

## Global Studies Research Programme guest talk

### **'No city for lovers': Urban poverty, public romance and violent moral policing of lower-class female youth in Mumbai**

Dr Atreyee Sen, Associate Professor in Anthropology, KU

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This presentation will explore the violent moral policing and aggressive spatial marginalisation of lower-class, young lovers in Mumbai. I interrogate contemporary nationalist discourses propagating appropriate, honourable conduct for women in modern India, and analyse the percolation of these forms of gendered moral surveillance into local urban politics. Young girls, who gain a small degree of economic freedom through low-income employment in Mumbai, are often keen to resist arranged marriages, and choose their romantic partners. However, since upper-class 'safe' public spaces (such as coffee shops, movie halls, shopping plazas) are not available to poor women, these young girls use open parks, street benches, public beaches and commuter bridges to kiss, cuddle and converse with their lovers. I show how orthodox lower-class communities, conservative nationalist groups, and local policemen concerned with 'public pornography', coordinate physical attacks and public shaming to punish such deviant youth. I argue that this form of virtue policing of poor girls is not just directed towards informally governing the morality of young women. It is also intimately related to invisibilising and edging out poor, mobile girls from public spaces, when they boldly display their right to love, labour and occupy public spaces in the commercial city