

Indian Ayahs: Caregivers of the Past and Caregivers of the Present

- The ayah system began in 18th century India, with Eurasian women of Indo-Portuguese descent; the word comes from the Portuguese, *aia*, and from Hindi and Urdu, *aya*, both meaning ‘nursemaid.’
- Ayahs prepared baths for her British mistresses, combed her hair, made beds, folded clothes, brought in breakfast, performed odd jobs around the house and became nursemaids for infants.
- With ayahs forming the inner core of imperial domesticity, their sacrificial qualities, popularity and usefulness have been well documented.
- The ayah was a highly sentimentalized and noteworthy figure in British and Anglo-European homes.
- For my book I argue that in post-independence India, the ayah system did not end but continued to flourish in international homes in New Delhi and is now part of undocumented international migration. Given the shift from colonial capitalism to neo-capitalism, today’s ayahs are ‘neo-ayahs’ - their labour is streamlined and they must have an eclectic skill set that involves new expectations around intimacy.

**Servant Loyalty During India's 1857 Mutiny: The Ayah's
Devotion and Selflessness Lives on in the Anglo-Saxon
Memory**



Defining Global Care Chains (GCCs)

- Definition of GCCs: Arlie Hochschild (2000: 131): ‘personal links between people across the globe based on the paid or unpaid work of caring.’ These links have manifested what is commonly known as the ‘transnationalization of care-domestic labour,’ whereby well-qualified, educated and skilled women and even those who are unskilled and less experienced, migrate to richer host nations to look after other people’s children and the elderly.

First Wave of Research On GCCs

- First, the majority of migrant care-workers employed in Western countries originate from Asia, Latin America and East Europe. Migrant labour intersects with gender, class, race, nationality and ethnicity, affirming notable global inequalities (Parreñas 2000).
- Second, GCCs involve a high degree of exploitation. Lutz (2002: 3) and Parreñas (2000) point to a shift of exploitation and dependence of racialized labour from a national to an international context. In the process host countries receiving cheap migrant labour deplete other developing nations of local care provisioning (Yeates 2012).
- Third, the most strident appraisal of GCCs, one that has prompted emotive debates involve critiques around ‘distant mothering.’ Migrant women offer a third-world supply of ‘emotional labour and mothering.’

Second Wave of Research on GCCs

- First, more nuanced accounts of GCCs have transpired over time, for example, Yeates (2012) scholarship that seeks alternative theoretical directions, as she captures care migrants diverse and positive experiences. She offers a refreshing reinterpretation of GCCs whereby workers subjectivities and their relational viewpoints begin to matter and are grounded, embodied and textured.
- Second, because GCCs have been associated with exploitation, scholars have come out with other conceptual frameworks that do not treat migrants as victimized 'labour diaspora' but as those who are making choices and have their sights on international migration (Johnson & Werber 2001; Grover et al 2018; Grover 2018). Johnson & Werber shift the conversation from exploitation to diasporic journeys, where migrants build new lives.

Third Wave: Identifies Gaps in GCCs Research

The interconnectedness of movements, especially the localization of globalization needs further exploration.

We need to focus more on male carers; the masculinization of migrant reproductive work.

Ageing is missing. What happens when the work force ages and caregivers reaches the retirement age?

see Nicola Yeates (2012) Paper for gaps in research; Future directions in care transnationalization research.

Contributions Via Indian Case-Studies

- The India case-studies will portray a different way of understanding a local variant of GCCs. They will track the journey of Mary from New Delhi's gated communities to transnational destinations. My aim is to illustrate the localization of globalization that will muddle/obfuscate the South-North, South-South, North-North migration divide.
- Mary's life story raises pertinent questions around, aging, futurity, precarity and the devaluation of social reproduction. How did she view Mary view her relationships with employers through various stages of her life, especially as an ageing widow? The life-cycle approach, allows us to prioritize these the critical disjuncture's between middle-age and later years.

Mary got used to migration as a way of life,a peripatetic existence, a roaming life.

- In the 1980s, Mary worked for an Indian couple in **Dubai** and a Lebanese Couple in **Qatar**.
- In the 1990s, she worked in **Delhi's Gated Communities** for a range of Western diplomats.
- From 2001 to 2013 she worked for a white American diplomat family in **Morocco, Jordon, Bangladesh, Turkey and Washington**.
- In 2014, she returned to Delhi to work for a Black American diplomat.
- In 2016 when Mary was 67 years old she faced unemployment and the Covid pandemic has enhanced her vulnerability.

How Did Mary Care for Her Family as a Transnational Migrant?

- She positioned herself as a ‘caring subject,’ (Beverley Skeggs 1997) especially in relation to her own kin members.
- Mary began to make significant material investments for her family, showing that through ‘caring performances,’ she was a caring woman (Skeggs 1997).
- The thread of caring through remittances runs unfailingly and consistently through Mary’s genealogy. There is never a time when Mary has stopped caring for her family. Most of her salary and savings went towards looking after her children in India.

Sentimentalizing Childhoods

- Card One (by elder son):
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 - I consider myself and my successes a product of the virtues you've instilled in me.
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- Card Two (by elder son):
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 - I certainly would not be who I am todaynor could have come so far.....without your unconditional consideration and love.

Mary's Accounts Bring The Perils of GCCs into Scrutiny

- Her twin daughters expressed their disenchantment and regretted their mothers' physical absence in their formative years. The twins were most unforgiving and vocal as they believed that their brothers were the beneficiaries of their mothers' fruit of transnational labour. As such the twins rejected their mothers 'caring subject position' as they did not benefit from her over-seas trajectory.
- The reactions of Mary's children put the perils of GCCs and gendered care-giving practices into evaluation. While Mary raised Peter and Amanda's five children and the couple were clearly benefitting from the racialized labour of her 'extra mothering' and 'gendered intimacy,' her own twin daughter's lamented how they painfully suffered without their mother.

Praying together and violating the 'law'

Card One:

You are the most amazing person I met in India. You made my two years magical. Because of you I felt at home every day, I prayed more, I stayed grounded and because of you I succeeded. Thank you for being my backbone, my rock, and a pillar of love.

Card Two: (In this second card, James drew himself together with Mary in a cartoon style)

I love you and thank you.

How Are Older Women Placed in the GCCs?

- Mary began to make significant material investments for her family, showing that through ‘caring performances,’ she was a caring woman (Skeggs 1997). She managed to save very little for herself.
- None of her diplomatic employers offered her a medical insurance and Amanda and Peter never offered/encouraged a pension scheme in 13 years.
- Mary’s dependencies increased as she returned to India; she was an elderly widow and dependent on her children for shelter. We observe the economic precariousness of ageing.
- Mary became critical about the sentimentalization she frequently faced in her lifetime. How are cards and letters going to fill my stomach? Why did they not leave with a pension or a medical insurance?
- Mary is in a precarious situation in the current covid crisis.

Where Policy Can Make a Difference? How do we advance Theoretical Models on GCCs?

- Care-domestic labour is often invisible to states and policy analytics (primarily caregivers are not regarded as citizens and are devalued and 'disposable' by nation states). Legal ambivalences stand out.
- Informal practices cross borders and areas – they travel. These are unwritten rules, open secrets and hidden practices. They are based on loyalty and trust and an economy of favors. These are ambivalent and resist articulation and measurement for they involve power-driven forms of co-optation and control (Alena Ledeneva 2018). With Indian employers, caste also gets transferred into transnational locations. Salaries remain unregulated by labour laws and often the informal employer-employee relationship takes over.
- The movements and hiring practices of elites illustrate enormous global inequalities as they abdicate responsibilities towards pensions, health care and even a minimum wage etc.
- Ultimately, care-work remains devalued as the Covid Pandemic has exposed.

My selected Publications on Care Work; Take a Look at Our Care Theme at III

Forthcoming: Grover, Shalini and Sanna Schlieve. Trailing Spouses in India. *In*, Petra Matijevic and Alena Ledenva (Editors)

Global Encyclopaedia of Informality. London: University College Press (UCL)

2019. Grover, Shalini. Streamlining Paid Domestic Labour in Postcolonial India: The New Female All-Rounder in Master-Servant Expatriate Relationships. *In*, Nitin Sinha and Nitin Varma (Editors) *Servants Past, Late-Eighteenth to Twentieth Century South Asia Volume 11*. Delhi: Orient Blackswan.

2018. Grover, Shalini. English-speaking and Educated Female Domestic Workers in Contemporary India: New Managerial Roles, Social Mobility and Persistent Inequality. *Journal of South Asian Development* (JSAD). 13 (2): 186-209.

2018. Shalini Grover, Thomas Chambers, Patricia, Jeffery and (Editors). Introduction to the Special Issue: Portraits of Women's Paid Domestic-Care Labour: Ethnographic Studies from Globalizing India. *Journal of South Asian Development* (JSAD). 13 (2): 1-18.

2017. Grover, Shalini. Revisiting the Devyani Khobragade Controversy: The Value of Domestic Labour in the Global South. *In* 'Voices' from Asian Feminist Activism, *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* (AJWS). 23 (1): 121-128.