



Week 10 – geopolitics and gendered labour

Schrober (2016) and Razavi (2021)



Schrober (2016)



US Army Bases in South Korea

South Korea: from “one of the most US-friendly [countries] in the world to one where the US military presence has become largely contested”

US bases as “vital spatial nodes of geopolitics and US empire-making”

Militarism understood in terms of how “military practices... influence social relations”



US Military Personnel in South Korea

US Soldiers have stopped staying within the “remote red-light districts close to their base facilities that they had informally been assigned to”, which were “tightly regulated spaces” - access to foreign women is an unspoken perk of joining the military

Power structures that allow US soldiers to dislocate the patterns within their camptowns into other neighbourhoods in Seoul



US Military Personnel in South Korea

“Imaginarities” that enable strong opinions of the US soldiers - but this obscures alternative stories

- Prime location for these obscured interactions: Adult entertainment areas (which are labelled as spaces of domination)
- Silencing of sexualised foreign workers' voices



Geopolitics and Gender

While violent escalations occasionally affect the women's lives, the focus will be placed on the fearful suspension between different countries that the entertainers experience. Their uncertainties are heightened by the deeply precarious working conditions and the strict visa regimes that they must submit themselves to, and that add further pressure to their already vulnerable state as transnational female workers in South Korea.

- Schrober, p. 25



Role of the Women

- **Women have no choice but to fall into this line of work for financial means**
 - "Entertainers"
 - The Age Factor
 - South Korean vs Foreign
 - Desirability
 - Victims of exploitation
 - Tricked into nature of work
 - Money
 - Pressured into performing sexual acts
 - Seek support from US Military Men to escape from predicament
 - Mobility
 - Legality of being an immigrant
 - Nature of work
 - To provide for their family/children or to build a better life for herself - coming from under privileged communities
 - No Autonomy? - some sense of agency

"a woman's worth largely defined by her ability to attract the attention of the American customers who come to the club she works at"



Role of the Men

- **Club Owners/Managers**
 - Controlling the women's salaries
 - "Bar fine" = "Sex fee"
 - Not giving the money promised
 - Exploitation of young women
 - Pressurise on performance of sexual services
- **US Military Men**
 - Power over the entertainers to perform sexual services
 - Paid money = has autonomy over the women
 - Means for the women to improve on their chances in life
 - "Prime concern, preferable source for support"
 - "Rescue" the entertainers - but can abandon them in a second



Power Relations within the Space

- **Element of Money**
 - Crucial role in shaping the relations - identifying who is the one with more power
- **Entertainers - Client Relationship**
 - Transactional relationship
 - Although power is definitely not distributed equally
 - US Military Men
 - 'a place where they can "let off some steam" after the day's work is done'
 - Women
 - May seem to have no autonomy
 - space of desire, uncertainty, anguish, and hope
 - Agency asserted - working for a brighter future ahead with soldier clients
 - Are they mere victims?



Geopolitics

vitality of hope is what inspires these women to partake in this transn

What is the camptown?

- “terrain where personal aspirations, collective imaginaries, and various temporal orientations come up against a local architecture that has attached itself to the globe-spanning infrastructures of the US Armed Forces.”
- “a historical project arising out of Cold War insecurities, an economic and political solution to the perceived danger posed by too many young foreign men in one place, and a social project in Mazzarella’s sense that is affective in its effectiveness”



Migration and Trafficking

Recruiters and their illicit practices & informal networks (migrant Russian community in South Korea)

US's attempt to combat global prostitution - pressure on South Korea to change its laws.

South Korea stopping the E-6 visa to women from Russia and other post-Soviet spaces.

Camptowns as economically destitute areas with few local women, and also as dependent on the young soldiers.



Migration and Trafficking

Critique of US Department of Defence's "Zero Tolerance Policy"

"distancing the military and its soldiers from camptown prostitution tainted with trafficking. The policy is nebulous about the use of (poor) women's sexual labor presumably without force or trafficking to keep male soldiers docile and useful. It continues to normalize male soldiers' heterosexual entitlement at the expense of marginalized women."
(Seungsook, 2010a: 350)



Why the women stay

Various complexities and social pressures: familial obligations, debts, desire to make fortune

The US soldier as a someone who can provide a better life, but this is undercut by the geopolitical backdrop



transnational spaces of assymetric spaces between us military men and sexualised



**Razavi
(2021)**





Background: US-Middle East relationship

- **Economic interests
(oil and location)**
- **Regional alliance amid
Cold War challenges &
regional instability**



Gendered Occidentalism

A form of strategic mimicry as to gain the trust, affection and epistemic power of US foreign policy – skillfully shape the way their American counterparts view the Middle East

“...the colonized subject embodies those feature of the colonizer that makes them more recognizable to the colonizer, but through imperfect enactments that ensure the hierarchies between the colonized and colonizer persist” (p. 94)

- Have to maintain a delicate balance between being comfortingly familiar (embodying American values) but also uniquely interesting (representing their own Middle Eastern cultures)
- Instil in the ambassador a sense of authority and legitimacy – able to effectively connect with his Western audience



West vs Middle Eastern Identity

Appealing to the US foreign policy community which “remains overwhelmingly white, male, and heterosexual” (p. 95)



Ardeshir Zahedi

- With his decision to take on a “Persian” identity due to the growing anti-Arab sentiments, it allowed him to enact gendered occidentalism (performing his heterosexual identity) as to be recognised by his US counterparts



Yousef al-Otaiba

- Educated in America – have a deep understanding of American culture and the political system
- Maintained the ability “to be both bro and Arab at the same time”



Homosocial Bonding

Both Zahedi and Otaibi hosted exclusive lavish parties:

"Zahedi was celebrated for helping Washington fulfill its own Orientalist fantasies by having Hollywood actresses taken on the role of seductive Eastern belly dancer, while also supporting DC's long-established practice of hiring women sex workers as a means of further cementing homosocial bonds among men."

- Through homosocial bonding, this aligns the ambassadors with gendered social expectations of men
- Reinforces their heterosexual masculinity and allows for greater familiarity and trust with one another
 - The fear of homosexuality in the US was closely linked to the fear of communism
- Helped the Establishment turn a blind eye to the abuses and brutality of the shah



Role of the Female



Reliance on their wives to appeal to the institution's gendered and racialized desire.

Have to appear modern and take on a Western look and taste – cementing her appeal as foreign yet sufficiently “white”

- **Shanaz Zahedi's** beauty and Western looks led her to be featured in *Vogue*, alongside other young women across Europe's elite
- **Abeer Al Otaiba** is being represented as a fashionably modern beautiful woman and a loving mother and wife
- Furthermore, the role of the wife establishes the ambassador's heterosexuality



The Occident in 'Gendered Occidentalism'

Its Origin

Edward Said coined 'Orientalism' in 1978, setting up a binary opposition between the Orient vs. Occident



The Orientalists

Western scholars and scientists that went to the Middle East to collect information

Writings that were published tend to **perpetuate views of Middle Eastern people (Occident) as inferior, subservient, and in need of saving**





What is 'epistemic power'?

Razavi defines it as the ability to **control narratives** and **interpret "facts"** on behalf of the state and international institutions (p.93)

Thus, empowering foreign elites like Otaiba to **influence how the US government understands and pursues its interests** in countries like the UAE



Implications of an Orientalist/ Occidentalist View



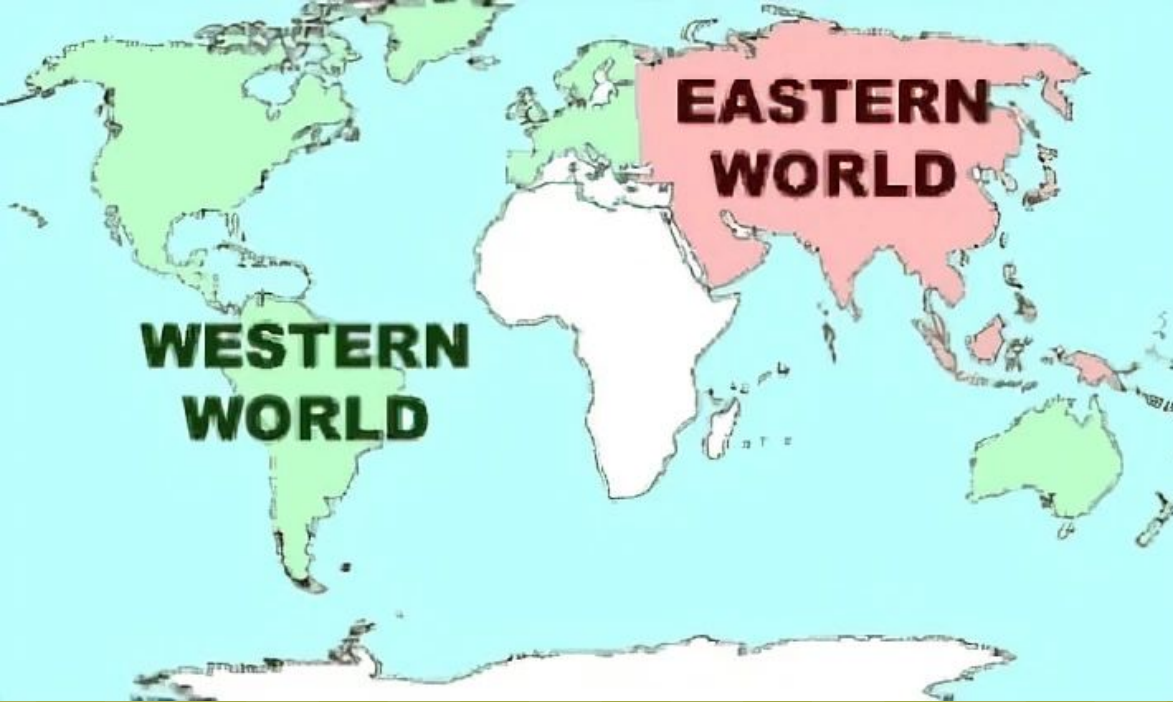
Foucault: **Power as productive**, and of power and knowledge as intrinsically linked to (and productive of) one another



Conflates a vast and diverse array of landscapes, peoples and cultures into **a single, unchanging unit**

(Said, [1978] 2003)





**Ultimately, reinforcing the imagined divide
between the 'East' and 'West'**



Realities of Affective Mediation

Pursuing Own Interests for the Middle East

Eg. “the civil war in Syria,
Iran’s nuclear program,
supporting ongoing assault on
Yemen” (p.102)

Facing minimal criticism & receiving a lot of trust

“In places like Yemen where I
can’t go myself [...] I’m bound
to trust an ally like the
Emiratis to interpret the facts
on the ground. I know it is
reliable stuff” (p. 102)

Uncovering the Harsh Reality

Feeling pressured to downplay
aspects of his racialized and
religious identity that could
hinder his social acceptance
within Washington (p. 98)



Discussion Questions

1. What are the industries and domains outside of the military where militarism and its associated hegemonic masculinity dominate women and/or marginalised communities?
2. Who is silenced in the creation of a state narrative and political representation of a country, as it is presented globally (For example, Middle Eastern identity in Razavi (2021), or Singapore's presentation to the rest of the world)?
What are the consequences of these voices being marginalised?
3. How does the **construction** and understanding of hegemonic masculinity (heterosexual, white males) influence geopolitical issues?
4. Should states be held accountable for the effects of policies when 'affective mediations' supersede **rationality**?



Thank you!

