

SC2217 Visual Analysis Project (Beck's Journey Film Analysis)

Group Members:

Jeanine Ong Jia Yi [jeanineong@u.nus.edu](mailto:jeanineong@u.nus.edu)

Keefe Yeo Kai Xun [e0725678@u.nus.edu](mailto:e0725678@u.nus.edu)

Keethanna Jeyaseelan [keethanna@u.nus.edu](mailto:keethanna@u.nus.edu)

Kwan Wan Yee [e0560028@u.nus.edu](mailto:e0560028@u.nus.edu)

## Becky's Journey Film Analysis

Good start, getting us straight to the discussion. How do you read this difference? What does this inequality reflect? Power of the Passport and Documentations

The stark differences between the ability to travel between those living in LDCs and DCs were highlighted by *Becky's Journey*. In most DCs, citizens possess a passport which allows them to travel easily. With reference to a week 1 reading, Singaporeans, who live in a DC, enjoyed "visa-free access to an unprecedented 190 destinations worldwide in January 2020", highlighting the ease for citizens of a first-world country to travel overseas (Travel Weekly Asia, 2020). This is juxtaposed against Nigerians, in particular Becky, who do not possess any passports or legal documentation to travel, likely due to the lacking development of travel structures in the country. One scene even shows a sign that reads "Nigeria Immigration Service" sitting rusted in a junkyard (Figure 1), visually hinting at how the systems in charge of overseas travel are mostly ignored and inefficient in Nigeria, a stark contrast to the streamlined process in Singapore.



Figure 1: Rusty sign that reads "Nigeria Immigration Service"

The function of passports and identification documents as gatekeepers are thus highlighted by *Becky's Journey*. Her lack of access to official documents restricts her ability to cross borders, thereby forcing her to resort to alternate ways to enable cross-border mobility. This elucidates the monopoly wielded by sovereign nation-states in constructing legitimate means of movement, thereby shaping people's access to various spaces (Torpey, 1998). Subject to the scrutiny of immigration bureaucracies created to manage their citizens' movements within and across borders, Becky turns to informal brokers - which were unfortunately fraudulent - to acquire counterfeit documentation, further creating obstacles to move abroad.

Furthermore, Becky's status as a Nigerian citizen has restricted her in terms of mobility. Due to the tepid economic growth in Nigeria, Becky's proficiency in the English language remained incompatible and insufficient for local jobs, leaving many like her unemployed and stuck in a perpetual cycle of poverty. In her case, Becky's decision to travel to Italy (Europe) labelled her as an 'illegal' or 'irregular' migrant, someone who travels overseas voluntarily for economic opportunities but has no legal right to stay in said destination. Moreover, the necessity and power of networks controlled by both sides of the law (state officials, private smugglers, and brokers) are crucial in enabling the 'illegal' industry, fuelled by its "lucrative" nature (Khosravi, 2007). Illegal border crossing is no longer the issue of an individual, but rather a collaboration of various actors for it to be successful.

#### The enabling of the 'illegal' migration industry (through networks, resources, and uncertainty)

*Becky's Journey* also shows how lines between illegality and legality have been blurred due to the defiance of state's border regimes by illegal migrants. Arguably, it is this defiance and uncertainty that created opportunities for businesses, leading to a rise in the 'illegal' migration industry. This 'mode of governance' that leveraged the "space of ambiguity between life and law" even strengthened the power of 'legal' in deciding who passes the border - legally or illegally (Reeves, 2013). Her travels further illustrate the complications brought forth by the illegal migration industry, and the multi-faceted relationships involved in a single person's travel. Uncertainty in the destination of travel, smuggling rates and political control often added to the risks involved, as seen by Becky's return on her second travel due to the upheaval against Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. Both Becky and Khosravi (2007)'s travels "depended on global politics and events", making illegal border crossings. It would be interesting to ponder: if Becky had attempted to bribe the Lagos airport officials during her first travel (just like Khosravi did), would it have been successful?

Great points in reading an "illegal" journey - shaped both in the nature of its illegality and success/failure to achieve its goals by multiple, heterogenous political economic and geopolitical factors well beyond the indiv undertaking the journey and typically held responsible for a criminal act

#### Role of education and Gender roles

*Becky's Journey* also highlights how the Nigerian state's lack of political and economic support perpetuates social inequalities amongst poorer citizens. Women like Becky are disadvantaged and left stuck in a cycle of poverty due to a lack of employment opportunities, hence pushing her to look for jobs abroad. It is noteworthy that Becky, given her decent

What do you think the role of European states is in this political economy - and moral economy - shaping Becky's life chances?

proficiency in English and diploma attainment, remains unsuccessful in securing a job for financial stability. This exemplifies the futility of education in Nigeria's poorly developed economy. Hence, any other means of sourcing income would seem viable for her, accentuating her view toward prostitution. Yet, she did not view sex work as a form of "human trafficking" and took it as a labour opportunity. This signifies that sex work was commodified, and the banners depicted in the film (Figures 2 & 3) allude to the prevalence of women who sought prostitution as a source of income.



Figure 2



Figure 3

Becky's autonomy to make choices aligned with her aspirations also underscores her privilege as an unmarried woman in Benin. Being "different" from her married sisters seems to emphasise the role of marriage and its influence on gender roles. Being unmarried enabled her to pursue a life based on her interests and not be tied down by kinship. More importantly, her responsibilities are not domesticated. In Becky's case, becoming affluent is a means to "surprise her family", and is not a situation that necessitated for her to go abroad for economic support. Hence, her priorities are shaped by her individual goals, which emphasise her agency.

(797 words, excluding references, citations, titles and words in brackets)

Good reading of Becky's journey - I hope you enjoyed working on this collaboratively. The use of readings to analyse the film was clear and effective. As my questions indicate, some parts of your analysis could have gone deeper, I wanted to hear more of your thoughts! Well done in a v short piece.

B+



## References

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