think English teachers in general think in 12-month blocks, as far as the end of the contact and then we'll see what is going to happen next and I am certainly no exception.
>
> Simon, 5th year of teaching

In this context it is not surprising that English teachers from New Zealand and other countries find themselves relatively un-prepared for life in South Korea. There were countless tales of 'culture-shock' as individuals recalled arriving in a country where they did not speak the language, felt out of place and were employed in a job for which they generally had no training. While the responses to arrival were varied and reflect personal experience and outlook, Sallie's visceral account offers an evocative insight into the affective shock of place:

> I was mentally unprepared about even being here. [My friend] went straight into her bedroom and started arranging her bedroom - that's the first thing she did! […] And I'm like watching her and going 'What is she doing?!' And

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33 Lan, Pei-Chia. "White privilege, language capital and cultural ghettoisation: Western high-skilled migrants in Taiwan." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37, no. 10 (2011): 1669-1693, p.1676.

34 Clausen, John A. *American lives*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

   Piore, Michael J. *Birds of passage: migrant labor and industrial societies*, 1979.

35 Bailey, Adrian J., Richard A. Wright, Alison Mountz, and Ines M. Miyares. "(Re) producing Salvadoran transnational geographies." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 92, no. 1 (2002): 125-144.

   Collins, "Transnational Mobilities".

then, what I did, was I went, I sat on the deck and I cried. I cried for about half an hour. I was hot, I was, as I said, tired, disorientated, not in the zone at all for being here.

Sallie, 1st year of teaching

These experiences point to important elements of context that shape the kinds of interactions that English teachers can and do have during their time in South Korea. As individual migrants contracted to employers and provided with accommodation proximate to their workplaces, English teachers are simultaneously presented with a plethora of opportunities for encountering local Koreans and yet are fairly circumscribed in their capacity to follow through on these encounters. As Figure 2 illustrates, English teachers are relatively sparsely distributed throughout the Seoul Metropolitan Region with only small concentrations in Yongsan-gu, Kangnam-gu and Sŏngnam-si. This distribution reflects the fact that the *hakwŏn* or English academies that most teachers work for are located throughout the residential areas of the city. In this way, English
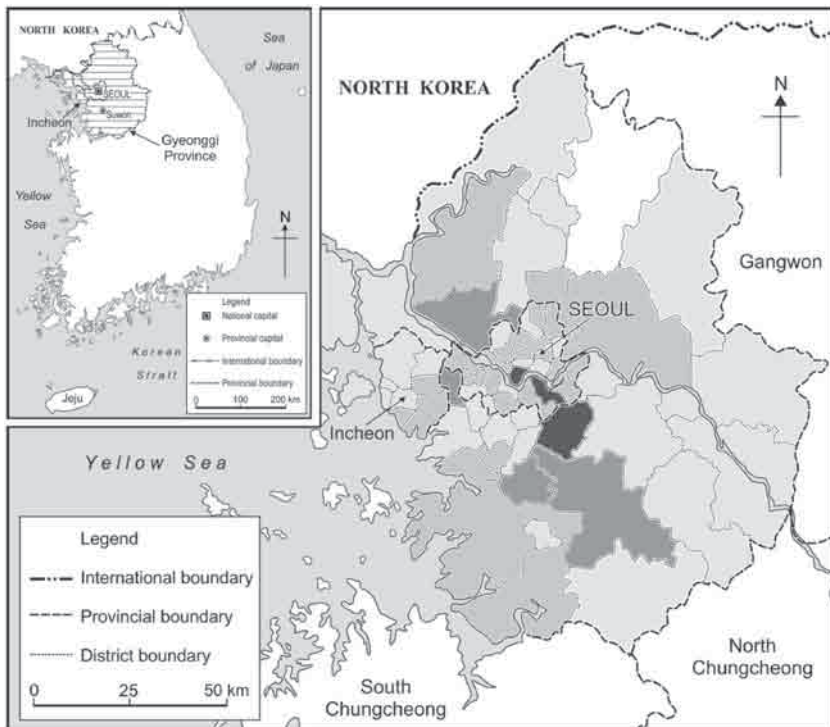

Figure 2. Distribution of E2 (language teaching) Visa holders in Seoul Metropolitan Region (2010). Source: data – Korea Immigration Service; map – author's own.

teachers generally find themselves living amongst local communities rather than in foreigner enclaves. They are also employed in schools where they have interactions with Korean employers, co-workers, students and parents.

The primary encounter that English teachers had with Koreans was in the workplace. Here, individuals were teaching classes to Koreans (who range from kindergarten children to professional businesspeople). Aside from some exceptions these encounters generally remained quite civil and professional; English teachers spoke about the challenges of adapting to a new workplace and politics but also about Korean co-workers who provided advice that helped them settle in. Equally, interactions with students (whether old or young) were generally positive and reflected the respect given to teachers in South Korea. Heather provides an account of interacting with both students (first) and co-workers (second):

> We interact on loads of stuff. I mean, I don't know if you have taught adults in Korea but they talk about primarily they want to talk about lifestyle, compare. But they also want to talk about their jobs. […] A lot just learn because they want to have contact with foreigners. They may have travelled, they don't want to lose that sense of being able to speak some English, they want to have contact outside Korea. […] And that is the same for the Korean teachers so we actually spend a lot of the time exhausted. We will have the odd coffee together or they ask advice about English phrases sometimes, or we ask them about Korean culture. There is certainly no ill feeling, there is quite a good feeling between the Korean teachers and foreign teachers, but maybe not that much time to socialise. I did go to one of the women got married three weeks ago, I went to her wedding.
>
> Heather, 4th year of teaching

What is notable in this excerpt from Heather's interview, however, is the limits that exist around encounters with students and co-workers. Perhaps unsurprisingly, most teachers were hesitant to spend time with students outside of class but it was the lack of socializing with Korean co-workers that was particularly striking in the research. The reasons for this included both an apparent lack of willingness on the part of Korean co-workers to spend time getting to know foreign teachers who would inevitably move on, but it also reflects a general attitude expressed by foreign teachers that non-work time was not something they wanted to spend with non-native speakers of English.

The broader neighbourhoods where English teachers lived were also characterized by generally positive encounters but also by quite clear limits on engaging with local populations. It was not uncommon for teachers to discuss being known to everyone in the neighbourhood: recognized by their students on the street, known to shopkeepers and landlords, and recipients of friendly waves or smiles by individuals they barely knew:

> Jamsil, because of the familiarity and sense of ownership. Gye-po, because that is where work is, and again, I am recognised around there, because there is a 7/11 and that is where I go to get my bottle of water, there is a cafe next

to that, that's where I go for my coffee at lunchtime and I am recognised by them, I don't even have to say what I want for my coffee, because the lady behind the machine knows what I want, knows how I like it and it's done. […] In fact, the 7/11 is owned by one of my students fathers, so there is always this discourse when I go in there 'Oh, how is my daughter?' And that is where my doctor is, opposite school.

Simon, 5th year of teaching

Such experiences can be very gratifying but again they do not in themselves appear to create the conditions within which more meaningful interactions might take place. English teachers are viewed here as "English teachers" – an object of interest, particularly in neighbourhoods where there are few other foreigners, but also by that same definition as someone who will soon depart either for their home country or for another job elsewhere in South Korea. These quite regular encounters and the behaviour involved also often strike English teachers as odd and contribute more generally to perceptions of the 'difference' between Koreans and westerners. Such difference was viewed almost universally as an immutable boundary; they might learn something new about Koreans but their identity as an English speaking westerner is rarely called into question. As the quotes below suggest this is most apparent in discussion of the need to socialize with other foreigners in order to survive in South Korea:

In fact, um, because you must speak in [English]... it's really difficult day to day living in a culture where English is a second language, because you don't have this free-flowing conversation opportunities very often, so I love going to the Seoul pub, but it's not about the beer – the beers are terrible... It's about hanging out with people who speak English, and to me, that's really important, and so [my friend] and I do that say once a month, sometimes twice a month.

Sallie, 1st year of teaching

Despite the generally limited character of interactions between English teachers and local Korean populations, there were examples in which encounters led to more meaningful and sustained relationships. Penny, for example, discusses the opportunities she received after being approached at a public swimming pool by a local resident.

I came in contact with a group of five Korean women who are very affluent, very wealthy upper-class women who are educated, world-knowledgeable, speak very well in English through the swimming pool - I was just swimming one day and one of the ladies just came up to me and said "Ah, are you an English teacher?", and I said "Yes", and she said "Well, I'm a member of a free-talking group, would you like to come and join us?", and so I said "Sure". I'd just come to Korea, only been here maybe a month, and so now ever since then we've been meeting once a week […] They've taken me to the monastaries, they've taken me to the museums, they've taken me to the

parks, they've taken me to the mountains, they've taken me... just spend one full day to go down with my free-talk group."

<div align="right">Penny, 1st year of teaching</div>

Encounters of this kind require willingness and capacity from both parties. On the one hand, it is clear that only certain quite "educated, world-knowledgeable" English speaking Koreans are likely to be in a position to invite an English teacher to their 'free talking group'. However, it also requires a willingness on the part of this group and on the part of Penny to take up this opportunity. As Penny notes, she was only in her first month at the time and perhaps could have simply politely declined the offer – the fact that she didn't opens an opportunity for new experiences and relationships.

It is also clear in this example and in the others presented above that language remains a key dimension of the politics of difference that plays out in encounters between Koreans and English teachers. There is a "politics of language"[36] at work here, where the global spread and mutation of English must be understood as entangled in quite uneven power relations.[37] The globalization of English is manifest in hierarchical relationships to other languages like Korean and in the capacity for individuals to claim to speak English appropriately.[38] The encounter above is based on a valorization of English and English speaking subjects in South Korea that is reflected in Penny's own description of the group itself. Equally, Sallie and Heather's comments about socializing with foreigners indicate that the weekend trip to Itaewon or another foreigner friendly area was driven in part by a desire to spend time away from Koreans and to speak English without being concerned about whether people understand you or not. Attitudes towards this language difference varied considerably however, from subtle articulations of the value of language to explicit derision for Koreans who cannot speak English:

She went into a restaurant and she picked up the menu, and she said "It's all in Korean", and put it down, walked up to the owner and said "You should really get an English copy of this", and I was like "No wonder you're miserable! You're not making an effort!" Yeah, it's insane. And I think when you get the negative people, they're not willing to try.

<div align="right">Lauren, 1st year of teaching</div>

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36 Schmid, Carol L. *The Politics of Language: Conflict, Identity, and Cultural Pluralism in Comparative Perspective*. Oxford University Press, 2001.

37 Jacquemet, Marco. "Transidiomatic practices: Language and power in the age of globalization." *Language & Communication* 25, no. 3 (2005): 257-277.

38 Pennycook, Alastair. *The cultural politics of English as an international language*. London: Longman, 1994.

English, as has already been noted, is a highly valorized language in South Korea and one that is tied to personal aspirations for success.[39] In this regard, English teachers are often viewed as an "opportunity" to practice English. Again, like everyday interaction in teachers' neighbourhoods the value ascribed to English is often viewed positively by teachers but it also appears to limit opportunities for further interaction that might emerge through a greater level of agonistic linguistic negotiation[40]:

> In Korea, if you take just a small amount of time to learn hangeul or to try and speak, Koreans love it, they think you are so cute, and quaint. They are appreciative that you have tried to learn the language and tried to speak their language and they will help you out, correcting you, but always in a pleasant way. […] Just trying to be accepted, functionally I have got no problem, and I would say that if you didn't speak a word of it, you could still function here. Often I will order something, and the guy knows I speak English, and if I order in Korean all the answers are back in English. Obviously it works out, and the Korean is good enough because he answers you. Language is more than just a communicative tool, it's a cultural thing and you know, I have been here long enough now that if I were to study a bit harder and get like the intermediate, they have one, TOPIC you know how they have TOEIC for English, the Korean Proficiency (KOPT), if I could get the intermediate one, I could get residency, without having to get married or anything, but that is a long way off.

> Simon, 5th year of teaching

Simon's experience is not uncommon – many English teachers spoke about "planning" to study more Korean and the possibility of becoming proficient. None of the New Zealand participants in this study had, however, followed through on this and only a very small number of even long-term English teachers ever learn Korean to a conversational level. This reflects the very real politics of language in which English teachers expect Koreans to be at least conversant in their native language and generally put very little effort into learning a language many see as irrelevant outside of their temporary sojourn. It is an individual choice but also reflects much broader uneven geographies of knowledge and culture that teachers and local Korean populations must negotiate.

South Korean International Students in Auckland

If the migration of English teachers eschews the representation of lifecourse and migration as a "planful" process, international student mobility appears to be an exemplary contrast. In popular, policy and scholarly literature, international student

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39 Park, "English fever".

40 Bhabha, Homi. "Minority maneuvers and unsettled negotiations." *Critical Inquiry* 23, no. 3 (1997): 431-459.

mobility has been characterized as highly formalized and intentionally strategic on the part of students, their families, education providers and the state.[41] This is particularly the case in accounts of educational mobilities from Asia, where scholars have emphasized the manner in which an overseas education can support the aspirations of individuals and families to achieve and maintain "distinction"[42] and subsequent class position. As Waters remarks, there is a somewhat paradoxical explanation for this: "an overseas education can, in fact, represent a way out of a highly competitive local education system *and* a more valuable form of cultural capital."[43] In this regard, international students can also be seen to be escaping from local conditions and the outcomes of transformations in education in the last three decades. While much scholarly attention is paid to international degree students, I want to focus here on language students who tend to spend much shorter periods abroad but are nonetheless caught up in this "politics of aspiration".[44]

> That's the reason why I moved to New Zealand, for my learning. And I worked in my company, my first job; maybe you know, Korean[s], they can read English, written English, but cannot speak English. So it was my special problem because [as part of] my work [I] had to meet many kinds of buyers from US because [of] my duty, my job is promoting or interacting with marketing [teams] in Europe so I had to meet European, many Europeans; yeah, I understood what they said but I couldn't speak English so I quit my job and I moved to New Zealand.

> Sang-Taek, 12 months language study

While Sang-Taek describes his need to study English abroad as his "special problem," this is a route that has become common amongst young people in South Korea in recent years.[45] Indeed, much like the valorization of native speakers as English teachers, learning English in its native context has become an important experience to succeed in the labour market. This is exacerbated by the growing emphasis on English conversational abilities in recruitment processes with businesses increasingly

41 Brooks, Rachel, and Johanna Waters. *Student Mobilities, Migration and the Internationalization of Higher Education*. Palgrave Macmillan. New York, 2011.

42 Bourdieu, Pierre. "The forms of capital." *Handbook of Theory and Research of for the Sociology of Education* (1986).

43 Waters, Johanna. *Education, migration, and cultural capital in the Chinese diaspora: Transnational students between Hong Kong and Canada*. Cambria Press, 2008, p.3.

44 Brown, Gavin. "Emotional geographies of young people's aspirations for adult life." *Children's Geographies* 9, no. 1 (2011): 7-22.

45 Collins, Francis L, and Seunghee Pak. "Language and skilled migration: the outcomes of overseas language study for South Korean students in New Zealand." *Asian Population Studies* 4, no. 3 (2008): 347-362.

selecting candidates for desirable jobs through English as well as Korean interviews.[46] Among students studying at lower-ranked universities many who can afford it will go to English speaking countries "for one or two years during their degree programme in order to obtain an English certificate abroad, which they know will subsequently give them notable advantage when applying for a job."[47] While this mobility is often represented in instrumental terms, it is clear that there remains significant uncertainty about the process and outcomes of studying abroad. Many are also seeking time out from education and career in South Korea's very competitive environment; others also seek adventure and travel or an experience of something different:

> If Korean people go to New Zealand, they are not going only because of study. The life is very important too. Actually, I can study English in here, in Korea, but the reason I went to New Zealand, Auckland, I wanna, how can I say, touch, I wanna feel the life of Auckland.

> Hana, 10 months language study

There are also a range of different practices while abroad – from English language students preparing for university enrolment, to short-term holiday-cum-language study, working-holidays that incorporate language learning, and diploma programmes in IT, business or other areas that lead to work-permit and residence applications. Like English teachers, then, language students have complex and dynamic identities that cannot be simply framed within logics of lifecourse transitions or international education as cultural capital accumulation.

New Zealand is a key destination for these students for exactly the same reasons as it is a source of foreign English teachers: alongside Britain and its past and present settler colonies, New Zealand belongs to a small club of nations that can claim English as "native language".[48] Alongside relatively low cost, perceptions about safety and the environment[49] and an emphasis on the colonial heritage of the country's education system, it is not surprising that New Zealand has become a key destination for language students.[50] Paradoxically, given the marketing and consumption of New Zealand in terms of environment, safety and lifestyle, the vast majority of Korean students choose to study in Auckland, the largest and most diverse city. In short, many students wanted, and were advised by education agents and friends, to be able to experience the difference of New Zealand with the convenience of "big city" life. This was not always what they found:

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46 Cho, Byung-Eun. "Issues concerning Korean learners of English: English education in Korea and some common difficulties of Korean students." *The East Asian Learner* 1, no. 2 (2004): 31-36.

47 *Ibid.*, p.34.

48 Jackson, Peter. "Constructions of 'whiteness' in the geographical imagination." *Area* 30, no.2 (1998): 99-106.

49 Ward, Colleen, and Anne-Marie Masgoret. "The experiences of international students in New Zealand." *Report on the Results of a National Survey. Wellington: Ministry of Education* (2004).

50 Collins and Pak, "Language and skilled migration".

> I was born in Seoul and I did live in Seoul [for] over 20 years, so I have been observe and adapt[ed to] City life and Auckland is the biggest city in New Zealand. So I want to study in [the] city which was Auckland for study and also my agent told me that Auckland give the best convenience for study English. […] I stay in Auckland because actually I really don't want to have [a] boring [life] but Auckland is the biggest city in New Zealand but even Auckland is boring for me […] because we [are] used to work[ing] hard or study[ing] hard or play[ing] hard [and you can't do that in Auckland].

> Sang-Taek

These sentiments were relatively common amongst participants – and many used the expression *simsimhan ch'ŏn'guk* (심심한천국) or "boring paradise" to describe Auckland and New Zealand. Positive comparisons were made about green open space, clean air, and lack of crowds; but at the same time participants commented on the relatively "undeveloped" character of Auckland compared to Korean cities – lacking public transport, shops closing early, or lack of amenities in the suburbs. Like English teachers arriving in Seoul then, we can understand these experiences of arrival and (temporary) settlement in terms of an adjustment to unfamiliar embodiments: senses of sight, sound, smell and taste, as well as the particular way of doing things – the very "alphabet of spatial indication"[51] that guides even the most basic of urban practices.

Unlike English teachers, students from South Korea are able to choose the kind of accommodation they will reside in. Education agents, who often organise student mobilities,[52] typically recommend students initially stay in a homestay with local families to experience "Kiwi culture" and improve their English. The homestay is based on a very intimate type of encounter – one in which individuals become temporarily part of family life. In that respect it takes considerable adaptability on the part of both host families and students themselves. The ideal notion of a homestay as a space of encounter rarely lived up to this in reality. Indeed, this intimate encounter appears to be constrained by the instrumental aims of the parties involved: the desire to learn English quickly and experience "real Kiwi life" by students; and the financial motivations of many homestay families. Students and language school counsellors commented on the breakdown of these relationships – often around mismatched expectations and cultural differences around food and inter-personal relationships. After departing, students often chose to live in rental accommodation, typically apartments in the inner city with students from Korea or other nationalities. While many articulated a desire to live flat with "real Kiwis" (as opposed to both homestay and living with other Koreans) this was rarely achieved, either because they simply were not aware of how to go about this or because they faced explicit discrimination when applying for flats. Jin-Yeong's account below illustrates the potential outcomes of this kind of arrangement when it eventuates:

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51 De Certeau, Michel. "The practice of everyday life." *Berkeley: U of California P* (1984).

52 Collins, Francis L. "Organizing Student Mobility: Education Agents and Student Migration to New Zealand." *Pacific Affairs* 85, no. 1 (2012): 137-160.

The first thing I can think [of is that] living in [the] Mt Roskill house is good [because I met] Steve and then there were two really different Kiwis [living there]. […] At that time I couldn't understand what they were saying because they tried to always speak too fast for me, it was like [a] song. […] Maybe my listening skills [were] improved by them, yeah, so it was good thing I think. And if I lived with Korean guys I never tried lasagne or spaghetti or homemade hamburgers. The food culture was really good for me. Sometimes I couldn't eat what they made [because it was] a little bit greasy but anyway I kept [trying] new food in [the] Mt Roskill house […] Their friends usually come to [the] Mt Roskill house and say hello and [are] interested in me because I'm Asian and I'm Korean. They tried to talk to me; how many Korean students can have this kind of opportunity it was really nice. Sometimes I travelled with Steve and sometimes I did tramping with Steve and Steve's friend and those kind of things.

Jin-Yeong, 11 months language study

This account illustrates the potential of shared living arrangements to produce the kinds of experience that Korean students seek but also to develop meaningful interaction that leads to friendship and shared interests for young people on the move. Unfortunately, this research and others like it has found that this is not a common experience.[53] Rather, most students reside in apartment buildings in the inner city of Auckland that were developed specifically to target international students from Asia and are often proximate to language schools and a broader concentration of international students in this part of the city (see Figures 3 and 4).

Even though the rationale for studying language abroad is to be immersed in local cultures and to use English on a daily basis, the principle site within which Korean students learn and use English remains in the classroom and the language school more broadly. Many had positive experiences in the confines of the classroom, commenting that teachers were kind and understanding and that the different style of teaching helped them to learn English at a faster pace. At the same time, however, many students in language schools were disappointed with the mix of classmates they encountered in the classroom.

Most of our classmates are nearly Chinese, we want to hear, we want to hear native English. We usually listen to Chinese English, or Chinese. Actually we want to study British English but we learn Chinese English. The teacher, he speaks very slowly so when we go out [to] another place, even a restaurant we can't understand, its very difficult [because New Zealanders] speak very

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53 Fincher, Ruth, and Kate Shaw. "The unintended segregation of transnational students in central Melbourne." *Environment and planning. A* 41, no. 8 (2009): 1884.

Collins, Francis L. "International students as urban agents: International education and urban transformation in Auckland, New Zealand." *Geoforum* 41, no. 6 (2010): 940-950.

fast. But in here Chinese students' conversation is very familiar and the teacher's speaking is very slow so we don't learn any real pronounciation or any speaking.

<div align="right">Diana, 12 months language study</div>

Represented as a white, native English speaking country, international students presume that it is largely European populations they will encounter in their daily lives. In reality, however, living in the inner city and attending language schools, most encounter either other Korean students, students from other parts of Asia, particularly China, or to a lesser degree international students from other parts of the world. In addition to problematizing pre-existing perceptions of place, encounters with predominantly Korean or "Asian" classrooms create a level of anxiety amongst students who are spending large amounts of money to improve their English but are concerned about their progress. In this regard, it is a certain kind of 'difference' that many students are seeking – Hyeon-Ji reflects on this after returning to South Korea:

My flatmate and I talk about it and we think that here is not a foreign country, here is just like Korea, because there are so many Koreans and Korean places and many other Asians so theres not enough chance to meet others, that's why maybe people think its not worth coming here.

[…]

[If I come again] I will make new [friends] in New Zealand again, I will meet lots of people because I want to make lots of friends, kiwi friends, lots of kiwi friends lots of European friends like that and I'd love to travel for one month two month because I travel around New Zealand for just 2 weeks… yeah… so I'd like to travel around [the] whole around New Zealand and live, flat with kiwi people, my flatmate was Korean.

<div align="right">Hyeon-Ji, 10 months language study</div>

Despite this interest in encountering difference both for experiential and instrumental purposes – the residential, educational and social concentration of Korean students in the inner city means that there are in fact relatively few opportunities for these encounters. Rather, the life-worlds of most students seemed to oscillate around seeking out familiar places, peoples and practices as a means to bridge the gap between Auckland and home. In addition to hosting a large number of new apartment developments and a substantial education sector, the inner city has also undergone considerable changes in terms of its retail landscape. Korean-New Zealand entrepreneurs in particular have set up a range of ethnically specific businesses that target the desire for familiarity amongst students: restaurants, grocery stores, hairdressers, internet cafes, video rooms, karaoke, bars and other amenities can be found throughout the inner city area.[54] All students

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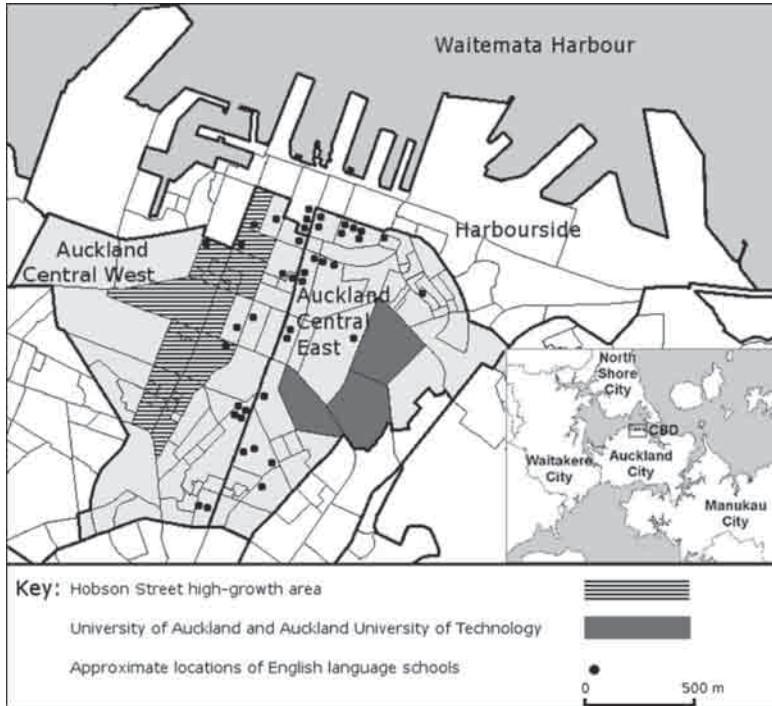54 Collins, "International students as urban agents"

Figure 3. Auckland's CBD and the concentration of residential and educational amenities (Source: Collins 2010).

Figure 4. New apartment developments in Auckland's CBD (Source: Collins 2010).

patronised these businesses during their stay – if only to different degrees. Like English teachers in Seoul, going to a Korean restaurant or catching up on the latest Korean drama offered a respite from the otherwise foreign world they lived in. In the case of students seeking to improve their language, however, it also generated mixed feelings of belonging and anxiety about its effects on their language learning:

> It's too difficult… actually for the first three months I tried to change my mindset in English, and tried to make some friends who speak English or are from another country but its really difficult
>
> James, 1 year 6 months language study

> Actually we want study English so we came here but sometimes we want to play at night… but we can't learn English… and sometimes we have stress and we want to [do] something, but we cant…
>
> Min-Jeong, 10 months language study

When encounters with non-Koreans, especially with New Zealanders, did occur outside of the homestay and language school context, they were often tainted by subtle or not-so-subtle derision. These experiences took place in shops, on buses, in public spaces or, as Sin-Hye indicates, while serving customers at a workplace:

> Just I can remember when I was [working] in [the] foodcourt, that time just that time I couldn't hear my customers order. Its quite usual thing. If I speak Korean, I can't catch some words its quite usual thing. But the kiwi customer said, 'can you speak English?' something like that and the sound is quite rude 'can you speak English?'.
>
> Sin-Hye, 2 years 6 months language study

These kinds of utterances reflect broader discourses about international students from Asia that emerged in the early 2000s as students numbers increased rapidly. In such discourses students from South Korea are embodied as "Asian" and often stereotyped according to crude notions of economic worth, cultural difference, or social nuisance.[55] Reflecting another dimension of the "politics of language,"[56] students are expected to be already proficient in English before arrival in New Zealand, even if that is the purpose of their visit. As Dong-Su's account below suggests, these encounters can contribute to significant negative affect and further delimit opportunities for encounters across difference:

> I don't care [if] someone call['s] me Asian, Korea is in East Asia. But well, […] I think the meaning of 'Asian' is getting worse – it changes to bad

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55 Collins, "Making Asian students".

56 Schmid, *Politics of Language*.

things, bad meaning, but I don't care. I think if one Kiwi call me Korean or Asian, I feel if they call me Korean it's a positive thing, if they call me Asian I think this word [is] negative.

                                                                    Dong-Su, 12 months language study

Despite the negativity of these experiences, and the generally constrained possibilities for interacting with local populations amongst students from South Korea, there were examples of substantial efforts on the part of students to reach beyond the apparently immutable barriers of difference. A small number of students, for example, decided to volunteer their services at rest homes helping to keep elderly patients company. Such activities served the instrumental purpose of learning English but they did so in a way that offered positive affects for all involved. A more substantial example comes in a the form of the Korean Volunteer Team, a group of South Korean students (accompanied by some Japanese and Chinese classmates) who took to cleaning up the streets of Auckland on Saturday mornings for more than a year and a half between 2004 and 2005.[57] Their effort was focused specifically on improving the perception of Asian students[58] – engaging in a kind of civic participation that would alter the sorts of encounters that were possible. I joined the KVT for over a year of their activities and during this time numerous positive encounters emerged out this effort to reach out: friendly comments and interactions, thanks and gratitude from members of the public, gifts and conversation occurred on many occasions. Not all encounters were positive in this way but the KVT illustrated the possibility for working through co-ethnic social networks to re-engage with majority publics in a more constructive fashion. Pedro, the founder of the KVT offers a neat assessment:

I realized that many Kiwi people do not know in terms of Korea and Korean people exactly and that they have a stereotype that Asians are the cause of many social problems, and dirty.

[…]

I guess that while we were doing this volunteering, there were some changes in native people's mind about Asian international students. It was a marvelous opportunity to international students who did not have any activity in the weekend.

                                                                                Pedro, 2 years language study

Pedro's initiative, and the contributions of other members, illustrate the possibility but also the relative fragility of these kinds of encounters. Like students themselves they are perhaps necessarily temporary – reflecting what appear to be passing experiences

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57 Collins, Francis L. "Volunteering, social networks, contact-zones and rubbish: The case of the 'Korean Volunteer Team'." *Everyday Multiculturalism* (2009).

58 Collins, "Making Asian students".

of and commitments to place. It is also quite clear that the crossing of borders that occurred with the KVT is much more likely to be undertaken by individuals such as international students who are on the periphery of society and for whom the benefits seem much more immediate. South Korean students do not have the luxury of possessing a language that is in demand and their presence is at best viewed as visiting consumers of export education, and often through much more negative social lenses. Nevertheless, the efforts of Pedro and the other KVT members point to the capacity to challenge the immutability of cultural and social difference even when context seems to militate against this.

Conclusion

The narratives of English teachers and international students discussed here point to the importance of transnational mobilities, even temporary ones, in the development of relations between places. The experiences of both groups are in many ways similar – their mobilities are embedded in processes of change in higher education, the uneven globalization of English, and the importance of travel for contemporary youth. These are processes that have emerged simultaneously even if in different varieties in South Korea and New Zealand during the last three decades. These mobilities also appear to be much less planful than might initially be presumed. Both groups knew very little about the places they were going to, or had relatively rose-tinted perceptions about what they might encounter on the ground. The process of uprooting and regrounding that has taken place through this mobility is then necessarily tied up with embodied and affective changes where individuals need to find ways of generating familiarity with the places they will inhabit, even if only temporarily.

It is also clear that the transnational mobilities of youth and their potential for encounters need to be examined in terms of the positions of mobile subjects in society. These encounters are clearly shaped by material, juridical and spatial conditions that mould the mobilities of these two groups. English teachers are positioned as temporary workers, valorized for their embodiment and language but only rarely engaged with beyond these seemingly immutable boundaries. Twelve-month contracts, employer housing and a desire for the familiar contribute to a distance between teachers and local populations that was rarely overcome. Language students too, positioned primarily as consumers of educational product and secondarily as a social problem are rarely viewed by local populations in Auckland as worthy of more serious engagement. The spatial concentration of student lives in the inner city also creates a very literal distance that reinforces perceptions of social and cultural difference. Finally, it is clear that these mobilites and their potential for encounter are entangled in complex ways in the politics of English as a global language. The different value ascribed to English and Korean, and actions that reinforce notions of who can speak, serve to fortify difference as a key dimension of these mobilities.

Despite the highly circumscribed character of these mobilities and the encounters that result, there were moments that point to an emphasis on the negotiation of difference rather than its immutability. The example of activities like the KVT, students

volunteering at rest homes, interaction in shared living arrangements, participation in free talking groups, or the aspiration to learn language point to other possibilities. They reveal moments of ambiguity in what otherwise seem like circumscribed lives and openness to understanding and collaboration that can produce more meaningful interactions between mobile and local populations. It is these sorts of practices that might potentially trouble social boundaries that otherwise appear to be reinforced through increased transnational mobility. If the mobility of youth between South Korea and New Zealand is to lead to greater understanding and interaction between people and places, then it is these sorts of encounters that must be encouraged and celebrated. While much of the burden for this falls on young people themselves, it behooves society more generally to critically reflect on the conditions under which mobility takes place and what it means for the ways we interact with those who arrive on our shores.

Biographical note

Dr Francis L. Collins teaches Urban Geography in the School of Environment at the University of Auckland. His research interests are in international student mobilities, temporary migration and changing urban form and experience, and the politics of cultural diversity in cities. In recent years his research has included projects on international education and South Korean international students in Auckland, New Zealand; temporary labour migration in South Korea; liveability in Asian cities; and educational globalization and international student mobilities in East Asia.

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