

SC 2217 TRAVEL MATTERS



DR SAHANA GHOSH
sahana.ghosh@nus.edu.sg



MATERIAL AND VISUAL CULTURES OF TRAVEL



LUGGAGE – LOST, OVERWEIGHT, ESSENTIAL

- What do you consider travel essentials?
- What makes your luggage precious? i.e. why would it matter if your luggage got lost, say when you are returning from a trip?



Do you really need two pairs of leggings?

**What about those
keyrings? What
souvenirs do you
buy? Why?**

FIFTY THREE KILOS

- Food and cooking are important ways of (1) showing/sharing love and care (2) remaining connected to a place & culture (3) experiencing/sharing new places and cultures
 - spices, pressure cookers, long-lasting food items
- Gifts are symbols of love and care but also obligations and expectations in social relationships



CONSUMPTION AND TRAVEL – WHAT IS A TRAVELER/TOURIST CONSUMING?

1. Landscape/nature
2. Adventure as experience
3. Place/Culture
 - Food
 - Dress
 - Ritual/custom
4. The photogenic/likable image

“Consistent visual motifs on Instagram echo a colonial iconography that sees tourist destinations as available for possession and consumption.”
(Sean Smith)

- the tropical exotic
- the promontory gaze
- fantasized assimilation

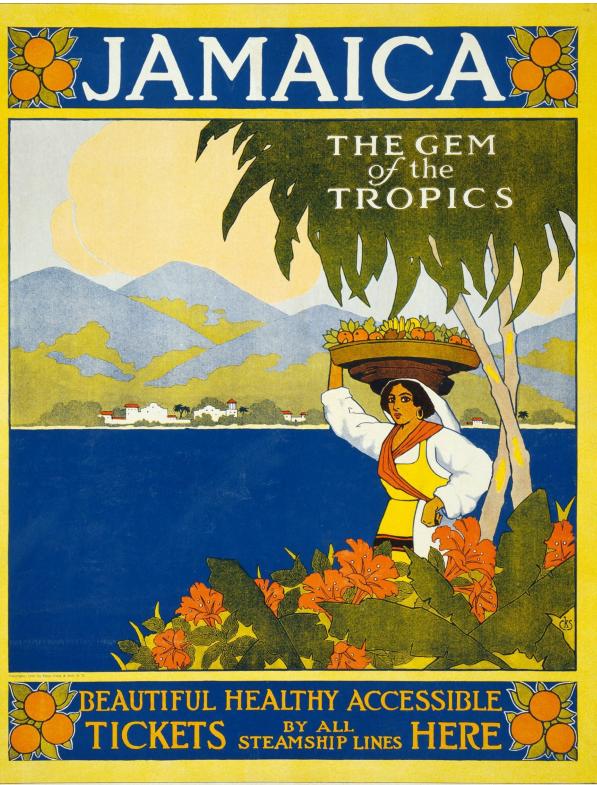


Figure 3. Photo by Lauren Bullen (@gypsea_lust), https://www.instagram.com/gypsea_lust/.

THE TROPICS – PICTURING RACE, SEXUALITY, PLEASURE



THE ON TOP OF THE WORLD GENRE – MASTERING LANDSCAPE

TRAVEL AS CONQUEST

TAKING POSSESSION -- The tourist/traveler comes to occupy this masterful position occupied by the colonial explorer or conqueror.

CONSUMING – In photographing and creating the image/moment-as-product, the landscape becomes a prop or a background, valuable only in relation to the pose/image

FORMULAIC/UNIQUE – Social media images provide a script/formula of what to do to have your own unique version – i.e. how to pose, at what spot etc.

NEW MEDIA, OLD TROPES

While colonial and Orientalist tropes that featured prominently in 19th and 20th centuries travel writing have been thoroughly challenged, we see new media like Instagram offering a largely uncritical space for these old tropes to be revived, broadcast, and made highly popular.

-Sean Smith p. 189

Is the new world traveler the old
colonial explorer?

KINDS OF MOBILITIES

- The tourist
- Transnational labor migration – the coolie, the domestic worker, the construction worker, the “global talent”
- The refugee/asylum-seeker
- The migrant – without papers, overstaying etc.
- Everyday urban mobility
- Marriage migration

TIME PERIODS / SCALES

- Colonial
- 20th century decolonization, transition to nation-state international order
- Globalization
- 21st century/current moment?
- Rural – urban migration (internal, international)
- Urban – city, neighborhood
- Transnational

- Who travels
 - Where
 - Why
 - To what end
 - And how
- (in what way, under what circumstances, etc.)



THE POLITICS OF MOBILITY

SO, WHAT DOES THE POLITICS OF MOBILITY MEAN?

The understanding that mobility is shaped by – in turn shapes – unequal relations of power.

These inequalities can be in terms of race, gender, sexuality, nationality, dis/ability, class.

Mobilities are a part of social life and shape social life, as do unequal relations of power.

Q -- is the Israeli permit regime exceptional? (If so, in what ways?)

Or a question of degree of a widely practiced colonial and now global system of population management?

Hint – think about different guest/temporary worker programs, the asylum granting system esp in the Global North to compare and contrast...

Role of documents, documentary regimes
and “rule of law” in normalizing suspicion
towards ethnically and racially marked bodies

Documents expand uncertainty and gray
spaces rather than eliminating them

‘Staying legal’ less about fixity, more about
successful socially-grounded performances

Migrants display tremendous creativity,
agency, and determination in pursuing desires
and better lives

BORDER
CROSSING AS A
PERFORMANCE,
SOCIO-
CULTURALLY
GROUNDED



MIGRATION AS A SOCIAL PROCESS

- Functionalist “push-pull” theories misleading, cannot explain real-world migration patterns
- See migration as outcome of static factors, trying to establish causal relations between them
- Qualitative migration research sees it as one part of processes of social change
- Account for human agency and dynamic imaginaries amid structural inequalities, and discriminations

E.g. place-based changes

E.g. aspirations-capabilities dynamic

TRANSNATIONAL WEBS BEHIND INDIVIDUALS



LIFESTYLE Vogue speaks to 3 foreign domestic workers living in Singapore

BY AMELIA CHIA AND CHANDREYEE RAY

25 SEPTEMBER 2020

In our inaugural issue, we hear from three women in this field about their journey in Singapore, the sacrifices they have made and their hopes for the future



Bangladesh Migrant Workers in Singapore: Video 5

[Home](#) / [Resources](#) / [safe migration](#) / [Bangladesh Migrant Workers in Singapore: Video 5](#)



Resource Type: Videos
Main Theme: Safe migration
Other Theme (if any): Forced Labour
Campaign: Migrant Voices
Language: Bangla
Country: Singapore

<https://iomx.iom.int/resources/safe-migration/videos/bangladesh-migrant-workers-singapore-video-5>

<https://vogue.sg/foreign-domestic-helpers-singapore/>

INTIMATE MOBILITIES / MOBILE INTIMACIES

Transnational marriage migrations bring out the coexistence of practical concerns and romantic desire in ALL marriages

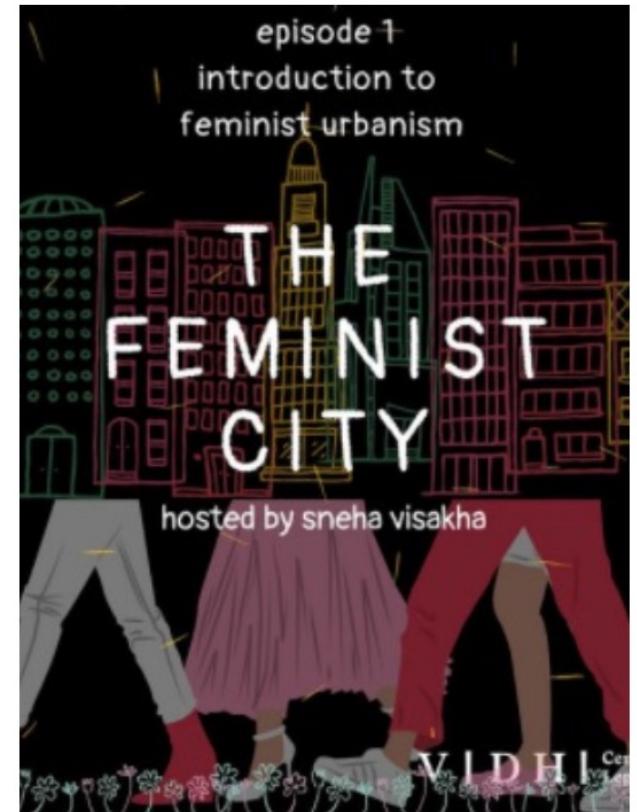
Representations – gender, race, nationality, class – play a key role in shaping desire AND social perceptions of that desire

Marriages, love, traditional, modern are always culturally mediated – cultural analysis can show HOW; political economy can tell us WHY

Marriage migrations are the intimate scale at which social reproductions of geopolitical relations and national community occurs

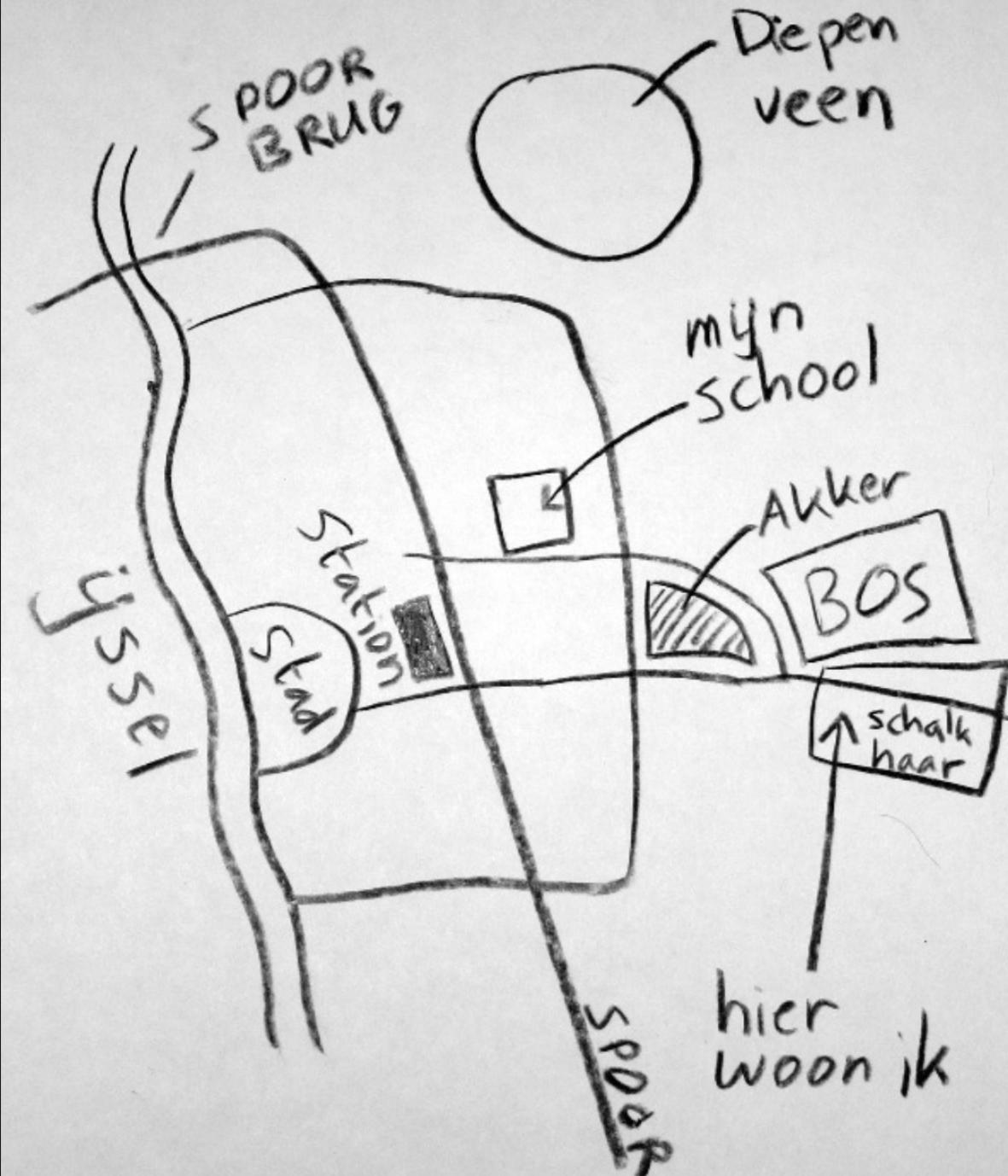
“The city has been set up to support and facilitate the traditional gender roles of men and with men’s experiences as the “norm,” with little regard for how the city throws up roadblocks for women and ignores their day-to-day experience of city life. This is what I mean by the ‘city of men.’”

- Leslie Kern.



The geography of fear

"...since we have very little control over the presence of men in our environments, and can't function in a state of constant fright, we displace some of our fear onto spaces: city streets, alleyways, subway platforms, darkened sidewalks. These spaces populate our personal mental maps of safety and fear. The map is a living collage, with images, words, and emotions layered over our neighbourhoods and travel routes."



METHODOLOGIES

- Anthropological and sociological perspectives - from individual's points of view, privileging historically and socio-culturally particular experiences
- Visual representations as key site to contestations over meaning (e.g. how stereotypes get formed & challenged)
- Thinking through the body
- What counts as data, who's the expert?

“Begin with the material. Begin with the female body. ... Not to transcend this body, but to reclaim it.” What are we reclaiming here? We’re reclaiming personal, lived experience, gut knowledges, and hard-earned truths. ”

What counts as “expert data”?

Who makes decisions about the city?

Go back to the “right to the city” argument. Missing women planners!

“Women” as a layered category.

SO WHAT?

- Mobilities – whether daily urban mobility, transnational migration for work, or occasional tourism -- are a part of social life and shape social life, as do unequal relations of power.
- Understanding the politics and inequalities of mobility and travel can explain a lot about the shared world in which we are embedded and which we shape.
- Seeing migration as a social process reveals the historical factors that are at work in the present.
- Most of all, it offers critical tools and (hopefully) the empathy to understand the interplay between structure and agency, individuals and the system.





Department of Sociology
and Anthropology
Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences

Sociology & Anthropology Seminar Series 2022

24th
Nov

*Unfree: Migrant domestic Work
in Arab States*

3PM SGT

FASS FACULTY LOUNGE
L2 The Deck # 02-01

Moderated by
Asst Prof Sahana Ghosh

THANK YOU!



Rhacel Salazar Parreñas is Professor of Sociology and Gender and Sexuality Studies at the University of Southern California. She is the author of numerous award-winning books, including *Illicit Flirtations: Labor, Migration and Sex Trafficking in Tokyo*, and *Children of Global Migration: Transnational Families and Gendered Woes*. She is the recipient of the 2019 Jessie Bernard Award from the American Sociological Association.



Register via the QR code or via
https://nus.syd1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8dmBuwiyk6ubGZ0