1 – 2. 30 pm, Friday 13th August
Theatrette, Level 2, Sir Roland Wilson Building
The Politics of Adoption and the Ethical Architecture of Human Rights Cambodia
Dr Karen Greene, Postdoctoral Associate at The Center for Historical Analysis at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, USA.

Deciding what is best for a child poses a question no less ultimate than who decides on the ethical system that should inform the choice?”
--Steven Parker, Faculty of Law, Griffin University, Australia, discussing the implementation of universal child rights cross-culturally (1994:30).

In 2009, a long-awaited adoption law was passed in Cambodia. The work in progress that I plan to discuss is driven by two observations. The first is general: the politics of adoption, like the politics of other technologies of reproduction, emerge at the fuzzy borders between people as monads and as political groups. They render the contingency of distinctions between nations, states, generations and differentiated bodies-in-space and time explicit sites of contention. The second is more specific to the era of geopolitics since 1989. In Cambodia, and arguably across the so-called ‘developing world,’ child rights articulated rights as bio-and anatamo-political practice realized through the pedagogical protocols of governmentalized care and a built network of child-centered, governmental and NGO shelters that challenged established institutions. This, even as the increasing vulnerability of Cambodian youngsters to dangerous and exploitative transnational economies put the sovereignty of the Cambodian government at stake. I use ethnographic encounters with ‘casual’ fosterage practices, social worker practices, and pedagogical images used in rights workshops and demonstrations to two ends. I situate the translation of human rights and child rights in the genealogy of the new law—and in the preliminary rationales of some of its authors. I explore the constitution of ethical bodies as citizens of a Cambodian democracy through peace-building, nation-building, temple building, and new forms of self-sustaining children’s shelters and orphanage-based alternatives to adoption.

Karen Greene holds an MA from the University of California, Berkeley in Folklore and a Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley/UCSF in Medical Anthropology. Questions of governance, personhood, the vibrancy of young people, and the ontological stakes in the circulation of persons, ideas, and things drive her work, and shape in her research questions

All Welcome
Convenors: Ken Taylor and Alastair MacLachlan

Sir Roland Wilson Building, Bld #120, McCoy Circuit, Canberra. Phone: 6125 6674