

## The Asian Migrant's Body

# New Mobilities in Asia

In the 21st century, human mobility will increasingly have an Asian face. Migration from, to, and within Asia is not new, but it is undergoing profound transformations. Unskilled labour migration from the Philippines, China, India, Burma, Indonesia, and Central Asia to the West, the Gulf, Russia, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand continues apace. Yet industrialization in Bangladesh, Cambodia, and India, the opening of Burma, and urbanization in China is creating massive new flows of internal migration. China is fast becoming a magnet for international migration from Asia and beyond.

Meanwhile, Asian students top study-abroad charts; Chinese and Indian managers and technicians are becoming a new mobile global elite as foreign investment from those countries grows; and Asian tourists are fast becoming the biggest travellers and the biggest spenders, both in their own countries and abroad.

These new mobilities reflect profound transformations of Asian societies and their relationship to the world, impacting national identities and creating new migration policy regimes, modes of transnational politics, consumption practices, and ideas of modernity. The series will bring together studies by historians, anthropologists, geographers, and political scientists that systematically explore these changes.

The aim of the series is to offer a forum for writers of monographs and occasionally anthologies on Asian history. The Asian History series focuses on cultural and historical studies of politics and intellectual ideas and crosscuts the disciplines of history, political science, sociology and cultural studies.

## *Series Editor*

Pál Nyíri, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam

## *Editorial Board*

Peggy Levitt, Wellesley College

Johan Lindquist, Stockholm University

Tim Oakes, University of Colorado, Boulder

Aihwa Ong, University of California, Berkeley

Tim Winter, Deakin University

Xiang Biao, Oxford University

# The Asian Migrant's Body

*Emotion, Gender and Sexuality*

*Edited by Michiel Baas*

Amsterdam University Press

FOR PRIVATE AND NON-COMMERCIAL USE  
AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cover photo: Rebecca Sampson

Source: Sampson, Rebecca (2018) *Apples for Sale*, Bielefeld: Kerber

Cover design: Coördesign, Leiden

Lay-out: Crius Group, Hulshout

ISBN 978 94 6298 866 8

e-ISBN 978 90 4854 097 6 (pdf)

DOI 10.5117/9789462988668

NUR 740

© Michiel Baas / Amsterdam University Press B.V., Amsterdam 2020

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the written permission of both the copyright owner and the author of the book.

FOR PRIVATE AND NON-COMMERCIAL USE  
AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY PRESS

# Table of Contents

Introduction	7
Conceptualizing the Asian Migrant's Body <i>Michiel Baas and Peidong Yang</i>	
1 'Not a Lesbian in Dubai, Not gay in Tehran' Sexualities, Migrations, and Social Movements across the Gulf <i>Pardis Mahdavi</i>	29
2 Bodies at Work Gendered Performance and Migrant Beer Sellers in Southeast Asia <i>Denise L. Spitzer</i>	53
3 Body, Space, and Migrant Ties Migrant Domestic Workers and Embodied Resistances in Lebanon <i>Amrita Pande</i>	69
4 The Day Off Policy, 'Reverse Domestication', and Emotional Labour among Indonesian Domestic Workers in Singapore <i>Maria Platt, Brenda S.A. Yeoh, Khoo Choon Yen, Grace Baey and Theodora Lam</i>	89
5 Embodying the Good Migrant in Ageing Negotiating Positive Subjectivities Through Paid Work <i>Michelle G. Ong</i>	109
6 Proper Conjugation of Bodies Chastity, Age, and Care Work in Sri Lankan Migrants' Families <i>Michele Ruth Gamburd</i>	135
7 Border-crossing as Sexual Subjects Interracial Dating Experience of Young Chinese in New Zealand <i>Alex Yang Li</i>	161

8	Managing Touch	183
	The Racialized Dynamics of Intimacy in the Los Angeles Beauty Industry	
	<i>Hareem Khan</i>	
	Notes on Contributors	205
	Index	209

# Introduction

## Conceptualizing the Asian Migrant's Body

*Michiel Baas and Peidong Yang*

### Introduction

A recent exhibition titled 'Apples for Sale' at Foam, a photography museum in Amsterdam, provides an overview of recent pictures by the photographer Rebecca Sampson, who has spent considerable time investigating and portraying the lives of Indonesian domestic workers in Hong Kong. The book that was published as part of the exhibition opens with a number of domestic workers wearing brightly coloured aprons of which a few sport the line 'Apples for Sale'. These are pictures that could have originated from any agent brokering between domestic migrant workers and host families, however by introducing her work in this way, Sampson also seems to suggest that we can think of these women as literally *for sale*. Friendly, smiling, and with hands folded, the images convey eagerness and obedience; these women are clearly ready to serve. What follows could not provide a greater contrast. In a particularly striking picture, we see two female domestic workers walking through a part of Hong Kong that can only be thought of as its outskirts. Strewn with rubble and garbage on both sides, one of the women is dressed in a simple black top, miniskirt, and open-toe shoes with a pink strap, her toenails painted blue. The other, however, is dressed entirely in black, her hair cut short and gelled up in pointy spikes, her face covered in piercings, pants and shirt decorated with belts and various aggressive looking emblems. Immediately clear is that the two are in a lesbian relationship, one a girly girl, the other a tomboy. Perhaps even more striking, however, is that the latter is carrying a sizeable doll on her neck; dressed in white lace, the doll's hairdo and glittery tiara seem inspired by Japanese anime, though the shoes of a sturdy boots variety seem to mock the doll's cuteness. As subsequent pictures illustrate, the doll is used for the re-enactment of family life, something not just this couple engages in

---

Baas, Michiel (ed.), *The Asian Migrant's Body: Emotion, Gender and Sexuality*. Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press 2020

DOI: 10.5117/9789462988668\_INTRO

FOR PRIVATE AND NON-COMMERCIAL USE  
AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY PRESS

but quite a few other women employed as domestic workers in Hong Kong as well. They rent containers for 1400 HKD (or 160 EUR) per month and turn these spaces into private sanctuaries of candy-coloured wonderlands that, on Sundays (a mandatory day-off for domestic workers), provide a temporary safe-haven from the much harsher realities of day-to-day life and work during the week.

What will strike any researcher working on the topic of migration is the sheer physicality communicated by Sampson's pictures. While academic work on migrant domestic workers frequently touches upon the issues of abuse and violence, much less do we encounter these women as having bodies that are impacted and shaped by the experience of migration in other ways. While Sampson does not shy away from revealing the more painful and exploitative dimensions of migrant domestic work, her pictures also convey agency and determination, especially in terms of being independent women with dreams, hopes, and aspirations of their own. They are determined to give shape and meaning to their lives outside the confines and watchful eyes of their host families, they are sexually active, and creatively rework gender roles within a context characterized by constraints and obstacles. Most of all though, they seem to deviate from the notion of an archetypical migrant worker as passive, docile, and (only) a victim.

While it has been acknowledged that migration leaves an imprint on a migrant's body and that that same body can be thought of as a facilitator of migration, studies have rarely foregrounded a body-centred perspective to understand how migrants relate to their bodies as part of migration trajectories. This edited volume brings together chapters that are united in their investigation of the way Asian migrants experience, think about, perceive, and utilize their bodies as part of the journeys they have embarked on. For this, it takes as a point of departure the observation that the body is naturally implicated in any form of movement or mobility. Yet, the way bodies are physically and symbolically marked by migration experiences often does not move beyond the immediate effects of hard labour and (potentially) exploitative or abusive situations. There is no denying that the migrant's body is present in explorations of how migrants negotiate borders and borderlands; in the ways they engage with low-paid employment (e.g. in construction, domestic work or the harbour); or in questions of safety, rights, and protection (e.g. prostitution, trafficking, and other types of illegal activities). However, rarely do studies explicitly conceptualize the body in terms of the meanings migrants ascribe to their bodies; how their relationship with their bodies changes over time, and how their bodies undergo processes of change and/or are marked by their experiences as



migrants. Rebecca Sampson's work points at something important here: migrants are not only on the receiving end where it concerns their bodies, their bodies are also not only utilized for their work as migrants. They also seek (to reclaim) control over their bodies and make them part of strategies to express themselves. The collective chapters in this edited volume argue that, as such, the body is a primary site to understand how migrants reflect on and experience their migration trajectories.

## What the Migrant's Body Can Tell Us

The body is clearly geographically the most intimate sphere, but it cannot be denied that the migrant's body is at the same time, as Lucy Jackson (2016) puts it, subjected to boundary making and territorialization. Parrini *et al.* (2007) identify two paradoxes of the migrant's body. The first relates to transformation as part of the migration process and the dyad that is produced by 'otherness' in the country of destination and the body as symbolically-marked by 'success' in the home country (upon return). They stress that the transformation of the meaning of embodiment (through the experience of migration) is neither seamless nor coherent, something which links to the second paradox they unpack: that of masculine identity and associated changing gender relations (particularly once a migrant has returned 'home'). As such, studies that have engaged with the migrant's body so far revolve mainly around notions of transition, transformation, tension, and friction. While it is acknowledged that the migrant's body is a container for identity formation and change, the way the physical body is imprinted by these experiences as part and parcel of the migration process remains understudied. In what follows we propose a conceptual framework for understanding the migrant's body in anthropological and sociological terms. In particular we will pay attention to questions of embodiment, representation, and subjectivities as they have been dealt with in the literature so far. The chapters included in this volume build in their own way on earlier theorizations and conceptualizations of the (migrant's) body but in doing so also show the potential for a more body-centred approach in migration studies.

Proposing a conceptual framework for understanding the (migrant's) body is certainly no easy matter, considering how complex the body itself is, often functioning as a border between various opposing forces. It is the interface between psychology and physiology. It is where interiority intersects with exteriority. The body is also highly private and personal, yet at the same time intensely social and political. This socio-political

significance of the body arises precisely from its private, intimate, and personal nature. Conversely, the private dimensions of the body cannot exist apart from its entanglement in social, economic, and political relations. Furthermore, the body is simultaneously a matter of materiality and semiotics. Sometimes, it is literally the surface of inscription, where meaning and being are consummated. Therefore, anything resembling an adequate anthropological or sociological understanding of the body has to start from a recognition and appreciation of such dialectics that inhere in the notion of the body.

Arguably, all the dialectics and paradoxes surrounding the body boil down to one central theoretical dualism – the body as a subject(ivity) and as an object(ivity). As a subject, the body houses the senses and agency: it is the medium through which the world around is apprehended and acted upon. In this sense, the body is a source of subjectivity: what kind of body one has – gendered, raced, classed, aged, and so on – to a great degree determines what kind of subject one *is*, and therefore, what kind of place one occupies in the world, and how one is inclined to act in it. On the other hand, the body is also an object, and sometimes seen to be an objective fact. The body, throughout history, has been the object of knowledge inquiries and a multitude of sociocultural practices. This fundamental dualism between subjectivity and objectivity forms the basic structure underlying the various ways in which the body has been conceptualized in contemporary empirical research.

## Embodiment and Representation

Thomas Csordas's 1994 essay (Csordas 1994a), written as the introduction to the volume *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self* (Csordas 1994b), provides an enduringly relevant framework for thinking about the subject-object duality of the body. According to Csordas, there are two main conceptual paradigms underpinning the scholarship of the body: the *representational* and *embodiment* paradigms. The first is concerned with the *body as representation* or *representation of the body* and understands it as 'a kind of readable text upon which social reality is "inscribed"' (Csordas 1994a: 12). This is also why Csordas refers to this as the 'paradigm of textuality' (ibid.). Accentuating the constitutive power of representation or, synonymously in this context, *discourse*, this way of looking at the body is 'postmodern' insofar as it rejects any essential truths about the body in favour of critically examining 'truth claims' made on its behalf. This paradigm can be seen as not only resonant with but indeed

deeply indebted to the thought of Foucault, whose work sought to ‘establish the discursive conditions of possibility for the body as object of domination’ (ibid.). ‘Domination’ need not refer here explicitly to coercive relations over the body (such as in Foucault 1977); instead, inasmuch as knowledge and power are two sides of the same coin (hence ‘knowledge/power’) in Foucauldian theory (Foucault 1980), scientific discourses that create the very terms in which the body can be thought (e.g. Foucault, 1963/2003; 1976) are also instances of domination. Beyond the scientific discourse, cultural and juridical discourses are also significant ways in which the body is caught up in representation. In sum, in the representational paradigm of the body, the object-ness of the body is foregrounded; and ‘discourse’ and ‘power’ stand out as key analytical and conceptual categories for thinking about the *objectification* of the body.

In contrast, the embodiment paradigm emphasizes the body as an experiencing agent. Borrowing from the philosophical tradition of phenomenology, Csordas explains embodiment in terms of ‘being-in-the-world’, which ‘captures precisely the sense of existential immediacy [...]’. This is an immediacy in a double sense: not as a synchronic moment of the ethnographic present but as temporally/historically informed sensory presence and engagement; and not unmediated in the sense of a precultural universalism but in the sense of the preobjective reservoir of meaning [...]’. (Csordas 1994a: 10). Although Csordas concedes that there can be no meaning or experience entirely unmediated by culture, such meaning and experience can be ‘preobjective’ in the sense that they are not products of *objectification*; quite the opposite, through these immediate experiences and meaning-making, the body constitutes ‘the source of subjectivity’ (ibid., 9). Hence, the subject-ness and agency of the body are foregrounded. Accordingly, the term ‘embodiment’ is defined as ‘an *indeterminate* methodological field defined by perceptual experience and mode of presence and engagement in the world’ (ibid., 12, emphasis added). The idea of *indeterminacy* here stands opposed to that of *domination* in the representational paradigm, which is about the fixing of meanings. The key conceptual categories under the embodiment paradigm, therefore, are those of ‘agency’ and ‘lived experience’. Summarizing this contrastive discussion of these two fundamental theoretical paradigms of the body, Csordas (ibid., p. 10) writes:

The distinction between representation and being-in-the-world is methodologically critical, for it is the difference between understanding culture in terms of objectified abstraction and existential immediacy. Representation is fundamentally nominal, and hence we can speak of “a

representation". Being-in-the-world is fundamentally conditional, and hence we must speak of "existence" and "lived experience".

While the subject-object dualistic theoretical framework outlined earlier pertains to scholarship on the body in a general way, zooming in on the migrant's body, a conceptual scheme can be thought of that analytically distinguishes the different *social and/or interactive scales* whereby the body becomes of concern. First of all, at the *subjective scale*, the body is a crucial aspect of one's self: it is the sensory medium through which migrants interpret their experiences of moving and mobility; it is the material and physical anchor of their identity, and it intimately partakes in the construction and transformation of identity by being the site of self-expression and agency. Secondly, at the *social/inter-subjective scale*, the body mediates social relationships in migrant contexts. The migrant's body is socially constructed: the body is present either physically in situations of encounter and interaction, or virtually in social imaginations and discourses; it thus shapes and is shaped by myriad types of social relationship and interaction. Thirdly, at the *institutional level*, the migrant's body is a crucial site upon which institutional powers and regulatory mechanisms are exercised.

## The Subject's Point of View

So far, studies of the migrant's body have tended to foreground bodily experiences and associated meanings from the *subject's point of view*. This centring of the migrant's subjective standpoint, whether implicitly or explicitly, is a distinguishing characteristic of this strand of research. One example is Parrini *et al.*'s (2007) study on Mexican migrant men. In this work, the authors analyse their research participants' experience as 'a trajectory differentiated according to the stages involved in migration: *going, staying, and coming back*' (ibid., 66), arguing that '[i]n each of the stages, we can find a particular experience of the body, a symbolization of the body, and a specific semiotic appropriation of the body'. Specifically, they note that '[t]he first phase was marked by suffering and risk, the second by exclusion; the third is distinguished by spectacle' (ibid., 68). Each of these stages thus involves distinctive bodily experiences and practices, contributing to the making of a male Mexican migrant whose subjectivity displays multiple and complex facets not only temporally, but also geographically (in relation to the Mexico-American border). In this account, the migrant's body is not analysed so much in terms of how it appears in the public discourse or

imagination of the sending or receiving society (for an example of this, see Jurado 2008) or how it is subjected to domination (symbolic or otherwise), but in terms of lived experiences and feelings, as well as meaning-making through body-related practices. Illustrated with ample interview quotes from the migrant men, the body emerges vividly as one important source of these men's subjectivities and agency.

Another example is Gorman-Murray's (2009) study entitled 'intimate mobilities', which looks at how, for queer Australians, 'embodied emotions and intimate attachments interleaved with relocation decisions' (ibid., 454). The author argues that the queer mobilities he examined in this study are emotionally embodied in nature, wherein the body acts 'as a vector of displacement' (441). Notwithstanding which type of queer mobility is in question, Gorman-Murray finds that 'feelings of comfort and love were emphasized as triggers for displacement and re-placement' (454). The body is crucial here, since 'comfort' designates essentially the relational feeling between the embodied self and the environment. In other words, comfort is a matter of the body; and it is found to be critical in shaping a queer person's identity and their agency in relation to relocation. Similar to Parrini *et al.*'s (2007) account of Mexican migrant men, Gorman-Murray's work dwells little on how the queer body is represented, but instead focuses on how it is actually *felt*, *lived*, and *enacted*, which comes through vividly in the queer subjects' own intimate narratives. In short, the body's sensory engagements and responses to circumstances associated with being queer form the very substance of the queer subjects' identities and agency. As such, both studies exemplify how the migrant's body is analysed at the subjective level. Since the description of bodily experiences and the narration of meanings in relation to those experiences are centred, research methods such as narrative research and life-history interviews tend to be used for such studies.

## Social/Inter-Subjective Level

Empirical accounts of the migrant's body at the social/inter-subjective level accentuate experiences arising from social contexts or situations in which there are typically some *dynamics* between the migrant and those of the host society. Such dynamics are often tension-ridden, charged with negative emotions. Indeed, the significant corpus of migration literature that deals with the ways in which the migrant's body is stereotyped, 'otherized', marginalized, and excluded in/through social processes in the receiving context, falls under this category. Two recent accounts emerging from

Singapore serve to illustrate this (Ang 2016; Jackson 2016). Both studies observed how the migrant's body became a locus of boundary-marking or, indeed, a form of border separating the migrants and non-migrant locals. In this sense, Ang's (2016) work examines how the figure of the female migrant from China is imagined and talked about by local Singaporean women who are middle-class or who aspire towards middle-class ideals. Ang found that her Singaporean respondents constructed the Chinese female migrants as the very embodiment of unrespectability, un-middle-class-ness, and un-Chineseness, which make them the boundary-markers that bring into relief the Singaporean women's supposedly superior social status and moral standing. Such boundary-marking, as Ang analyses, is often achieved through unflattering depictions of migrant Chinese women's bodily practices, such as their fashion sense, behaviours, and their embodied desires, whether in relation to their material consumption or sexuality. In fact, Ang's work echoes previous scholarship's discussion of a deeply-seated sexualization of migrant Chinese women in Singapore (e.g. Yeoh and Huang 2010). In contrast, Jackson's (2016) study focuses on two very differently positioned groups of migrant women in Singapore – foreign domestic workers (FDWs) and Caucasian expatriates. Jackson interrogates 'the way in which stereotypes are placed on the migrant body, reflecting on the norms and assumptions of bodily practices and performances and how these effectively produce and reproduce particular territorial identities' (292). Put differently, according to Jackson, stereotyping the body serves to mark the migrant subjects as territorial 'others'. However, alongside examining the stereotyping of female migrant bodies from the Singaporean perspective, Jackson's study also looks at the issue from the perspective of the migrant women themselves, which enables her to interpret the latter's bodily practices in the following terms:

By clothing the body according to their own cultural norms, expatriates and FDWs chose to practice a symbolic boundary around their body, demonstrating a particular bodily territory. This boundary was not penetrated by the culture of the host society, but was instead a defiant way of performing a distinctly separate emotional space, using their bodily subjectivity to do so. (Ibid., 297)

For both Ang (2016) and Jackson (2016), thus, the migrant's body is caught up in a social process, which revolves around the thorny relation between migrants and locals. The body is seen to play a pivotal role in mediating or structuring the migrant-local dynamics; and in both cases, this role is one of accentuating differences, of highlighting boundaries and borders between 'them' and 'us'.

These findings can be thought of to represent the existing literature's 'mainstream' conceptualization of the migrant's body at the social/inter-subjective level. However, the migrant's body need not always be considered a site of division or 'stratification' (see Collins 2000; Dirksmeier and Helbrecht 2015), but may under certain circumstances act as a catalyst for recuperative and reconciliatory inter-subjective relations. Raghuram *et al.*'s (2011) study of the contribution to geriatric medicine in the UK made by migrant medical workers from South Asian backgrounds is a case in point. In geriatric medicine staffed by migrant-background medical professionals, the doctors' racialized (darker) body encounters another stigmatized body – that of the ageing or aged body. Providing medical care to older people is a highly embodied experience, for both the medical professionals and the aged patients. Based on extensive interviews with South Asian migrant doctors who underwent such experiences, the authors discover that 'rather than a double marginalization, these two marked bodies were both recuperated through this association' (*ibid.*, 322). As the authors explain, 'through the encounter between these bodies, the older body came to be increasingly seen as a body that could be cured and recuperated, while this process of recuperation also gave geriatricians a distinctive place and recognition in the medical specialty' (*ibid.*, 322). Thus, for the aged patients, recuperation meant physical restoration; whereas for the migrant medical professionals, it meant opportunities for personal and professional development. However, the authors stress that the recuperative relationship between the two negatively marked bodies goes beyond such a seemingly simple transaction but is in fact more deeply transformative for both parties, inasmuch as the very 'identities of the two marked bodies are [...] prescribed' (*ibid.*, 322). In other words, in this case, the inter-subjective dynamics between the two marked bodies – each stigmatized in their own ways – redeems both from marginalization. This process contrasts sharply with Ang's (2016) and Jackson's (2016) accounts as reviewed above, where the migrant's body essentially facilitates processes of marginalization.

## **Institutional Power and Regulatory Mechanisms**

Research literature addressing how the migrant's body is targeted by public institutional powers and regulatory mechanisms is also well developed. Studies falling under this category typically deal with how the migrant's body is discursively constructed, objectified, categorized, and disciplined or regulated by institutions of authority. At least two types of authority seem to be reflected in the literature: the political and the epistemic.



One example of the migrant's body being subjected to political institutions is the discourse of *suzhi* in relation to rural-to-urban domestic migrants in China – a topic that has attracted a great deal of research over the past two decades (e.g. Anagnost 2004; Jacka 2009; Kipnis 2006; Sun 2009). Literally meaning 'quality' in Chinese, the notion of *suzhi* more or less refers to embodied cultural capital in the Bourdieusian sense (see Bourdieu 1986), and has become an extensively used category to mark rural migrant workers' undesirable bodily presence – as in 'low *suzhi*' – in China's urban spaces, as the country has witnessed massive rural-to-urban migration and urbanization. Analysing how rural migrant workers are policed in cities, Han (2010) argues that these migrants are essentially victims of racialization and racism, whereby the *suzhi* discourse legitimizes discrimination, even violence, on the basis of their (stereotyped) bodily attributes. Importantly – and this point distinguishes the *suzhi*-based racialization of the Chinese rural migrants from the marginalization of migrant bodies in the Singaporean context as discussed in the previous section – the discourse of *suzhi* in China is not only rooted deeply in a long-lasting state institution (the *hukou* system) but is also to a large degree officially legitimated by the state. As scholars writing on *suzhi* have noted, China's *hukou* or household registration system which sorts citizens into bifurcated categories of urban/rural residents and distributes economic resources and social welfare highly unequally according to this binary, has resulted in severe disadvantages and stigma being attached to the rural residential identity. Moreover, the notion of *suzhi* arose as part of the Chinese state's emphasis on improving 'population quality' (Murphy 2004) as a key step towards modernization and socioeconomic development since the 1980s. The term thus became a powerful discourse with which the Chinese state differentiates different social groups' respective values or utility to its developmental objective (Yan 2008), thereby allowing the state to exercise discipline over the population. Although the *suzhi* discourse also applies to urban Chinese citizens, it disproportionately bears on rural residents and migrants. In short, the construction of rural Chinese migrants as low-*suzhi* bodies is premised on state power/authority; in turn, this discursive construction further serves the disciplining and regulation of population by state institutions.

An arguably more pervasive form of objectification of the body is exercised by epistemic institutions in the name of science and knowledge. As mentioned previously, Foucault's work is credited for having established how scientific discourse about the body coincides with the body's emergence as an object of medical intervention and thence a site of social and political domination. Against the background, Sargent and Larchanche's (2007) study



of the biomedical representations in France of Muslim migrant women from Mali shows how the institutional objectification of the migrant's body may be further influenced by political and cultural ideologies pertaining to immigration and race. The authors note that despite French biomedicine being underpinned by republicanism and humanism which collectively lead to an emphasis of the 'common humanity' of the body of the patient, their research on African women migrants receiving maternity care in public hospitals in Paris finds that:

[i]mmigrant women are classified and labeled with reference to perceived 'cultural' traditions or 'racial' attributes. To midwives, nurses and social workers in the maternity service, informal conversation about African women often includes reference to such 'traditions' as polygamy, extended breastfeeding or excessively short birth intervals. (Ibid., 87)

Specifically, in the case of Muslim migrant women from Mali, essentialised notions of the 'Muslim body' – docile, submissive, irrationally religious, and polygamous – were developed, and 'superimposed on identities of colour heavily influenced by colonial constructs of race' (98). According to the authors, one main consequence of such discursive constructions of the migrant Malian women's body under the institutional framework of biomedicine (public hospitals) in France, is the emergence of 'a hierarchical model of the body that corresponds to varying degrees of social legitimacy and acceptance' (80). Put differently, 'cultural racism' (see Taguieff 1990) pertaining to the migrant's body feeds into the discourse of the medical establishment, resulting in the marginalization of migrants in terms of their legitimacy and acceptability in the eyes of the migrant-receiving state.

Separating the political and epistemic institutions, as was done above, is more of an analytical device than a reflection of any clear-cut demarcation in the literature. Indeed, as is evident in both case studies discussed above (in addition, see also Lan 2008), political powers and epistemic authorities tend to be locked in a mutually reinforcing relation when bearing upon the migrant's body as a site of domination.

## **This Volume**

The outline as presented above is helpful in situating the chapters presented in this volume. While embodiment is an important theme throughout this volume, all the chapters draw upon a wide-range of theoretical and

conceptual considerations with regards to the (migrant's) body. In Chapter one, Pardis Madhavi focuses on same-sex relations among migrant workers in Dubai and Tehran. Drawing on long-term extensive fieldwork with activists in Iran and migrants in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, Madhavi focuses on a growing number of migrants from Iran, Nepal, and Pakistan who are in search of spaces to explore their bodies and sexualities. While Madhavi acknowledges that activism around sexuality has increased in recent years, some of her informants seek to untangle sexual politics from identity politics. This in turn produces the desire for a new type of intimate politics characterized by mobility, which Madhavi conceptualizes as intimate mobilities. Her chapter opens with a migrant originally from Pakistan who came to Dubai explaining that she was tired of her politicised sexuality and body. While this migrant defends the idea of the right to love and to be with whomever one wants to be, she also emphasizes that sexual politics and activism left her uncomfortable and that now that she is in Dubai, she 'does not have to be a lesbian'. She is still dating women but feels liberated from having to join in the politics associated with a marginalized sexuality. Madhavi argues that '[t]he embodiment of sexuality, and bodily agency acts as a "push" factor for some migrants in the Middle East who move in search of spaces to explore their bodies and sexualities in less overtly politicized ways'. Central to her argument is that the desire to disentangle sexual politics from identity politics is productive of the desire for a new type of intimate politics characterized by mobility itself. For her analysis she draws on an interplay of Lefebvre's production of space (1991) and Martin Manalansan IV (2006) and Eithne Luibhéid (2004, 2008), the two latter of whom have argued for more studies that challenge the inherent heteronormativity in migration scholarship and the way sexuality both shapes and is shaped by migration. With respect to this, Nicola Mai and Russell King have even made a powerful argument for both a 'sexual turn' and an 'emotional turn' in migration studies, specifically stressing the intersectionality of these two dimensions (2009: 295-6). The argument which is put forward here sees migration as informed by a variety of emotional, affective, and sexual liaisons, attachments and expectations. Madhavi's chapter responds to calls for more studies about sexuality and migration that foreground non-heteronormative approaches to the issues.

In Chapter two, Denise L. Spitzer focuses on female beer sellers in Southeast Asia whose work often also entails promotional activities and participating in karaoke, and who are predominantly rural-to-urban migrants. With wages solely or partially based on the sales commissions of alcoholic beverages, Spitzer turns her attention to the surveillance and patrolling of

women's bodies, which commences with the hiring process itself. Here she notes that women who are deemed most in line with Western standards of attractiveness are selected to work at busy locations and special beer company sponsored events. As Spitzer argues (this volume): 'the sexualized presentation of beer sellers' bodies and their interactions with clientele, like those of food and beverage servers in other parts of the world, help to generate a particular atmosphere and enhance sales'. While many of these women feel uncomfortable with the sexy, revealing, and impractical uniforms they are made to wear as part of their jobs, Spitzer argues that they do understand that offering a sexually tantalizing self means potentially higher earnings: 'The habitus of new hires changes as they are enculturated into the beer-selling world as does their interaction with other bodies – those of customers and co-workers'. The embodiment of new cultural norms is thus a crucial aspect of their work. '... [C]rafting an alluring appearance and engaging in gendered and sexualized banter with customers, can be regarded as beauty work – a set of self-managed techniques that individuals undertake to position themselves to secure advantages within a particular social hierarchy'. Here, Spitzer also draws on Hoang's (2014) deployment of the term 'body work' to refer to the production of bodily capital which enables workers to be successful in a highly competitive environment where they have to vie for the attention of the customer. As Spitzer puts it: '... the development of bodily capital is reinforced not just by the immediate response of clientele and subsequent financial benefits, it is promulgated in popular discourse and expressed through employer expectations and regulations'. The way female beer sellers and their male clients interact is often revealing for an embodied social order that holds men to be in control, to threaten and to transgress bodily boundaries. With respect to this, migrant beer sellers say that their male clients have 'squid arms'.

In both Madhavi and Spitzer's work there is a strong focus on embodiment and the question of how female migrants relate to their bodies with respect to their migration trajectories and their employment. As with the photographic-work by Rebecca Sampson, these migrants experience and engage with migration through their bodies, but they are certainly not only on the receiving end here. They actively give shape and meaning to their migration pathways and employment, something that also comes strongly to the fore in Chapter three of this volume, by Amrita Pande, though in a surprisingly different way. Focusing on migrant domestic workers in Lebanon, Pande's work examines the embodied way in which female migrants experience and shape the space they inhabit. In this chapter, Pande foregrounds the powerful and creative attempts made by migrant workers to organize and

resist exploitative conditions. For her analysis, she builds on the spatial ties that are forged by migrant domestic workers in public space such as ethnic churches and cybercafés, as well as private spaces like apartments and balconies. Pande argues that the ties that exist here are ‘fundamentally embedded in the migrant’s body and/or embodied experience of space’ and that these are employed for two very specific purposes. On the one hand they forge conjugal and sexual ties with other migrants, while on the other they contribute to forming work alliances with colleagues. As in Madhavi and Spitzer’s work, Pande challenges dominant portrayals of migrant workers as abused and defeated victims. Pande suggests that we think of the migrant’s body as the next scale of discussion, one complimenting and augmenting a discussion that already includes a strong focus on issues such as border policing, migrant politics, citizenship rights, power struggles, and practices of everyday resistances at the level of the household.

Pande argues that for most live-in migrant domestic workers, home and workspace are constantly under surveillance and in practice constitute one and the same space. In the absence of any privacy, this is sought elsewhere, for instance in the anonymity of public space. Yet mobility remains restricted, not just because of employers but also because the way migrant mobility is disciplined at various scales. As such, gendered and racialized forms of othering from public space are enacted in various ways, as Pande argues. As female migrant workers, their bodies are exoticized bodies, requiring discipline through racialized and gendered violence which reduces their bodies to being undesirable, ‘illegitimate as dirt’. Overt acts of sexual harassment, wolf-whistling, sexual remarks, and even touching, secures their position within Lebanese society as inherently undesirable. There are even ‘no-go’ zones within restaurants and cafes, restricting these women’s entry. Yet Pande’s work also underlines how female migrant workers find creative ways to challenge these restrictions and boundaries: ‘the flirting and dating taking place in public spaces like the café were visible and embodied challenges to the state’s and employers’ restrictions on migrant women workers’ sexuality’. As active users of spaces such as ethnic churches, balconies, and elsewhere, these women resist disciplining practices in ways that point at the critical ways in which these migrants use their bodies to shape and even challenge spatial structures.

Chapter four continues this conversation by focusing on the emotional subjectivities of Indonesian domestic workers in Singapore. Maria Platt, Brenda Yeoh, Choon Yen Khoo, Grace Baey, and Theodora Lam’s chapter takes as a point of departure a recent law-change which holds that migrant domestic workers are entitled to one-day off per week. The chapter argues that

live-in domestic workers are subject to a form of 'domestication' themselves, something which manifests itself in a range of ways including in corporeal, spatial, and social terms. These migrant domestic workers are expected to adjust their actions and behaviour to fit with their host families in whose houses they live. The weekly day-off is perceived by some employers as well as employees as a means of 'reverse-domestication', in that the training and maintenance of a 'good' domestic worker could possibly come undone. As a result, this weekly day-off has become a source of tension and a site of renegotiation of relations between the two.

Domestication is an interesting term when we consider the way migrant workers integrate in as well as are often excluded from local space and place. By their very being, embodying a set of ethnic, racial, class, and cultural markers, migrants often stand out yet at the same time are required to blend in. As Platt *et al.* argue, difference not only lies in the corporeal realm, but also in terms of the notions of citizenship, rights, and regulation embedded in the migration regime within which migrants are implicated. The need to domesticate thus stems from the implicit notion of foreignness. While it could be argued that this is a more general need that characterizes the incorporation of employees in new work environments overall, the largely unregulated and intimate nature of the domestic realm can lead to discrimination or differentiation which means making sure that undesirable characteristics are ironed out and a particular hierarchy is sustained. A sharp power imbalance thus characterizes the relationship between host family and domestic worker. As the researchers of this chapter found, the mandatory day-off has triggered fears among host families that a domestic worker may spend their time hanging out with undesirable company or perhaps even become pregnant, something which means the domestic worker would lose the right to stay in Singapore and which would also mean the host family would lose the security bond that they had to pay to recruit the domestic worker in question. Such fears contribute to a renewed assessment of their relationship and may even lead to augmented surveillance and restrictions with the migrant's body becoming a site of contestation itself.

What is striking in Platt *et al.*'s chapter as well as Pande's is the idealization of what the migrant could be held to stand for, a similar concern with which can be found in Chapters five and six. In Michelle G. Ong's work, the focus is placed on older Filipina migrants and the question of what happens if a particular migrant no longer fits with certain idealizations. Ong's chapter is situated at the intersection between studies of ageing and migration, and seeks to develop an understanding of the issues older and ageing female migrants are faced with. She asks how these migrants negotiate a positive

identity despite their (increasing) distance from the ideal. Ong argues that representations of the modern retiree as active, productive, responsible, and self-reliant, together with the depiction of Filipinos overseas as *Bagong Bayani* (modern-day heroes), frames a continued engagement in paid work as desirable in old age. Neoliberal subjectivities shape such representations, especially where they concern notions of choice, freedom, and individual responsibility. Ong challenges the way this is perceived as empowering and argues that such perceptions 'perpetuate ageist and anti-migrant positions that serve to obscure the discrimination produced by the multiple marginalized positions they occupy'.

In the subsequent chapter, Michelle R. Gamburd also focuses on 'ageing' but in her work it is mainly those left-behind who are getting older. This chapter not only focuses on migrant's bodies but also on those of their younger and older kin, who the migrant in question may not be able to directly care for anymore. Since migration is typically a family affair in Sri Lanka, this raises important questions about the consequences of migration itself. Gamburd shows that migrant families deploy their family members strategically not only to diversify sources of income but also to assure that the care and needs of youngsters and elders continued to be taken care of. As such, even those who remain behind are usually deeply imbricated in the dynamics of international migration. Therefore, transnational migration affects the family as much as that family structures and strategies affect those who (can) migrate. Within the Sri Lankan context, a sending family needs to consider the bodily and emotional needs of three and sometimes four generations of kin.

In her chapter, Gamburd considers several different patterns about family life, caregiving, and migration. As a first she asserts that migration decisions take place within family relationships. Secondly, with such decision-making comes moral implications, evoking ethical considerations in terms of obligations to care-giving as well as who requires physical and social support and economic financing. Thus, thirdly, migration decisions usually involve an emotional engagement, revolving around questions of good and bad, right and wrong, ultimately taking the form of culturally shaped emotional responses. Migration is therefore very much a practice, as Gamburd argues. Finally, migration decisions are deeply gendered, aged, and classed, an assertion which also resonates with previous chapters. 'These culturally constructed identities influence how people see, judge, and make decisions about bodies and whether they should cross borders'. As Gamburd, furthermore, explicates: the mobility of migrants is dependent on the state of other bodies in the family and the required care which can

often only be offered by the would-be migrant woman. In her conclusion, Gamburd argues that 'bodily processes related to food, sex, and health are deeply meaningful in understanding working-class migrants' choices and the narratives that they related about their work and lives'. Discussions of the would-be migrant's body take place within firmly established discourses that ultimately problematize women's migration as detrimental to a family's well-being and social reproduction. 'The moral panic emphasizes women's vulnerability to abuse abroad and the adverse effects of their absence on the daughters and husbands left behind'. Therefore, the mobility of would-be migrants not only depends on their own bodily fitness but also on that of the other members of their household.

In the final two chapters, the analysis turns to how migrants are reflected in idealized and stereotypical terms in their host countries. In Chapter seven, Alex Yang Li investigates the predicaments that come with interracial dating in New Zealand. Taking as a point of departure the transnational context of overseas education, her work focuses on interracial relationships and the challenges this comes with, not just vis-à-vis parental authority but also in racialized terms. A racial minority in a society dominated by white New Zealanders, Li shows how notions of masculinity and femininity are subjugated by racial stereotypes. As a result, this constrains the possibilities of sexual expression, thus producing uneven power relations in intimate relationships. While Chinese women are either perceived as victims of exoticization (yellow fever) or as calculating gold diggers, Asian men are principally considered unattractive. Li shows how young Chinese migrants in New Zealand constantly need to negotiate two tugging sets of social relations where on the one hand sexual sameness is assumed among co-ethnics while sexual difference characterizes interracial dating. While Li shows how interracial dating offers space for resisting oppressive sexual and gender norms, in practice none of this is simply liberating. Li pays particular interest to the idea of immigrant women as the symbolic guardians of cultural values and family honour. While migration offers them the opportunity to challenge and transgress such idealized notions, it is clear that in practice they face considerable roadblocks in negotiating their position as independent women in New Zealand. Strikingly, Li shows that while interracial intimate relationships hold the potential to be liberating, they are also accompanied with new oppressions produced by unequal racial relations, fuelled for instance by Caucasian men's fetishization of 'submissive' and 'subservient' Asian women. She therefore argues that interracial relationships occupy an uneasy position in young Chinese migrants' lives, confronted with patriarchal gender relations, nationalism, and assimilation. Furthermore, she argues



that '[t]hese relationships invoke an "in-betweenness" which illustrates the importance of contextualizing diaspora's sexuality within discourses of race, ethnicity and mobility'. Since racial stereotypes impact and subjugate notions of Chinese masculinity and femininity, the possibilities of sexual expression within the context of New Zealand involve constrained and uneven power relations determining relationships.

In the final chapter, Hareem Khan examines how intimacy is navigated within the South Asian beauty industry in the US by focusing on the skill of threading eyebrows. Khan notes that the ability to thread successfully is dependent on the management of *physical* closeness between the esthetician and the client, thus also involving touch. Both the esthetician and the client use their hands in the process, thereby co-producing fully shaped eyebrows while, as Khan argues, also simultaneously co-producing their own subjectivities. The interactive, emotional, and physical, contours of intimacy, layer the role intimacy plays in this industry, which relies on the labour of migrant women of colour, predominantly from Nepal, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The work thus has clear racial dynamics as it involves processes of *self*-production, whereby client and esthetician both negotiate their racialized, classed, and gendered subjectivities within the realm of the service encounter. Since South Asian migrant women make up the workforce, clients associate expertise and skill as inherent within South Asian women's bodies and labour, something which has implications for how migrant bodies are understood and situated within the American racial landscape. Khan focuses specifically on the embodied experience of carrying out threading and having this done on one's own bodies with the aim of fostering a deeper understanding of beauty work as 'multi-transformative'. Khan argues that this work is corporeally transformative in that women undergo a service that literally transforms their faces by the shaping of their eyebrows or the removal of their hair from other parts of their face. Yet, it also renders necessary an affective transformation of subjectivities into racialized providers and recipients of an ethnicized service. This then enables the formations of intimacy between clients and migrant workers.

Together these chapters take an important step in foregrounding the importance of the body in migration strategies and trajectories. However, by and large absent from these accounts are the voices and experiences of male migrants. While for this volume we did seek to include chapters that address the way male migrants experience and utilize their bodies as part of migration trajectories, we found research into this much more lacking than that concerning female migrants. Even in case of the latter, research had not directly focused on the female migrant's body per se, inspired by



the question itself it often turned out to be quite easy to unearth or excavate 'bodily' experiences from the research material, often with surprising results. Suddenly it seemed the migrant's body was everywhere! We hope this volume will inspire the same with regards to male migrant-centred research. It is thus up for future research to give weight and space to male migrants' accounts of their bodies as part of their trajectories of crossing borders, working abroad, and navigating migration pathways.

## Bibliography

- Anagnost, A. 2004. 'The Corporeal Politics of Quality (Suzhi)'. *Public Culture* 16(2): 189-208.
- Ang, S. 2016. 'Chinese Migrant Women as Boundary Markers in Singapore: Unrespectable, Un-middle-class and Un-Chinese'. *Gender, Place & Culture* 23(12): 1774-1787.
- Bourdieu, P. 1986. 'The Forms of Capital'. In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, edited by J. G. Richardson. 241-260. New York, Westport, Connecticut, London: Greenwood Press.
- Collins, R. 2000. 'Situational Stratification: A Micro-Macro Theory of Inequality'. *Sociological Theory* 18(1): 17-43.
- Csordas, T. J. 1994a. 'Introduction: The Body as Representation and Being-in-the-World'. *Embodiment and Experience: the Existential Ground of Culture and Self*, edited by T. J. Csordas. 1-24. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Csordas, T. J. (Ed.). 1994b. *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dirksmeier, P., and Helbrecht, I. 2015. 'Everyday Urban Encounters as Stratification Practices: Analysing Affects in Micro-Situations of Power Struggles'. *City* 19(4): 486-498.
- Dunn, K. 2010. 'Embodied Transnationalism: Bodies in Transnational Spaces'. *Population, Space and Place* 16(1): 1-9.
- Foucault, M. 1963/2003. *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A. M. Sheridan. Oxon: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. 1976. *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1 An Introduction*, trans. R. Hurley. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Foucault, M. 1977. *Discipline and Punish*, trans. A. M. Sheridan. London: Allen Lane.
- Foucault, M. 1980. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, edited by C. Gordon. Harlow: Prentice Hall.
- Gorman-Murray, A. 2009. 'Intimate Mobilities: Emotional Embodiment and Queer Migration'. *Social & Cultural Geography* 10(4): 441-460.

- Han, D. 2010. 'Policing and Racialization of Rural Migrant Workers in Chinese Cities'. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 33(4): 593-610.
- Jacka, T. 2009. 'Cultivating Citizens: Suzhi (Quality) Discourse in the PRC'. *positions: asia critique* 17(3): 523-535. doi:10.1215/10679847-2009-013
- Jackson, L. 2016. 'Experiencing Exclusion and Reacting to Stereotypes? Navigating Borders of the Migrant Body'. *Area* 48(3): 292-299.
- Jurado, K. 2008. *Alienated Citizens: "Hispanophobia" and the Mexican Im/migrant Body*. (Doctor of Philosophy), University of Michigan.
- Kipnis, A. 2006. 'Suzhi: A Keyword Approach'. *The China Quarterly* 186: 295-313. doi:10.1017/S0305741006000166
- Lan, P. C. 2008. 'Migrant Women's Bodies as Boundary Markers: Reproductive Crisis and Sexual Control in the Ethnic Frontiers of Taiwan'. *Signs* 33(4): 833-861.
- Manalasan IV, Martin F. 2006. 'Queer Intersections: Sexuality and Gender in Migration Studies'. *International Migration Review* 40(1): 224-249. doi: 10.1111/j.1747-7379.2006.00009.x.
- Mountz, A. 2004. 'Embodying the Nation-state: Canada's Response to Human Smuggling'. *Political Geography* 23: 323-345.
- Murphy, R. 2004. 'Turning Peasants into Modern Chinese Citizens: "Population Quality" Discourse, Demographic Transition and Primary Education'. *The China Quarterly* 177: 1-20.
- Parrini, R., Castañeda, X. c., Magis, C., Ruiz, J., and Lemp, G. 2007. 'Migrant Bodies: Corporality, Sexuality, and Power Among Mexican Migrant Men'. *Sexuality Research & Social Policy* 4(3): 62-73.
- Raghuram, P., Bornat, J., and Henry, L. 2011. 'The Co-Marking of Aged Bodies and Migrant Bodies: Migrant Workers' Contribution to Geriatric Medicine in the UK'. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 33(2): 321-335.
- Sargent, C., and Larchanche, S. 2007. 'The Muslim Body and the Politics of Immigration in France: Popular and Biomedical Representations of Malian Migrant Women'. *Body & Society* 13(3): 79-102.
- Smith, S., Swanson, N. W., and Gökarnksel, B. 2016. 'Territory, Bodies and borders'. *Area*, 48(3), 258-261.
- Sun, W. 2009. 'Suzhi on the Move: Body, Place, and Power'. *positions*, 17(3): 617-642.
- Taguieff, P.-A. 1990. 'The New Cultural Racism in France'. *Telos* 93: 109-122.
- Yan, H. 2008. *New Masters, New Servants: Migration, Development, and Women Workers in China*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Yeoh, B. S. A., and Huang, S. 2010. 'Sexualised Politics of Proximities among Female Transnational Migrants in Singapore'. *Population, Space and Place* 16(1): 37-49.

## About the Authors

**Michiel Baas** holds a PhD in anthropology from the University of Amsterdam. He is currently an Associate Fellow of the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, and lecturer with the University of Amsterdam. He has conducted extensive research in the field of migration and transnationalism, particularly focusing on mobility between India, Singapore and Australia. More recent work also focuses on new middle-class professionals in urban India such, a topic which he studies through the lens of social and cultural mobility.

**Peidong Yang** (PhD, Oxford) is a sociologist of education, with specific research interests in educational mobility. His research projects include mainland Chinese ‘foreign talent’ students in Singapore and Indian students pursuing medical education in China. He is the author of *International Mobility and Educational Desire: Chinese Foreign Talent Students in Singapore* (Palgrave, 2016) and various journal articles and book chapters.