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Ikebukuro in-between: mobility and the formation of the Yamanote's heterotopic borderland

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Abstract
Ikebukuro, one of the major stations along the Yamanote line is ambiguously placed in Tokyo, both spatially and discursively. Serving as a black-market in the immediate post 1945 era, and situated as a major hub leading to Tokyo's North-western suburban sprawl today, its position as an in-between space is mirrored in its image as a site of excessive consumption and play. This position has also meant it has become home to many marginalised groups and consumption practices in Tokyo.
This paper demonstrates the ways different forms of mobility, from transportation, to people and media have produced Ikebukuro's place as a borderland. Understanding these mobilities as historically cumulative, it shows how the Yamanote in many ways made Ikebukuro, and how in turn Ikebukuro exemplifies the heterotopic nature of Tokyo more generally. Today Ikebukuro is one of the largest sites of social activity among recent Chinese migrants in Japan, with its North-western area unofficially referred to as Tokyo Chinatown by some. At the same time, it is home to many other migrant groups and constitutes the second largest adult entertainment district in Tokyo. It attracts waves of consumers on their way home to neighbourhoods in Saitama, and is only second to Akihabara as a space which 'rotten girls' and 'otaku' frequent. These practices and groups are also reflected upon in popular culture, where Ikebukuro is portrayed as a site of danger and excitement. Through these analyses, the importance of heterotopias to marginalized groups in Japan is explored, as well as the crucial role the Yamanote plays in making heterotopias possible.

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Attention to lines of movement within Tokyo helps us think through the spatial and discursive boundaries found within Japan. Exemplified by the Yamanote rail loop, such lines of movement intersect at the various stations within the city, constituting different meanings, urban textures and places. The lines that form Ikebukuro situate it in ambiguous terms. As one long term resident, Aka-san, stated in English "Ikebukuro is somewhat of a borderland". Aka-san is a charismatic cabaret club employee in his mid-sixties who has worked in Ikebukuro for almost 40 years. Always dressed in red, with hair carefully gelled in a pompadour style, Aka-san in many ways embodies Ikebukuro's complex image of seediness, cosmopolitanism, and fun. He has worked in a range of bars and clubs throughout the years, mostly playing piano and acting as concierge, and is well known within the entertainment district of Ikebukuro's west-gate area. He has married twice, first to a British woman and now to a Filipina, and speaks fluent English with a charming international accent. I first met Aka-san through my research on Chinese migrants in Ikebukuro. A young Chinese business owner who bought the bar where Aka worked is his current employer. In this sense, Aka's present circumstances as well as his past reflect many of the changes Ikebukuro has seen in the past 40 years. Once a poorer area on the outskirts of Tokyo, Ikebukuro has been particularly sensitive to social and economic fluctuations in Japan over the past century. While the area was a hub of consumption and adult entertainment in the boom years, economic decline saw customers dwindle and many entertainment venues declare bankruptcy. At the same time, as a site of cheap wooden housing, Ikebukuro has attracted a large number of migrants over the past 20 years and has become Tokyo's informal Chinatown. Ikebukuro's image has been reinvigorated recently due to concerted efforts among Ikebukuro's residents and government. This history of boom, bust, migration, and rebirth situates Ikebukuro as a somewhat ambiguous place in the context of wider Tokyo. Aka-san contends that Ikebukuro is 'mysterious' (*fushigi*) in the eyes of many, it is neither 'rural' (*inaka*) nor part of the centre of Tokyo and its cultural diversity engenders complex debates around its identity.

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As Aka-san stated, Ikebukuro can be understood as an urban borderland in Tokyo, both in terms of the spatial imaginaries of the city, and in terms of the border between social inclusion and exclusion. Borderlands have historically been associated with spaces on the edge of nation-state boundaries or the limits of the city (Van Houtum, Kramsch and Zierhofer 2005). The term 'borderlands' conjures images of refugee camps at national borders, slums on the edge of the city, or wild frontiers inhabited by wily characters that society is yet to tame. Recent attention to the process of 'bordering' however, has shifted focus from the inter-state and inter-urban, to the zones that demarcate difference within the city (Newman 2003; Newman 2006). As Deljana Iossova has noted, attention to 'urban borderlands' allows us to think beyond classic categories such as community or ethnic enclave, and pay more attention to the processes that create 'spaces in-between' within the city (Iossifova 2015; Iossifova 2013).

If Ikebukuro is a borderland, what processes produce this bordering? Using analyses of lines, Tim Ingold argues that places and borders are best understood as 'knots' and 'meshworks' constituted by multiple lines of mobility (Ingold 2006). Mobility, defined as meaning-laden movement, can take many forms: from transportation, to people and imaginaries (Cresswell 2006). A mobility approach to

space does not refute the existence of spaces, but rather emphasizes the processual nature of their production, in terms of the movements, discourses, and people that constitute a space. In this approach, borders are understood as the product of intersecting lines of mobility rather than simply zones between spaces.

This view is commensurate with extant scholarship on urban life in Tokyo. For example, Jordan Sand, tracing the 'vernacular' forms of Tokyo, combines metaphors of mobility and 'threads' of history to create a generative sense of the local:

> The landscape of the vernacular city is a fabric continually being woven. Threads of the past cross with new ones. The individual threads tend to be invisible, except at the margins or in the interstices of the larger pattern. As a generative grammar rather than a fixed tradition, the vernacular incorporates modern buildings and products of mass culture. Yet enduring patterns of land tenure, construction, housing, and commerce developed over generations sustain a readable local idiom. (Sand 2013, p. 35)

While Sand uses metaphors of mobility to show how locality and popular culture are produced, I ask how these same processes produce spaces of ambiguity, and how ambiguity leads to new Tokyo vernaculars. My interest in Ikebukuro stems from my experience conducting research on Chinese social relations in Ikebukuro (cf. Coates 2015). Whenever I discussed my research with colleagues and friends outside of Ikebukuro, issues of crime, mafia, and deviance often came up. I was repeatedly warned against conducting research there, and on one occasion was personally seen as dangerous due to my association with my interlocutors. These experiences not only drew my attention to how Chinese migrants in Japan are treated, but also the heterotopic and liminal status of Ikebukuro.

Ikebukuro, as a borderland, can be understood as a 'heterotopia' (Foucault 1967), that 'interrupts the apparent continuity and normality of ordinary everyday space' (Dehaene and Cauter 2008, p. 4). With the proliferation of migrant groups, industries and youth cultures in Ikebukuro, its streets have taken on an increasingly heterotopic form. The rail line, running north-south, cuts Ikebukuro into two distinct areas that are further segregated into multiple heterotopia. The northwest functions as a site of adult entertainment and the unofficial Chinatown, while further to the west the student haunts of Rikkyo University provide cheap fare for those on a budget. On the east, 'maid's street', the Sunshine building, and a complex of fashionable department stores serve young consumers and the areas further east and south of the station have become a popular residential area. Woven through each of these spaces the past also creates heterotopia, producing tensions over how each space should be remembered, and facilitating new ways of imagining Ikebukuro as a whole. I will first examine how the construction of the Yamanote line defined Ikebukuro as a space, before moving on to an analysis of how flows of people and flows of media continue to constitute its image today. In doing so, I demonstrate how thinking from a particular point along the Yamanote line, allows us to reconsider how spaces in Tokyo are imagined from a mobility perspective. Moreover, I show how the historically contingent mobilities that constitute Ikebukuro, continue to shape current debates over its future.

Transport and the constitution of Ikebukuro

Ikebukuro is a product of multiple processes of bordering produced by mobilities that expanded Tokyo's city limits. Prior to the Meiji period, the area surrounding Ikebukuro station had been mostly farmland owned by nobles within the Musashi region of the Yamanote area. The name Ike-bukuro, literally meaning 'pond-bag', is the pre-Tokugawa era name for a small village found next to a large water catchment near the current site of the Tokyo Metropolitan hotel on the south-west side of Ikebukuro. However, during the establishment of the Meiji municipal system in 1889, the area was included as part of the Sugamo area, and the name Ikebukuro would not be officially used again for almost another 15 years.

The establishment of rail systems in the Meiji period meant that Ikebukuro was initially defined by a rail line that cut across its territory, rather than connecting it to the rest of the city (Toshima kuritsu kyōdo shiryōkan 2004). The regions northwest of Tokyo held fertile agricultural land, and so, in the 1880s *Nihon Tetsudō* developed a rail line to ship farm goods from Akabane (north of Ikebukuro) to Shinagawa. This line would later become one of the initial routes along which the Yamanote line would be built, and is currently a part of the Saikyō line running from Omiya to Osaki. In 1903, a line linking the *Nihon Tetsudō* line to the government rail line that cut through the eastern side of the city was planned. The line was intended to link Ueno to Mejiro via Tabata station, however due to the uneven geography of Mejiro, initial plans had to be re-routed. Surveyors quickly redesigned their plans to a location in the flatter Sugamo area just north of Mejiro, and so Ikebukuro was born.

Before Ikebukuro was officially linked to the major rail systems of Meiji Japan it was treated as a relatively remote location. Indeed, it was somewhat of a 'non-place' (Auge 2009)(also see Mooney this issue) its only significant building being Sugamo prison, built in 1895 (Ginn 1992). Despite the presence of Sugamo prison in the early Meiji Period, Ikebukuro remained a relatively remote location. However, once linked to the major rail lines, Ikebukuro slowly became a common terminal for other transport systems in Tokyo. For example, in 1912 it became a transit point for Tokyo's tram system; acting as a terminal for lines running from Tokyo's Kanda business district, and a connection for the line from Otsuka to Waseda (Toshima kuritsu kyōdo shiryōkan 2004). The Otsuka to Waseda line remains one of Tokyo's last tram lines. The routes of the other tram lines originally ending in Ikebukuro were slowly replaced by Tokyo's current subway system, such as the lines connecting Ikebukuro to Shinjuku and Shinbashi, which were replaced by the Marunouchi line in 1954. Despite its important role in Tokyo's burgeoning transit system Ikebukuro remained undeveloped for almost 15 years. Indeed, Ikebukuro was not included as part of Tokyo until 1932 when Tokyo's 5 neighbouring counties and 82 hamlets were incorporated into the city's new ward (*ku*) system (Seidensticker, Waley, and Richie 2011). It was at this point that Toshima Ward was established as Ikebukuro's local government.

The increase in students and traffic to Ikebukuro, facilitated by its connection to the Yamanote line, inspired further developments. In 1909 land to the west of Ikebukuro was marked as the new site for Rikkyo University. Originally a private Anglican college in Tsukiji, Rikkyo's campus was completed in 1919 with its official

opening in 1922. The rail companies who had already invested heavily in the area built several department stores. As Brian Moeran points out, the rapid modernisation of Japan in the Meiji and Taisho periods posited rail systems and department stores as hybrid symbols of modernity in the early twentieth century (Moeran 1998). What is more, they were often developed in innovative ways where train stations and department stores became integrated hubs. Although not the first, Ikebukuro's position as a major rail hub ensured it was no exception in this regard. The Keihin electric company established the Kikuya department store as part of its rail system in Ikebukuro in the 1930s. The Musashino Rail Company (now know as Seibu) built the Seibu department store in 1949 (Ueno 1998). These department stores now straddle Ikebukuro station forming Tokyo's largest department store complex. The companies that inspired the lines of mobility that initially constituted Ikebukuro as a place were therefore also instrumental in creating its sense of locality. Much of Ikebukuro's contemporary image as a space for youth consumption and department stores can be traced back to these early rail company developments.

From Transport Flows to Human Flows

The development of the Yamanote line placed Ikebukuro on the edges of Tokyo through processes of connection and inclusion for much of its early history. The human flows facilitated by these transit lines were defined by their exclusion as non-normative and marginalised people, who developed sub-cultures and political movements over time. Ikebukuro's position on the periphery of Tokyo meant that it became an affordable and attractive site for the flow of internal migrants who moved into urban centres during Japan's industrialization. It is estimated that Japan's rural population as a proportion of the total population halved from 1879-1940, indicating massive internal migration from the countryside to the city (White 1978, p. 83). While exact figures and migratory trajectories are unavailable for Ikebukuro specifically, patterns of urban and commercial development indicate that Ikebukuro became a major hub for cheap small-scale wooden housing in the 1920s, (*Toshima Ku no Genjōto Tokusei* 2015). At first Ikebukuro attracted mostly lower-middle and working class migrants from areas such as Okinawa, Tohoku and Hokkaido. However, cheap housing and the location away from the centre of the city became an attraction for many by the 1930s. After the Great Kantō earthquake of 1923, much of the older parts of the city (*shitamachi*) had been destroyed, due to the earthquake and the subsequent fires that decimated large parts of Tokyo's predominantly wooden housing. While Ikebukuro was affected, its remote location saved it from much of the fire damage leaving space for new flows of people to move into the area.

Due to Ikebukuro's rail connections to Shinagawa, transport between the traders in the bay area and inland agricultural producers attracted a range of merchants and workers. In particular, migrants from Japan's colonies at the time, Taiwan and Korea, established several businesses in Ikebukuro. Of the new flows of people into Ikebukuro however, artists are perhaps the most celebrated today. During the 1930s a series of cheap, wooden studio villages emerged on the western half of Ikebukuro. The buildings were more studio than accommodation, north-facing with skylights ideal for lighting, but with no running water and poor heating. Ikebukuro attracted more aspirational bohemians than successful artists, however a few notable figures are often invoked when discussing Ikebukuro in the 1920s and 30s. One is the painter Ishimura Nichirō,

who after leaving his land-holding family in Hiroshima and moving to Tokyo, changed his name to Ai-Mitsu and shared a small studio with a group of friends and his wife, a school teacher who supported him financially (Culver 2013, p. 80). In 1933 Ai-Mitsu travelled to Shanghai after finding inspiration in Chinese painting styles. However, after witnessing the circumstances there his works took on a political tone, documenting Japanese commercial expansion in China with dark surrealist paintings.

The conglomeration of artists such as Ai-Mitsu in Ikebukuro led the poet Oguma Hideo to coin the phrase 'Ikebukuro Montparnasse' in an essay for the Sunday Mainichi in 1938 (Usami 1995). Making a play on the relationship between Paris' Montmartre and Montparnasse, Oguma argued that a new generation of artists were collaborating within the cheaper housing areas of Ikebukuro. Unfortunately, 'Ikebukuro Montparnasse' was short lived. During the Pacific War artists were increasingly arrested as subversives and dissidents (Havens 2006). Many artists were conscripted by the end of the war and the 'Ikebukuro Montparnasse' community fell apart. Ai-Mitsu's experiences are no exception in this regard; in 1944 he was conscripted to fight in China and died after returning to Japan in 1946, having contracted a fever in Manchuria.

By the end of the war much of Ikebukuro had been destroyed in the firebombing of Tokyo, its cheap housing particularly susceptible to the fires that destroyed much of the city. Japan's economy was devastated, and access to basic foodstuffs and supplies in Tokyo was extremely limited. Consequently, several black-markets (*yami-ichi*) opened in Yokohama, Shinjuku, and Ikebukuro (Molasky 2015). Ikebukuro's proximity to Allied forces' stores, agricultural land, and migrant traders with smuggling contacts, meant that it was one of the largest and longest running inland black-markets in Tokyo. The black-market was located on the western side of the station where Ikebukuro West-gate park is currently located. Due to its illicit trade networks, the market also attracted gangs, sex workers, and migrants, tarnishing impressions of Ikebukuro for decades to come.

Taiwanese, Chinese, and Koreans played key roles in running black-markets in Yokohama, Shinjuku, and Ikebukuro. Due to the trade-routes and official ally status Chinese and Korean merchants held with the Allied forces during the immediate postwar period, they held powerful, yet contentious, positions within black-market informal networks. Civil war in China and the subsequent separation of China into the mainland People's Republic of China and the Taiwanese Republic of China saw many mainland Chinese repatriated over this period, and connections to mainland China were severed after 1949. The 44,000 Chinese left in Japan in 1952 came to orient themselves towards Taiwan and the rest of the Chinese-speaking diaspora, using their international connections to occupy a niche within Japan's postwar markets (Morris-Suzuki 2010, p. 195). Similarly, the comparatively larger population of over 500,000 Koreans left in Japan after 1952 often relied on informal economies due to their marginalised positions (Chapman 2007; Morris-Suzuki 2010, p. 178-180). Dependence on black-markets in the immediate post-war period largely shaped the Japanese impression of overseas Chinese (Tsu 2011) and black-market spaces such as Ikebukuro and Shinjuku would come to define the imaginaries surrounding non-Japanese spaces in Tokyo more generally. Yokohama managed to re-brand itself as an enticing Chinatown in the late 1970s, and is now imagined as the home of Chinese inspired Japanese dishes such as *rāmen*, *gyōza*

and *shō ronbo*. In contrast, Shinjuku and Ikebukuro's image was left tarnished with complicated associations to both black-markets, and adult entertainment.

The crucial role black-markets played in the immediate postwar period also ensured that the belt of housing running from Shinjuku to Ikebukuro along the Yamanote line would become a major site for social life. This area was largely developed along pre-war lines, with cheap, tightly packed wooden housing predominating in areas near the stations (Jinnai 1995). Described as the 'wooden apartment belt' (*mokusai apāto chitai*) today, this area of Tokyo is estimated to be the most vulnerable part of the city in the case of an earthquake or other disaster. The belt has become the focus of local government renovation schemes, with Setagaya ward leading the charge on tearing down and rebuilding these areas, and Toshima ward one of the last to renovate. In the early 2000s Toshima ward had one of the largest congregations of old wooden housing along the Yamanote line (Sorensen 2005), although recent government activities have targeted wooden housing as a primary renovation goal.

During Japan's economic boom, many families relocated to new, larger housing regions on the outskirts of Tokyo (Douglass 1993; Matsubara 1989;Waley 2007; 2002). Consequently, much of the wooden apartment belt immediately around the stations emptied of their original residents, creating a demographic gap between inner and outer Tokyo. This intra-urban movement would reshape the terrain of class and ethnicity from Shinjuku to Ikebukuro in years to come. As several scholars have noted, Japan's image as a nation of middle-class homogeneity obfuscates local divisions of class (Bestor 1989; Ishida and Slater 2009). When national level statistics are aggregated, patterns of social class in Japan appeared relatively homogenous in the postwar period, despite patterns of stratification existing on the local level. When attention is paid to local areas as distinct yet interconnected places however, different dynamics emerge. The areas accessible from Shinjuku, such as Suginami Ward and Setagaya Ward, became the suburbs of the white collar classes in the economic boom era of the 1970s and 1980s (Yoshiki and Ryo 2014; Waley 2002). Shinjuku came to mark a boundary between central Tokyo and the upper middle-class suburbs of west Tokyo, becoming the largest commuter rail station in Japan. In contrast, the northern and eastern peripheries of the Yamanote line constituted the margins of Tokyo (Yoshiki and Ryo 2014; Waley 2002; see Hankins this issue). The areas immediately north of Ikebukuro were predominantly blue-collar or lower middle-class. What is more, as the major rail link to Tokyo's neighbouring prefecture, Saitama, Ikebukuro became the gateway to lower-middle class and working class commuters who had opted to buy more affordable accommodation outside of Tokyo proper.

In addition to class implications, Ikebukuro's unique position also left it somewhere in-between in terms of culture and identity. Patterns similar to Ikebukuro are found across the Northern and Eastern outskirts of the Yamanote where blue-collar workers and links to Chiba and Saitama prefecture have ensured that it too serves as a hub for the less prestigious. That being said however, the ambiguous imaginaries surrounding these areas differ from Ikebukuro due to the strong historic blue-collar *shitamachi* identities that place the social networks of people born into these areas firmly within Tokyo's past (Waley 2002; See Hankins this issue). As Shunya Yoshimi recently argued at a symposium on Ikebukuro's identity, while the *shitamachi* embodied Tokyo's roots within East Asia and the southwest embodied Tokyo's connection to

American pop-culture, the northwest's connection to a particular cultural milieu is more difficult to define (Yoshimi 2015).

The emptied belt of wooden housing along the northwest corner of the Yamanote line from Shinjuku to Ikebukuro attracted a range of people. Shin Ōkubo, just north of Shinjuku station, attracted *zainichi* Koreans and today is seen as Tokyo's Koreatown. Further north, areas such as Takadanobaba became vibrant locations for cheap food and accommodation for students attending universities nearby. However, Shinjuku station and Ikebukuro stations' position as major transit hubs also meant their status differed from these other sections. As transit hubs, both Ikebukuro and Shinjuku became renowned as entertainment districts. Shinjuku's position as a site of entertainment, particularly adult entertainment, was more intentional than Ikebukuro as it was suggested as a site for adult entertainment businesses by the Japanese government in the immediate postwar period (Kanematsu 1988). Named the Kabukichō, this site would grow to become East Asia's largest red light district, attracting migrants, mafia, and businessmen who drank and played within these spaces. Shinjuku's Kabukichō developed from a GIs' playground in the immediate postwar period to a last-stop playground for salarymen on their way home during Japan's economic boom. Ikebukuro underwent a similar process, although the areas north of Ikebukuro are cheaper and less prestigious. As a gateway to Saitama it nonetheless became a last stop site of consumption and play in the 1980s. Due to similar formative processes, both areas have been imagined as sites of deviance and play, and demarcate a boundary between the heart of Tokyo and its surrounding suburbanised conurbation.

The differences between Ikebukuro and Shinjuku are largely affected by recent historical developments. Up until Japan's economic downturn, the Kabukichō was associated with danger and hedonism, and in popular culture today it serves as a recognizable location for crime-related stories, as in the film *Shinjuku Incident* (Yee 2009)(Yee, *Shinjuku jikken*, 2009) and the Playstation game series *Yakuza,* aka *Like a Dragon* (Sega, *Ryū ga Gotoku*, 2005-2015). However, according to the memoirs of those who worked in the Kabukichō (cf. Li 2005) as well as the work of sociologist Takeoka Toru (Takeoka 2013), a series of crackdowns initiated by Tokyo governor Ishihara Shintarō has gentrified Shinjuku in recent years. As I will show in the proceeding section, Ikebukuro became a more prominent site of popular culture images of danger, deviance, and youth culture in the 2000s, largely due to its connection to new flows of people and culture over the past 20 years.

Ikebukuro's property market was hard hit by Japan's economic downturn in the 1990s, particularly after the 1997 Asian financial crisis. Less prestigious than Tokyo's major entertainment districts, many of the small bars and clubs that ran out of Ikebukuro's cheap wooden housing went bankrupt in the late 90s and early 2000s. At the same time, Ikebukuro's clientele had less money to spend due to their own precarious circumstances. Much like Ikebukuro's earlier history of migration and sub-culture development, the vacuum created by this drop in the market created opportunities for recent migrants, particularly Chinese (Tajima 2000). Since 1985, Mainland Chinese migration to Japan has grown to become the largest inflow of people into Japan in the post-war period, overtaking the Zainichi Korean population in 2006 (Liu-Farrer 2011). This has resulted in a boom in Chinese businesses opening along the

stretch of the Yamanote from Shinjuku to Ikebukuro. Today there are over 200 Chinese-owned businesses in the northern quarter of Ikebukuro station, providing a range of services from food, to travel agencies and entertainment. Although they are the largest identifiable group, Chinese migrants were not the only new flow of people into Ikebukuro. Several Japanese youth cultures have also taken advantage of the cheap rents in the area, with a range of independent music stores, cafes, and shops catering to specific youth cultures. In particular, Ikebukuro's eastern quarter is increasingly seen as a major site for Japanese popular culture consumption. Akin to Akihabara, but with a greater emphasis on forms of popular culture gendered female, the eastern side of Ikebukuro has become a distinct site of play for young women. The name 'Maid's street' has been given to a section of the eastern quarter of the station where 'rotten girls' (*fujōshi*) go to buy their favourite 'boy's love' (BL)comics and anime (Galbraith 2011).

Media Mobilities and Imagining Ikebukuro

Aka-san's use of the term 'borderland' encapsulates much of how Ikebukuro's human flows and transit mobilities created an entangled border within Tokyo in both spatial and social terms. His customers would stop on their way in and out of Tokyo, dipping into the entertainment and consumption spaces of this heterotopic gateway. The term borderland however, also invokes much of how Ikebukuro is imagined *as a whole* within media. These media representations have changed over time; from Ikebukuro as an ambiguous transit point to one where its dangerous and deviant associations have become part of its appeal. As Sarah Kovner has highlighted in her research on sex work in occupied Japan, sex work and black market activities were rendered invisible within the postwar re-imagination of Japan (Kovner 2013). It is arguable that this was not merely the case for these marginalised economies, but also the places where they proliferated. In the immediate postwar years Ikebukuro featured in a variety of stories documenting the disjunctive and wandering lives of young people immediately after the devastation of Tokyo.

The most famous of these is Hayashi Fumiko's *Floating Clouds* (*Ukigumo* 1951) written just before she died, published posthumously (Hayashi 1953), and quickly adapted into a film by Naruse Mikio (Naruse 1955). *Floating Clouds* follows the life of a young woman, Kōda Yukiko, struggling to find her place in postwar Japan. A series of flashbacks to her time assisting in the Japanese war effort in French Indochina are juxtaposed with the protagonist's current circumstances. In Indochina, she lived a quiet life in the mountains pursuing an affair with a Japanese colleague Tomioka; in the novel's present she negotiates the ruins of postwar Japan, with a significant portion set in Ikebukuro's blackmarket where she lives. However, Ikebukuro features only as one place among many in Yukiko's travels and is used as a metaphor for downward social mobility and loss (Fessler 1998). In this way, the novel shifts between time and place, as Yukiko negotiates relationships with both Tomioka and an American soldier before finally dying of tuberculosis. For much of the postwar era, Ikebukuro did not have an explicit place-based identity in film and media, but rather was portrayed as a place in passing. These motifs continued into the 60s and 70s, with films and novels using Ikebukuro as a symbol for decline or liminality. For example, *A.K.A Serial Killer* (*Ryākusho: renzoku shasatsuma*, Adachi Masao, 1969) (Adachi N/A) , is a 'landscape film' (*fūkeiron eiga*) which follows a narrated voice documenting the areas a serial

killer is purported to have moved through (see Coates this issue). In a similar way to *Floating Clouds,* Ikebukuro is part of the killer's route but not a focal point. The killer moves to Ikebukuro as a youth after dropping out of school and finding training before moving on to other areas. In this way, *A.K.A Serial Killer* portrays Ikebukuro as a place of change and liminality, much like in *Floating Clouds*.

In the post-boom era Ikebukuro's media representation started to change. Feeding off Ikebukuro's liminal status as a place for dropouts, misfits, and migrants, several media productions started to conjure a fashionable image of Ikebukuro as a space of diversity and danger. Popular media portrayals of this area are epitomised in two popular series: the television drama *Ikebukuro West Gate Park* (IWGP: *Ikebukuro Uesuto Gēto Pāku*) and the animated series *Durarara*. IWGP, aired in the late 1990s and early 2000s, followed the misdoings of a group of youths in the West Ikebukuro area. Ikebukuro's West Gate Park was the original site of the postwar black-market, suggesting a discursive resonance between Ikebukuro's past and present imaginaries. However, the themes the show tackled and the characters it portrayed were framed as explicitly contemporary, with little reference to Ikebukuro's past. The show covered issues such as school dropouts, economic struggle within families, gang violence, sex work, and murder. In this sense, IWGP epitomised the anxieties of Japan's so called 'lost decades' and its effect on youth. The main character, Makoto, is a 20-year-old once-renowned juvenile delinquent (*waru*) who despite his unsettled past tries to live a moral life. Makoto becomes embroiled in efforts to track down his girlfriend's killer, while avoiding the various social groups that would hold him back from his quest. From gangs, to police, to a pyramid scheme in which his mother becomes involved, Makoto's story explores the failure of social institutions in Japan from a righteous individual's perspective. Comical rather than explicitly critical, IWGP played on Ikebukuro's extant association to add drama to the storyline, but in the process reinscribed its image as a site representative of contemporary youth.

Much like IWGP, the series *Durarara* focuses on young people's experiences in Ikebukuro, albeit with more fantastic components. Originally a series of young adult fiction novels or 'light novel' (*raito noberu*) published in 2004, the series was turned into an animated show in 2010. Each episode focuses on a particular character in Ikebukuro, showing how each of their lives intersect. The setting is first introduced through Ryugamine Mikado, a young country boy who has decided to move to the city to join his childhood friend Kida Masaomi, although as the story unfolds other characters take over as protagonists. The first episode portrays Ikebukuro in paradoxical ways. Ryugamine, new to Ikebukuro, is guided through the area surrounding the station by Masaomi. At first hesitant to go out at night due to fear of gangs, Ryugamine is quickly convinced that his fears are all misconceptions. Once out on the streets, Masaomi proceeds to tell Ryugamine about all the dangerous people of Ikebukuro, including a mysterious headless motorcyclist from Ireland, a Russian-African sushi chef, and a gang who call themselves ' The Dollars'. The series continues in this way, featuring fantastical characters and images of danger in Ikebukuro, while paradoxically insisting that fearing these characters would be an overreaction.

When Ikebukuro's potential dangers are re-mediated by popular media, camp depictions of Ikebukuro as dangerous serve as a useful grammar for producing a particular kind of Tokyo vernacular (Sand 2013). Where Ikebukuro was once a faceless

area of liminality and danger in popular media, today its associations with danger function as a burlesque wink to viewers familiar with Ikebukuro as either a space they have visited, or one they know of due to previous media representations. As an 'in joke', such representations allow viewers a sense of 'group' recognition and emplacement by providing a paradoxically comical depiction of Ikebukuro as a 'dangerous space' in media while also creating a sense of belonging derived from knowledge about Ikebukuro's 'real' dangers. Indeed, when Aka-san used the term 'borderland' he stated it with a grin and a twinkle in his eye, evoking the light yet dangerous implications of the term he chose. In this way, media imaginaries such as those evoked by IWGP and Durarara can be seen as a form of ironic Tokyo vernacular that plays with tropes of stereotyping and expectation. While the ingenuity and play found within these inversions demonstrate a shift within how Ikebukuro is portrayed and imagined, a question remains as to what the consequences of such portrayals might be.

Alongside Ikebukuro's popularization as a hub of youth culture, it has also been increasingly associated with Chinese criminal activity in popular and news media. In recent years IWGP has created a spin-off series of books, including a recent series titled *Dragon Tears*, which focuses on a Japanese detective's quest to track down Chinese trainees and students who have become involved in sex work (Ishida 2011). In news media, violent crime linked to migrants in the area has been paid significant amounts of attention. For example, in 2014 a descendent of a Japanese national who remained in China after the war (*zanryūkoji*) reportedly shot his wife during an argument in a café in Ikebukuro (Sankei News 2014). The gun had been illegally obtained and so, the various news outlets reported the incident as an indication of increased Chinese mafia activity. According to accounts among Chinese migrants in the area, informal economies definitely exist within Chinese migrant networks in Ikebukuro, however violent crimes are more directly linked to Japanese organized crime than the emergence of Chinese mafia. More importantly however, the statistics surrounding Chinese crime in general are often conflated with horrific incidents such as these, rather than the majority of crimes related to visa or fraud. Although Chinese migrants are responsible for almost 40% of the total crimes committed by non-Japanese, crimes by non-Japanese constitute less than 3% of Japan's total crime rate (Ministry of Justice, Japan 2012). With this in mind, it would be erroneous to see Chinese crime as a major problem or disproportionate. Considering these forms of representation, and the lack of Chinese media producers in mainstream Japanese media, Chinese inhabitants in Ikebukuro occupy a more vulnerable position within the ironic vernacular of Tokyo.

Making Ikebukuro

From a mobility perspective, place can be understood as the intersecting lines of movement that form 'meshworks' of meaning and emplacement (Ingold 2007). Ikebukuro's image, its existence, and the people that traverse its streets are the 'meshworks' that constitute it as a place. Viewed over time, it is evident that these mobilities have often left Ikebukuro somewhere between the dominant geographies, imaginaries and human flows that constituted Tokyo. Too new to have a *shitamachi* identity and too peripheral to be truly part of the middle-class suburbs of Japan's boom era, Ikebukuro sits uncomfortably within the dichotomies that shape Tokyo's boundaries. At the same time, its associations with criminals, misfits and migrants from

the postwar era onwards has ensured that there is an additional human element to Ikebukuro's ambiguous status. In recent years, the imaginaries surrounding Ikebukuro have been reinterpreted, placing Ikebukuro as an exciting place for young consumer culture. At the same time, conflicts over efforts to define Ikebukuro as a place have recently produced new heterotopic vernaculars within the area.

In 2008, a group of Chinese business owners put forward a proposal to rename the northern quarter of the station 'Tokyo Chinatown', local shopping district organizers resisted the proposal (Yamashita 2010). Saiki Katsuyoshi (1938-). The Chairman of the Toshima Tourism Association, a lifelong resident of Ikebukuro, was particularly vocal in his concerns about the Chinatown proposal. He was often quoted in local media sources, expressing concerns over the influence of Chinese migrants on Ikebukuro's identity.

> *"From here forth we believe we cannot avoid cooperating with the Chinese [Saiki used the honorific term for 'Chinese' here.]. However, in Ikebukuro, this thing called "Ikebukuro's history" is still with us today. We will ignore/overlook this abrupt assertion that you want to make an Ikebukuro Chinatown. And so… it is obvious that we will reject this proposal." (Saiki quoted in Yamashita 2010, p. 145)*

Katsuyoshi's various public speeches showed fears about the influence Chinese migrants might have on efforts to combat historical associations between Ikebukuro, crime, and deviance. Stating that from 1998 onwards, local organizations had worked hard to clean up Ikebukuro, his repeated listing of the various achievements betrayed anxieties about Ikebukuro's image within the wider context of Tokyo. Implying that Ikebukuro was yet to be truly recognized by the rest of the metropolis, the Chinatown proposal threatened to take away their village building (*machizukuri*) efforts.

> *"The Chinese don't even know of our efforts, and yet they suddenly say they want to turn all our hard work into a Chinatown…?" (Katsuyoshi quoted in Yamashita 2010, p. 145-146)*

The official response of the Toshima ward government to the Chinatown proposal was a tentative "from cooperation first" (*mazu kōryū kara*) (Kyūmatsu 2008). Despite the official rejection of the proposal however, over the past 7 years the northwestern section of Ikebukuro has been unofficially recognized as a Chinatown, eventually being included in promotional magazines about the area (cf. Rurubu Ikebukuro 2015; Ikebukuro Walker 2015).

The rejection of the Chinatown proposal was fuelled by anxieties over Ikebukuro's heterotopic past, and its influence of Ikebukuro's identity struggles today. As Sand notes, the heterotopic nature of the past in Tokyo is an important part of how contemporary vernaculars are produced:

> 'In its new uses in Tokyo and elsewhere, the past existed to generate difference, producing the exoticism upon which local identities and the local appeal of cities depended. It was to be preserved neither as a record of progress nor as a tragic

> memento mori of the world's irreversible decay, but as a heterotopia, an otherness in the midst of the contemporary world.' (2013, p. 62)

In recent years, efforts to reinvigorate Ikebukuro's image have invoked the past in ways that celebrate its ambiguities and heterotopia. As part of the 80 year anniversary celebrations of Toshima ward in 2012, an ambitious campaign to re-brand Ikebukuro began. Titled "A Safe and Secure Cultural City, Toshima" (*anzen, anshin na bunka toshi Toshima*), the campaign laid out a range of reforms, including renovations of the wooden housing areas, a new ward office, and a reimagining of Ikebukuro as a international artistic centre. In justifying this last point campaigners have drawn upon Ikebukuro Montparnasse, Ikebukuro's multicultural population and the collaborative, humanistic spirit of the postwar blackmarket to emphasize the pluralistic and creative nature of Ikebukuro's past. For example, in the *Rurubu* series of 'mook' (magazine-book) guides, an interview with Mayor Takano of Toshima ward is used as an introduction to Ikebukuro (2015, p. 7). His interview cites how the Montparnasse and black market demonstrate Ikebukuro's "mysterious ability to attract people", stating its "historic energy continues to this day in an unbroken line." Affiliated with Rikkyo University, a series of seminars on "Ikebukuro studies" (*Ikebukurogaku*) have been held with the explicit task of rethinking the blackmarket, montparnasse and sex work. A 2015 project to celebrate 70 years since the end of World War 2 has started with the title "Ikebukuro= Free culture city project" (*Ikebukuro = jiyū bunka toshi purojekuto*) (Toshima Government, 2015). These references to 'free culture' and disparate groups of people coming together, is targeted as a means to celebrate the pluralistic nature of Ikebukuro's identity, linking a purportedly bohemian past to a creative pluralistic future. While some mention of Ikebukuro's Chinese population have featured within these discussion however, no spokespersons, artists or business owners have been invited to participate in the free culture project. Indeed, discussions at these symposia so far have remained somewhat baffled as to how the recent flow of Chinese migrants might be re-narrated into Ikebukuro's current identity forming efforts (Kawamoto 2015).

The mobilties that have shaped Ikebukuro's vernacular are wrought with tensions between inclusion and exclusion, and past and future. Its past elicits heterotopia that also look towards the future. This concern with the future asks us to reinterpret Aka-san's comment at the beginning of this paper stating that Ikebukuro is a 'borderland'. As much as a borderland constitutes a liminal point at the edges of bordering processes, it also constitutes a site of potentiality. Liminality's power, as both Victor Turner and Homi Bhabha point out, lies in its implication of change; a becoming *into* new forms of being (Turner 1995) and a site of new cultural significations (Bhabha 1994). In spatial terms, the in-between or *ma* as theorized in Japanese architectural theory (cf. Arata 1979) are the interstices that constitute space in itself. This interstitial position is also what enables reinscriptions of history, as Homi Bhabha argues:

> It is only through a structure of splitting and displacement…that the architecture of the new historical subject emerges… (1994, p. 310)

The potential generated from Ikebukuro's 'in-between' status is a reflexive; it comes from the internal processes that form its problematic position in the first place. In reinscribing its interstitial and liminal past, Ikebukuro's government, alongside those who participate in its promotional activities are attempting to build a new kind of

historical subjectivity. Familiarity with the structures and affects produced by the mobilities that constitute Ikebukuro allows one to become a talented *bricoleur* of these cultural forms (De Certeau 1984), as is the case in with ironic media representations of Ikebukuro and recent rebranding efforts by the local government. At the same time, an inability to strategically adopt these cultural forms, as in the case of the Tokyo Chinatown, leaves some at a disadvantage. It is evident that the reflexive nature of Ikebukuro's 'in-between' status is likely to be a site of contested identities for years to come.

Ikebukuro's rapid changes over the past 20 years, in terms of cultural and ethnic makeup, positions it as a primary site that lays bare questions about Japan's future as much as its past. Despite being excluded in the past, the threads that constitute its emplacement are still moving, and new threads produced by migrants and subcultures are being added to its social fabric. Unlike the Yamanote line, these lines of mobility have not closed in on themselves, but rather keep moving as they leave ambiguous trails and head towards an uncertain future. It is this dynamic that inspires my use of the term 'borderland' to describe Ikebukuro. In its literal sense, Ikebukuro once lay at the borders of Tokyo, and constituted an imagined border or gateway between the inner and outer circles of the city as it is defined by the Yamanote line. However, Ikebukuro is also a borderland in terms of being a frontier, as an intersection of new mobilities constituted by migrants, youth and media. It is perceived as a contact-zone between one space and another, between one time and another, as well as a horizon projecting into the future.

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