

Public Lecture by Professor Caroline Knowles (Goldsmiths)

## **Digging Up the Urban Periphery: Reflections from Beijing on Migration, Ethnicity and Cities**

6-7.30pm, 29 May 2013

The lecture will take place in Samuel Alexander lecture theatre LG12 (building number 67 on the [campus map](#)).

Drawing on recent fieldwork in Beijing this lecture takes a close look at dynamic co-productions of social inequalities, ethnicity, migration and urban surface. Beijing is both unique and speaks to other cities' precarities and uncertainties. Thus it provides a lens onto a set of issues demanding further reflection. Beijing is a rapidly expanding megacity in which the generation of wealth has drawn internal and foreign migrants to its new opportunities. With 20 million inhabitants it is a vast experiment in urban life in which the practicalities of everyday exceed urban planning as neighbourhoods are torn down and replaced. In this lecture I will explore the routes and urban navigational skills of two incommensurable groups of migrants who are ethnicised in complicated ways: poor internal migrants in Xiao Jihare and wealthier UK migrants living in a sequestered space in the gated community of 'Capital retreat', both urban fringe locations. I will suggest that navigational skills reveal migrants' relationships with cities. Unpacking specific versions of Chineseness and white Britishness I will suggest that intimacy and distance, protection and exposure provide ways of thinking more systematically about the connections migrants make with cities. Although this material captures only a tiny capsule of urban life I will conclude by suggesting that it raises important questions for the ways in which we think about cities, ethnicity and migration in the context of looming crises.

Caroline writes on race and ethnicity, especially postcolonial whiteness, circulations of people (as migrants) and objects, urbanism and madness. She specializes in visual, spatial and biographical methods. She collaborates with photographers, most recently with Douglas Harper of Duquesne University in Pittsburg investigating how British migrants live in Hong Kong (funded by the British Academy). She has just completed the biography of a pair of flip-flop sandals with artist Michael Tan of Nanyang Technological University in Singapore (funded by the British Academy). This involved following the plastic trail from factories in SE China to Ethiopia, one of China's most important emerging markets, passing through the lives of migrant factory workers, smugglers, market traders and onto the feet of an elderly woman navigating the streets of Addis Ababa in a year old pair of flip-flops. She also worked with Roger Hewitt and colleagues in Hamburg and Bergen on 'The Architecture of Religious Transmission'. This project, funded by NORFACE, investigates the mechanisms of religious transmission among young people in the Finsbury Park area of London and comparable sites in Hamburg and Oslo. She is currently working on a research project investigating British migrants in Beijing.



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