

LKYCIC Seminar Series

Border Biopolitics and Interstitial Identities along the Malaysia-Singapore Causeway

DATE AND TIME
14 August 2025,
1 - 2 pm

MS EMMA GOH
PhD student (in-coming),
Department of City and Regional Planning,
University of California, Berkeley

VENUE
Think Tank 21
Building 2, Level 3 (2.310)

SYNOPSIS - Around 15,000 Malaysian students from Johor Bahru spend close to a third of their day crossing the Causeway every morning to attend local public schools in Singapore and making the same commute back home at the end of the day. Yet so little is known about their border commutes, and this talk is an effort to make legible the temporalities and spatialities of their lives in motion. I will first explore how a sense of identity among the student border crossers is produced from a series of negations and absences that characterize the Causeway as “non-place”. I will then propose the idea of mercurial mobility to describe how the Causeway’s rhythmic regime, enforced through the capricious nature of the Causeway congestion and its unwieldy wait times, conditions students to internalize time-discipline as a moral imperative. Nevertheless, student commuters still find ways to reclaim their temporal agency and disrupt the temporal design of mercurial mobility by donning a disposition of detached indifference and constructing parallel temporalities of play along their Causeway commutes.



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EMMA GOH is an incoming PhD student in the Department of City and Regional Planning at the University of California, Berkeley, where she recently completed her Master of City Planning degree. Keenly interested in the politics of infrastructure, her previous research projects have explored the institutional logics behind Singapore’s network of covered walkways and the spatial practices of student borders crossers along the Malaysia-Singapore Causeway. Extending these interests, her doctoral research will focus on the regional politics of renewable energy infrastructure development in Southeast Asia. Previously, she worked as a Research Assistant at the Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities, where she contributed to projects on ageing urbanism and urban innovation. She holds a Bachelor of Arts (Honors) in Urban Studies from Yale-NUS College in Singapore.



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