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Place, Politics and the Social: Understanding Temporariness in Contemporary Australian Migration

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Figures from September 2016 show that there are 1.9 million temporary visa holders residing in Australia, an increase of nearly 5% from 2015 figures (DIBP 2016). This reflects global trends, with temporary migration on the rise across many Western industrialised countries including traditionally 'settler' immigration countries such as Canada and Australia. Increasing temporariness, which represents a paradigm shift in the way migration to 'settler democracies' like Australia is both understood and experienced, has caught the attention of researchers across different academic disciplines including demographers, legal scholars, political scientists, economists and sociologists. Most of the research on temporary migration to date has focused on its economic, legal and political implications, such as the consequences of temporary migrant labour on host country labour markets (Birrell and Healey 2014; Hugo 2006), the regulation of social entitlements of temporary migrants (Ottonelli and Torresi 2012; Ruhs 2013) and the creation of second-class citizens (Carens 2008). Recently, Canadian and British sociologists and socio-legal scholars have drawn attention to the broader impacts of visa regulations on the experiences of temporary migrants within and beyond the labour market through the lens of precarious migrant status (Anderson 2010; Goldring et al. 2009; Goldring and Landolt 2011; Fudge 2012). Such research has been critical in highlighting the insecurity migration regulations create for temporary visa holders as workers and also as residents. In the Australian context, however, the majority of attention in both scholarly and media debate has been on the exploitation of temporary migrant workers and allegations of corruption by employers and brokers within temporary migrant visa schemes (Boese 2017).

With this Special Issue, we seek to demonstrate that 'temporariness', as a condition of migrant mobility that is legally, politically and socially constructed, has political and social implications beyond worker protection and immigration compliance. Australia is an important case study in this regard because immigration law and worker protection regimes are tightly regulated in comparison to many other states globally that receive high levels of unregulated and undocumented temporary migrants. Yet despite this high level of regulation, temporary migration in Australia still has far reaching social consequences beyond the intended provision of 'flexible' and 'demand-driven' labour supply. This collection is also a timely intervention given the highly

politicized nature of debates on temporary migration in Australia currently, as economic growth is slowing and unemployment rising. Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull's conservative coalition party 'abolished' in May 2017 the 457 temporary visa scheme, which has been a centrepiece of skilled migration policy since the mid-1990s. Although the visa is being replaced with two new temporary visa streams with a suite of new costs and regulations for migrants and sponsors, Turnbull's reform, as a performative piece of policy, speaks to the fact that temporary migration programs are increasingly unpopular with Australian voters in times of economic uncertainty.

The papers in this Special Issue seek to understand the lived consequences of migration policy and policy change, rather than their economic effects. They provide a close analysis of the broader social dimensions of temporary migrants' lived experiences, including the implications of temporary migrant status on people's personal, family and community relations; their social networks and agency as temporary residents; and their sense of belonging. These aspects of temporary migrants' lives are often deeply intertwined with their labour market position and employment experiences yet they deserve focused attention in their own right.

This Special Issue thus addresses several important social and normative implications of temporary migration from multiple perspectives, including scholarly analyses grounded in sociology, human geography and political philosophy. These contributions are based on a workshop on temporary migrants, their networks, belonging and agency which was held at the Centre for Employment and Labour Relations Law at the Melbourne Law School in August 2015. The aim of the workshop was to bring together a range of stakeholders from government, the community sector and academia to discuss the social implications of temporary migration. The lively discussions at the workshop demonstrated the need for more and deeper engagement with the experiences of temporary migrants beyond their position in the labour market, as temporary residents with restricted rights and entitlements, and the implications of temporary migration for a society that has been built on migration for settlement.

Temporary migrants in Australia

For much of the 20th century Australia's immigration policies were aimed at attracting migrants for long-term settlement and the building of the national population, albeit implemented through variable racially discriminatory screening processes which came to be known as the White Australia Policy. With the introduction of multiculturalism in the 1970s the basis of selecting migrants shifted from notions of 'race' to human capital attributes such as age, educational qualifications and English language competency, guaranteed by the introduction of a points-test similar to Canada. Over the last twenty years, temporary migration schemes have come to be an increasingly significant part of Australia's immigration program. This reflects the shift in skilled migration policies over time from a supply-led to a demand-led intake, exemplified

by the introduction of Long Stay Business (subclass 457) visas in 1996, an employer-sponsored visa with a duration between 1 day and 4 years.

Today, temporary visa holders are the fastest growing group of migrants to Australia. They make up the vast majority of visa grants of about 600 000 grants per year, which includes onshore visa transitions for migrants already in Australia as well as new entrants (Sherrell and Mares 2016). They constitute a diverse group in terms of the primary purpose of their migration, their legal status and their demographic characteristics. They include international students in a range of categories (from high school to English language and postgraduate university students) (310,845 visas granted in 2015/6); Working Holiday visa holders (214,583 visa grants in 2015/6); temporary graduate workers (34,189 visa grants in 2015/6) and temporary skilled visa holders (85,611 in 2015/6; half of whom are partners or children on secondary visas) across a range of industry sectors as well as New Zealand citizens who have access to special visa classes via bilateral agreements (677,030 in Australia in September 2016) (DIBP a, b 2017).

One particular feature of temporary migration to Australia that requires further attention in the context of this Special Issue is the phenomenon of 'staggered pathways' (Robertson 2015). Contrary to the notion of 'guest worker' and seasonal worker programs that are geared towards a rotation of temporary residents, several temporary visa programs in Australia have come to be recognized as implicated into long-term and multi-stage forms of migrant mobility, with temporary visas often operating as 'stepping stones' to other temporary statuses or to permanent residency or citizenship (Spinks 2010). Pathways from temporariness to permanence are, as seminal work by one of this SpeciaI Issue's authors has shown, seldom explicit or guaranteed, leading to 'long term temporariness' and ongoing insecurity (Mares 2016).

The insecurities associated with 'staggered pathways' are manifold, ranging from increased vulnerability to exploitation by employers (Boese et al. 2013) to the frequent need for temporary visa holders to adjust their life and education goals (Robertson and Runganaikaloo 2014). Recent research on these experiences has called into question the common assumption of temporary migrants as a category of migrants in control of their migration pathway (Boese and Macdonald 2016). The picture that emerges from case studies of different categories of temporary migrants in this Special Issue highlights instead the complexity of negotiating mobilities and insecure futures, work and family, belonging and not-quite-belonging.

The papers in this Special Issue offer three key insights into the consequences of temporary migration in Australia: questions on the sustainability of liberal multicultural democracy in light of new patterns of temporary migration; insights into the significance of place and social networks to migrant belonging; and questions of how temporariness frames family, community and other reciprocal relations of care. As a collection, the papers address these issues across different scales and from different perspectives, engaging with the voices of migrants, policy makers, service providers, non-government ac-

tors and non-migrant community members.

The contributions from Peter Mares and Elsa Koleth tackle normative socio-political questions around the sustainability of liberal democracy and settler multiculturalism in light of the new migration patterns we have described above. Mares importantly argues that rights-based solutions to temporary migration issues, especially discourses of equal labour rights, do not go far enough, because the inherently sub-ordinate status of temporary migrants diffuses beyond the sphere of work. He also tackles head on the pragmatic, but contentious, question of temporality and political belonging, asking 'how long is too long' for migrants to live and work within the nation-state without the political and social rights afforded to citizens. Mares highlights how the very physical presence of migrants within the nation-state, as well as subjective dimensions of connectedness and belonging, trust and allegiance, matter to political questions and legal precedents.

Koleth's contribution adds significant empirical and theoretical weight to Mares' critiques of the contractualist models of citizenship that underpin temporary migration and 'staggered pathways', showing how the social outcomes of migration policy have been "left to chance" under neoliberal migration management. Her analysis of the externalization of temporary migrants from social policy provides important perspectives from institutional actors as well as migrants, showing how the withdrawal of the state from social responsibility puts increasing pressure onto informal family, community and kin networks to provide social support, as well as onto local agencies and local government, where service providers pay an 'affective toll' in being unable to service those in need. Koleth also shows that the commercialization and outsourcing of state functions to the private sector makes social welfare increasingly about commercial transactions rather than civic relationships.

The contributions from Martina Boese and Melissa Phillips and Robyn Mayes highlight the value of community-focused and place-based modes of analysis of the far-reaching impacts of temporariness and its regulation. Focusing on regional communities, these papers also highlight the implications of policies that have sought to funnel 'skills' and labour more broadly into regional areas in Australia, and thus require the sociological gaze to be drawn beyond the urban in terms of sites of multiculturalism and diversity. Both these papers show how traditional models of 'ethnic community' and migrant social networks need to be rethought in the context of increased temporariness. Mayes frames the closure of a mining operation that leaves both migrant and non-migrant workers in the town of Hopetoun in crisis as a 'moment of extreme precarity' that allows a window into how the networks of these workers become mobilised. Mayes challenges us to think beyond 'ethnic' and 'migrant' networks in her analysis of how a community faces precarity via networks that evolve within and outside of the workplace. Boese and Phillips further develop these challenges to think about temporary migrants' sense of belonging beyond the workplace as shaped by the interaction of social, cultural and legal factors. Their paper reveals how, for many migrants

living in regional areas in Australia, place-based interpersonal relations and cultural participation contribute to a sense of belonging and affective citizenship, whilst exclusions from social rights render such feelings tenuous. In alignment with Koleth and Mares, Boese and Phillips provide important reflections on how regulatory constraints that limit social entitlements also have a negative impact on trust, reciprocity and community building. They also highlight, however, how civic responsibility evolves in the absence of formal rights, with an ethics of care, rather than contractual logics, operating within community networks and social relations.

The contribution from Harriett Westcott and Shanthi Robertson furthers arguments about the complexities of relations of care in the context of temporary and 'staggered' migration, but in this case focusing on negotiations of care within families, specifically around decisions on the care of children under conditions of migration insecurity. This paper addresses the question of the consequences of temporary migration at the levels of social reproduction and gendered division of labour within the family. This paper seeks to look at repercussions of being temporary for families beyond the lack of social entitlements, showing how migration decisions are closely intertwined with care decisions.

Taken as a collection, these papers clearly illustrate how, although migration and citizenship have become heavily contractualized at the level of policy, at the level of the everyday, temporary migrants are friends, neighbours, parents, co-workers, and potentially new kinds of political subjects. Temporariness has inflections and implications far beyond questions of legal rights and entitlements, and brings into question the very nature of belonging, community and reciprocity across levels of social organisation from the family up to the nation-state. As Mares states astutely in his contribution:

> We are social beings. We live together in communities. Society and culture are shaped by our interactions. We establish bonds of connection, interdependence and mutuality. Out of those bonds grows an ethic of reciprocity and obligation. That ethic will eventually make its presence felt, no matter how hard we seek to ignore it or constrain it with legal technicalities.

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