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POLITICS OF THE TEMPORARY: MIGRANT LIFE IN URBAN MALAYSIA

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, 2015

Urbana, Illinois

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ABSTRACT

In this project, I look at an aspect of contemporary migration that has been largely sidelined and marginalized in mainstream debates, policy circles and research work – what happens to ‘host societies’ in the developing South that experience a rapid increase in numbers and diversity of urban populations owing to temporary migration. What are the implications of ‘temporariness’ on people’s everyday lives, practices, experiences, social environments and the urban spaces they inhabit? How does the presence and work of diverse groups of ‘temporary migrants’ alter and re-shape social, cultural and political dynamics of societies that have already been experiencing massive transformations and developments? What new forms, new practices, new networks, new hierarchies, new inequalities, and new strategies emerge in these contexts that might provide important knowledge from a transnational sociological perspective and critical studies standpoint? In order to address these broad questions, I looked at the experience of temporary labor migration in Malaysia, following a period of field research in the country. My concern that the agency of migrants is increasingly being looked at almost exclusively through an economistic, top-down lens dominated by development has prompted me to seek out the alternative experiences, conditions and practices that the Migration Development Nexus obscures and renders invisible. I sought to do this by looking at how 'temporariness' appears from below - from the perspectives of migrants, non-citizens and other inhabitants of an actual urban center in a fast-developing country of the Global South.

To my parents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the support and assistance provided by all the people whose contributions, guidance and encouragements made this dissertation possible. It would not be possible to thank everyone individually in this limited space. First and foremost, this project would not remotely be possible without the generous and brave participation of the many women and men whose lives are documented within – the migrants in Malaysia. Their contributions in terms of narratives, stories and glimpses into their daily lives form the foundations of this research, and I am greatly indebted to them.

I would like to thank my doctoral committee, led by Dr. Asef Bayat, whose guidance, inspiration and advice proved invaluable throughout my time as a doctoral student. Similarly, the completion of this project and my growth as a scholar drew heavily from the support of Dr. Zsuzsa Gille, Dr. Brian Dill, and Dr. Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Dr. Faranak Miraftab, Dr. Christine Chin, Dr. Tim Liao, Dr. Anna Maria-Marshall, and Dr. Assata Zerai for their continued support and help.

Dissertation writing can be a long and arduous process, if done in isolation. I would like to thank my two wonderful writing collaborators and dear friends, Dr. Erin Castro and Stephanie Rieder, for making the writing process a meaningful and wonderfully fruitful journey. I would also like to thank Shari Day for the years of support and care she has provided to graduate students in Sociology, of which I have lost count of the number of times I have benefitted greatly.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife and intellectual soulmate, Valeria Bonatti.

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INTRODUCTION

> "Most of us didn't come here knowing what kind of work we will be doing. I didn't know that I would be working in a sundry store carrying stocks and arranging items on shelves, sleeping in a tiny room with five other people. There are guys I know from Bangladesh now working in construction, standing under the hot sun every day in holes and ditches, and have a worse time than me. I got lucky – this job is good, my bosses are good, and I feel good being able to help the restaurant get good business. That's my job now, I'm good with the customers so my bosses prefer if I work as a 'greeter', for all the customers, especially regulars. They know me well, and I try to be very friendly and give them lots of information. They know I'm a 'foreigner', but they don't treat me like one because I speak Malay well, and I know so much about Malaysia" – interview with Ali, a temporary migrant worker from Bangladesh in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

> "This whole area is all foreign, from everywhere… almost everyone who comes to this café is a migrant. Look… those girls over there (points at a table of young women), they are all from Vietnam, that two guys over there are from Pakistan, my husband and I from Patani (Thailand), and then the men we work with are all from India. Here, all the flats and condos around are full of foreigners. That's why the police and RELA (civilian volunteer corps) always come here – because they can stop and arrest and ask us for money or free service. All the time, we get a lot of *ayam* (hens – slur for sex-worker) who come here to eat lunch and breakfast, buy their condoms and then meet their *bapak* (pimps) to pay money. This whole building is full of all these girls from Vietnam, Thailand and Philippines who work like that… My husband and I… we're just here to cook and serve food. I don't like a lot of the things these people do, but I'm still grateful because we're really lucky to have a very generous boss who helps us so much, even paying us extra and giving us bonuses to help us build our house (back in Patani) " – Interview with Lina, a short-term migrant 'visitor' from Patani, Thailand in KL.

> "Migration is a megatrend of the twenty-first century. We can no longer think about our economies, societies or cultures without thinking about human mobility. How many of us do not have at least one migrant among our relatives, neighbors or colleagues? Which country can claim that migration has no role in its past, present or future? Migration is a reality for us all, irrespective of whether or not we ourselves move." – William Lacy Swing, Director General of the International Organization for Migration, October 2013

Temporary Labor Migration (TLM) has been an emerging and important element of the latest phase of neoliberal globalization, post-Washington Consensus. As part of a push towards liberalizing markets for labor – as opposed to labor itself – national states, private firms and international organizations have been promoting a more open, unregulated trade of migrant labor under the 'Managed Migration' framework that came into vogue in the mid-1980s. Under this paradigm, we have seen an unprecedented number of people become part of transnational migration flows across the world, not just between countries the 'Global South' to the North, but also between different

developing countries outside of the traditional North. Human mobility, as set forth by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) at the 2013 United Nations High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, is to become a 'mega-trend of our century'. The latest estimate puts the number of migrants at 1 billion people, of which 214 million are international migrants.

Along with becoming a global 'mega-trend', migration and human mobility has also become a cornerstone for social and economic development around the world. Human mobility, more than ever before, has become an integral part of the agenda of nation states and international organizations when it comes to development, particularly with the impact of remittances as a resource for local community development and long-term investments. 'Migrants' today encompass a very diverse and fragmented category of people – highly educated professionals and experts, mobile expatriates with multiple homes away from homes, refugees and asylum seekers, people trafficked and smuggled across borders and international waters, and temporary guest workers. Philippines, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Mexico, and a host of other countries benefit greatly from the inflow of remittance money, which in many cases is significantly more than the amount of foreign direct investment.

The mega-trend of human mobility has spurred more states that have struggled to foster internal economic development in contrast to their regional neighbors to turn towards exporting their own citizens as a source of labor to different countries. Philippines, a pioneer of the state-as-labor-broker approach, sends more women to work overseas as nurses, care-givers and domestic helpers than any other country, making it one of the central nodes of a 'global care chain' (Parrenas, Hochschild). Global remittance flows for 2013 were estimated to be USD 542 billion, with USD 404 billion estimated to be flowing into developing countries, more than three times the amount of 'official' development assistance (World Bank 2014) This aspect of migration has understandably caught the interest of policy-makers and researchers for more than two decades, giving rise to a dominant 'Migration-Development Nexus' within which the notion of migrants as agents of development has taken on something of a mantra-like fervor (Kapur 2004; Faist 2007)

Along with this tremendous expansion in human mobility comes an enormous growth in the numbers of people living and working as 'temporary' migrants. These are groups and individuals who are referred to by various labels – guest workers, international students, foreign workers,

economic migrants, transnational migrants, short-term visitors, expatriates. Temporary migrants are also often regarded as being part of 'circular migration', people who move to a different country or place without the expectation of permanent residency or citizenship, but with plans to return home after a certain period. Temporary labor migrants – who make up the vast majority of migrants from countries like Bangladesh, Nepal, Indonesia and Philippines – are the key 'agents' of development for the sending countries and societies. Their mobility, opportunities, rights and wages are governed by bilateral agreements and treaties between sending and receiving countries, at least officially. These agreements and treaties are frameworks that are part of the 'new economics of labor migration' beginning in the mid-1980s (Stark and Bloom 1985), which soon gave rise to Managed Migration and Temporary Labor Migration (TLM) the institutionalized transnational systems.

As more states began adopting TLM as part of their development initiatives to support burgeoning labor demands in the private and industrial sectors, poorer and less developed countries began to compete within an emerging global labor market as suppliers of cheap and flexible (temporary) migrant labor. The unevenness of contemporary capitalist growth meant that regional inequalities deepened further between fast-developing countries and those left increasingly behind. TLM very soon becomes a system built upon conditions of tremendous economic inequalities between different societies and countries. Certain destination places, especially urban centers like Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, became magnets for migrant labor thanks to the combination of fierce labor demands, relatively deregulated and open channels for entry, and high levels of capital investment.

Research Questions

In this project, I look at an aspect of contemporary migration that has been largely sidelined and marginalized in mainstream debates, policy circles and research work – what happens to 'host societies' in the developing South that experience a rapid increase in numbers and diversity of urban populations owing to temporary migration. What are the implications of 'temporariness' on people's everyday lives, practices, experiences, social environments and the urban spaces they inhabit? How does the presence and work of diverse groups of 'temporary migrants' alter and re-shape social, cultural and political dynamics of societies that have already been experiencing massive transformations and developments? What new forms, new practices, new networks, new hierarchies,

new inequalities, and new strategies emerge in these contexts that might provide important knowledge from a transnational sociological perspective and critical studies standpoint?

In order to address these broad questions, I looked at the experience of temporary labor migration in Malaysia, following a period of field research in the country. My concern that the agency of migrants is increasingly being looked at almost exclusively through an economistic, top-down lens dominated by development has prompted me to seek out the alternative experiences, conditions and practices that the Migration Development Nexus obscures and renders invisible. I sought to do this by looking at how 'temporariness' appears from below - from the perspectives of migrants, non-citizens and other inhabitants of an actual urban center in a fast-developing country of the Global South. I chose Malaysia (and more specifically the cities of Kuala Lumpur and Georgetown) because of its growing appeal as a major destination for migrant workers, international students, expatriates and other foreign-born nationals as well as my deep familiarity with the culture and history of my country of origin.

Along with other states such as Singapore, Qatar and China, Malaysia has become a non-traditional magnet destination for people in search of opportunities and work. Currently, it is home to more than 2 million non-citizens migrants in a country of 29 million (and another 2 million estimated to be in the country as undocumented migrants). Almost a quarter of the adult working population is made of foreign-born migrants, largely from Indonesia, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Philippines, Vietnam, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and India. A vast majority of migrants in Malaysia fall under the categories of 'low-skilled' or 'unskilled', classified by Immigration law as 'foreign workers' or 'foreign domestic workers'. There are also large numbers of temporary 'visitors' to the country - people who make use of tourist visas or 'social visit permits' as ways to enter the country in search of informal work and other opportunities. International students - marked increasingly by the growing presence of young, mostly male, migrants from African countries such as Ghana and Nigeria- are also an important group to be taken under consideration, as many are also searching for opportunities to earn a living and material wealth.

The Politics of Temporariness

My emphasis on looking at temporariness 'from below' is meant to reveal the fluidity, porosity, complexity and diversity of experiences, practices and identities of 'migrants' who do not fit accepted characteristics defined under these formal categories, labels and benchmarks imposed upon

them from a structural or institutional standpoint quite so easily. Migrants who live in Malaysia, for instance, are more than just development 'agents' who send home money and other 'things'. They are more than just 'foreign workers', 'maids', 'servers', or students. Many of the people I observed and interviewed live lives that are highly marked by dynamism and flexibility, as well as highly restrictive conditions.

This study of the particular practices, experiences, and transformations engendered by the shift to temporary forms of migrant labor – which I refer to as the *politics of temporariness* – is built on various periods of ethnographic field research between 2010 and 2014, during which I spent time in Kuala Lumpur and Georgetown conducting participant observation and in-depth interviews. My research subjects were primarily migrants who were in Malaysia under some form of 'temporary' status – as domestic helpers (women), foreign workers (non-domestic), international students, short-term visitors and tourists. These were people whose main purpose for coming to Malaysia was to work and find opportunities to earn a living. Their 'temporary' statuses are conferred upon them by the socio-legal framework of the state which differentially accords rights and restrictions on the basis of nationality, gender, job sector and ethnicity. The temporary statuses people attain when they move to Malaysia is not the same – in practice, it is hierarchical and varies in conditions and rights that people are allowed. However, their temporariness may also become an identity category that marks groups out as 'foreigner', 'alien', 'migrant', or even as *PATI* (Pendatang Tanpa Izin – illegal immigrant), which depends on other ethnic and national identities that they bear.

Temporariness does not necessarily overshadow or undermine the diverse ethnic, national, linguistic and cultural backgrounds that migrants have – it is a category that is imposed upon particular groups who are deemed to be unsuited for long-term settlement in Malaysia, and are purely categorized by some type of economic value (as workers, visitors and helpers). The categorization of migrant workers by sector, country of origin and gender leads to their classification as either 'short-term visitors', foreign workers, or foreign domestic helpers (exclusively women).

The TLM framework adopted by the Malaysian state since the 1990s led to the liberalization of the markets for migrant labor while simultaneously fostering the conditions for increasing 'precariatization' of the working class. Guy Standing's uses the concept of 'precariat' to refer to people around the world who are increasingly experiencing a stripping away of traditional forms of labor securities – such as long term employment, welfare benefits, pensions, protections and the

right to mobilize. Instead, we are currently experiencing rises in short-term employments, intern-style jobs, temporary contracts, and a general condition of growing precariousness. Migrants form a significant part of this 'class-in-the-making', which according to Standing are likely to experience intensifications of alienation, anomie and anxiety.

Temporary Labor Migration frameworks tend to operate through the nexus of bilateral agreements, state immigration policies and human resource ministries, with participations by private corporate interests and employers organizations. The fragmentation of migrant labor goes hand in hand with policies that seek to restrict the rights and mobility of non-citizens from poorer and more vulnerable backgrounds, which can be seen as increasing the precariousness of their conditions. By looking precisely at how people navigate and negotiate these conditions entailed by their temporariness at the everyday level, I sought to interrogate mainstream assumptions about growing precariousness, vulnerability, and, just as importantly, informality, using a critical approach aimed at challenging those assumptions.

The multi-sited ethnographic work used here illuminates how informality, especially, becomes an ever-more important resource for temporary migrants in resisting and combating the effects of precariousness. This work is also meant to challenge the paradigmatic binary categorization of migrants as either 'agents of development' or 'victims' of some form of exploitation (trafficking, indentured labor, and slavery) by shedding light on how migrants' experiences and practices are far more diverse and dynamic then either of those characterizations suggest. More to the point, these binary understandings hide more than they reveal – some migrants such as transnational sex-workers and escorts tend to be completely ignored and left out of debates and discussions on remittances and development (Agustin 2009).

Informality, despite being characterized as a 'problem' that needs to be addressed within the MDN discourse, is a thriving and critical resource for people living under the shadow of a neoliberal, pseudo-democratic state. Informality, at the very least, provides potential means and pathways to securing dignified life. Informality, as analysis of my field research shows, is not limited to the presence of informal economies, markets, and appropriations of urban spaces through illegal or extra-legal means, but it also relates to expressions of co-optation and resistance of imposed 'statuses' of temporariness as identifying categories for migrants, such as 'domestic helpers' and victims of 'sex-trafficking'. In such cases, informality takes the form of innovative practices where

some migrants are able to move between these statuses, 'slipping' from one identity to another, by doing part-time work as 'maids', or engaging in vending and entrepreneurial activities on the side. Young women, for example, are able to use their status as 'visitors' to advertise via new mobile 'apps' as 'escorts' and 'travel companions' as part of a very lucrative sex-tourism industry.

My explorations of the academic literatures and policy discourses around transnational migration revealed a general trend which needs urgent addressing. There is a tendency, amongst researchers and policy-makers, to move away from the experiences of migrants in the context of host societies. While issues such as human rights abuses, exploitation, labor vulnerabilities, and increasing precariousness remain key concerns, the dominance of a developmentalist paradigm has meant that the majority of research is being pushed into examining 'flows' of remittances, improving networks of international finance, setting up 'accountable', transparent and 'accessible' channels for remittances, and developing better methods for measuring and benchmarking the developmental effects of temporary migration. Subsumed under paradigms of ‘global migration governance’ and managed migration, major international organizations such as the World Bank, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) continue to push for both research and policy towards more efficient regulation and measurement of economic migration and remittances. The value of migration to the development industry has become so large that it has now been identified as a key 'enabler' of development for the Millennium Development Goals[1].

As one major outcome of the MDN paradigm, large groups of temporary migrants are being categorized as 'agents' of development. Their agency is seen as a product of their capacity, via economic remittances and to some extent social remittances, to foster and promote national development in their countries of origin. Migration is no longer viewed as a 'problem' of under-development or 'brain-drain' that might be due to massive inequalities between countries (traditionally from a South to North perspective), but as a structural component of contemporary globalization and global economies (Hugo 2003). The discourse of migrants as 'agents' has become so prevalent that it has been described as a mantra for policy-makers and heads of states (Faist 2008). Seen through this particular 'from-above' lens, the agency of migrants becomes

[1] UN System Task Team (on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda). 2013. *Realizing the Future We Want For All: Report to the Secretary General*. http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/Post_2015_UNTTreport.pdf

operationalized and consequently reduced to their relevance as economic 'commodities' (Leighton 2013). It is not simply a coincidence that this discourse is paralleled by the greater participation of women in transnational migratory flows, particularly as part of a global care-chain of domestic workers, nurses and care-givers. Migrant women from poorer developing countries are identified as the best 'agents' because of their capacities to save and their sense of responsibility that guarantees better remittance practices. This so-called agency is reductive and serves only to further highlight the commodification of flexible, vulnerable and compliant peoples from different communities as the new carriers of development, to be managed by an increasingly sophisticated system of alliances between national states and international organizations such as the World Bank and the International Organization for Migration (Muniandy and Bonatti 2014).

'Temporariness', in this project, is a metaphor - a site for a new politics that is linked to processes identified as part of globalization, development, but also to urban right to the city movements and studies of 'ethnic enclaves/economies'. This politics occurs at multiple levels- at the level of discourse and policy surrounding global migration management, privatization and securitization at the state level, city municipalities, private businesses and firms, as well as households and neighborhoods. The advent of mobile web-based technologies have also been opening up new realms of possibility for this politics, as more people, including migrants, are able to engage, market themselves and form useful networks of information and resources that contribute to new patterns of mobility and transfers.

My purpose for taking 'temporariness' as a metaphor is to reveal not an impermanence of 'being' or status, but to expose new forms of positionalities, modalities and strategies that are based upon an underlying assumption that contemporary globalization is producing greater transnational movement of people. In contrast to Standing's (2011) argument that the growing precariousness on the lives of ordinary people, migrants included, will produce greater 'short-termism' in thinking and ultimately feelings of deep anomie, alienation and anxiety, I suggest that these sites of politics of 'temporariness' actually display the ever-present desire for people to plan for the long term and to secure dignified lives, even under highly restrictive, precarious or informal situations. Transnational networks of information, emergent communities of 'temporary' migrants, and flexible strategies of the urban 'non-citizen' poor are generally informed not by pure opportunism and materialism, but also by notions of 'better futures', long-term security, visions of travel, emergent inter-ethnic relations, and strong communal bonds.

The notion of temporariness is also a way to avoid constructing any particular ethnos to be studied. Migrants are diverse in their nationalities, ethnicities, languages, gender, race, occupation, class, and education – yet the subjects of this research share very similar institutional conditions that define them by their status as non-citizens and temporary populations. This shared status – albeit one that does not produce similar experiences or outcomes for different people – becomes a powerful influence in lives of migrants and for many can become a source for the mobilization of new politics of resistance and claims-making. As I show in chapter four, with regards to new migrant communities in Chinatown, Little Bangladesh and Little Burma, a shared recognition of national, ethnic, linguistic and cultural similarities are very important to the development of new communities and economies of poor migrants, but this development is also mitigated by a sense of shared temporariness that cuts across transnational networks. The latter has implications for the formation of new inter-ethnic relationships between migrants from various parts of the world, connecting people from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Nepal and Bangladesh, for instance.

A notion of a politics based around temporariness implies mobilization – of people, critical resources, ideologies, and practices – for the purpose of fostering social, economic, political, and even cultural change. Traditionally, such forms of organizations are understood as *movements* with shared identities and goals, aiming to achieve gains or address some issues deemed unwanted. Political organizing can span different scales, from the local to the global. Migrant workers – and indeed, migrants of poor, marginalized and/or disenfranchised positions – are rarely seen as capable or relevant actors or agents of mobilizations. Examinations of migrant political mobilization has only been given any attention when it pertains to more established immigrant communities, largely in developed Western countries (USA, Germany, UK, France, Netherlands, in particular).

What about the political mobilization capabilities and capacities of non-immigrant temporary migrants, who have not been in a country for generations and are not considered long-term residents of their host countries? To an extent, there has been a rise in interest in the experiences and mobilization of migrant communities in the United States – such as the case of 'DREAMers' movement (children of undocumented migrants seeking rights of citizenship primarily through access to education), yet the experiences of millions of migrant workers working and living in non-Western societies requires a lot more attention and understanding. One starting point that many migration scholars interested in political mobilization take is by studying grassroots activism and

migrant rights' NGOs – in fact, this is where much of the research on migration in Asia and Southeast Asia tends to be focused.

A politics of temporariness, in contrast to existing scholarship on migrant activism and movements, takes as a starting point the seemingly mundane, passive, often informal and peaceful everyday practices of urban-based migrants. Rather than focusing on NGOs and grassroots movements engaged with migrants, I chose to look at how different communities and groups of migrants are able to secure and claim different resources, opportunities and rights, through strategies that Bayat calls 'quiet encroachment of the ordinary', which may lead to broader changes and transformations nonetheless. In the case of migrant communities, such as the ones in Malaysia I focus on, it is through the common, mundane everyday negotiations and practices – plus the ways in which many migrant workers have to deal with their temporariness of status – that this new politics emerges. Whether it is migrant women (mostly domestic helpers) meeting to share opportunities and resources at church on Sundays, or men from Bangladesh and young people from Hong Kong working for transnational goods trafficking and vending in Chinatown, the effects of these largely apolitical activities do result in important political, economic and cultural transformations. These activities are vital for the formation of subsequent political mobilization – as I show in the example of the migrant communities of Little Bangladesh in chapter four.

Who is Temporary? Temporariness as fields of Power and Governance

Throughout the dissertation, I make references to different groups of people as temporary migrants, but it is important to clarify that this is a reference to their status in the host country of Malaysia – a status which is formally assigned by the state. A temporary migrant could be a foreign worker, a foreign domestic helper, a refugee, an international student, a short-term visitor, or even an undocumented migrant. Each group or category is a strictly defined one that comes with specific regulatory frameworks that govern the rights and mobility of people. Not all temporary migrants are the same, nor do they share the same sets of rights and regulations. The legal and regulatory framework that the Malaysian state (as well as other states where Managed Migration is practiced) reproduces highly gendered and discriminatory segregation of non-citizens, especially (if not exclusively) with regards to low-skilled and unskilled employment.

These frameworks create artificial hierarchies of migrants, even among those on the low-income end of the spectrum, through the management and regulation of rights and mobilities based

on nationality, sector and gender of migrants. The hierarchy of temporary migrants largely puts migrant women, especially those in domestic work, at the very bottom of the ladder, with the least mobility and the fewest rights. Refugees and asylum seekers, as well as victims of trafficking and human slavery, are largely unaccounted for and not recognized by the Malaysian state, which means that groups such as the Rohingya from Burma are often treated as illegal immigrants and face the constant threat of repatriation.

The differences in terms of rights and mobilities of temporary migrants are most prominent along gender lines. Migrant women, as discussed in chapter 6, face far more significant obstacles and struggles when attempting to secure basic needs and carry on with their daily life, whether it is while trying to transfer their income back home, finding time to rest, securing days off work, or even simply finding ways to move in the city. The institutional and legal barriers, as well as the lack of opportunities for formal organizing and mobilization, faced by migrant women tend to be overtly draconian – to the point of not requiring employers to provide off-days, prohibiting any type of work that is 'outside the home where they are employed' and not even recognizing domestic work as a type of formal labor (hence the designation of foreign 'helper' rather than 'worker').

In contrast, male migrants have far fewer rigid controls on their mobility, at least in most urban sectors of employment. It should be noted however that migrant who are employed in non-urban industrial and agricultural sectors (in the more remote parts of the country) have been subject to far worse and inhumane treatments such as being forced to live in ramshackle, condemned buildings and forced to work for more than 12 hours per day – both male and female.

This hierarchy of temporary migrants also includes international students and short-term visitors – groups that are generally affordable slightly better opportunities and mobility. Short-term visitors include migrants from Thailand and East Asia who are somewhat similar to 'seasonal workers' – those who come to Malaysia for a period of two months per visit, in order to work part-time or as 'temps' through agencies or private employers. Meanwhile, international students tend to be the most diverse group of temporary migrants, coming from anywhere between Japan and West Africa. These are students who register with local colleges and universities, and in order to pay their tuition and find income, often seek informal work opportunities.

Overview of Research Project/ Outline of Dissertation

This dissertation is organized around an ethnographic project conducted in Malaysia, based in urban centers of Kuala Lumpur and Georgetown. Chapters are arranged to reflect different thematic and issue-driven concerns around the new politics of the temporary. The substantive chapters of this dissertation (4-7) are primarily reports of findings, analyses and discussions of my field research, organized around three broad themes of formation of new informal communities in the city, reproduction of cultural authenticity in the age of migration, new forms of migrant mobility, and everyday life of migrants in one of KL's gated communities.

In my second chapter, I describe how transnational migration processes, practices and systems have long-standing roots in Malaysia's colonial and post-colonial history. The adoption of migrant labor regimes which follow the rationale of 'divide-and-rule' in which people from different countries are brought in to work in segregated sectors of employment actually can be traced back to British colonial practices since the late 19th century. Migrants were brought in as indentured servants from China and India to work in mining towns and plantations respectively. Women, spouses and dependents were not allowed to come to Malaya – only single men, with the expectation that they would return home once their work was no longer needed or their debts had been paid off. These systems of recruitment foregrounded the racial and ethnic politics and experiences that shaped post-Independence Malaysia, and have important implications and ramifications for the new temporary labor migration regimes and migrant experiences today.

Chapter 3 delves into the scholarship and academic literatures about contemporary migration and transnational mobility, highlighting the impacts of the increasingly powerful discourse of the migration development nexus (MDN). Here, I discuss the contributions of supporters and advocates of the MDN, along with the sharp critiques that have emerged of the 'developmentalist' paradigm over the last two decades. This analysis of the existing scholarship is meant to reveal several important trends and gaps that require addressing, particularly the shifting focus towards 'developing' countries of origin and the equating of migrant 'agency' with remittance practices (i.e. as economic agents).

In this literature review, I take into consideration the growing criticisms of the MDN paradigm by the likes of Martin Geiger (2013), Antoine Pecoud (2013), Thomas Faist (2008), Nicola Piper (2010), Parvati Raghuram (2009), and others who highlight how 'global migration

management' is having quite detrimental effects on migrants in host societies. More and more migrant groups are becoming 'invisibilized' by the 'calculative processes' of migration management, for example (Raghuram 2009), a trend that has particular relevance for migrants in Malaysia- from informal vendors to part-time maids and social 'escorts'. The significance of the MDN discourse is also reflected in the relationship between 'development' and the feminization of migration, with the emergence of the global care chain. I highlight how research on migration within the MDN paradigm, despite the debates about 'agency', is largely distanced from other disciplinary areas that address issues of informal citizenship, agency of the urban poor, ethnic economies/enclaves and right to the city movements, all of which could provide a more nuanced and complex analytical conceptualization of 'agency' beyond the economic/instrumentalist variant.

The methodological framework and issues engendered by this research on migrants in Malaysia is described and discussed in chapter 4. Here, I detail the rationale behind choosing a critical ethnographic framework in understanding migrant experiences as a way to develop grounded, empirically-based critiques of key paradigmatic discourses and narratives about migration. The ethnographic detail of diverse migrant experiences and practices presented here pose strong challenges to existing notions of ‘economic migrants’, ‘agents of development’, and ‘victims of trafficking’, among others. A key component to being able to explore this level of detail within the ethnographic study comes from the positionality of the researcher, and the different power dynamics that manifest throughout the data collection process. I describe some of the ways in which my own presence and identity – as an Indian male, as an academic, as a migrant, as a minority – enabled different levels of access to the experiences I was seeking to learn about, and how this ultimately shaped the knowledge that I am sharing. The relationship between my positionality and the ethnographic endeavor plays into the analysis of data, the identification of themes and the construction of theories which frame the substantive chapters of this work.

Chapter 4 focuses on emerging new 'migrant' communities and economies in Kuala Lumpur, particularly with regards to thriving Myanmarese and Bangladeshi communities in the districts of Chinatown and Pudu. These new communities which seem like examples of migrant 'ethnic enclaves' are in fact much more hybrid and dynamic in terms of the inter-ethnic connections and arrangements that are in place. Bangladeshi migrants benefit from a busy and active hub of resources, shops, services and information that is located close to the city center, mostly run and managed by their fellow compatriots. The 'temporary migrant' community in Jalan Silang exists

largely because of arrangements between local Chinese property and business owners who have decided to rent out their shop-lots to Bangladeshi and Myanmarese migrants who use the spaces to sell a variety of goods and products. This has enabled communities of 'Little Bangla' and 'Little Myanmar' to emerge, typically through forms of 'quiet encroachment' and appropriation of public spaces (sidewalks, alleyways, streets), in urban spaces that were formerly fairly traditional 'ethnic enclaves' of Chinese and South Indian businesses.

The presence of vendors and migrant 'entrepreneurs' is another aspect of current migration that is invisible, at least within the development literature. Scholars have emphasized the need to look at the 'entrepreneurial' side of migrant activities, though this has been limited to studies of 'ethnic economies and enclaves. Migrant entrepreneurship is not confined to diaspora or enclave communities anymore (if it ever was), but is an integral and critical component to the transnational networks of migration we have today. My conversations and time spent with migrant vendors and entrepreneurs in Malaysia (especially those from Bangladesh and Myanmar) shed some light on the importance of transnational and trans-*ethnic* networks and relationships that enable people to leave their home countries to seek out business opportunities in places like Kuala Lumpur. Here, I am referring to low-level street vendors from Bangladesh and Myanmar who are able to secure and sell fashion and cosmetic products shipped in through major ports from Hong Kong, Korea and Taiwan- as part the so-called shadow economies of illegal shipping and trafficking.

Most migrants who spend their time in these new communities are 'temporary' in terms of formal status- they are not citizens or permanent residents. Jalang Silang and Chinatown provide opportunities for leisure and time away from work, where they may look for groceries, restaurants that serve 'home' food, companionship and shopping. Due to the visibility and centrality of these communities in KL, they have largely become target for xenophobic discourse and commentary, by anti-immigrant movements and commentators that use Jalan Silang and Pudu as examples of how foreigners are 'flooding the country'. These spaces are also politicized for their apparent states of degradation and pollution, which are used to describe the 'dirty' and 'irresponsible' nature of migrants from poor backgrounds (NST). This is not to say that the migrant communities are completely at the whim and mercy of local authorities or citizens.

Such is a the extent of the encroachment and appropriation of public space that the communities have been able to mobilize to make claims to the city municipality, as shown by the

Malaysian Bangladesh Business Association's (MBBA) organizing of Aidilfitri (Eid) prayers for the predominantly Muslim migrants along Jalan Silang. This event, which brought thousands of Bangladeshi migrants out for prayers on the usually busy street, was part of an organized demand for the city to construct a Bengali mosque for Bangladeshi migrants and to recognize the needs of this 'temporary' community- an exemplification of the 'art of presence' (Bayat 2010) . Here, we are not only able to look at how actual grassroots mobilization represents forms of agency, but acts of informal/insurgent citizenship - another issue rarely examined by migration scholars. The practices of these migrant communities, in many ways, represents a Lefebvreian 'right to the city' form of urban citizenship (Purcell 2003).

Chapter 5 focuses on how the issue of 'cultural authenticity' has become an important instrument of government and state development initiatives within which the marketing and promotion of local Malaysian culture is encouraged and supported by businesses in the service sectors. The national branding project which aims to foster and cultivate and image of 'Malaysia Truly Asia' as well as the notion of a unified '1Malaysia' culture ties closely to the methods of brand advertising and service promotions that occur at the level of the everyday, as businesses such as restaurant chains and franchises increasingly move towards active promotion of what is determined to be the true and authentic Malaysian culture, history and identity.

My field work revealed an underlying contradiction in these promotions where there exists an overwhelming dependence on temporary migrants to recreate and reproduce this cultural authenticity. Servers and cooks at restaurants are expected to prepare meals that are uniquely Malaysian, while young men from Myanmar carry out funeral embalming services for Hindu funeral parlors, just to name a few. How this work of reproducing cultural authenticity is shifted onto the shoulders of migrant workers who have only been in the country for a brief period of time is a consequence of a highly neoliberal version of culturalism.

In Chapter 6, I focus on how various 'formal' categories of work and identity with regards to temporary migrants actually appear from the perspectives of informants, in various 'local' settings. In particular, my findings, captured via ethnographic vignettes based on field-notes and interview transcripts, reveal that these categories are far more fluid and unstable than they are made to appear, and are often 'used' as gateways or tickets for seeking out different opportunities. Some migrant women who come to Malaysia to officially work as 'foreign domestic workers', for example, are also

engaged in an informal 'part-time maids' service where they are able to market their labor to households and employers outside of their legally restricted 'home of employments'.

The 'part time maids' service economy is one that often involves arrangements between primary 'employers' who are responsible for renewing and securing work permits and temporary visas for the migrant women, while the latter gives a portion of their earnings from 'outside' to those employers. Some migrants who are formally restricted in such ways also 'slip' into different forms of work such as cleaning and cooking in restaurants or vending phone pre-paid and reload cards. Similarly, the fluidity of identities extends to 'international students' who come to Malaysia in search of business opportunities. The importance of informality in the mobility that many migrants possess or are able to claim for themselves, including women, is a key part of this discussion. Migrant women from Thailand and Philippines, who work mostly in domestic or food service sectors, rely on their networks of friends and contacts in order to secure ways to return home, transport money and things, as well as find alternative sources of income as part-time employees. Much of this is done informally, either due to the exorbitantly high transaction costs of travel or the lack of formal opportunities.

In the seventh chapter, I look at one of the many new expensive, luxury ‘gated communities’ or ‘fortified enclaves’ that have emerged in Kuala Lumpur over the past decade – a hyper-modern, posh neighborhood complete with top of the line security and surveillance systems. This community, like others in Malaysia, is where many temporary migrant workers are employed as security guards, domestic workers, and construction workers and as maintenance crews. This particular community of Jaya Hills is where migrant men from Nepal work as sub-contracted security guards, tasked with monitoring who goes in and out, and patrolling the neighborhood 24 hours every day. Migrant women make up the bulk of domestic workers in these expensive and lavish homes, while Indonesian men are brought in to construct new properties and buildings for future homeowners.

Contrary to how urban planners and urban studies scholars have tended to look at gated communities (Genis 2007), this particular neighborhood is not entirely an exclusive space for the wealthier classes who are trying to keep out the dangers of urban life and working class groups. Rather, my time at Jaya Hills reveals a deep and critical heterogeneity in the types of work and the identities of people who perform them, primarily for the purpose of sustaining everyday life and

reproducing the image of ‘gatedness’. This ‘private’ space brings together groups of people from very different backgrounds to form new relationships and mutual dependencies, albeit on an uneven power terrain (homeowners, developers, and migrant workers).

The daily production of surveillance and security of this space relies on the labor of the Nepali men, while the maintenance of homes (which entails intimate access into private spaces) is made the responsibility of women from Philippines and Indonesia. Many of the migrants who work at Jaya Hills live outside the community, and commute on a daily basis, including part-time domestic maids who go here twice or more times a week. The residents of Jaya Hills often rely on informal arrangements and ‘special gifts’ to curry favors from the migrant workers – including watching over their children who are playing, walking them home at night, and so on. What this space of a gated community does is foster new relationships between people who would not normally come into contact otherwise – between the subaltern poor (migrants) and the wealthy local residents. These relationships are both formal and informal, and they are highly unequal, even though there can be instances of mutual trust and dependency.

As way of providing some concluding analysis on these multi-faceted discussion of politics of temporariness, I return to my initial question on the implications of the global shift to regimes of temporary migration on how we understand agency through their everyday experiences and practices. A limited view on migrant agency that characterizes them as purely economic 'agents' bearing the responsibility and burden of national development renders invisible the actual complexity and diversity (not to mention messiness) of migrants' capacity to adapt, co-opt and resist imposed structures of temporariness. This blindness is what potentially leads many scholars to claim that contemporary migrants are prone to 'short-term' thinking and fatalism, ultimately a consequence of their precarious situations. My ethnographic work in Malaysia instead reveals the opposite - the strength and importance of transnational networks, inter-ethnic relationships between citizens and non-citizens, and innovative strategies taken up by migrants to secure long-term stability and success. This politics of the temporary, as seen from below, is quite different from the image that is constructed within the migration and development discourse, as well as studies of neoliberal globalization.

CHAPTER 1: CONDUCTING CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH ABOUT MIGRANTS IN MALAYSIA

Introduction

> "There is no neutrality. There is only greater or less awareness of one's biases. And if you do not appreciate the force of what you're leaving out, you are not fully in command of what you're doing" (Rose 1985)

The ethnographic research that informs this dissertation began officially in the May 2011, and has been conducted in periods of 2-5 months in 2012 and 2013. However, the knowledge, experiences and lessons I have come to engage with has a much longer and older history – a very personal history of being a migrant minority in Malaysia for most of my life. By most accepted conceptions of ethnographic/anthropological debates, I have always been situated as an 'insider' studying his own culture, by virtue of sharing a language, common cultural symbols, and ways of life, with one big difference – migration as a subject for ethnographic investigation is inherently at odds with the very notion of 'insider' perspectives. This is because any attempt at understanding migration or the experiences of being a migrant will inevitably run into the problem of unpredictability, diversity, liminality and dynamism that directly challenges traditional modes of ethnography which emphasize the boundedness and situated nature of 'cultures', 'groups', 'communities' and 'societies'.

One of the primary uses of ethnography, and in particular critical ethnography, is that it allows us to develop rich empirically based critiques of categories, processes, trends, and systems that tend to be taken as objective facts or conditions. It is about addressing how our existing frames of knowledge and understanding can and do produce blind-spots and obscurations towards diverse experiences and practices. I found this to be particularly significant in research on migration and migrant communities, as mentioned in preceding chapters. An overreliance on international migration trends and remittance 'flows' result in a blurring of the richer and more complex picture in favor of a tunnel-vision that focuses on one particular aspect, producing a *depth-of-field* effect in which different people to be ignored or considered irrelevant.

This *depth-of-field* effect in migration research goes hand in hand with what Scott calls 'seeing like a state' (see chapter 2). From a top-down perspective where a particular methodological paradigm or policy orientation dominates, it become near impossible for new researchers to pay heed or even notice how the details of lived realities often contradict or challenge taken-for-granted assumptions. One really big example is in how the latest debates about growing precariousness of

migrant and other working class groups around the world is leading to greater feelings of anomie and alienation – a presumption that only exists because of this macro-view that does not allow room for understanding the growing importance of informality in the lives of people today, particularly in developing societies.

Here, the problem is in how we categorize and conceptualize people and the work they do.. As is the case for ethnographic work in general, my point of departure for this research arose from the extensive fieldwork conducted 'on the ground', so to speak. I began with a broad inquiry about what 'temporariness' implies for the everyday life experiences of migrants today, and my engagements in Malaysia with different informants and people gave rise to a rich and complex set of practices and arrangements that form the substance of this project.

This research uses a mix of ethnographic data 'types' – interviews, observations, media and press, historical accounts, various primary and secondary sources, along with my own critical reflections – to address the broad questions framing the dissertation. These are primarily qualitative forms of data. I rely on these forms of data in looking at the experiences of temporary migrants with the intention of describing and understanding a more grounded and sophisticated account of real people, not just as units within a category or class. I arrived at this project with a strong belief that the lives, subjectivities, identities and core experiences of migrants tend to be far more complicated then how they are depicted through existing narratives and discourses, such as that of 'agents of development', victims of trafficking, refugees, undocumented migrants, or 'economic migrants'. This belief is informed by my positionality – as a child of migrants with secondary citizenship status in Malaysia and as someone who has engaged and worked with temporary migrants from different places.

The title of this project, *Politics of the Temporary,* and the broad question which asks about the implications of temporariness on the lives of migrants today, is intentionally meant to highlight the complexity, dynamism, constantly fluctuating and unstable conditions that people who choose to migrate across borders in search of opportunities face. The methodology framing this research follows from that objective – a critical and reflexive transnational ethnography aimed at capturing that complexity of everyday life. In this chapter, I will explain and discuss the rationale behind the chosen methodology for this research and how this relates to my broader questions.

I will also discuss the ways in which research methodology impacts the type of 'knowledge' that is produced about migrants and migrations today, and more specifically argue for a more nuanced and complex understanding that challenges existing 'macro'- scale understandings that take many categories and problematic assumptions for granted. I frame this argument with a discussion of the significance of positionality in social research, particularly in relation to issues of access, mobility, identity, subjectivity, and privilege affecting the 'data' we collect, the way we analyze and reflect, and consequently the 'knowledge' we produce – in this case about migrants.

In the second half of this chapter, I detail the process of collecting data, including the process of identifying sites, recruiting informants, conducting interviews, writing field notes, preliminary reflections and coding procedures, followed by more detailed analyses of the data. The process of crafting a dissertation drawn from ethnographic research involves constant dialogue with the data and reflections to identify emergent themes, problems, issues and questions, all of which contribute to theory construction and subsequent discussions. I explain some of these processes and detail how the various substantive chapters were crafted, organized and written based on the multiple dialogues with the data.

The Significance of Positionality in Research – Critical Ethnography as Methodology

During the early development stage of this research project, I came to realize quickly that ethnographic methods were by far the most effective way to address the question of the everyday experiences of temporary migrants in Malaysia. This is obvious because the methods available – interviews and participant observation – offered the best ways to record and describe the minute, subtle yet significant complexities of these experiences. I wanted to show the nuances, commonalities and differences between very diverse groups of people, including restaurant workers from Bangladesh, domestic 'helpers' from Philippines and Indonesia, security workers from Nepal, international students from Africa, short term visitors from Hong Kong, Ukraine and the Middle East and, last but least, migrant sex-workers. The different informants and people whose life experiences form the empirical foundations of this research do not fit easily into any particular category of 'economic migrant', refugee, illegal, victim or agent. While the task of capturing the detailed experience of such a broad and diverse range of people is a daunting undertaking, it is nonetheless a necessary and much-needed initiative.

The 'critical' aspect of this ethnography draws upon ongoing qualitative methodological advancements that largely occur in the interstices of anthropology, sociology, media studies, and philosophy. Scholars have largely situated critical (or reflexive) ethnography as a product of a postmodernist turn in social science where a process of 'bending back' to look at ourselves through our research on others to understand the act of knowledge production becomes a central methodological and ethical concern. An important concept that reinforces critical ethnographic research is that of positionality, which pushes and encourages researchers to take into consideration different ways in which their own identities, ascribed or otherwise, may or may not have affected the research process. Taking into account the researcher's positionality means accounting for how one's race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, and other potential subjectivities (as researchers, as academics, as professionals, as employers, co-workers, etc) influence the ways in which others – especially informants – relate and engage with us, and also the ways in which we interpret and understand the information we gather.

Positionality is fundamentally an attempt to challenge further the powerful scientific impulse of obtaining objectivity, particularly with regards to knowledge production. Knowledge about societies, groups and communities have historically been subjected to the 'objective' view of the outsider – nominally the colonial ethnographer, historian, anthropologist, and others. The knowledge produced about different, seemingly contained 'cultures', nations, tribes, and groups becomes taken for granted as a 'fact' through traditional research methods. The researcher goes missing from the text – their own biases, perceptions, conflicts and emotional engagements are not part of the knowledge production, thus giving that knowledge its veneer of 'objectivity', but as many critics have shown, any knowledge that is produced about others (groups, communities, societies) is always also reflective of the researchers' own self and what they consider to be their 'own' community. Most famously, Edward Said showed how knowledge produced about Middle Eastern 'cultures', societies and peoples by European colonial endeavors was ultimately knowledge that was meant to reinforce ideologies of difference between the civilized 'West' and the traditionalistic 'Orient'.

While commonly treated as a concept emerging out of feminist perspectives on broader social scientific research, positionality has increasingly been accepted as an important and central element framing qualitative research in general. However, this is still a highly Euro-and-American-centric trend that has yet to be actively and meaningfully taken up in research on non-Western

contexts. With the exception of a handful of scholars like Aihwa Ong and Christine Chin, most of the research on Southeast and East Asian societies are still desperately in need of being 'de-colonized' in terms of the accepted methodologies and knowledge production, to use Linda Tuhiwai Smith's terms. Case in point, very little existing research actively engages and critiques notions of race, nationality and ethnicity in ways that do not immediately assume these categories as given.

Migration research, in particular, is prone to this easily assumed categories and does not take into serious account how different groups and peoples are racialized and gendered. The notions of 'Bangladeshi' workers, Philippina maids, Thai prostitutes and the rest are loaded with historically constructed racial and gendered categories made to encapsulate (or obscure) a wide and complex reality of socio-linguistic, cultural, and political contingencies. Yet, the research that informs academic and policy initiatives in these areas tend to take these categories of race, nationality and gender for granted more often than not. One of the key points of this project is to show how it is near impossible to address, describe and understand what it means to be a migrant in Malaysia today without also taking into consideration the legacy of colonially-drawn racial categories, race/ethnicity based governance and the process of racialization. How, for instance, do women from Philippines and Indonesia who come to work as domestic labor in Malaysia become situated on a racial hierarchy which ranks the former as having better 'status' over the latter?

Seemingly obvious categories blur, intermingle, and become entangled in the politics of informality that complicates and messes up the neat little pictures we have of different groups. It is a difficult and challenging aspect of research to acknowledge, as it connotes the willingness to admit how our 'data' might be skewed, narrow, biased and/or very one-sided. My own field work in Malaysia involved rather troublesome elements such as bias, nostalgia, sentimentality, sensitivities, discomfort, and others which skewed, subverted and affected my 'data' and what I am able to learn from my informants and observations. The reflexive exercise of recognizing positionality made me reflect critically on other studies on migrants (women, sex-workers, etc.) and think about several questions; what, or who, gets left out? What is the researcher not mentioning? Why is the researcher not recognizing how their own positions affected what they learned from others? It ultimately makes me question the validity of many theoretical and conceptual categories that exist (especially those of 'cosmopolitan sex workers' and 'agents of development') and realize the dangers inherent with these conceptions, in terms of marginalization of experience and lack of inclusivity.

Conducting research in Malaysia as an ethnically South Indian Male in his twenties comes with a many advantages and disadvantages. Due to the way in which ethnic, racial and religious minorities with formal Malaysian citizenship are given secondary status to that of the *bumiputera* (native), South Indian, primarily Tamil-speaking Indians in Malaysia have been historically marginalized and remain the most impoverished community in the country- we are still largely viewed as *pendatang* (migrants) who are subject to the generosity of the native Malay citizens. South Indian migrants first came to Malaya under British colonial rule to work as plantation workers on the West Coast of the Peninsular (Kaur), as was the case for my own grandparents. The second-class citizenship means that consecutive generations of Malaysian-Indian citizens have been unable to gain political and economic influence or power, and have largely been left out of national 'development' initiatives and policies which favor the politically dominant Malay elites.

For me, the experience of growing up as an Indian minority in Malaysia has meant being subjected to constant racial profiling by authorities, random acts of violence and racist insults, and being denied opportunities for education and employment on the basis of my 'race'. Partly, this experience is what motivated me to try harder to understand what it means to be a 'migrant', once I had begun my college years. Safe to say, it is my positionality that drove me to this research project, and subsequently the choice of methodology, in the first place. My ascribed identity as a migrant minority gives me a privilege of sorts of being seen as 'one of us' for some of the individuals and groups that I studied – especially mostly male 'temporary' migrant workers from Bangladesh, Nepal and India. There was often an almost brotherly rapport that was established between us on the basis that we both 'know what it's like to be a migrant'. In many cases, the men who came to work in Malaysia from these countries were quickly made aware of the strongly entrenched racial hierarchy here, and thus express empathy for the situations of Indian Malaysians. This rapport goes a long way to the openness and trust created during interviews.

There is a gendered and generational aspect to how positionality affected my research as well. In some cases when I have interviewed or engaged with migrant women from India or Sri Lanka, they would sometimes recognize me as 'one of their own', or a 'son', who should be a good role model for their own children. This instances often made interviews a lot more personal and sometimes difficult because of the emotional pressure that gets created, but it also helped me gain insight and understanding into the lives, hopes and dreams of people who are not normally seen as even capable of possessing such 'privileges' as hopes and dreams. They shared more of their own

lives and experiences with me then even what I had originally asked about – and in almost every case, they express surprised that someone would actually be interested in their stories.

What proved to be an advantage in some cases also worked as a big disadvantage in other situations - being young, Indian and male in urban Malaysia means constantly running the risk of being targeted by members of RELA (the Civilian Volunteer Corps infamous for carrying anti-immigrant raids) or the police, especially in districts that have heavy migrant presences and other public places. I was stopped by the police on numerous occasions as 'random spot-checks' and asked to show my identification. A common question that I kept being asked, especially by RELA members, was "*you PATI[2]? Ada permit/passport?"* (Are you an illegal migrant? Do you have your permit or passport?). While I never ran into any serious trouble with these enforcement groups, the experience was a constant hindrance and quickly proved to be stress-inducing. It also made me understand even further what it must be like for other migrants who are find themselves subject to those searches but do not possess my privilege of citizenship. Many of my informants, as discussed in latter chapters, describe in detail some of their encounters with RELA and the authorities and have far more disturbing experiences to speak of.

Another case where identity became a barrier to understanding is when I attempted to engage with migrant women in sex-work. Many simply refused to believe that I would be anything other than a customer, and, worse, someone who is simply trying to fool them and take advantage. In several ways, I fit the profile of the 'client' – young, well-educated, probably professional, and male. Their hesitation and refusal to accept my word, while entirely understandable, meant that I was struggling badly to secure interviews with migrant women from Vietnam, China, Thailand and Indonesia who worked in various 'massage parlors', nightclubs and red-light districts. I had significantly more luck with those who advertised their services through online portals and websites, thanks to the security of non-face to face interaction where I was better able to convince them that I was interested in their stories and not a potential customer. It is with that experience that I became immediately cognizant and grateful for the works previously done by Christine Chin on migrant sex-work in Malaysia – for the insights and experiences she was able to explore, share and discuss with regards to the complex sex-tourism complex that connects the Malaysian state's national 'branding' practices to the intricacies of sexual tourism with its various actors and networks.

[2] PATI stands for Pendatang Tanpa Izin (Visitor without permission, the Malay term for illegal immigrant)

Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater (1996), in her description of positionality in ethnographic research, suggested that the process of writing for ethnographers should include how we are positioned as 'part of the data'- our 'entrance into a community, how we present ourselves to our informants, and how we think our informants perceive us'. As my own work suggests, positionality is also important as a contextual frame that informs the rationale, motivations and choices made during the development of the project itself, especially for researchers who not only engaged with research for professional reasons. Particularly with ethnographic research aimed at learning about the lives of highly marginalized and poorly understood experiences (such as that of temporary migrants today), it is critical for researchers to be clear and upfront about how involved they are in the process of 'guiding the reader through the narratives of the Other' (Chiseri-Strater 1996). It is to this end that I hope to clarify my positionality- in terms of my own privilege, the varying levels of access I was able to have, and ultimately what was included and what was left out of this research project.

Issues of Access and Restrictions

Between June and August 2012, I spent two and a half months establishing contacts and friendships with different individuals, groups and organizations in Kuala Lumpur, all of whom had some sort of role in or engagement with migrants and migrant communities. This includes NGOs such as the Coordination of Action Research on AIDS and Mobility (CARAM) and Tenaganita, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, the Royal Malaysian Police (PDRM) and several informal migrant worker networks. This was a vital preliminary process that enabled me to gain access to informants that I would not have been able to reach otherwise. My contacts with NGO staff helped me reach out to several migrants who were in the process of leaving the country or securing more permanent statuses. Some of them were asylum seekers from Burma (Rohingya Muslims) who were trying to find work in Malaysia as their status as refugees were not recognized and they were vulnerable to arrests and deportations by the authorities.

Securing access to the different migrant communities proved to be challenging – in many cases, access was as simple and straightforward as walking into stores and restaurants and engaging in casual conversations with people, while in others, just trying to figure out where people were working was extremely difficult. The latter had much to do with how fragmented migrant workers are in Malaysia, particularly along gender and ethnic lines. Burmese Rohingya Muslims, who come to the country as a refugees, are often stuck living in special camps or shanty towns on the outskirts of

KL, while their primarily Buddhist compatriots are more visible and present as temporary workers in commercial and business districts.

Women who work as domestic helpers also happen to be divided based on where they came from – I had far more luck securing interviews with Filipina migrants then I did with Indonesian women. The former seemed to have better mobility and freedom compared to the latter, especially in terms of being allowed to leave their homes and have free time. The problem of access to migrant domestic workers was compounded by ethical restrictions that prevented me from conducting interviews with women who were not allowed to leave the homes where they were employed. Doing so would have run the risk of having privacy infringed by employers or supervisors who may have been present. This creates a frustrating dilemma as migrant women in domestic work are often the most marginalized and hidden voices – their narratives were ones that I felt would provide much needed knowledge and insight.

Migrant women, in most instances, were by far the more 'hidden' presences. Sites such as Jalan Silang and Chinatown were perfect examples of this 'behind closed doors' presence of women, as opposed to the open and public life of migrant men. The vendors and cleaners working outside were overwhelmingly male, with women (Thai, Indonesian, Chinese, and Vietnamese) often worked 'from the shadows', so to speak – from stairways between shop-lots and darkened rooms at the back of stores. It did not matter if they were cleaners, cooks, masseurs or sex-workers – there always was an intermediary male authority figure that tended to intervene and speak for the women, in most cases refusing point blank to allow them to be interviewed even though many were formally employed. The risks were clear – many women had their freedoms curtailed by the fact that they had their passports withheld by employers, and in some cases were physically forced to stay indoors.

The women I did secure interviews with tended to be out on their own volition, either working as independent vendors or having the day off to spend with friends at church. Of the first group, I was able to make contact by spending time at some of the stalls and markets around Chinatown – there were young women who worked as sales representatives and vendors for mobile phones and prepaid top-up cards. Many of them were working informally and had left their original employments for various reasons. They were independent, for the most part, even though some were running the risk of being harassed by police or RELA officers. I was also able to gain

interviews with mostly Filipina women at three different Catholic churches which held services specifically for migrant communities.

There were also issues related to access when it came to finding and speaking with informal sector workers. Again, this was largely influenced by the type of work and the gender of the workers. It was far easier to meet and speak with Bangladeshi and Nepali men who worked as street vendors around KL's bustling commercial areas, as well as the numerous restaurant workers. However, women working in the sex and escort services were much harder to reach – ironic as their presence was quite visible in daily life even in busy districts. The difficulty again lay in the presence of intermediaries and middle-men, who would be constantly surveying the women. I secured several interviews with women who were or had been sex-workers through two NGOs dealing with women's and migrants rights, while another handful were women from Hong Kong, Philippines and Iran who were advertising their services as independent 'freelancers' on websites such as Craigslist.

Language was often a barrier to communication, though the sheer necessity of speaking or knowing some Malay or English in order to work meant that I was able to have conversations with different migrants relatively easily. Those who were new in Malaysia and did not speak the local languages tended to stick close with compatriots or fellow-workers who were more experienced. I had trouble interviewing Burmese migrants who worked at a few local restaurants as cooks – they were the ones relegated to the kitchens and were not as visible as other workers (Bangladeshi or Indian). They were less likely to be able to speak or understand Malay, though most could converse in broken English.

The Rationale of the Research

An ethnography of the politics of temporariness is meant to provide richly detailed accounts of migrant experiences, practices and narratives. The methods of field observation and in-depth interviews both work to describe in detail the daily life of people who work and live under structurally precarious and uncertain conditions – experiences that of often lost or ignored by the mainstream. The ethnographic methods also enables an understanding of how the practices, decisions and choices people make every day represent or can represent forms of agency under structural and institutional constraints that do not always take the form of protests or mass mobilizations. A grounded politics examined in this way, through daily interactions and engagements with different people, is also the only effective way to observe, learn and write about the importance

of informality in the lives of urban subaltern communities living with so much uncertainty and vulnerability.

This ethnographic project also allows us to bring a discussion of 'diversity' into a much larger picture of transnational migration – not as some sort of free-flowing 'global' coming together of various cultures and peoples in a liberalized space, but as reconfigurations of national, racial, ethnic and linguistic borders and hierarchies. New networks of temporary labor migration, fragmented along those lines, are not just a side-effect of neoliberal globalization but a core structural component that is part of what Tsing (2009) calls supply chain capitalism. It is virtually impossible to identify and see how this 'diversity' works as a crucial component of global production from a macro-perspective – how postcolonial racial legacies of different nation-states blend with new global labor markets to co-produce new racialized identities through fragmentation and diversification of migrants. A grounded perspective not only reveals the sheer diversity, informality and complexity of migrant life under contemporary globalization, but it also enables us to look beyond narratives of total exploitation that tend to emerge out of more top-down analysis.

Description of Field Experience/Methods

My first visits to Malaysia were in 2011 and 2012, between the months of June and August. I conducted preliminary work during these visits, which included establishing contacts with local organizations and groups, making excursions to different parts of Kuala Lumpur and Georgetown in order to identify potential sites for observations, and making contacts among possible informants. I was able to establish contacts with several staff members working for CARAM Asia and Tenaganita – two non-governmental organizations whose advocacy work were directed towards migrants' rights and women's rights – during those visits. Additionally, I was able to get in touch with the managing office of Central Market (Pasar Budaya) in KL, to secure permission to conduct observations at that particular site.

In 2012, I visited about 54 different establishments, mostly restaurants, stores, markets and cafes that predominantly employed temporary migrant workers. Of these, I selected 30 as field sites for further observation and recruitment purposes. My initial observations were non-participatory and purely as a passive observer, although I did manage to establish informal contacts with some of the workers and managers. My preliminary field work experience provided a good preparation for the full research carried out in the second half of 2013. I was able to get an idea of the need to find

and navigate different avenues in order to reach out to different migrants and their communities – partly by the realization of how the different fragmented groups were either visible or invisible in the public sphere.

Upon the start of the full field research in Kuala Lumpur, I began making daily visits to the various establishments initially identified, among which were privately owned and run street cafes, *mamak* stalls, local chain restaurants, multi-national franchises and chains (usually coffee and fast food establishments), and public markets. I spent four to five hours daily at each site on average, alternating the time of day when I would visit. For example, I would visit the same restaurant or café in the afternoon on some days and also late at night on others. During these visits to individual establishments, I would mostly be there as a customer, recording observations, carrying out casual conversations with the staff, and seeing what their routines were like. For 7 of these establishments, I was able to secure the permissions of the manager to conduct more engaged observations – which meant having relatively free access to different parts of the restaurant, store or café. I was able to observe and engage with workers while they were in the kitchens, backrooms and, on several occasions, when they would return to their living spaces (which tend to be above the restaurants themselves).

For larger sites such as the Chinatown district, Jalan Silang, and two red-light districts, my visits usually involved spending between two to four hours walking and observing the daily routine activities of people in very public spaces. These were districts where a lot of economic and social activities were conducted outdoors – on the streets, alleys, and sidewalks – and primarily by migrants. In the case of Chinatown, I made visits twice every week for four months, at various times of the day, to conduct observations, talk to different people, and ask for interviews. I also spent several nights, between the hours of midnight and 3 am, observing and speaking with the migrant contract workers tasked with cleaning up the streets of the Chinatown market areas – mostly Bangladeshi men. I spent three weeks carrying out similar observational and interview research in the city of Georgetown on Penang Island.

Aside from those mentioned above, I also spent two weeks each in the districts of Little India (Brickfields) and an expensive, high-end gated residential neighborhood called Jaya Hills. Brickfields is one of the older districts in KL that, like Chinatown, has also undergone massive changes and redevelopments in recent years – it is located close to KL Sentral, the city's brand new

mass transit and rail hub, and surrounded by new and expensive luxury high rises. Little India itself still maintains its Malaysian-Indian character, but has also become a major center for migrant activity and presence. The gated community, Jaya Hills, is located in one of KL's suburbs, about 30 minutes from the city center. It is a newly built and completed private neighborhood that is marketed as a highly secure and luxurious enclosed space. I visited Jaya Hills on the advice of one my informants, a part-time domestic helper from the Philippines, who suggested that I would be able to find different temporary migrant workers there. At Jaya Hills, I was able to observe, meet and conduct interviews with Nepali men working as security guards, Indonesian construction workers and several Filipina women working as part-time maids.

The recruitment strategies for this project involved a mix of formal and informal methods. For migrants who would be more difficult to seek out, I approached my contacts at local NGOs for assistance, and I was able to arrange interviews with some migrants who visited these offices. In most cases, securing interviews was fairly straightforward – I would be able to ask different workers in person while visiting their places of work or stores, as well as the more public areas. In the more specialized situations such as the gated community, I inquired with the developers' office before gaining access to the neighborhood, wherein I was able to obtain a visitor's pass to enter and leave.

My informants are from very different and diverse backgrounds – they include Bangladeshi men working in food and cleaning services, Nepali men in security, Indonesian men in construction and food services, Indian men working in restaurants, Thai women in food service, Filipina and Indian women in domestic work, Burmese men and women in various sectors, Nigerian and Ghanaian international students, Hong Kong migrants (of both genders) working as informal vendors and sales representatives, and Iranian women working as social escorts. I also conducted interviews with two police officers and chiefs from one of the main KL branches of the Polis Di-Raja Malaysia (Royal Malaysian Police, PDRM), immigration officials, five business owners who employed migrant workers, homeowners and residents who employed domestic workers, and private foreign worker recruitment agents.

Full in-depth interviews and follow up interviews with participants were conducted during their free time or off-hours, outside of their workplace. In many cases, this had to be arranged days in advance because of the lack of time on the part of the workers, who most often had at least 10 or 12 hours of work every day. A vast majority of my informants refused to have their interviews audio

recorded, so for the most part, I relied on a combination of written notes and memory to construct the interview transcripts. In total I conducted 42 full interviews and follow ups, though the number of informal conversations and casual engagements included more than a hundred people.

The selection process for the interviews involved identifying migrants who were in the country in some sort of temporary capacity to work and make a living. The different categories encompassed by 'temporary' – foreign worker, foreign domestic helper, short term visitor, international student, or 'illegal' – made selection complicated on occasions, as I did not want to inquire about individual participants legal status. In many cases, this information would be offered freely by participant who were keen on highlighting their legal presence. All informants were asked for their voluntary participation in the interview process. I selected individual participants who were able to share their stories and experiences living and working as temporary migrants in Malaysia.

My objectives with the interviews were two-fold – I wanted to collect and document rich and detailed narratives from the standpoints of migrants themselves, but also wanted to reach out to as diverse a group of temporary migrants as possible within the reasonable boundaries of this research. A similar double objective applied to my selection of field sites for observational research. To achieve this second objective with interview subjects, I had to visit very different neighborhoods and districts, and often take a few risks in terms of safety in visiting red-light districts and crime-prone areas of the city – these proved invaluable as I was able to learn about the work of night-time street cleaners and migrant sex-workers. Institutional Review Board restrictions meant that I was not able to conduct formal interviews with many migrants and potential participants because of their vulnerable conditions, but their experiences and the spaces they worked in are incorporated anonymously in my ethnographic field notes.

Data Analysis Process

The data collected in this study consisted of ethnographic field notes, interview transcripts, archival notes, clips, and some photography of public spaces. I used a number of different means of collecting, indexing and analyzing the data. Most of my ethnographic notes were recorded in hand-written notes that were converted digitally into a note-taking software. This software incorporates an automatic time and date indexing function, and also allows for quick search functions to scan through all the notes. I created separate files of interview transcripts, ensuring that everything was recorded without identifying information to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of participants.

Again, these were compiled in the same note software and indexed by date and time. The program also allows me to clip links, newspaper articles, columns and photos efficiently by tagging their date of production and access, and website addresses.

I began my data analysis process in December 2014, towards the end of my field research period. This began with a basic coding process of my notes to identify a broad framework of major issues and themes. This initial process also encompassed a series of personal reflection essays written while on fieldwork which I had published as a blog. I was able to narrow down the key themes through this initial analysis, and proceeded to do more in-depth coding of the data over a period of 5 months between January and May 2014. The note-taking software I used for this purpose allowed me to create different coding schemes for the same set of notes, which allowed me to cross-identify, aggregate and compile key data points under different 'themes'. Repeated runs through these notes using the different schemes helped me arrive at potential areas to present and discuss as chapters. This is how I developed chapters on urban reproduction in Chinatown, the role of migrants in cultural reproduction, mobility and informality, as well as work in a gated community.

Each theme emerged from the analysis of the data, and were not constructed or developed before-hand. Part of the reasoning behind this approach was to highlight and emphasize what issues were especially important from the perspective of migrants in the daily life – what is the significance of having spaces like Chinatown for migrants seeking a living and some form of community? What informal arrangements and relationships are necessary for helping migrants find some way to live their lives with dignity and stability? Both the major chapter-defining themes and the smaller sub-themes are identified and developed with this rationale.

Taking the above into consideration, deciding what was 'important' and what was not, at least in terms of this dissertation, was a difficult and conflicted and at times uncomfortable experience for me. This particular work leaves out some very big elements – I do not, for one, discuss much about the complexities of the sex-tourism sector that involves many different migrant women. I arrived at this decision because the space and sensitivity required for that issue requires more space and consideration that could reasonably be provided here. It is also an area that requires far more work that I was able to devote during my field research period. However, I have tried to include the narratives and experiences of individual sex-workers, especially independent 'freelancers' whose experiences illuminates the discussions on mobility of people and information.

In the substantive chapters (4-7), I present my research findings and analysis organized thematically. Each chapter presents different aspects of the politics of temporary migrant life, focusing on different spaces, different identities, different communities and different sectors. Each of these chapters engage with different theoretical and conceptual issues that are particularly relevant to the themes and findings being presented, whether it is about urban transformations, the concept of informality and citizenship, or the concept of the 'gated community.'

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION SCHOLARSHIP

Introduction

While migration-related studies and research has exploded along with the massive growth of transnational migration in the past two decades, we are currently experiencing a major trend within the literature where large amounts of focus, funding and interest is being channeled towards investigating and assessing the developmental impacts of migration on sending countries (a.k.a 'countries of origin'). Despite the sheer numbers and percentages that make up contemporary migration (over 1 billion people who migrate and over $400 billion in remittance flows to developing countries in 2012, according to the World Bank), migration is still largely seen as a peripheral phenomenon that takes place within the context of nations and nation-states, and with little or insignificant impact upon the transformations and changes that these states, cities, societies and places undergo due in part to migration. What today's migrants experience, how they live and ways in which they seek out opportunities in their so-called 'host societies' is marginalized within policy and academic circles primarily oriented towards understanding the impact and value of remittances on the developments of places of origin (Raghuram 2009, Muniandy and Bonatti 2014).

At the same time, migration continues to grow and diversify as demands for cheap, flexible and mobile labor in fast-developing countries increase. These demands are not restricted to any particular form of occupation, but there are multiple shared characteristics that have been identified by previous research. One of the most urgent aspects of contemporary labor or 'economic' migration has been the trend towards increasingly precarious[3] forms of work and living that people are subjected to by virtue of lacking formal rights and having their status as citizens curtailed by their new status as 'temporary' or 'guest' workers. Growing precariousness of work, especially among those groups of migrants who are stuck with indentured contracts and debt bondage that tie to them to agents and recruitment services, is part and parcel of private, national and international practices and regimes that seek to ensure the supply of cheap and flexible labor is maintained. Qatar's 2022 FIFA World Cup is currently being built on the backs and quite literally upon the bodies of poor migrant workers from Nepal and Bangladesh[4].

[3] Standing 2011
[4] http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2013/sep/26/qatar-world-cup-migrant-workers-dead

Yet, precariousness is only one side of the story of contemporary migration. States such as Qatar, Malaysia and Singapore (to name a few) have set in place immigration policies and laws that regulate international migration in a largely stratified and 'securitized' manner, in order to control the flows of people who come into these countries in search of work and opportunities. In theory, at least, such 'Managed Migration' regimes are meant to improve security of borders as well as ensure that migration does not go spiral out of control – and thus lead to concerns over uncontrollable waves of illegal and undocumented migration that make up the fearful national imagination of some nations. In actual fact, national laws and policies act mostly as smokescreens that obscure actual realities of migration and economic demands. Taking the Malaysian state as an example, the Immigration Act that presumably governs and regulated migration, serves largely as an enabling facilitator for the interests of the national state's international investment and development interests (Malaysian Investment and Development Authority, MIDA).

The impacts and transformations that migrant populations and groups have on the 'host' societies is an area that is still largely hidden from the purview of migration research. It is most certainly not an area that has received any attention in international policy circles, with organizations such as the IOM and World Bank far keener on the developments impacts of migration on origin countries. Migrants live and work in cities, not just in the North, but also increasingly in countries located outside the traditional 'center' or 'metropole'. New destinations such as Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Delhi, Mumbai, Shanghai, Qatar, Dubai and others are becoming powerful magnets for those seeking opportunities for better work, better livelihoods and, generally speaking, a better 'life', though whether they find these opportunities or not is another question. What is it about these new cities, many of which express ambitions to be regarded as 'world' or 'global' cities that makes them so attractive to migrants?

Transformations and rapid development is the most prominent feature of these cities of the Global South. Kuala Lumpur, for example, has seen massive infrastructural and financial growth in various parts of the city, most visibly in new 'satellite' urban developments and gated communities that are mushrooming around the city center. Property development, both corporate and residential, is a big business, as seen by the success of firms like Setia and Berjaya (whose CEO is also the new owner of an English Premier League Football club). The success and prosperity derived from property and real estate development in urban areas is highly reliant upon the availability of extremely cheap

and flexible labor, provided by masses of 'temporary' migrants from Bangladesh, Indonesia, Nepal, and Myanmar. It is quite a common sight to move around both city centers and other 'peripheral' parts of KL and see constructions sites (buildings, road works, piping, etc.) primarily occupied by male migrants from these countries, alongside rich commercial avenues trafficked by wealthy cosmopolitan elites, red-light districts frequented by tourists and other informal settlements. Woven through these diverse but interconnected spheres is a type of 'cityness'[5] that is encapsulated by the experiences and work of migrants, an effervescent, always-there-but-taken-for-granted presence which makes the work of producing the 'urban' possible.

Outline of Literature Review

In the following chapter, I highlight the key areas of interest which speak to the question of contemporary migration in the developing world. From a migration research perspective, it would be impossible to ignore the biggest elephant in the room – the Migration-Development Nexus and its impact on how scholars, researchers and policy-makers have come to undertake research initiatives, formulate policies and research instruments. In particular, I highlight the main debates surrounding migrants' 'agency' in light of the MDN paradigm which currently dominates, looking at both proponents and critics of the discourse. The Migration-Development Nexus produces several 'blind-spots' for analytical and critical inquiry, especially with regards to the experiences of migrants in their host societies and the impacts that they have on rapidly growing cities of the Global South. These blind-spots also extend to the fact that current migration scholarship, under the MDN paradigm, tend to ignore or marginalize the important roles of different groups of migrants, such as micro-entrepreneurs and sex-workers.

The field of transnational studies has been one in which these debates are most prominent. I turn to a consideration and discussion of scholarly contributions by several key transnational scholars such as Nina Glick-Schiller, Peggy Levitt, Thomas Faist, and Ayse Caglar, among others, who have raised the importance of developing new analytical frameworks and methodologies that move beyond nationally bounded categories to better understand the cross-border and 'transnational' practices, flows, networks, and fields that characterize migration. Along with the globalization of neoliberal forms of temporary 'managed migration' regimes comes increasingly circular, impermanent and precarious forms of mobility which cannot entirely be treated as inter-national or cross-border

[5] Simone (2009)

processes. Other contexts, spaces, issues and problems that cannot be reduced to that of a nation – such as the central importance of so-called 'global' cities and emerging networks of diaspora communities – require new conceptual and analytical frameworks in order to be examined.

The second section of this chapter delves into the scholarship in another key area of interest – cities and urban life. Here, I look at how various scholars have identified and discussed migration and migrants with regards to urban transformation. In particular, I draw upon some of the works on 'global cities' and neoliberal transformation of the urban in order to highlight ways in which global processes alongside local practices are able to bring about dramatic changes to many cities of the South. Migrants are largely treated as being one part of these transformations, though rarely as key agents or actors, as scholars tend to locate migrants as neoliberal subjects who are peripheral in the context of the city. More recent scholarship, such as the work of Caglar and Glick-Schiller (2012) on migration and cities, highlight the central role of migration and migrants in urban transformation. Migrants are seen as important agents who engage in various activities and practices that have significant implications for urban restructuring.

In the final section of the chapter, I present a conceptual framework drawn and synthesized from this various interest areas that inform my own study of migrants in urban Malaysia. This framework builds upon important work done in urban studies and urban social movements' literatures that focus on micro-practices, place-making work, informal citizenship and right-to-the-city practices of the urban poor. Migrants are an important and significant proportion of urban Malaysia, in cities like Kuala Lumpur and Penang, even if they are formally recognized as 'temporary' or 'short–term'. The conceptual framework I introduce engages with notions of migrant agency, citizenship, urban politics and the implications of 'temporariness', among others, as potential theoretical and analytical lenses through which the experiences of poor migrants in Malaysia can be looked at.

Blind-spots of Migration Studies

Thomas Faist (2008), in his critique of the Migration-Development Nexus, identified three key elements that characterized the paradigm. The first has to do with the act of naming migrants as 'development agents', largely thanks to the potential contributions that they are able to make through their remittances. The second element is the re-identification of communities as a 'supplemental' actor to the market and the state, a process that is largely in-line with neoliberalization of societies. Lastly, the MDN paradigm shifts attention to migrant 'collectives' (networks, diasporas, home-town

associations, etc.) largely within the context of emigration states. Historical 'phases' of the MDN since the 1960s coupled with failures of 'developmental' projects since then have been a major reason for this shift towards migration as a potential 'enabler' of development (Akerman-Borje 2013).

Faist (2008) highlights that one of impacts of the MDN paradigm has been a more favorable, if not outright encouraging, approach towards temporary labor migration regimes, which are undertaken by both sending and receiving states. Temporary migration, or 'circulatory migration', is about sustaining short-term visits and impermanent residences for migrants, in order to ensure their continued 'transmission of remittances' (GCIM 2005). Temporary migration, in other words, becomes desirable for the purposes of 'development', though this aspect of the project is rarely ever emphasized by international organizations such as the IOM or World Bank. Rather, TLM is largely left to the purview of states that are keen on achieving stronger 'managed migration' policies which enable sophisticated and primarily economy-oriented regulation of labor migration (Hugo 2009, Faist 2008). As one major consequence of this approach, we run ever closer to the treatment of migrants not as 'agents' but as 'commodities' to be traded and exchanged (Leighton 2013).

The MDN paradigm produces an implicit hierarchy of migrants, ranging from those who are deemed favorable and dependable to those who are unwanted or ignored. Some migrant are made completely invisible as well, such as sex-workers and students (Raghuram 2009, Agustin 2007). Women, for example, are being increasingly pushed to the center of the migration-development nexus as the model development agent, due to their 'reliability and sense of responsibility' (World Bank, IOM). Women from poorer countries of the South are considered ideal 'agents' of development as they are more likely to send home remittances regularly and maintain the ties to the home communities (World Bank, IOM). However, the other side of this coin is the creation of what Arlie Hochschild (2000) refers to as a global care chain, based on Parrenas' notion of an international division of reproductive labor. In this care chain, migrant women become implicated within a network of care-giving which connects families in the Global North to those in poorer, rural areas of the South. Women's participation in labor migration has been growing rapidly, particularly from states that have placed a lot of interest in exporting their citizens as care-givers – nurses, baby-sitters, cleaners, and domestic workers. States such as Philippines go as far as claiming the role as 'labor brokers' while championing local women as national 'heroes' for their migration (Rodriguez 2008). The global care chain implies an oft-hidden reality of globalization – the deprivation of care and love from poorer communities from where many migrant women come from (Hocschild 2000).

The migration of women from poorer neighboring countries to Malaysia is regulated by the very stringent national Immigration Act which determines the sectors that women are allowed to be employed in, based on their nationality. Filippinas and Indonesian women are primarily employed as domestic labor (Chin 2009), although they are not formally recognized as 'workers'. Instead, these women are classified as 'foreign domestic helpers' in order to prevent any legal access to unionization or mobilization. Migrant women who work as domestic labor in Malaysia are subject to severe curtailment of basic rights and protections, such as the right to leave their jobs or even the right to leave the home of their employers. They are also victims of a social 'hierarchization' of migrant domestic labor, in which some groups are viewed as more preferable on the basis of nationality. Filippina women, for example, are considered to be 'better' domestic helpers, or maids, then Indonesians, which results in a bizarre use of these women as status symbols among local Malaysian employers. Unionization or any form of collective action remains marginal and rare for these groups, yet their role as 'national heroes' of their home countries and as agents of development somehow obscures their actual experiences, the sacrifices and compromises they have had to make, or even their labor for that matter.

Women's experiences as migrants make up a troublingly large blind-spot in the research, at least those that are focused on the developing world. Certainly, the valorization of women as agents within policy circles and international organizations does not seem to result in a more nuanced or grounded approach to understanding and exploring their roles, experiences and practices. Initiatives that are undertaken tend to fall to those researchers engaged in critical studies and ethnographies of peoples' lives from outside mainstream academic and policy-circles, such as the works of Christine Chin on domestic workers in Malaysia (what she terms 'indentured servitude', Laura Maria Agustin on migrant sex-workers, and Lenore Lyons on transnational migrant women grassroots organizations in Southeast Asia. A similar condition also exists for other groups of migrants who end up 'invisibilized' by the MDN paradigm, to use Parvathi Raghuram's (2009) term, such as micro-vendors and student-entrepreneurs who travel to new destinations in search of opportunities.

The Migration Development Nexus[6]

Research on migration as a macro-scale process covers issues of public policy, human rights, social justice, NGOs and transnational advocacy networks; scholarship focusing primarily on migrants incorporates various analytical categories, such as temporary workers, traders, entrepreneurs, expatriates, asylum seekers, diaspora communities, refugees, as well as non-human elements such as remittances. Even within the context of a single nation-state, issues of migration tend to engage with a very 'complex and unwieldy reality' (Geiger and Pecoud, 2013): as complexity makes high level governance difficult, national and transnational institutions are constantly in need for new technologies that enable standardization (Scott 1998). In order for migration to be a 'key driver of development', migration needs to be 'mainstreamed into development policies, with the ultimate goal of including migration in broader national development' (GFMD 2013).

'Mainstreaming' migration has largely entailed identifying how best to measure and maximize the economic developmental contributions of migrants: over the past decades, remittances have become a key instrument in this process. Remittance contributions today are far more than that of foreign investment and foreign aid for many developing countries. While unequal development appears as a central, though hardly unique, factor in generating labour migration flows towards wealthier regions, the role of remittance-driven economic growth in sending countries remains contested: on the one hand, Neoclassical migration theory postulates that decreasing inequality will reduce migration flows (Massey, 2012); on the other, the new economics of migration indicate that the demand for remittances in sending communities does not decrease linearly, nor gradually, with local development (Nyberg-Sørensen et al, 2003). Nonetheless, this has not tempered the belief in the 'huge potential' of migration for 'development' (UN System Task Team 2013).

The market driven need for labor migration at the level of immigrant destinations, coupled with the demand for remittances in sending regions has brought various stakeholders in the migration debate to assume that the MDN produces spontaneous and mutually beneficial relationship between regions. Advocates of this approach, such as the IOM and GFMD, highlight several advantages of a remittance-driven, rather than aid-driven development: these include the greater monetary value of remittances compared to foreign aid and the fact that remittances can potentially reach directly the

[6] This section was co-authored with Valeria Bonatti, and is derived from an earlier publication (Muniandy and Bonatti 2014)

poorer strata of the population (Nyberg-Sørensen et al, 2003; GFMD 2013; Borje 2013) as well as providing great contributions to the private and public sectors (Khadria, 2008). As remittance-senders, migrants appear in this literature as active participants to development processes in their home countries. Furthermore, proponents of the MDN, be it scholars or supranational institutions, understand this relationship to be mutually beneficial and empowering (GFMD 2013; Borje 2013).

Critiques of the MDN as mutually beneficial to developing and developed regions highlight three major flaws in the literature: 1. the assumption that migrant sending and receiving countries enjoy equal power relationships (Geiger and Pecoud 2013), 2. Broad concepts such as "migration" and "development" are used in vague terms (Raghuram 2009), and 3. Its engagement with the development scholarship is disproportionate compared to the consequences of neoliberal capitalism on global migrant labour exploitation. The latter two tendencies underlie a political interest in bringing migration and its governance closer to the policy and advocacy arena, and away from activism and social movements - an objective that is effectively achieved by subsuming migration as an enabler of development (Skeldon, 2008; Piper 2009; UN System Task Team 2013).

Geiger and Pecoud (2013) denounce a number of 'implicit assumptions' and 'hidden shortcomings' wrought by the migration-development paradigm: among these, the authors cite ignorance of history and ignorance of empirical evidence as two fundamental examples. The authors also highlight that despite the fervour that actors engaged in the migration-development debates show for the 'new' alternatives to the problem of development, policies relying on migration in order to 'trigger' development are not in any way a new phenomenon – the critique of the development apparatus as being a cultural and discursive construction can be traced to Escobar's work, *Encountering Development* (1995). According to Geiger and Pecoud (2013), however, the biggest 'blind-spot' of the migration development nexus is the actual global inequality which transforms development into a 'convenient umbrella' or policy instrument that justifies and facilitates developed states' interference with the political strategies of less wealthy regions.

Parvati Raghuram (2009) situates her critique of the migration-development nexus within the broader framework of circular migration and the misplaced emphasis on migrants' agency in promoting development through monetary remittances and social capital acquired abroad. Specifically, she highlights how the notion of agency that such studies attribute to migrants takes focuses predominantly on macro-level processes that they participate in and largely ignores migrants' own concerns and interests (Raghuram 2009; also Geiger and Piper, 2007). The kind of agency that

advocates of the MDN refer to is in fact closer to Bruno Latour's notion of actancy, i.e. the behaviours that social actors are induced to display when they are enrolled in a particular network of relationships. Becoming enrolled in a migration-development network positions migrants as active agents regardless of their actual empowerment, while in fact the agency that they display is delimited to their role in development (whether it be economic or social or political). This kind of agency is determined and measured via sets of 'calculative processes' that monetary remittances render easy to calculate. By focusing on remittances, the migration-development machinery renders temporary labor and high skilled migration paradigmatic while rendering others invisible: Raghuram (2009) and Augustin (2010) provide a poignant example of this phenomenon by citing how migrant sex workers are virtually missing from any discussion of migration and development.

The Political Economy of Remittances

Global flows of remittances in monetary terms continue to increase at a strong positive rate, according to World Bank reports. Money remittance is one type of remittance that, broadly defined, includes a variety of resources (social, cultural, economic and political) that migrants living in 'host' countries repatriate to their homes for investment, savings, development or debt-repayment purposes (Kunz 2011, Levitt, Faist 2008). There have been wide-spread debates since the late 1980s about what exactly the effects of remittances are on home countries, national development and the global economy, though little consensus has been reached about these issues, unsurprisingly. One thing that most scholars agree on, however, is that remittance is very much a growing economy, one that will only continue to expand (Kunz 2011, Mohapatra, Ratha and Silwal 2013, Hugo 2012). In 2012 alone, the estimated total global flow of remittances was reported by the World Bank to be USD 510 billion, with USD 401 billion going to developing countries. World Bank estimates put the forecasted annual growth of remittances at 8.8% between 2013 and 2015. Never has the remittances economy been more important to those seeking to govern and manage migration for development at a global scale.

In 1985, Stark and Bloom highlighted what they called a 'new economy of labor migration', within which migration was categorized as a 'distinct labor market phenomenon.' This identification of a labor migration as a 'market phenomenon' is important as it implies that migration has now become a primarily economic concern. Labor migration, in particular, is increasingly framed in terms of economic necessities and choices, and in order to support that discourse, a new evaluative device

for assessing this market becomes necessary. The remittance economy is one such political device[7] fabricated in order to help with this political process of treating labor migration as a market. For researchers, this meant developing new tools for measuring international remittance flows, new metrics and instruments that are capable of empirically operationalizing 'remittance', i.e. reducing it into purely monetary terms. This allowed remittances to be measured in terms of international monetary transfers, as portions of savings by migrants and their communities, as components of national GDPs, and as 'graph-able' data for visual exposition at policy-forums.

The remittance economy, in other words, made 'managed migration' possible. Timothy Mitchell's (2002) definition of 'political economy'[8] as the 'proper governing of a polity' is instructive here in addressing the growth of scholarship and policy-advocacy strongly emphasizing the need to 'manage' migration, by virtue of enabling and regulating efficient flow of remittances. Remittances become a policy problem in need of effective administrative management rather than a political issue, through infrastructural investment in the banking sector and facilitation of formal migration channels (Hugo 2012, Ratha et al 2010). The measurement and evaluation of global remittance flows in the form of reports, databases (such as the Remittance Prices Worldwide Database of the World Bank) and policy briefs allow new strategies and practices to emerge with regards to migration. A good example of this is how some states like Brazil and El Salvador have developed 'innovative financing mechanisms' built upon the securitization of future flows of remittances in order to secure funding (Mohapatra, Ratha and Silwal 2010).

Temporary labor migration policies are increasingly being adopted and implemented in various sending and receiving countries, enabling the emergence of 'managed migration' as a new paradigm in global migration governance (Hugo 2012, Kunz 2012, Brown 2011, Betts 2011, Lindley 2011). Immigration scholars began paying greater attention to global remittances in the late 80s, by which time pioneering states such as the Philippines were already well on the way to implementing TLM as part of their official immigration policy on the basis of using remittances to bolster national

[7] A device in this sense may be similar to Latour's concept of inscription devices, which are made to produce new entities or discoveries out of their analyses (i.e. 'remittances' used to produce TLM regimes) or as Maares' concept of political device.

[8] Political economy, with regards to moral philosophy, is broadly synonymous with economics and state governance national production and distribution. Of concern here is the processes and practices through which certain 'fields' or areas become identified as components of an economy, and are thus made governable by experts (Mitchell 2002)

development (Gonzalez 1998). The research on remittances, however, began to provide greater political legitimacy to the adoption of TLM by other states and regions, including Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and the Middle East. The other side of the coin is the adoption of official guest worker/temporary labor/circular migration regimes by rapidly states like UAE, Singapore, and Malaysia (McGahan 2008, Chin 2009, Syed 2011). These regimes are of similar models but carry different names; in parts of the Middle East the infamous *kafala*[9] system of private recruitment is very similar to the practices of foreign domestic worker recruitment in Malaysia, a system where employers are regarded as sponsors who may effectively hold on to documentations and exercise near-total control over migrant workers. How models of TLM are translated by different state ministries, departments and offices is an important question that needs exploring.

Margaret Somers (2005), in her analysis of 'social capital' as a swiftly emerging dominant concept in social sciences, asks a similar question concerning the 'needs' that are fulfilled and roles that are performed by having a prevalent theory of social capital. There are several compelling parallels between the emergence of the new economy of remittances and that of social capital. Somers (2005) questions the inherent contradiction and impossibility of the concept of social capital, as well as the detrimental effects that it has on narrowing the 'conceptual-space' available for alternative theories and frameworks because of its sudden prominence. Social capital, according to Somers, is a combination of a fundamentally anti-sociological (or anti-relational) and utilitarian view of people as individual agents within the logic of the market. The concept acts as a 'trojan horse', a means for economists, neoliberals and neo-utilitarians to appease sociologists who have long demanded the 'social' to be considered as integral components in the production of economic value. Social capital then becomes seen as a solution to the problem of 'externalities' and non-market transaction costs which economics have long ignored. However, Somers argues that, far from being truly sociological, social capital actually cordons off the epistemological space for the inclusion of the relational and social aspects of society. As capital can only exist as 'property', social capital takes as its basic logic that of methodological individualism, treating people as rationally acting agents whose capacity for creating economic value is aided by their agency within their social networks. This view inevitably

[9] Comparing the systems of labor migration is not intended to treat them as exclusive and separate nationally bounded practices, but as an illustration of how similar practices travel and emerge in different geo-political contexts. For detail studies of the *kafala* system, please refer to Pande (2012).

reduces networks, relationships, indeed the very notion of social, to the logics of the market and economic instrumentalism.

Somers further argues that regardless of the various contested definitions of 'social capital' proliferated by policy-makers, sociologists, economists, the World Bank, civil-society advocates, liberals and neoconservatives, it is the widespread and whole-hearted adoption of the term that poses greater issues for social research. We risk inadvertently colluding with the neoliberal project of appropriating, domesticating, transforming and evacuating the 'social' from political knowledge. Social capital becomes a powerful tool to successfully marketize and privatize the social. We can take a similarly critical view of the widespread dominance of 'remittances' in migration and development literature. Remittances, for one thing, is closely related to the concept of social capital – migration theorists focused on the issue of assimilation have long emphasized the importance of social capital (loosely defined; the economic value co-produced by social relations and networks) in determining a migrant's successful integration into the host society (or economy, to be precise) (Portes, Guarnizo and Haller 2002). It is not very surprising that the rise to prominence of 'social capital' as a concept coincided with greater attention to the remittances economy.

The World Bank in particular has played a strong role in pushing both social capital and remittances into the spotlight. Like social capital, the economistic/political economy view of remittances is founded on a methodological individualism that atomizes migrants as agents of development, turning the complex networks of constraints, sociality and diverse practices involved in migration into rational and instrumental economic choices individual people make. This is a response to the 'problem' of unpredictable economic externalities and transaction costs that cannot be measured in market terms. These 'externalities', in the case of the remittance economy, include the informal networks of relationships, infrastructures, and 'gateways', human and non-human actors that affect economic and financial exchanges across borders. Economists and developmental actors see the need to 'clean' up these market externalities, which can only be possible once the 'market', or 'market phenomenon', itself is 'made true' as an autonomous sphere for management.

The Problems of seeing like a State

James C. Scott (1998 & 2010) describes how the act of 'making legible' complex and unwieldy practices, processes, and phenomena provides one perspective through which we can examine the

migration-development nexus. While similar to the way authors like Geiger and Pecoud (2013), Nicola Piper (2009), Parvathi Raghuram (2009) and others discuss the problems of developmentalism in relation to migration, Scott's theory about legibility and 'seeing like a state' offers a way to further these debates through a fundamental critique of the very act of naming migrants as 'agents of development'. The process of naming becomes a way of constructing particular types of actors and developing relevant measurement tools, which then produces a variety of intended and unintended effects on how these subjects are subsequently treated and viewed.

Scott's notion of legibility relates the process of 'naming' to the various practices that states implement to secure successful and effective rule over large dominions. Naming procedures aim at generating standards that will encapsulate localized forms, tacit knowledge, and render them viable as instruments of governance. Standardized knowledge lies at the heart of state rule- in fact, Scott argues that when tied to power, legibility becomes a way to measure an inherently complex social reality as well as having the potential 'to change the world it observes'. Legibility is capable of achieving 'formidable power of resolution by a kind of tunnel vision that brings into sharp focus a single aspect of an otherwise far more complex and unwieldy reality' (Scott 1998, 2010). At the heart of the naming process, which seeks to make complex and multi-faceted realities 'legible' to state control, management and regulation, is a simplification that makes the 'phenomenon at the centre of the field more legible and hence more susceptible to careful measurement and calculation'. Through notions of "scaffolding" and "invisibilizing", Raghuram (2009) expresses similar ideas with regards to migration.

By linking migration to the equally complex concept of development, states and international organizations (IOM, the World Bank, GFMD and the UN) facilitate the diffusion of extensive toolkits and measurements that are meant to help further global governance of migration, such as remittances. These kinds of evaluations are enabled by migrants' becoming legible as "agents of development". The immensely powerful act of naming almost completely shaped the direction and nature of debates and discourses surrounding migration over the last two decades. As agents of development, migrants do not necessarily become empowered as actors. Despite being hailed as the new heroes of the development conundrum, migrants are still not at the centre of the debates, as their voices and experiences are still largely marginal and ignored by the forces of governance (Piper, 2009). Naming migrants as agent of development renders them the subjects of new rules, expectations and burdens: rather than empowering and liberating, this role provides a space for further disciplining. It threatens to turn migrants into commodities via new temporary worker regimes and expanding circular

migration, where they can be 'better exported, imported, and measured for economic impact or gain' (Leighton 2013). Leighton, for example, warns that in its 'worst forms –for unscrupulous agents – the goal is how they can be bartered, trafficked and traded.'

Due to the need for funding, empirical research and inquiry on migration is often geared towards specific types of migrants: among these, regular remittance senders, who can stand to become representatives of effective social and economic development practices, feature most prominently (Castles, 2007). As Raghuram (2009) argues, there are much fewer incentives to consider migrants and practices that are not specifically linked to a particular form of development: for example, little attention is paid to the fact vast numbers of migrants are engaged in informal economies and underground markets, either outside the control or implicitly endorsed by states and authorities. Leighton (2013) suggests that 'a large informal economy, weak labor policy, and insufficient labor migration management capacities prevent destination and origin countries from realizing the benefits that positive labor migration can stimulate', although this is perhaps less cognizant of the capacity of informal economies in providing pathways for migrants to work towards better lives.

An alternative example of how the concern with legibility can be used to construct categories and names for management and governance purposes emerges from the World Trade Organization's (WTO) approaches to the complex and diverse field of international migration, in particular through the implementation of Mode IV of General Agreement on Trades and Services (GATS). The latter represents the WTO's response to obstacles to human labor mobility, which the organization identifies as potentially lucrative and important to economic growth for countries (Dawson 2012); in terms of WTO policies, the impetus behind GATS Mode IV is liberalization of labour markets. One of the ideological foundations for Mode IV is the re-categorization of migrant workers as 'service providers' rather than 'agents of development': according Betts and Nicolaidis (2009) "In the strike of a pen (migrants) are freed from the legal ghetto of migration ministries and the ILO and brought under the spotlight of the global economic arena'. GATS and Mode IV feature prominently in the national development plans and policies of Malaysia, for example, where the role of the Malaysian Investment Development Authority (MIDA) shows how Mode IV appears to be far more prominent in policy-making and official agendas rather than international agreements such as those by the GFMD or IOM, or for that matter, the Colombo Process. In Malaysia, migrants' role in development is much more consistent with the one of the "service providers" indicated by the WTO than with the 'agents of development' framework emerging from MIDA's policies. In this context, it is important to note that

the term 'service providers' may be referring to a specific group of migrants (temporary contract migrants), states like Malaysia (and others) have almost entirely shifted to adopting TLM regimes as the preferred mode of migration. Private recruiting agencies play a central role in this structure, particularly in ensuring that migrants already have 'work contracts' before arriving to Malaysia: under Mode IV such contracts are a necessary requirement to be categorized as 'service providers'.

Temporary Labor Migration and Managed Migration

Temporary Labor Migration (TLM) or temporary contract migration (TCM) have become the preferred regime of immigration regulation across developing countries in Asia, from Taiwan and Hong Kong to Singapore and Malaysia. TLM and TCM fall under the policy of managed migration that has been adopted by both sending and receiving countries as a regional and transnational form of migration governance and control. Managed migration is often treated as the outcome and/or solution to the failures of developmental projects of the 1980s and 1990s which eventually led to severe economic crises in many parts of the world (Rosewarne 2012). In Southeast Asia and greater Asia, developing countries that experienced massive economic transformations, coupled with internal realities of urbanization and rural-urban migration, were hit by the shock of labor shortages in key sectors of the economy. Other less developed countries struggled to draw in the types of foreign direct investment and capital that were considered crucial to their own progress and had to rely on alternative sources of economic growth (Hugo 2009).

Human resource and labor power gradually came to be seen as a potential solution or *panacea* to the development dilemma for countries seeking to boost their national growth. While labor migration has always been an integral and structural element of the global economy, new forms of managed migration that have proliferated over the last decade represent a more stratified, controlled and regulated form of transnational governance that officially aim to maximize efficiency and remove obstacles to the flow of legal labor migration across borders and better transfer of remittances (CARAM 2010b). Managed migration has made the links and connections between receiving and sending countries more central, calling for a greater focus on the experiences of migrants and their communities at both ends of the spectrum (Piper 2010).

TLM, TCM, and managed migration plays out differently in various contexts- while it is a reality in most developing and developed nations in Europe, North America and Asia, the conditions, expectations, policies, legal forms and requirements are very different and result in vastly differing

outcomes. The fragmentation of migrant labor occurs along the lines of nationality, gender, race and ethnicity, as well as income and employment, thus creating strange new inequalities and social marginalization in different communities. On the side of the 'host countries', temporary contract migration offers the dual opportunity to sustain a cheap pool of low and unskilled labor and simultaneously attract high-skill and professional migrants through a stratified policy (Yeoh 2006). These bifurcated labor markets are a result of a strong push on the part of national governments to develop their economies and remain competitive globally (Kaur 2006; Kneebone 2010; Hugo 2009; Yeoh 2006). For countries like Singapore and Malaysia, high skill labor migration is a key component for the development of the services and 'expert-knowledge' sectors as part of 'k-economies' (knowledge economies). The high income potential of these skilled workers also create incentives for these states to ensure the workers remain in the country for a long period, with fewer obligations to repatriate their incomes (Yeoh 2006; Brown & Tannock 2009). Brown and Tannock (2009) refer to this pursuit of highly skilled workers and migration as the 'global war for talent' which they categorize as another phase of neoliberal globalization. This is largely because it involves further liberalization of the market for high skill talent- removing barriers to entry, creating incentives for long term settlement through promises of citizenship and permanent residency, opportunities for investment, and opportunities to resettle families.

On the other hand, the temporariness associated with low-skill and unskilled migrant labor is very much about the maintenance of a separate and excluded group of transnational commodities that are denied any opportunities to settle in their host communities. TCM and TLM policies and practices are concerned with the segmentation of labor markets which enable governments and governmental organizations to differentially regulate and control migrant populations (Chin 2002 & 2009; Kung and Wang 2006; McGahan 2009). At the same time, these policies create barriers for the establishment of common laws and standards for employment and labor rights (Rosewarne 2012) due to the predominance of bilateral agreements such as Memorandums of Understandings (MOUs) between sending and host states that enable these segregated management of migrant labor (Verite 2005; CARAM Asia 2010). However, the vulnerability of certain migrant groups relative to others is not just due to the policies of the host state- in many ways, what enables the host state to establish such segregation practices is also the historical development of labor movement and organizing of migrant labor communities in sending countries (Ford and Susilo 2010). The success of migrant women's organizations and activism in Indonesia and Philippines, for example, means they are able to 'enjoy'

relatively better treatment and rights than their Sri Lankan counterparts in the host countries (Rosewarne 2012; Verite 2005).

With TCM and TLM, labor market inequality is heavily influenced by a combination of governmental policies, private agencies and the vulnerable positions of workers themselves. This inequality derives from the market share possessed by private recruitment and employment agencies who are the primary facilitators of labor migration. When migrant workers are denied their rights and capacity to seek out alternative forms of representation, they have few means of redress and are subjected to the almost-total control of these recruiting agents and actors. They are forced to pay high amounts of fees which leave their families bonded in debt to agents, a situation that Verite (2005) associates with 'contracts of indenture'. The notion that labor migration in Southeast Asia is very much a form of indentured labor is not new- Christine Chin's (1998) ethnography of domestic workers in Malaysia has already highlighted the ways in which restrictions of mobility and bonded labor place many migrant women in incredibly vulnerable positions. Similarly, the efforts of feminist migrant NGOs such as Tenaganita have consistently emphasized the effects of restrictions of freedom of association and mobility that are formally placed on female domestic workers as examples of indentured servitude and, in some cases, slavery.

TCM and TLM, as practiced or adopted by specific states, tend to produce different outcomes and effects. This largely depends on the context, history and political spaces of various countries. They affect different groups of migrant workers along the lines of their gender, nationality and ethnicity in intersecting patterns. While the position of migrant women is particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged, the extent to which 'temporariness' affects other groups of migrants, such as victims of trafficking, children, and undocumented workers, are also grave concerns and change from country to country. One thing that is for certain is that the very notions of TLM, TCM and Manage Migration are all legitimized and encouraged within the broader migration-development nexus. Indeed, in order to 'harness the potential of migration for development', the adoption of managed migration regimes becomes a prerequisite for individual states as it is supposedly the 'best practice' in regulating and sustaining circular migration (Hugo 2009).

Methodological Nationalism and Transnational Social Fields

Flows of currency and other non-human entities such as remittances across national borders increasingly become more efficiently measureable 'variables' that help illuminate new perspectives on

migration. One of these new perspectives that have gained prominence in the last ten years is that of transnationalism. Transnational migration perspectives often take the remittance economy, broadly conceived, as a gateway to highlight networks, structures, institutions, relations, channels, flows, organizations and actors that are engaged in an emergent 'transnational community' (Glick-Schiller 2012, Guarnizo 2005, Faist 2008, Faist, Fauser and Reisenauer 2013). The adoption of transnational perspectives engender strong critiques of 'methodological nationalism' against traditional immigration perspectives that insufficiently account for cross-border practices and transactions in favor of nation-state oriented approaches focusing on assimilation, multiculturalism and migrant incorporation. These perspectives are criticized for treating national communities as objectively present and bounded- the classical sociological tendency to treat the nation as containers of society- and, as a result, viewing migrants solely within the context of host societies. Critics of methodological nationalism argue that it tends to produce narrow understandings of primarily *transnational*, or cross-border, practices and processes such as remittances. Remittances has tended to be treated as a marginal process of North to South transfers of money, linked closely to migrants' social status in their host societies (i.e. their level of assimilation) (Portes, Guarnizo and Haller 2002). Remittances were thus reduced to transfers of resources from one country to another, rather than as part of a structural component of transnational economies (Hugo 2012, Brown 2011).

The remittance economy, for supporters of the transnational perspective, is important in revealing the cross-border, transnational networks, institutions, actors and structures that are necessary for making possible such transfers. These are not merely the national states and their banking sectors, but also international financial institutions, the World Bank, independent wire-transfer agents, local-community based banking services, NGOs, and other non-national actors such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Migrants themselves, particularly temporary labor migrants ('guest workers') and other mobile individuals are increasingly seen as being members of these cross-border networks, practicing what Guarnizo (2003) calls 'transnational living'. Some have gone as far as referring to members of these groups as 'transmigrants' -- living simultaneously in multiple places both home and away, neither as full citizens nor as completely marginalized populations (Faist 2013). Remittances offer a way to explore questions about life plans, consumption practices, banking and savings, connections to families and different communities, as well as migrants' hopes for the future, but only if remittances are understood as fundamentally transnational and as one aspect of a much broader and more complex field of practices, exchanges, flows, and experiences

(Levitt 2001). Just as importantly, these social fields are always located somewhere and do not exist as an abstract 'macro' phenomenon – they are based on localized decision-making practices, community and network building initiatives and real things that real people do which are always placed somewhere. The transnational social fields in which migrants are engaged emerge only because of what they do and experience in the places where they live and work, not just as 'migrants' or 'guest-workers' but also as citizens and informal residents.

The Urban Question

This brings us to the centrality of contemporary urbanism and urban studies in discussions of migration and migrants. In their edited volume *Locating Migration*, Glick-Schiller and Caglar ask an important question about the role of migrants in the transformation of cities and how different cities become positioned in a global and transnational setting. Their main critique of the existing literature is that while there are many studies about migration to cities or the experiences of migrants *in* cities, there remains a significant gap in terms of research on the relationship between migrants and cities; in other words, the actual contributions that migrants make to the restructuring, transforming, and re-scaling of different cities in terms of their positioning. Migrants are important actors in the processes that create the changing identities of cities, particularly from a transnational perspective.

Cities are a subject of great interest in globally and transnationally oriented studies, especially in the fields of urban social movements, urban sociology and urban planning. Cities are seen as primary sites that facilitate the connections, flows and networks that constitute 'globalization' (Sassen 1991), where the necessary infrastructures and resources – financial institutions, servers, offices, etc - are located and maintained. More than two decades ago, Saskia Sassen argued against prevailing notions of neoliberal globalization that the world was experiencing a 'flattening', where connections were becoming super-fast, distances were being shortened and the possibility of a hyper-connected and hyper-mobile global society (Castells, Friedman, Harvey). Sassen's argument was that many of the phenomena associated with globalization (financial flows, communications networks, and hyper-connectivity) required actual, physical infrastructural development, which are situated in so-called 'global cities'. These cities created new jobs, opportunities and a thriving service sector, amongst other things. While Sassen's view of cities recognizes the importance of urban spaces and practices in producing the 'global', this still takes as a given that cities are merely the 'context' in which urbanites (including migrants) live and work (Glick-Schiller and Caglar 2010).

What forms does the relationship between migrants and cities take, if we were to follow from Glick-Schiller and Caglar's standpoint? The authors argue for a comparative view of how migrants in different places engage in 'place-making' and rescaling practices that actively transform those urban spaces, although this needs to be critically acknowledged with the understanding that 'cities' themselves are not fixed or bounded categories (Van Dijk 2011). Migrants, depending on where they are, often have not one but multiple pathways through which they may be incorporated into a society, and these pathways do not necessarily have to be limited to formal and legal means. They are important 'scale-makers' for cities, according to Glick-Shiller and Caglar, which means migrants have an active role to play in the 'neoliberal transformation of cities' – by being part of a labor force that makes cities competitive (at a global level), as 'historical agents', as 'neoliberal agents' who engage in repositioning particular neighborhoods within the city, and also as providers of alternative 'social visions'.

The impacts of neoliberal changes across the globe has only recently been alarmingly obvious following the 2008 debt-crisis, with societies currently experiencing unprecedented levels of urbanization coupled with astronomical material inequality (Purcell forthcoming). The rise of the city has led some to start referring to a phenomenon of 'planetary urbanism' (Merrifield 2012) – a worldwide process of literally covering the globe in one massive urban sphere, along with the attendant and consequential politics that implies. Transnational and internal migration from rural areas drives the massive growth of populations in cities, largely as a consequence of the dispossessions wrought by capital-driven neoliberal restructuring that destroys rural livelihoods and smaller economies (Harvey 1989, Sassen 2010, Wilson and Miraftab forthcoming, Purcell forthcoming). Cities become over-populated in parts, especially where the poor are concentrated, as shown by the experiences of rural-to-urban migrants in China who have to deal with the *Hukou* system of residential registration (Kuang and Liu 2012). New 'slum'-like areas, informal settlements, *favelas* and other temporary residential arrangements increasingly characterize urban centers, while at the same time new urban development projects spring up as gated communities, satellite cities and 'city doubles' (Murray). Older, 'left-behind' parts of urban centers are seen as undesirable and only fit for poor minority and migrant communities, yet still fall prey to what Miraftab and Wilson refer to as 'parasitic economies' – payday lenders, pawn shops and temporary work agencies that are fronts for larger, often multinational, corporations and firms. This is a powerful alternative view to the more popular narrative of corporate interests that are 'reinvigorating' decaying urban spaces. While Miraftab and Wilson are primarily examining these 'left-behind' urban spaces and parasitic economies in Rust-Belt

America, their descriptions fit well with areas in central Kuala Lumpur such as Pudu and Chinatown as well as the heart of Georgetown, Penang, where transnational multinational financial entities such as Western Union and MoneyGram are heavily represented.

The neoliberal transformations that impact cities such as Kuala Lumpur shapes and is shaped by the people who live and work there, including migrants. Asian cities like Shanghai, Singapore and Delhi are no longer the 'post-colonial centers of subalternity' that represents the other of the traditional metropoles of the North, but have emerged as alternative examples and models of 'world cities', as Aihwa Ong and Ananya Roy (2011) highlight. These new models provide new 'visions' about the norms and scripts that are deemed ideal for new forms of globalized urbanism, produced by an 'ongoing art of being global' (Ong 2011). Kuala Lumpur is another example of this phenomenon – a city that is meant to be the central pillar of a 'true Asia' – a place where mixing, crossing, exchange, connections and mingling of cultures and traditions occur under hyper-modern urban environments, with one significant caveat – these 'planned' visions do not account and do not tolerate the politicization of the 'urban' and must be free of the unpredictable, chaotic and undesirability of truly contested urban life (Roy 2011).

Which brings up this issue of urban politics/urban political/politicization or the urban, something which has been capturing the interests of commentators, theorists and researchers quite strongly since the uprisings and massive protests began in Africa and Middle East. Having said that, it is by no means a new area of interest – political urbanism has its roots firmly planted by Henri Leferbvre, whose 'right to the city' approach sparked the imaginations and inspired a generation of scholars who grew very interested in how the urban poor, the urban subaltern and those who generally have to deal with very complex and difficult conditions while living in the 'BIG CITY', find ways to exert some form of agency and influence in reshaping, reclaiming and contesting these spaces (Purcell 2009, Holston 2009, Bayat 2012, Swyngedouw forthcoming) . Studies that focus on these movements *in* the city cut across various parts of the world – South America, Europe, the Middle East, and, of course, Asia, though they largely remain within a 'methodological urbanism' which Van Dijk critiques as being too un-critical about the fluid and fragmented nature of cities themselves.

It is a tricky relationship to disentangle – migrants (who, as I am trying to argue, should be seen as importantly as any other urban residents) have a stake in the constantly rearticulated and restructured spaces of urban life as a key resource for their own well-being and capacity to seek out opportunities. These 'pathways' or strategies are multi-faceted and diverse. Asef Bayat (2012) describes

the practices of the urban poor as 'quiet encroachments of the ordinary' – largely un-coordinated, non-collective actions rooted in the maintenance of everyday life that actually produce significant collective changes, which can lay the groundwork for stronger claims upon the state. Street vendors who set up little stalls to sell anything from fresh fruit to counterfeit smartphones on public sidewalks and youth who gather to 'loiter' in public centers, and those who set up informal shacks to live in are part of these 'quiet' encroachments. There are different strategies that are taken up as well – in her study of a small town in the Midwestern heartland of America, Faranak Miraftab (2011) identifies multiple ways in which a predominantly poor migrant community of factory workers are able to counter the stratified and segmented labor management practices of the town's primary employer by forming pockets of community networks and spaces – soccer leagues, child-care homes, and so on.

There are other precedents for examinations of the 'migrant experience' in an urban context as well. In the field of sociology, migration scholars such as Alejandro Portes provided explorations of so-called 'ethnic enclaves'- basically self-sufficient, transnational, sub-economic systems nested within (and often apart) from the broader urban, state or national economy made up of migrants or ethnic minorities – although this is largely seen as being a Global North phenomenon. More recent contributors such as Antoine Pecoud (2011) suggest that 'enclaves' is a misleading term that fails to capture and highlight the inter-connectedness of these seemingly ethnically-homogenous economies. There are significantly more complex arrangements at play, often between entrepreneurs and local real-estate developers and property owners, local authorities and urban municipalities that interest and interact to co-produce 'ethnic' neighborhoods. The importance of this construction of what Pecoud calls 'ethnic economies' is particularly salient when talking 'Chinatown', KL – an 'ethnic neighborhood' that is, as far as anyone can tell, experiencing multiple split-personality (or split-ethnicity) disorders with a largely Bangladeshi, Nepali and Myanmarese community living and plying their trades in local Chinese-owned properties illuminated by the red-glow of a thousand Chinese lanterns – and frequented by European and American backpackers.

The politics of urban life and urban space, to put it simply, is about contesting the planned models and visions that the state and capital have for the city. It is the challenging of what gets defined as legitimate or proper use of public spaces (Bayat 2012), often manifested through the actions and practices of the urban poor. Herein, as Mark Purcell claims, lies the true democractic power of the 'constituent' – an emergent will to be heard and be seen that will always come up where the marginalized and peripheral are concentrated. Different terms have been used to describe this agency

of the subaltern 'from below'- 'insurgent citizenship' (Holston 2009), 'urban insurgencies' (Swyngedouw forthcoming), and informal citizenship, among others. However, we need to be mindful of the difference between the exceptional/spectacular 'events' and the everyday when trying to speak of subaltern agency. It is easy to be pulled along by the tide of revolutionary spirit built up by protests and movements taken up by the grassroots as forms of urban insurgencies against the state or corporate interests, but these events often render invisible the importance of the 'ordinary', the 'everyday', in shaping the politicization of the 'urban'.

Building a Conceptual Framework for a 'Politics of the Temporary'

The 'politics of the temporary' is framed here as the adaptive, transformative and contested experiences and practices of temporary migrants and peoples without formal citizenship. My conceptual framework aims to highlight these diverse actors and their experiences and to locate them within discussions of contemporary migration and urban studies, as important agents of transformation beyond that of developmentalism.

Firstly, it would be useful to reiterate the important distinction between categories of social and political practice and categories of social and political analysis (Brubaker and Cooper 2000) – these include identity, class, nation, in this case citizenship, for example. Brubaker and Cooper argue that these categories often interlap and are thus subject to unreflexive and unclear analytical applications. Some categories, such as 'identity', become used in so many different and ambiguous ways in practice that they hold very little use as analytical concepts. My purpose is to reveal these dualistic categories as they emerge from discourse of migration/urbanism and through the everyday life of actual migrants. Key terms include citizenship, agency, race and nationality – or 'migrant'; I want to highlight how these categories of practice become 'reified' within a broader 'political and sociological fiction' (Brubaker and Cooper 2009), but also wish to avoid reproducing that reification. This is important for a sociological investigation of urban Malaysia because categories of practice often diverge sharply from analytical ones. Race, for example, is somewhat poorly understood and much-less salient as a practical term in Southeast Asia, yet discussions of 'racialization' and racial hierarchies remain pertinent when analyzing ways in which categories of nationality, ethnicity and gender become the basis for political governance of migrant populations.

'Temporariness'

Temporariness forms the underlying logic and rationale for many of the adaptive, incorporative politics in the everyday life of migrants and urban poor in Malaysia. It can largely be viewed as the product/consequence of neoliberalizing trends in governance – that is, changes that lead to rolling back and re-routing of social services, welfare and public provisions offered by the state and general waves of privatization (property, services and governance). However, as AbdouMaliq Simone suggests, neoliberal changes are only half the story of the 'temporariness' of urban life and cities. He roots 'temporariness' as a fundamental substance of 'cityness', which informs the fluidity, unpredictability and intensely anticipatory character of cities in the global South (Simone 2009). Here, I also make a distinction between 'temporariness' and a temporary status. Temporariness is a 'category of practice' that I'm using to describe a set of diverse practices and experiences (micro-entrepreneurial activities, remittances, frequent long-distance travels, informality, networks, etc) - developed based on observations of daily life, interviews with different migrants and examinations of patterns of urban transformations. It follows very closely with Simone's notion of 'politics of anticipation' (the gearing of action towards opening up possibilities, with an open-endedness that entails both opportunities and risk), though, in my analysis, what makes a politics of anticipation necessary is the inescapable temporariness woven into the lives of today's migrants in multiple ways.

'Temporary migrants'

This term covers a broad analytical spectrum that includes people not considered formal 'citizens' of a country; guest-workers, undocumented migrants, refugees/asylum seekers, international students, social 'visitors', migrant sex-workers. Many of these migrants are being marginalized (Raghuram 2009, Agustin 2008) in policy and academic circles, and this is an attempt to counter that trend. Aside from making significant contributions vis-à-vis economic and social remittances, these invisible migrants are very important to the sociological reshaping of urban life in the 'host' society. It is especially salient to clarify this distinction in the context of the colonial and post-colonial history of Malaysia in which notions of citizenship and national identity is inextricably linked to migration, and who gets defined as 'migrant' and 'citizen' can be very fluid unstable and interchangeable, often by virtue of possessing the right documents (Sadiq 2008). Malaysia's heterogeneous society also consists of 'migrant-citizens' (or second-class citizens, depending on the reading) who are afforded different rights, resources and privileges under the national constitution, although the official categories tend to obscure, reduce and reify actual diversity into a simplistic racialized discourse (Alatas 1969(2010), Noor 2010). As an

analytical category, 'temporary migrants' is also meant to move beyond confusions arising from having to distinguish 'immigrants' from 'migrants'. Temporary migrants are those who have little or no pathways to formal citizenship (and hence to become 'immigrants' in an official sense), but are rather transnational in terms of their belongings, simultaneously inhabiting two or more communities.

The prescribed status 'temporary' does not imply a permanently impermanent condition, however. Many of the migrants who come and work on temporary permits have been in Malaysia for almost a decade (some even more). Nor does 'temporary migrant' encompass a group that is homogenous in their experiences or practices – as highlighted in the introduction, temporary migrants are a highly fragmented group that is split along gender and national lines.

Political urbanism and agency

The main argument of my thesis is informed by an understanding that migrants are indeed capable of exerting significant influence over transformations of urban social and economic life in the 'host' society. This agency is fundamentally multi-faceted and unpredictable (just as is the politics of temporariness), yet the changes and transformations are tangible and affective. This is the initial question driving my research – my resounding answer, derived from experiences in the field, is yes. Can those who are 'temporary' make significant changes? So-called 'guest-workers' are able to transform former 'ethnic' enclaves and national cultural centers into new thriving cosmopolitan communities and economies, through micro-entrepreneurial activities, engaging with complex transnational networks of trade and trafficking, and imbuing new identities that subvert, resist and co-opt 'planned' urban development projects. Some migrants are able to use essentially restrictive 'foreign visas' (social visits, students) to establish new trading 'outposts', form information networks using the latest advances in communication technologies (cheap smartphones, free social apps) circumventing attempt of regulation and control. 'Maids' and domestic laborers (overwhelmingly women) sometimes are able to take advantage of informal opportunities as part-time 'maids' and vendors, bringing them in contact with other migrants and networks that offer possibilities for something better.

Citizenship

Citizenship is possibly the most deeply contested and ambiguous notion that has to be addressed in this research, even in a formal sense. The traditional liberal-democratic model based on 'national belonging' has gradually been weakening, with 'inhabitance' rather than nationality becoming increasingly more important for 'political community and decision-making authority' (Purcell 1999).

Building upon what Purcell (2009) and others have referred to as the 'rescaling of citizenship' where both the 'urban' and the universal are invoked frequently as basis for belonging, I examine the ways in which many of the practices of 'temporary' migrants in Malaysia represent expressions of informal citizenship, driven by a strong and flexible 'right-to-the-city' politics. The most powerful example of this is the capacity of Myanmarese, Nepali and Bangladeshi migrants to encroach and transform entire districts in KL, thus providing a strong foundation for staking their claims for resources from the municipal authorities (a mosque, translated signs, permits for businesses, etc.). Following Purcell, this type of citizenship entails 'appropriation of urban space', the right to 'participate centrally in *production of urban-space*', and the right of 'use rather than exchange'. Even in archetypically 'neoliberal' urban spaces such as gated communities, luxury property developments and new private satellite cities and suburbs (similar to those Martin Murray (forthcoming) describes as 'city-doubles'), informal citizens and the urban poor are able to establish relationships and communities through subversive practices that often produce unexpected and unpredictable outcomes, largely because of their presence which is driven by the demand for cheap labor in service sectors. Some migrants (such as servers in restaurants, security guards, and sex-workers), become 'public character', as Jane Jacobs (1961) and latter Mitchell Duneier (1996) describe:

> "A public character is anyone who is in frequent contact with a wide circle of people and who is sufficiently interested to make himself a public character. A public character need have no special talents or wisdom to fulfill his (sic) function—although he (sic) often does. He (sic) just needs to be present, and there need to be enough of his counterparts. His (sic) main qualification is that he *is* public, that he talks to lots of different people. In this way, news travels that is of sidewalk interest (Jacobs 1961)[10]

National and ethnic 'identity'

Like the term 'migrant', these identities are primarily used in this research as ascriptions; due to the fact that migrants come to Malaysia from a wide range of places, they often tend to be defined and grouped according to their national identities ('Bangladeshi', 'Indonesian', 'Nepali', 'Fillipino/a', 'Arab', 'Thai', 'Indian', 'African' etc), which almost entirely obscures more complex ethnic, cultural, and gendered identities. Add to the fact that migration from some regions such as Africa and the Middle East is relatively new, the reduction of identities to nationality reinforces powerful stereotypes about different migrant groups ('dirty Bangladeshis', 'loutish, drug-trafficking Africans', 'adulterous

[10] Special thanks to Daniel J. Steward for introducing Duneier's work in *Sidewalk*, which led me to look into Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*

Fillipinas', and so on). My own usage of these national identities is meant to be critical and reflexive – how different people and discourses read into, understand and apply these identities (on others or themselves) varies wildly, especially among migrants who have different interests and stakes in these identifications. The same applies to religious identities as well. For example, the leveraging of a shared Islamic identity between local Malaysian Muslims and Bangladeshi migrants is often invoked by the latter in their calls for better treatment, rights and protections. In contrast, this shared religious identity is strongly downplayed in favor of national difference both in mainstream public discourse and official governance policies.

At the same time, the diverse cultural, ethnic, linguistic and national backgrounds of the migrants this research focuses on are not necessarily subsumed or marginalized by any shared conditions of temporariness. Temporariness, in practice, often becomes a new shared identity for migrants from various backgrounds – such as Bangladeshi and Burmese men who choose to live together in apartments, or Thai and Indian migrants working and sharing spaces together while working in restaurants and food service. The ethno-cultural identities of different migrants are still very important in the building of new communities and ethnic economies, as in the case of Little Burma and Little Bangladesh, where the proliferation and development of 'ethnic cuisines' and Bollywood entertainment is spurred by the consumption demands of migrants. While such transformations may be seen as similar to classic models of immigrant enclaves, these communities of temporary migrants have a far more transnational and mobile character, which involves substantial networks and connections between different ethnic groups and actors at the local, national and transnational level.

Summary and implications

Taking into account this broad and diverse literature of existing scholarship, research and debates that surround questions of migration under contemporary globalization is an obviously tricky task. My intentions with highlighting these various sub-fields and discussions is not just to show just how diverse the field is, but how these trends are actually converging in a number of ways, primarily through the influence of the migration and development nexus. The MDN paradigm continues to provide powerful rationalizations for more states to adopt restrictive and deeply questionable temporary migration regimes in a supposedly 'win-win' scenario (from a national economic perspective). An over-emphasis on development through remittances –another by-product of the MDN paradigm- produces further obfuscations of actual migrant experiences and practices, and only

recently with the controversy of migrant deaths in Qatar has any popular attention be turned towards the problem of 'Managed Migration' in the context of developing states.

The conceptual framework introduced in the previous section centers around a 'politics of the temporary' that aims to a) highlight the presence of invisible migrants/actors who do make important interventions and contributions to social changes, b) highlight a more general prevailing condition of 'temporariness' that pervades the lives of large numbers of people, as a consequence of neoliberal processes that intensify transnational migration, not only as a South to North phenomenon, but as an increasingly South to South one, c) reveal forms of real agency beyond that of mainstream discourse that emphasizes remittances and development, and d) describe how the 'urban' is a critical element in the political, social and economic lives of migrants, especially in terms of how cities becoming contested spaces in which new and alternative forms of citizenship are fermented.

CHAPTER 3: LABOR MIGRATION TO MALAYSIA – HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Systems and Legacies

The Southeast Asian country of Malaysia (formerly Malaya) has experienced significant transnational migration long before the debates abour globalization and transnationalism even began. Located south of Thailand as part of mainland Southeast Asia, along with the northern section of Borneo island, the country experienced numeous periods of both internal and international migration in the form of early traders, imperial powers from India, Arab merchants, European colonial powers such as the Portuguese, Dutch and British. The demographic characteristics of the country is markedly complex, diverse and fluid. Providing a representative overview of the history of migration to Malaysia/Malaya would be an enormous task which cannot be undertaken here; instead, my purpose is to provide some necessary context crucial for understanding how contemporary migration to this country came to be. Here, my concern lies with the types of processes, trends, systems and structural changes that took place from the colonial period onwards which have had tremendous bearings upon how temporary labor migration becames institutionalized in its current form and how the various politics and struggles around it are shaped by long-standing legacies of racial, ethnic and gender hierarchies.

What are the historical roots and origins of contemporary temporary labor migration systems? While many regional and global systems of migration share very similar practices and policies when it comes to engaging with markets for foreign labor, there are very distinct and unique characteristics that shape and determine various aspects of actual migration experience. In a country such as Malaysia, the importance of ethnic, national and gender differences (or rather, inequalities) to the experiences of migrants cannot be underplayed, and this is directly linked to the country's colonial and postcolonial legacies of 'divide and rule' (Kaur 2004), an overarching and widely practiced policy of colonial powers to maintain social, cultural and spatial divisions between different migrant and indigenous populations. The practice had long-standing effects on Malaysian society in terms of racial and ethnic tensions, tremendous inequalities between different groups, and the marginalization and dehumanization of poor working classes. Of particular relevance to my research on temporary migrants is how those legacies of divide and rule have come to influence and

shape the institutionalization of foreign labor regulations today and the very politics that migrants are engaged in.

This chapter is organized around three key periods of the history of modern Malaysia, starting with the colonial period at the end of the 19th century, followed by the post-Merdeka (Independence) period between 1960 and 1980, and lastly the period of New Labor Migration (post 1990). In each period, I examine how the two major governing powers (colonial and national) adopted systems of mass migration in response to different demands for labor, based on transformations in key economic sectors broadly characterized by typical 'modernization' shifts (from primary resource production to secondary ones and on to tertiary sectors). In each period, a combination of private enterprise and governing instutions turned to migrant labor as a critical resource for industrial labor. For example, the British colonial enterprises – whose locus of power mainly concentrated along coastal towns and marine bases – took advantage of 'surplus labor' pool colonies such as India to source indentured labor to work the rubber plantations of Malaya. In the same period, between 1900 and 1950, Chinese migrant labor were recruited via a 'credit-ticket' system (basically a labor brokerage system similar to private agents today) to work in various mining towns and urban centers.

The systems of transnational migration governance adopted during the start of the twentieth century are significant in how they shaped the adoption of subsequent policies, frameworks, laws and approaches to migrant labor recruitment. Some of the practices that were most commonly used to bring in migrants under the British occupation include open regulation of South Indian laborers, the Indian *Kangani* system, the aforementioned 'credit-ticket', the 'corvee labor' (which protects indigenous rulers' sovereignty over the use of indigenous labor), gender restrictions on migrant labor, and the adoption of various segregation-based policies (such as enforcing vernacular education to minimize contact between different ethnic groups). The effectiveness of this divide and rule approach in creating obstacles against worker mobilization and labor movements was particularly evident in the fragmentary and primarily ethnic-based labor organizations that emerged during and after that period, such as the mostly Indian-based National Union of Plantation Workers (NUPW).

Table 3.1: Systems of Labor Recruitment by Historical Periods

Period	*Key Economic Characteristics*	*Labor Force Demands*	*Systems of Recruitment*
1890 – 1940 British Colonial Rule	Export-based primary resource Extraction (mainly rubber and tin)	Primarily Foreign (Chinese and Indian)	Credit-ticket, *Kangani*, Headman, open recruitment, corvee labor, and indenture contracts
1960 – 1980 Post-Independence period of Modernization	Rapid Industrialization, Import substitution, Development of EPZs	Expansion of local labor force, Greater participation of women in work	Rural-to-urban migration, subsidies for education (particularly vocational training), growth of urban working class
1980 – present Neoliberalization	Shift to Tertiary sectors – services and value-added production	Temporary, flexible migrant labor, domestic labor (Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, India, Bangladesh, Burma, Nepal, etc)	Institutionalized Temporary Labor Migration and irregular migration Contract substitution

Labor Migration during High Colonialism (1890 – 1940)[11]

It is possible, and necessary, that we trace the roots of modern temporary labor migration back to the period known as High Colonialism in Southeast Asia. European imperial expansion to the East has always been a matter of competition and primary resource control, along with a fiece contest to secure important trading centers in ports such as Melaka (Malacca) and Singapore. Towards the middle of the 19th century, when Malaya was a colony of the British empire (the Dutch had control of Jawa and Borneo), the demands for labor in these colonies outstripped the availability in the form of working age populations. These were, after all, relatively sparse populations mainly concentrated along the coasts of Peninsular Malaysia.Additionally, conflicts and tensions between the empire and

[11] I am deeply indebted to the research done by Amarjit Kaur, whose detailed exploration of immigrant labor histories of Southeast Asia and particularly Malaysia remains the strongest and most informative resource on a subject that receives very little attention in academia. Statistics and demographic data on colonial migration are not the best and should often be taken with a grain of salt, while good ethnographic scholarship about the life experiences and conditions of migrant laborers and migrant diaspora during colonialism are almost impossible to come by. I rely heavily on Kaur's own data and discussions in these sections, but have attempted to re-frame the historical context in order to make them more relevant to our understanding of systems of temporary labor. migration. My focus on 'systems' of recruitment and outcomes such as 'divide-and-rule' are aimed at bridging these colonial histories with contemporary realities.

indigenous rulers over the sovereign right to control indigenous economies meant that compromises had to be made in terms of local labor recruitment.

The 'traditional' economies of subsistence farming and fishing were irreconciliable with imperial ambitions to turn these colonies into primary resource extraction economies, a condition which gave rise to the proliferation of the myth of the 'lazy native' (Alatas 1967). Syed Hussein Alatas' famous argument suggests that the British generated and disseminated powerful racial stereotypes about indigenous populations in Malaya on the basis of their unwillingness to participate in the imperial industries – depicting the latter's preference to engage in their more familiar forms of everyday labor as indicative of their inherent laziness. These myths said less about the 'native' but much more about the desperation of the Empire to find willing sources of labor power to work the new plantations and mines in the Malayan Peninsular.

The British turned towards its existing major source of surplus labor – India - in response. Similar imperial powers such as the Dutch also resorted to sourcing its labor demands in the colonies from existing pools of labor around the same period (Kaur 2004). In addition, the opening up of the China's stance on emigration during this period meant that greater numbers of laborers from there began moving to Malaya. The Chinese and Indian migrants became the two largest and most important sources of labor for the British colonial empire in Malaya between 1890 and 1940. These migrants were viewed as 'sojourners to be repatriated' (Kaur 2004), essentially the genesis of the temporary guest worker. Chinese migrants were mainly brought in to work in tin and gold mines as well as in urban centers as middle-men and merchants, while Indians (mostly from the Tamil-speaking south) were sent to work in rubber plantations. There were also a small minority of Chettiar (Tamil) financiers and North Indian migrants who were brought in the employ of police and military forces[12].

The start of this period of mass migration under high colonialism is important to our understanding of temporary labor migration in terms of three major processes. The first is the impact of demographic transformations and population growth in Malaya, where the colonial migration patterns set the grounds for workforce expansion and the new racial/ethnic dynamics that shape nationalist movements and post-colonial politics. Secondly, the sectoral and spatial

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[12] This group includes the Nepali 'Gurkhas' – who trace their lineage to an ancient warrior community. Gurkhas were often recruited in the military forces in Malaya and Malaysia, while the contemporary prevalence of Nepali security guards shares possible links to this history (see chapter 7 for more discussions)

segregation of different groups of workers (Indians in plantations, Chinese in mines and towns, indigenous (or 'Malay') groups in rural farms) were part of the racialized 'divide-and-rule' policy which can be paralleled with many of the policies on migrant labor practiced today. Thirdly, the various systems and practices used to facilitate mass migration during colonialism – open recruitment, *kangani*, credit-ticketing, and indentured contracts – reinforced notions of temporariness which have largely been ignored in colonial studies but have important significances to how temporary labor migration operates today.

These processes came to operate in a context when versions of slavery and unpaid labor were already in existence in Malaya. One of the key contensions between indigenous rulers (the Muslim-Malay Sultans) and British officials revolved around the sovereign right over *hamba* (unpaid servant or slave). Sometimes referred to as 'corvee' labor, slavery was very much an important part of Southeast Asian colonies, as maintaining good political relations with the indigenous rulers allowed the colonial enterprises to profit from indigenous labor (Alatas 1967, Kaur 2004). These forms of indentured and slave labor were prevalent and persisted well into the 20th century.

Chinese and Indian Labor Migration, 1890-1940

Colonial period mass migration of Chinese and Indian migrants were facilitated by a number of different systems that required the participation of various transnational networks and actors, including private recruiters, captains, traders, brokers, private colonial firms and enterprises, official British governing entities, and the governments of India and China. Between 1890-1940, migration led to a sharp demographic shake-up, with thousands of Chinese and Indian migrants brought in every year. This was important to the growth of migrant diasporas in Malaya and Malaysia. The mass migration involved long-distance travel which relied heavily upon the provision of credit-based travel accomodations and the promise of employment in the new colonies (or 'receiving countries' to use contemporary migration terminology), even though the original intention was always to treat migrant labor as temporary populations to be repatriated once their work was done.

The recruitment and employment of migrant workers in this period was largely 'elastic' (Kaur 2004) – they wre primarily unskilled adult males (preferably with no dependents), generally drawn from rural villages, with the expectation being they would return. Chinese laborers were recruited under a 'credit-ticket' system under which migrants sought passage to Malaya from ship captains and traders who they would be indebted to by virtue of their labor and future income.

Indian migrants, on the other hand, were recruited via openly regulated systems adopted by the British colonial governments, which can be seen as a type of 'managed migration'. Many of the Indian laborers were brought in under indentured contract which bonded them to anywhere between 1 to 3 years of service, usually in rubber plantations[13]. These indentured contracts were designed to favor the employers and interests of the empire, and would serve truly harsh punishments and sanctions upon the workers – infringements of the contract were, for instance, considered 'criminal' rather than civil (Kaur 2004)[14].

Perhaps the most infamous component of the Indian migrant recruitment system was the *kangani*, who were basically supervisors and brokers of laborers. The *kangani* were private Indian agents working for the colonial enterprises as regulators of laborers. Their roles were expansive and included the recruitement of new workers (from India), the overseeing of workers, and especially the disciplining of workers. The *Kangani* had a major role in maintaining the docility and overarching surveillane of migrant workers and indentured laborers on the plantations. The use of intermediaries such as the *kangani* or the *kepala* (Headman, in the case of Chinese laborers) had important implications for the success of 'divide-and-rule' policies and latter mobilizations of labor (Kaur 2004).

To understand even further the significance of colonial mass migration as a precursor for temporary labor migration in Malaysia, we can look at how gender divisions further illustrate the colonial empire's desire to maintain the 'foreigner' status of migrant workers. During that period, only 1 out of 10 Indian migrants who came to Malaya were female. Workers who were single adult

[13] As an autobiographical and autoethnographic note, both sets of my grandparents came to Malaya as part of the Indian recruitment system. My father's parents worked under the British in a rubber plantation in the northern state of Kedah, where they lived in a small plantation shanty-village (built by the migrants themselves) in the middle of a large rubber-tree plantation. This side of my family largely maintained their families and homes in that village, and sent their children to local vernacular schools. As a child, I was taken to visit my grandparents and cousins who still lived in that village, although these days the plantation has long been eradicated and replaced by new townships and residential neighborhoods. Most of my relatives (including my father's siblings) still work in local factories and as manual laborers, while many have managed to move on to more professional and highly educated positions elsewhere.

[14] There are some alarming parallels in the treatment of Indian immigrant workers today, where the use of 'contracts' unlawfully attempt to circumvent labor restrictions and basic rights, in Silicon Valley. http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2014/oct/28/-sp-jobs-brokers-entrap-indian-tech-workers
As recently as late 2014, in Malaysia, there has been controversy surrounding the public revealing of one Indian migrants experience of being forced into human trafficking in Sarawak. This issue has hauntingly familiar echoes to colonial indentured servitude on plantations. http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/after-indian-slavery-case-putrajaya-urged-to-scrutinise-rules-on-migrant-wo

males were preferred on the basis that their incomes would be too small to support families (which ironically can be seen as almost benevolent compared to the way today's migrant workers are expected to support their families while on below-poverty levels of income). Married men and those with dependents were not allowed to bring their families along seemingly because of the harshness of the working conditions and poor living accomodations (Kaur 2004) It was only after the 1923, when the Indian government passed two Emigration Acts which required the gender ratio of female to male emigrants to be 1:5 that some of these imbalances were addressed – although it should be noted that Malaya was exempt from these Acts.

Divide-and-Rule and the Legacy of Racialization

As mentioned earlier, communities of migrant workers were largely kept separated from one another for the puposes of maintaining social control and limiting intermingling. How did the colonial government achieve this, and what were the implications of such practices on the racial and ethnic legacies that shaped Malaysia for decades to come?

Divide-and-rule policies in Malaya were almost inevitable in how they followed the patterns of labor recruitment based on employment sectors and natural geographical boundaries. Mining towns and urban centers were primarily located along the coasts of the Peninsular, while rubber plantations tended to be located deeper into the mainland, away from these towns. Plantations were often very hard to reach and early railroads mainly connected mining towns to the ports. As a result, it became relatively easy to maintain the separation of the 'races'. The colonial government reinforced the separations by creating segregated vernacular schools that were in the languages of migrant communties (Chinese, Tamil, Malay, or English) which further reduced the opportunities for interracial connections.

As a result, the organization and mobilization of labor, and consequently even nationalist movements seeking independence, were split and fragmented along racial and ethnic lines. Early labor unions and associations such as the Central Indian Association of Malaya (CIAM) and the National Union of Plantation Workers (NUPW) were all characterized by the racial division (Kaur 2004). Indigenous communities, who were caught up in a struggle to maintain their autonomy and sovereign rights over the land, were largely hostile opposed to the notion of accepting Chinese and Indians as potential citizens, despite the obvious political leverage this would give against the British colonizers.

Eventually, realizing that a compromise would be needed in order to secure Independence, the first national government of Malaya formed around a foundational racial 'pact' between the three ethnic groups. The central component of this compromise was that the privilege of Malay rulers (*Ketuanan Melayu*) would be unchallenged and protected, while the Chinese and Indian migrants would be granted second-class citizenship which still identified them as foreigners granted rights by the benevolence of the *bumiputera* (indigenous sons-of-the-soil). This is still apparent today when the major political parties still draw their bases of power from the mobilization of ethnic and racial communities, where *ketuanan Melayu* (today known as Malay Supremacy) is still a powerful ideological force that manifests in the form of ethnic-based public subsidies, racial quotas, and development projects.

Post-Independence and Modernization (1960-1980)

The divide-and-rule policies adopted by the colonial governing powers in Malaya had very profound effects on the racialization of different ethnic groups in the country. The practice of keeping migrants and indigenous groups separated by employment sector and geography led to the perpetuation of stereotypes and myths that persist about racial differences between Malays, Indians and Chinese (Alatas 1967). Politically, the racializing of both migrant communities and indigenous ones led to the birth of ethno-racial politics, and the further marginalization of the under-represented groups. Following Malaysia's independence in 1957, which was secured only after a coalition party made of UMNO (United Malays National Organization), MCA (Malaysian Chinese Association) and MIC (Malaysian Indian Congress) led negotiations with the colonial government, racial tensions started to boil up even further due to the patronizing character with which the Malay rulers were perceived to be treating ethnic Chinese minorities. This culminated in the 1963 Chinese-Malay race riots and sectarian violence, the most significant being the 13th May 'incident'.

The events of 1963 led to the newly formed Malaysian government's passing of several 'nationa; unity' initiatives (such as the *Rukunegara*) and, more importantly, several affirmative action policies. Many of these initiatives were driven by the perception of backwardness attributed to largely rural Malay populations, in comparison to the economically successful and primarily urban Chinese communities. The most notable of these policies was the New Economic Policy (NEP) of 1969, which was also adopted against the backdrop of a newly independent state attempting to transform its older colonial economies into a nationalized, 'modern' ones. Modernization became an

important state-led project in Malaysia, premised upon the prioritization of rapid economic (gross domestic product) growth and mass industrialization.

Workforce expansion of the Malaysian population became a major priority within the new framework of modernization between 1960 and 1980. The New Economic Policy (NEP) was implemented in order to facilitate the entry of more Malays, both male and female, into the urban workforce – primarily through the provision of free education (at every level, including vocational) and large subsidies for small Malay-owned businesses and entreprises. Rapid urbanization, particularly in Kuala Lumpur and the Federal Territory, was another major outcome of these economic policies, as mass rural-to-urban migration began in earnest. The expansion of the workforce coincided with several trends, including the greater participation of woman in major sectors (manufacturing, in particular) and increasing standards of living which eventually gave rise to the emerging urban middle-classes.

Trade liberalization was part of the national government's project in terms of engaging with global markets, although this was coupled with a very firm policy of import-substitition. The state imposed heavy levies and restrictions on foreign imports while fostering a 'protectionist' approach towards what were earmarked as 'favored' infant industries (Kaur 2004). Part of the national project's objective was to shift away from the agriculture-based primary economies (of rubber and tin) to secondary industries which were focused on manufacturing with the hopes of removing the dependency on imported goods and finished products. Following the passing of the Pioneer Industries Ordinance (PIO) of 1958, in which manufacturing firms enjoyed tariff protections and tax relief, the number of such firms in Malaysia grew from a meagre 18 to 148 in ten years (Sivalingam 1994), although this initial approach of pure import substitutions was deemed insufficient for generating new jobs and maintaining stable growth. This prompted a further shift into an export-based economy.

Table 3.2: Structural Change in Malaysian Economies by Share of Official Labor Force (%), 1950-1990

Sector	***1950***	***1960***	***1970***	***1980***	***1990***
Industry	10.13	11.68	14.28	18.76	23.14
Services	22.52	25.06	31.98	40.45	49.50
Agriculture	83.52	80.95	78.39	75.82	73.25

Source: ILO (hhtp://laborsta/ilo.org)

The Birth of Malaysian Export Processing Zones

With unemployement circa 1968-69 hovering at the very high rate of 10% (12% for Malays), the government was hard pressed to come up with new initiatives to boost economic production further (Choudhury 1970, Sivalingam 1994). As a result, the 1971 Free Trade Zone Act was passed, which stimulated the growth of export porcessing zones (EPZs) close to major cities and the major expressways. These zones were protected in terms of their subjection to broader trade regulations already in place, and were afforded tax exemptions (on exports) and even subsidized factory spaces. EPZs was lucrative and highly appealing not just for the purposes of growing the national economy but also for foreign investment.

Manufacturing firms from America, for example, were keen on taking advantange of the relaxed regulatory framework, political stability and availability of cheaper labor by moving their manufacturing productions to these zones. Electronics became a major sector of production in these zones, with Intel and National Semiconductor leading the way. In the space of two years between 1972-1974, there were a total of 41 EPZ manufacturers established in Malaysia, with a staggering 20% increase in employment in manufacturing sectors in the same period (Sivalingam 1994). The rise in Foreign Direct Investment was unprecedented, with a 230% increase between 1973 and 1974 representing a high-water mark and evidence for the appeal of the EPZs. However, this was immediately followed by a sharp decline when FDI inflow actually dropped by 60% in 1975, primarily because of the adoption of a new ethnic requirement that imposed *Bumiputera* or indigenous Malay ownership and stakes upon large firms (Sivalingam 2004).

Table 3.3: Inflow of FDI, 1971-1981

Year	*Inflow of FDI (USD millions)*	*Growth rate of Inflow of FDI*
1970	94	
1971	100	6.38
1972	114	14.00
1973	172	50.80
1974	571	231.90
1975	350	-38.70
1976	381	8.80
1977	406	6.56
1978	500	23.10
1979	573	14.60
1980	934	63.00
1981	1265	35.40

Source: International Monetary Fund (IMF)

Employment in the manufacturing sectors of EPZs between 1960 and 1980 were primarily aimed towards local Malaysian populations, but since many of the firms consisted of Multi-national Companies (MNCs), there were significant presences of foreign expatriates, mostly from other East Asian countries and American firms. While the overwhelming majority of workers were Malaysians (i.e. those with some form of Malaysian citizenship including Chinese and Indians) in these zones, there were some differences in the sectoral and firm-based hierarchies, as noted by Sivalingam:

> "More than 99% of the total number of employees in the 131 EPZ firms were Malaysian citizens. The Malays constituted about 60% of the workforce in the seven EPZs. However that figure varied according to the country of origin of firms. In MNEs owned by locals or Asian nationals, Malays comprised of more than 70% of the workforce. In those owned by OECD investors, they made up just 50%... in companies owned by NICs and other developing countries (e.g. Bermuda, Panama), Malays were less than 45% of the total number of employees. In the case of MNEs from NICs, they were less than 25% of the workforce." (Sivalingam 1994).

The pariticpation of women in the EPZs was also markedly higher – with more than 50% of the workers being female in both industrial estates and EPZs. However, only 11% of the managerial and professional employees were female (Sivalingam 1994).

EPZs that were originally set up for the purposes of boosting Malaysia's economy as exporters of manufactured goods and also as generators of local employment were successful on both counts for a large part, setting up three decades of strong GDP growth. The increasing urbanization of Malaysian society also led to a growth of the middle class of professionals and business-owners. Between 1974 and 1985, the expansion of the workforce, through the EPZs and other urban indsutries also provided the grounds for new mobilizations of labor. The Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) in particularly grew in prominence as more firms started to have labor unions, even in EPZs. As wages and demands for benefits and protections grew, so did the tendency to seek out alternative sources of cheap and flexible labor, as the decline in foreign investment in the 1980s began to threaten an outward shift.

Table 3.4: EPZs in Southeast Asia, 1990

Country	*No. of Zones*
Indonesia	1 EPZ; 5 bonded zones
Malaysia	15 EPZs; 3 commercial zones, 9 free industrial
Philippines	5 EPZs
Singapore	6 Free Trade Zones
Thailand	5 Industrial estates; 4 EPZs

Source: Caspersz (1996)

New Labor Migration

In the mid- 1980s period, political and economic transformations were anchored within a broader shift towards greater openness and liberalization. In many developng countries, these shifts (beginning in the 1970s) were part of widescale and over-reaching Structural Adjustment Programs pushed by international organizations and western states that forced NICs and developing countries to relinquish state regulations over the economy and markets of production. The neoliberal trasnformations brought about the withdrawal of the state from economic oversight, through the eradication of trade barriers and protectionist policies, the opening up of markets to the volatility of unregulated competition (which of course drove economies of Egypt and Argentina, among others, into crisis). Neoliberal globalization did not just entail the liberalization of product markets and capital, but also a further liberalization of labor markets.

While transnational labor migration has already been present for a long time, as shown in the previous sections, the changes that can be seen as characterizing a neoliberalization of labor markets refer in particular to the formal institutionalization of 'Managed Migration' (a.k.a Global Migration Governance). What this meant for developing countries with a strong and growing demand for flexible labor is that foreign labor becomes an ever more attractive option, particularly when coupled with the realities of previous generations of workers becoming part of a booming of middle-class consumers and professionals. The EPZs and other economic bases of the Malaysian state, thanks to the stablity and growth of productivity, enjoyed the protection of the government, but the growing labor demands meant that the state (and private firms) had to reach increasingly outwards for workers in semi-skilled sectors.

Both Malaysia and Singapore enjoyed sustained growth through the 1980s, but were very quickly beginning to experience labor shortages. Inflows of foreign investment were beginning to be affected (Sivalingam 1994), especially where in sectors that relied heavily on unskilled and semi-skilled labor. It was during this period that there was an increase in bilateral agreements with neighboring states through which a greater flow of foreign labor was facilitated (Kaur 2004). The Malaysian state, which by now came under the leadership of Mahathir Mohammad, did not relinquish its protectionist policies for various sectors (automobile and information technology) but at the same time reversed many of its frameworks from earlier on facilitating local workforce expansion in order to address these labor shortages. This manifested in practices and policies aimed

at managing foreign labor inflows through agreements with Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and other countries.

It was also during this period that different global actors begin exploring the value of a rapidly growing remittance economy, in what became known as the New Economics of Labor Migration, or simply the New Labor Migration (Stark & Bloom 1985). This new period of liberalized labor markets fostered a more complex division of labor at the international level, largely due to very different levels and rates of development between countries. Inequality, in other words, drove this shift and turned existing development paradigms on their heads, as policy-makers, economists and experts begin to recognize and highlight the impact that migrant remittances could have on boosting national economies. 'Migrants as agents of development' became the new policy 'mantra', which still persists as a dominant paradigm today (Faist 2011, Muniandy and Bonatti 2014).

For countries with high demands for labor such as Malaysia, whose primary source of growth was from exports of goods and increasingly value added services, this new labor migration paradigm allowed the state to maintain its legitimacy and control over large parts of the economy while at the same time maintaining competitiveness in the global markets. Memorandums of Understandings (MoUs) with Indonesia, which began in 1984 under the Medan Agreement, secured a regulated flow of plantation workers, and was followed in 1985 by an MoU with Philippines for domestic workers (Kaur 2004). The Medan Agreement marked the first formal institutionalization of Temporary Labor Migration (TLM) at the level of the state, wherein managed migration became codified into state law and part of the regulatory framework. Further MoUs were made with Bangladesh and Thailand in 1986, primarily for securing the services of plantation and construction workers.

One of the major factors involved in this shift towards foreign labor in unskilled and semi-skilled sectors was the changing character of local Malaysian populations. While still divided by ethnic differences in terms of economic prosperity and political power, there was still a general expansion of the middle class and higher standards of living due to subsidized and free public education and increasing numbers of highly education professionals. The jobs in sectors that used to be heavily occupied by working class Malaysians – especially manufacturing and agriculture – were no longer seen as appealing, and began to acquire the identity of being '3-D' work – Dirty, Dangerous and Demeaning (Chin 1999, Nah 2013). At the same time, states such as Indonesia and

Philippines, and very soon after Bangladesh, began to realize the economic benefits of exporting their citizens as foreign labor to fill those demands in high-growth economies such as Malaysia.

Table 3.5: Sector Distribution of Migrant workers (1990- July 2004)

Sector	*Share of Workers (%)*				
	1990	1995	2001	2003	July 2004
Agriculture	47.9	36.1	32.9	16.5	24.7
Mining	0.6	0.4	0.2	-	-
Construction	10.4	13.5	11.5	23.6	19.8
Manufacturing	9.8	24.1	24.7	31.5	30.5
Services	31.3	25.9	30.7	28.4	25.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Department of Statistics, Sarker (2012)

Table 3.6: Estimates of Registered Migrant Workers (Skilled and Semi-Skilled), 1993-2006

Year	*Numbers of migrant workers*
1993	532723
1994	642057
1995	726689
1996	745239
1997	1471562
1998	1127652
1999	897705
2000	799865
2001	807984
2002	1091512
2003	1398495
2004	1359500
2005	1944646
2006	1869208

Source: Dept. of Immigration, Kanapathy (2001), Kaur (2004)

Key shifts of labor demographics occurred primarily in construction and manufacturing in the early 1990s, with a greater reliance on foreign labor being the primary trend. While the institutionalization of Temporary Labor Migration did facilitate a new age of mass labor migration, the levels of bureaucratic complexity and fee structures this shift entailed also had another impact – the rapid increase of irregular migration. Hence, statistical data on migrant labor in Malaysia has to be read with a lot of caution – estimates of the number of undocumented migrants vary wildly between 500,000 to 5 million, although the tentative consensus situates the number as similar to the number of documented (or 'registered) migrants – 2 million. It is still somewhat possible to analyse the statistical data in terms of broad patterns and shifts in terms of economic sectors however.

Along with the liberalization of labor markets, Malaysia also experienced transformations away from agriculture and primary sectors, a trend that continued since the Independence. Manufacturing, construction and services grew increasingly more important, with the last being particularly significant politically as the state began pushing for development of Information technology, value added services and other tertiary sectors. Kuala Lumpur began to increasingly attain the characteristics and attributes of a 'global city' (Sassen), with its cutting-edge competitiveness in the IT sector, as well as the state's newfound pioneer status in Islamic Banking and as an international 'Halal Hub' putting it on the global map, so to speak. Tourism is another major sector where services becomes crucial.

The Economies of TLM

Instiutionalizing Temporary Labor Migration, through reform of Immigration laws, establishment of bilateral agreements, and various other measures (including bring foreign labor under the supervision of the Ministry of Home Affairs), has various economic implications for Malaysia, far beyond the most obvious changes to demography and general workforce. As the country became increasingly perceived as a strong 'destination' country for migrants, this fostered new opportunities and industries to emerge that thrived of this period of managed migration. These new 'parasite'[15] economies are able to thrive and, in many cases, achieve tremendous levels of profits thanks to temporary labor migration and the remittance economy in particular.

One such economy is that of international wire transfer – led by the likes of Western Union, Moneygram and Prabhu. Many of these agents are located in the most migrant heavy locations in the city- such as Chinatown and Bukit Bintang. Small, private airlines such as *Air Asia* have grown into vast, multi-billion dollar firms thanks to the low-cost travel model specifically designed for facilitating transportation needs of migrant workers, with the help of state-backed infrastructural support in the form of low-cost carrier terminals (LCCTs) being build alongside the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA). Private colleges in the country also benefit from the greater openness to foreign students, with a more relaxed appraoch to regulating student visas and the ability to bring in foreign tuition money.

[15] I draw this term from the concept introduced by Wilson and Miraftab, who use it to refer to new economic firms such as money-lenders, brokers, and pay-day loans in poor urban neighborhoods in the US, that prey upon the desperation of marginalized and migrant communities

Key Systems of Migrant Labor Recruitment Post-1985

This period of New Labor Migration can in many ways be compared to the colonial period in terms of the adopted systems and practices of recruitment that are used. Broadly, what Kaur termed the 'elastic use' of Chinese and Indian migrant labor between 1890 and 1940 can almost be completely transplanted to describe TLM practices in the current period. This elastic used is premised on the requirement and expectation that migrants would return to their home countries once their term of employment ends, or they would have to seek renewal of permits. 'Elastic' could also be used in references to the increasing fragmentation of migrant labor which echo the older 'divide and rule' approach designed and implemented to keep different ethnic and racial groups separated by sector and space – the contemporary form of 'divide-and-rule' has been referred to as 'securitization' (McGahan 2010) and 'diversification and privatization' (also through the lens of security) (Chin 2008). 'Elastic' also poignantly describes the cyclical way in which the state moves between phases of legalization and deportations of foreigners.

Facilitating an increase in labor migration to Malaysia was never a smooth or easy process. While the demand kept increasing for cheap labor, along with a newer demand for domestic work, there was also the issue of local ethnic politics produced by affirmative action policies built around Malay Supremacy that were not made to assist or help under-represented populations, especially rural communities and Indian- Malaysians. There were growing contestations on issues of citizenship and challenges to the authority of the Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition in parliament. The ruling party, UMNO, were also concerned with the dilution of it's supporter base of Malay-Muslim voters with the growing vocal presence and mobilization of different ethnic groups. In some cases, such as in Sabah and Sarawak (the Eastern Malaysian states on Borneo), the local state authorities were accused of bringing in large numbers of Indonesian migrants by offering 'fake' citizenship documents for the purposes of increasing the numbers of Malay-Muslims against the largely diverse indigenous groups (Sadiq 2008).

Table 3.7: Composition of Foreign Workers by Country of Origin (%)

Country	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*	*Jan-July 2004*	*March 2006*
Indonesia	53.3	65.7	69.4	68.4	64.7	63.8	66.5	65.7
Nepal	0.1	0.1	0.1	7.3	9.7	9.7	9.2	10.8
Bangladesh	37.1	27.0	24.6	17.1	9.7	8.4	8.0	3.2
India	3.6	3.2	3.0	4.0	4.6	5.6	4.5	7.6
Myanmar	1.3	0.9	0.5	1.0	3.3	4.3	4.2	5.0

Philippines	2.7	.8	1.2	1.0	0.8	0.6	1.1	1.2
Thailand	0.7	0.5	0.4	0.4	2.4	0.9	1.0	0.4
Pakistan	1.0	0.6	0.5	0.4	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.8
Others	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.4	4.6	6.5	5.4	5.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 3.7 (cont.) Source: Sarker (2012)

Table 3.8: Migrant Workers in Malaysia by Job Sector, 2010

Country	*Domestic*	*Construction*	*Manufacturing*	*Services*	*Plantation*	*Agriculture*	*Total*
Indonesia	203225	192789	198643	38684	202156	82435	917,932
Bangladesh	18	61303	170332	27002	30599	18112	307366
Nepal	84	3785	135764	26901	1621	7655	175810
Myanmar	118	13542	92135	22654	2211	9600	140260
India	236	5002	13866	47021	16675	30997	113797
Vietnam	901	3021	68433	2018	28	441	74842
Philippines	9657	1031	1915	2944	1489	1604	18640
Pakistan	11	5922	2217	1593	1244	12002	22989
Thailand	346	811	893	4588	57	407	7102
Cambodia	9166	92	2353	218	137	125	12091
China	15	1303	935	6592	36	13	8894
Sri Lanka	753	69	1382	665	128	417	3414
Laos	2	7	16	3	1	28	57
Uzbekistan	0	0	0	4	0	0	4
Kazakhstan	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Others	11	45	2	3	0	0	61
Total	224544	288722	688886	180890	256382	163836	1803260

Source: Department of Immigration; Sarker (2012)

Table 3.9: Countries and Sectors Allowed Foreign Worker Recruitment

Sector	*Country*
Construction	Philippines (male), Indonesia, Cambodia, Kazakhstan, Laos, Nepal, Myanmar, Nepal, Thailand, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam
Manufacturing	Philippines (male), Indonesia (female), Cambodia, Kazakhstan, Laos, Myanmar, Nepal, Thailand, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Vietnam
Plantation/Agriculture	Philippines (male), Indonesia, India, Cambodia, Kazakhstan, Laos, Myanmar, Nepal, Thailand, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam
Services	All source countries for general work (except India – cooks only)
- Restaurants	All source countries except India
- Laundry	All source countries except India
- Cleaning/Sanitation	All source countries except India
- Caddy	All source countries except India
- Resorts	All source countries except India
- Welfare Homes	All source countries except India
- Cargo	India Only
- High tension cables	India Only
- Domestic (maids)	Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Thailand, Philppines, Cambodia

Table 3.10: Foreign Labor Dependence by Sector (%), 1985 and 2004

Sectors	*1985*	*2004*
Agriculture	6.2	20.5
Manufacturing	1.7	11.0
Construction	7.6	13.0
Services	4.8	13.3

Source: Dept. of Statistics, Malaysia (Kanapathy 2008; Sarker 2012)

In general, the systems of foreign labor recruitment were varied based on the sectors, the countries of origin, and state regulations. As TLM became increasingly institutionalized, the number of migrants who came to Malaysia via irregular means – trafficking, smuggling, and as asylum-seekers – also increased. Different groups were assigned different status, terms and conditions, as well as labels, including as 'foreign workers', 'social visitors', short term visitors, 'foreign domestic helpers' and refugees. Gender divisions were restructured and reinforced under this new labor migration, with more women from countries such as Philippines joining a global care chain of migrant domestic labor. In Malaysia, domestic labor has become a sector most troubled by issues of exploitation, abuse and human rights vioations – largely because of the overwhelming presence of migrant women from much poorer and vulnerable backgrounds as well as the patronizing treatment of these workers as non-workers (Chin 2009, Tenaganita 2010).

Temporary labor migrants who are formally recruited in unskilled and semi-skilled sectors come under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Home Affairs, but are also subject to the regulatory power of the Immigration Department. They are given short-term contracts that usually last 3-5 years but very between sectors and types of work – with the explicit stipulation that they would not be allowed to settle permanently, apply for residency, bring in spouses or dependents, and acquire any property or businesses. These short-term labor contract apply largely to male migrants from Indonesia, Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Pakistan, and India, a situation that bears similarities to the colonial preference for 'sojourner' laborers from India and China who were single and male. Private recruitment agencies and labor brokers are key players in the transantional market for labor, with most workers from South Asian countries coming to Malaysia under bonded contracts and a lot of debt to these recruiters (Dannecker 2013).

Over the last two decades, the issue of 'contract substition' has become more concerning with regards to migrant workers in Malaysia. Similar to the 'indenture contracts' at the start of the 20th century, contract substitution occurs when migrants who come to Malaysia with the aid of private agents and brokers are forced into employment contracts and conditions vastly different

from the ones they had either signed or been promised before they had left their homes. These substitute contracts are overtly exploitative and tie helpless migrants to almost complete bondage with very little compensation, as exemplified most recently in the case of Lokesh Sapaliga (Palansamy 2014). Human trafficking and the far darker side of illegal exploitation of migrants continues to be a major international and global issue that is extremely rampant in Southeast Asia.

From Divide and Rule to Diversify and Control: The New Politics of Temporariness

The migrants who participated in this research and the sites which I spent time conducting observational research at reflect a massive increase in diversity and inequality as the historical trends shown in this chapter suggest. Migrants come to Malaysia from a wider spectrum of national and ethnic backgrounds than ever before, yet in many ways there is a reversion towards the older, colonial modes of regulating and exploiting migrant labor on the part of private interests and the state. Diversity of migrant populations unfortunately does not entail a greater sense of openness and progress in social and political terms – but very much the opposite, as more workers find themselves unable to secure the mot basic of rights and civil benefits despite being part of a migrant workforce that makes up more than a quarter of the adult working force in the country.

'Security' has become an important concept through which regulation and policing of 'Managed Migration' frameworks such as Temporary labor Migration in Malaysia gains legitimacy and authority in the eyes of the public. The state's establishment of civilian corps such as RELA in order to police and root out the *PATI* 'scourge' (*Pendatang Tanpa Izin – Non-Permitted Visitors)* imposes powerful institutional power upon migrants who have to negotiate restrictive conditions and the risk of unjustified punishment on a regular basis. The diversification of the migrant labor force has visible manifestations – in places such as the Chinatown distict where Bangladeshi, Nepali, Indian, Chinese, Thai and Burmese migrants work and interact everyday, as well as in expensive gated communities where Nepali security guards, Indonesian construction workers, Philippina and Sri Lankan maids live and work within the same spatial settings.

What this diversity of temporary migrant labor engenders in terms of everyday life practices and politics is the key issue with which this work grapples. The history of migration in colonial Malaya and Malaysia provide important contexts and contingencies that have shaped and influenced not just structural dynamics (such as development and post-colonial politics) but also the unique cultural and social conditions migrants find themselves thrown into – one where ethnic and class

politics take on particular forms that have a direct bearing on the experiences of migrants – as well as the ways in which they negotiate and work through them.

CHAPTER 4: MIGRANTS AND THE RE-MAKING OF URBAN SPACES IN CHINATOWN, KUALA LUMPUR

An Evening in Petaling Street

It is quite possibly one of the noisiest, busiest, and chaotic spaces in the heart of KL - Petaling Street in the heart of 'Chinatown'. On a normal weekday evening, throngs of people move through and inhabit the two narrow stretches of tarmac which intersect this formerly 'frontier' urban center made prominent by early colonial-era Chinese miners and entrepreneurs. Today, the rows of colonial buildings, shop-lots and residences lining the streets form part of a canopy that also includes a looming, semi-transparent green ceiling that was built as part of an urban 're-development' project in 2003. The ceiling is known as the 'Green Dragon'. A few feet above the multi-colored tents and stalls that occupy these streets hang a thousand little red-lanterns, which glow with an almost ethereal electric light. Giant arches with elaborate Chinese dragons line the main 'entrance' of to Petaling Street, further accentuating the ethnically Chinese identity of this preternaturally urban setting.

Petaling Street's main inhabitants consist of migrants from Bangladesh, Nepal, and Myanmar, along with a handful of ethnic Chinese who still continue to work and trade their goods here. The many stalls and markets here sell everything from pirated and counterfeit goods to body-tattoos and piercings. One can easily find top-brand name perfumes, fashion accessories, soccer jerseys, shoes, toys and all manner of items on the cheap, at the 'lowest prices around', as many of the vendors repeatedly remind those who walk by. The place is also permeated by the smell of roasted nuts, various local street foods, strong perfumes, and sour milk - a heady and disorienting mixture. The presence of so many distinctly non-Chinese migrants working here reveals the deep contradiction between the 'planned' aesthetic of Chinatown and practices and identities of people who spend their daily lives here.

A vast majority of the vendors, crafts-workers, and other service providers (tattoo artists, masseurs, and sex-workers) tend to come from places as diverse as Dhaka, Jakarta, Rangoon, Manila, Kathmandu and Bangkok, as well as Phnom Penh. Young Bangladeshi men sit in groups just outside their stalls, deep in conversation, often stopping to attract the attentions of mostly Western

backpackers to peruse their wares. Women from Vietnam and Thailand approach single men walking by with brochures in their hands, offering different forms of services, including sexual. Other migrants, mostly men, walk around wearing reflective jackets with the word 'Kontraktor' printed on the back, carrying brooms and dustpans which they use to sweep up litter from the streets and sidewalks.

Later in the evening, sometime after 1 p.m. when the tents are being taken down and most of the vendors have closed up and left, the only remaining people in these streets are around 25-30 of the 'street cleaners' - the men with the reflective jackets - plus a few women and transgendered sex-workers waiting for clients between alleys and stairways of the shop-lot buildings. The cleaners go about their late night work quietly and efficiently, with barely a hint of conversation. Some of them drag along large heavy-duty plastic bags into which they dump trash and all manner of rubbish left lying on the ground. Most of these men are from Bangladesh, recruited via private agents and contractors to carry out work required by the city municipality. They are responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of the Street, and ensuring that it is ready for the return of the vendors and visitors the following day. Their labor, despite being out-doors, is largely invisible, literally cloaked in darkness with only the dull red glow of the lanterns providing minimal illumination.

Reproducing "Chinatown" as Neoliberal Urban Space

The work of migrants in maintaining the everyday 'life' of Chinatown is a relatively recent phenomenon, stretching back roughly a decade or so since the redevelopment plans began in 2003 (Malaysia Chronicle 2013). The district, which is also in very close proximity to the iconic cultural center of Central Market, the city's main public transportation terminal, and other 'superblocks' (Simone and Roy 2010) such as Bukit Bintang, underwent periods of gradual degradation due to the moving out of mostly ethnic Chinese businesses and property owners whose desire to move out of central city locations and into posh new middle-class residences in the suburbs of KL. This created problems for the city and urban planners who recognized the district's appeal as a tourist attraction, an important sector of the national economy, thus prompting significant investments aimed at improving the infrastructural and aesthetic qualities of the streets. This, for the most part, meant generating new incentives for small businesses and entrepreneurs who saw their opportunity to tap into a very lucrative tourism industry. Many of the businesses changed to accommodate new 'global'

cosmopolitan sensibilities that translated into cheap accommodations for backpackers from Europe and Australia, new 'rentier' practices and a greater openness to different markets of labor and capital.

In many ways, Chinatown represents an example of a 'neoliberal urban space' (Harvey 2007, Bayat 2010). The re-development plans since 2003 largely followed the pattern of re-structuring urban space to fit the needs of capital at the cost of public good, a shifting of priorities that meant basic services such as maintenance, trash collection and landscaping became outsourced to private contractors. These 'neoliberal rationalization' that favors a 'market-driven urbanity' (Harvey 2007; Bayat 2010) consequently brings about several outcomes that engender profound changes that include higher levels of unemployment, casual work and an 'expanding informalization which altogether resulted in the fragmentation of urban labor' (Bayat 2002). Bayat argues that this 'neoliberal city' produces new forms of lifeworlds which are characterized by a greater public presence and visibility of the urban subaltern, a city that is turned inside-out in a very literal sense.

This neoliberal city, while built upon sharper divides of inequality fostered by capitalism, can also produce new, unintended and unpredictable modes of politics bolstered by this 'out-door' way of life. Here, the 'urban' public space becomes a 'crucial arena to express discontent' through both physical and non-physical practices of encroachment (Bayat 2010). The poor, following Bayat's argument, are able to encroach upon the 'urban texture' through their presence and visibility. This urban texture implies physical space but also culture, order, 'mode of life' and the 'sensory'. Bayat's exemplary cases tends to be the cities of Cairo, where the increasing presence of educated and professionally trained groups in informal economies and spaces tend to give rise to what he calls 'street politics' and 'non-movements'.

In this case of Chinatown, Kuala Lumpur, it is the presence of a different type of urban subaltern – 'temporary' migrants – who become the main agents engaged in these politics of the neoliberal city. These are migrants who come from countries that are largely considered to be economically poorer and less developed than Malaysia – Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar, and Thailand, among others. In addition to being poor and marginalized, they also do not possess the formal rights of citizenship which would give them to existing public services such as social welfare, public healthcare and the right to organize (Chin 2008, Nah 2013). They work formally as indentured sub-contracted labor (as in the case of the cleaners) or as informal entrepreneurs and

service-providers (as in the case of vendors and sex-workers). Most of the services that are made available to them by 'public' provision tend to be through informal, 'under-table' and corrupt arrangements with local residents, business owners, and authorities, which exist outside the recognized institutions of neoliberalization – the state, the private sector and NGOs.

Despite this severely disempowering and marginalized positioning, 'temporary' migrants in Chinatown have become a very important and significant part of both the reproduction and transformation of this particular urban space. My ethnographic observations and interviews with the inhabitants of the Chinatown district, reported and analyzed in this chapter, reveal that they are very much deeply engaged with the politics of place-making that are subversive and unintended by city planners and neoliberal capitalism. Aspects of this type of place-making agency includes, for example, the growth of new migrant cosmopolitan communities such as Little Bangla and Little Burma, located very closely to Petaling Street, where the sheer presence of migrants in public space highlight powerful forms of encroachment. Streets such as Jalan Silang, have taken on the identity of 'political streets' (Bayat 2010); streets that encapsulate the 'collective sentiments, shared feelings, and public opinions of ordinary people in their day-to-day utterances and practices expressed broadly and casually in urban public spaces, taxies, sidewalks, and mass demonstrations.'

Migrants in Chinatown

> "Petaling Street was for once quite crowded in the evening - it was about 7.00 pm when we walked around. There were a lot of tourists and backpackers, almost as many as there were locals. As my friend commented, this seemed to make the number of migrant vendors seem somewhat diminished, though I think this had more to do with the fact that they were able to blend in much better in the sheer diversity of the crowd. We came back to Chinatown around midnight, most of the vendors had already packed up and were leaving, and the migrant cleaners were out and about with their nightly labor. It was a surreal experience, walking around here at night, with no crowds, and only the people who were packing up or doing last-minute chores, under the eerie red glow of the lanterns hanging above us all along the street. We came across three Vietnamese men who were grilling dried salted fish outside a restaurant, probably for the next day. There were the migrant workers from Bangladesh who were sweeping and moving the trash and litter from the streets. Between the construction workers working on the sewage pipe and the street cleaners working to clear up Chinatown late at night, that metaphor of a 'city built by migrants' seemed way less like a metaphor and much more like the actual reality. For me, despite the fact that this was not really anything new to see these workers about their daily lives, it still felt deeply humbling to watch all these men quietly sweeping the streets, and smiling cheerfully while standing in deep holes covered in dust and dirt, putting themselves at risk just to make sure important things got built. They might never actually get to enjoy the benefits or privilege of those very things they built, which is another sad and depressing truth. More than the fact that they were migrants or foreign workers being tasked with maintaining and building this city, it was

> the fact that they were an entire fleet of silent, largely ignored labor force that struck me deeply. As my friend said to me as we walked back to the car after the midnight filming in Chinatown, under the red glow of the lanterns, it is things like this that suddenly make us realize the privilege that the rest of us often take for granted. I could not agree more. It is nothing more than good fortune and the luck of the draw that results in some of us being able to lead much more comfortable lives and not have to work under such difficult and marginalized conditions - the good fortune of being born in a wealthier country, to wealthier families, and under relatively stable conditions." (Excerpt from field notes)

'Chinatown', Kuala Lumpur is prominent for its migrant identity and diversity. The people who live, work, and visit this intensely busy and active part of the city come from quite literally everywhere – from rural Vietnam to California. The majority of those who work here tend to be from poorer 'developing' states of the global South, though this is perhaps not an accurate reflection of the relative inequalities and differences between countries and regions that actually produce and reinforce transnational patterns of migration. In Chinatown, the 'work' of producing this iconic urban space is carried out by a complex assemblage that draws together and brings into contact migrants from Bangladesh (men), Nepal, Myanmar, Phillipines (women), Vietnam, Ghana, Nigeria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and China, tourists from Europe and Australia, and even international students. There are also still a large number of local Chinese vendors and shop-keepers as well, though nowhere near as many as there just less than a decade before.

In *Locating Migration*, Glick Shiller and Caglar (2010) stress the need for research on migration and urban transformation to pay more attention to how these two processes are mutually affective and crucial for one another. Migrants, they argue, play more than just marginal or consequential roles in shaping and reshaping urban spaces and 'cities' – they also engage in major transformative practices through various methods and outcomes. Here, migrants –specifically those who are 'temporary' and not formally 'citizens' of Malaysia – are the core labor that allows 'Chinatown'/Petaling Street to exist as it is, on an everyday basis. They perform the crucial work of setting up stalls, cleaning the streets, providing various services and facilitating the necessary links for the trading and shipping of goods. These forms of work range from complex transnational arrangements for counterfeit goods to hailing cabs for visitors and tourists. The significance of this diversity of both migrant identities and practices to urban transformation lies in how such elements 'rescale' the city at a global level (Glick-Shiller and Caglar 2011). Re-scaling has to do with how different cities become positioned within the global economy, and how important or powerful they are in relation to other cities. Chinatown, KL, benefits from the transnational social fields in which

migrants are engaged in – the various counterfeit goods that are sold here depends heavily on the international reputation of this market and its capacity to appeal to foreign visitors.

> "I met up with one Bangladeshi friend who I had come to know over the past few weeks. Khader (not his real name) sold many different soccer jerseys at his little stall that he sets up daily here in Petaling Street. Soccer jerseys are very popular in Malaysia, and because most 'original' replica shirts of this type tend to be very expensive due to the exchange rate (sometimes more than RM 300 per shirt!), most people preferred to buy the far cheaper imitation ones such as those sold by Khader. Khader is not the only one selling soccer jerseys - there must be at least 15 or more other vendors who were selling the same things. The jerseys were mostly of the popular and big European soccer clubs - the English Premier League clubs (Liverpool, Man Utd, Arsenal, Chelsea), Italian clubs like Juventus and Napoli, and of course the Spanish giants Real Madrid and Barcelona. The imitation shirts were very authentic looking - a far cry from the obviously fake ones that used to be sold years ago. According to Khader, who had been selling these jerseys since 2010, the reason these new imitation jerseys looked so authentic was because they were probably made by the same people who make the original ones. He thinks this because even the originals are made in the same countries as the imitations - Thailand, China, Taiwan, and Indonesia. Khader says that it is really stupid that companies like Nike, Reebok, Adidas and Puma sell their officially sponsored jerseys at such expensive retail prices in markets that are so close to where they are manufacturing those shirts - and I could not agree more. By comparison, the 'advertised' price of a shirt from Khader's collection is only RM 20-30 per shirt, though negotiating and haggling could sometimes bring down the price to RM 15. Khader's jerseys, he claims, are made out of actual 'sports' quality material, the same type that most of the expensive jerseys are made from, though I have uncertainties about this. Either way, the shirts did seem to be of high quality, as far as I could tell. The shirts all come from a local Chinese supplier, says Khader. That supplier gets his goods from China, through 'shipments in Port Klang', he explains. Port Klang is Malaysia's largest and most important international and regional shipping hub, not too far away from Kuala Lumpur itself. Khader's supplier takes a fix cut of the sales of the goods, usually around RM 5-7 per shirt that he manages to sell, while the rest is his 'profit'. That must mean that the cost of manufacturing these shirts is incredibly cheap, if even one of the final middle-men only takes such a small cut from each product. I do wonder how much the worker who makes the shirt gets per shirt - it wouldn't surprise me if it was less than RM 1, or even fifty cents. Khader says his income is quite unsteady, but normally he manages to make at least RM 50 or so each day, sometimes during the weekends he would be able to make a lot more than that. It was not the most stable income, but it was good enough and he has been able to save quite a bit. " (excerpt from field notes)

Migrant vendors who sell their wares and goods under the cover of tarpaulin and canvas tents along Petaling Street have to engage with local business and property owners in order to gain permission to do so, and often end up paying some form of 'rent' to these owners. In many cases, these vendors set up deals and arrangements with middle-men who are able to provide the goods they need to sell – goods that are trafficked and shipped in from East Asian ports in Taiwan, Korea and Hong Kong. This creates a very complex and bewildering network that connects migrants from South Asia and the Middle East, and South East Asia with local Malaysian agents, shipping

networks, port authorities, to those in Hong Kong, Seoul and Taiwan. Vendors like Khader are the most 'public' faces of these transnational networks, but not the only ones. There are also a large number of migrants on tourist visas ('social visit visas') from Hong Kong and China who are similarly working as vendors, many of whom are young teenagers working as 'sales representatives' for cheap mobile phones and computers.

> "As I was walking around the kiosks of phone vendors in one particular building, a number of vendors kept gesturing and calling me towards them - young men and women mostly. They spoke to me in Malay, well enough to make me simply assume that they were local. Most of these young vendors were trying to sell the latest mobile phones, iPhones and Android phones, and were generally well-dressed and quite 'trendy'. The first of these vendors, a young man who looked barely out of his teens, with well-groomed hairstyle and upturned collars, hailed me rather impolitely and beckoned me with his hand to come close. He was rather conspiratorial in speaking with me, showing me a brochure advertising the retail prices of some of the latest phones in the market. He pointed to one particular phone which was retailing at over RM 2000 (USD 650), and immediately pulled out his calculator to show me his special 'discount' price which was RM 500. A quarter of the retail price of the phone. He tells me to wait and brings out the actual smartphone in question, which he then proceeds to demonstrate- it was in fact a very shiny and very impressive phone, capable of responding to hand gestures even without touching the screen. He even explained that it came with a 2-year warranty. I was obviously skeptical and asked if him he was pulling my leg with the price, but he insisted that it was a 'promotion'. He then, for some reason, asks me if I was 'Bangla'[16] (sic) - to which I was a bit surprised and said no. I was a local Malaysian, I said, and he seemed rather embarrassed. When I asked him if he was Malaysian, he laughed and said that he was from Hong Kong. So were his two colleague at that kiosk. It struck me then that perhaps I had been wrong in my assumption about some of the vendors in this place. I asked him how it was that he spoke Malay so fluently, and he replied that he has been in Malaysia for more than two years now. The young man continued to hustle me to buy the phone, even asking me about my current phone (which was actually only slightly cheaper than his 'offered' price, but significantly weaker and less advanced than the one on promotion). When I told him how much I had bought the phone I was using for, he immediately reduced the offer down to RM 450 (less than USD 150). Just for comparison, the phone he was trying to sell is comparable to a Samsung S4 in technology - a phone that costs about USD 580 on retail - but being sold at 150! Having declined to purchase the phone, I really cannot say much about the quality or authenticity of the product that is purchased. I walked around a bit more and had similar experiences with other vendors - six of them, in fact, four men and two women. They were all very young and, as I found out, they were all from Hong Kong. They were engaged in the same business of selling mobile phones at ridiculously discounted prices. Almost every single vendor had the same strategy of calling out to potential customers and beckoning them with their fingers, followed by very conspiratorial conversations." (Excerpt from field notes)

[16] A term used derogatorily towards Bangladeshi migrants in Malaysia.

The presence of these young migrants from Hong Kong comes as a surprise as this is not a group that is officially recognized or acknowledged in the migration statistics of Malaysia. Many of these young men and women were passing as local Chinese Malaysians, thanks largely to their language proficiency. Those that I spoke with said that they were on 'holiday' or tourist visas to the country, which they use to come and work for short periods of time in KL. The opportunities to work as vendors and sales representative are apparently numerous and plentiful enough in Malaysia that it makes sense to travel from Hong Kong for these brief windows of time (usually between 1-2 months). While not formally the same as migrant workers on 'temporary' permits, the Hong Kong youth are part of this extensive migrant community, albeit a group that has managed to successfully hide their foreign status thanks to their ethnic affiliations. The young man from the excerpt above shows further example of his understanding of urban KL ethnic terms in his use of the word 'Bangla' to refer to me.

Returning to the question of rescaling the city, the young Hong Kong migrants are important agents who facilitate and reinforce a transnational network of information that help Malaysia become identified as a place of opportunity away from the hyper-competitive markets of Hong Kong. This also hints at the recognition of potentially new and strong markets for different commodities such as smartphones and mobile solutions outside of the established markets of East Asia, and also outside of the formal (legal) markets in Malaysia itself. Migrants and other members of the urban poor provide the demand for such new technologies but cannot obviously afford the official retail prices. Instead, their buying power drives a very lucrative market for cheaper knock-offs, refurbished devices and generic non-brand-name goods. Surveying many of the items on sale at these kiosks reveal this mix of commodities – refurbished brand-name smartphones seem to be the most popular and in-demand.

While some migrant groups, such as Bangladeshis and Chinese vendors, are more visible and prominent in terms of their public presence in Chinatown, there are others whose visibility is somewhat 'submerged'. I use this term to imply that these are migrants who are not necessarily hidden or invisible per se, but whose work and presence is still noticed but often set aside or drowned out by others. Chinatown attracts large numbers of international students, thanks to the numerous bars and cheap hotels/inns around here. Many international students, a large majority of which come from Africa, the Gulf States, Iran and the Middle East spend their leisure time

frequenting Petaling Street and the neighboring areas. Aside from the cheap shopping, the ubiquitous presence of migrant sex-workers coupled with hotels that rent rooms 'by-the-hour' further increase the appeal of this district to visitors.

These multi-faceted connections, transactions, relationships, and practices of diverse migrant groups within a single district in many ways transforms and reproduces the contemporary identity of 'Chinatown', KL. It becomes what Van Dijk terms 'hot-spots' of cities – crucial spaces of urban activity that boost the rescaling of a city in global terms. However, the presence of such hot-spots as Chinatown goes hand in hand with the production of 'in-between' spaces that are often unexpected and undesirable from the point of view of the state. *Jalan Silang*, or 'Little Bangla' and 'Little Burma', is one such case.

Jalan Silang as a Political Street

Jalan Silang is a street located less than two blocks from the Chinatown markets of Petaling Street. It is one of the most crowded parts of this district of Kuala Lumpur, with high volumes of foot and vehicular traffic. The street itself is a three lane, half a kilometer long stretch of tarmac lined on both sides by three and four story 'shop-lots' (which are typically a mix of business establishments and residential units on separate floors). A large public transportation hub, formerly known as *Puduraya*, is situated less than a five-minute walk away – the building had recently been renovated and upgraded, as well as renamed the 'Urban Transformation Center' (UTC). At one end of Jalan Silang is a small shopping mall, which also has a very busy bus terminal on the intersection.

This particular street is the heart of the Bangladeshi, Nepali and Burmese migrant communities in the city. At any given time during the day, hundreds of pedestrians move around Jalan SIlang's narrow sidewalks and corridors, moving in and out of the numerous buildings. These buildings are a mix of the old and new – some have been left with minimal maintenance and look their age as relics of colonial-era constructions, while others have been renovated and refurbished to look like more modern establishments. The latter tend to be limited to several large, wealthy businesses and financial firms such as Western Union, Money-Gram and Prabhu. The rest are a mix of micro-businesses, individual vendors, restaurants, fashion wholesale retailers, and entertainment outlets. These shop-lots are attached to one another, side-by-side, and typically have narrow stairways in between that lead up to the upper floors. The ground level is primarily made up of

shops and businesses that are open to pedestrians to walk in and out of, almost as an extension of the public space of the street.

The businesses of Jalan Silang almost exclusively cater to the migrant groups who live and work around this district. Names of shops, restaurants, and other establishments tend to be in Bengali or Burmese, although some still carry the original Chinese names of businesses. The sides of the buildings and walls are covered with posters in the various languages of the new migrant communities – cheap airlines packages to a host of countries clearly aimed temporary migrants, low-cost wire-transfer agencies, apartments and hostels for rent, and even advertisements for college programs in KL, usually at small private institutions offering short-term diplomas in language or business. These posters would also be accompanied by stenciled phone-numbers that advertise 'Thai Massages', male virility medicine, tattoo-parlors, and other forms of services. Even public phone booths are covered by these ads.

During my visits to Jalan Silang, where I spent upwards of five to six hours each day at the various establishments talking and observing the people here, I was immediately struck by just how profoundly this urban space has been transformed over a relatively short period of time. What used to be a collection of mostly Chinese businesses has now been replaced by entirely different and new ones; Bollywood/South Asian entertainment stores, Bangladeshi and Burmese cuisine restaurants, money-transfer agents, phone and prepaid vendors, and South Asian textile/garment retail stores. The 'ethnic' identity of this space, at least in terms of its inhabitants and symbols, has undergone a startlingly dramatic transformation. The space is surreal in many ways – the hundreds, maybe thousands, of people who inhabit it are overwhelmingly male, for instance. These men, generally young adults from Bangladesh, Nepal and Burma, tend to walk, browse through stores, or simply stand along the sidewalks and corridors, in groups or alone. There are also those who staff the various businesses – restaurant servers, prepaid phone vendors, and sales representatives.

The number of people who occupy the sidewalks and establishments in Jalan Silang is aided by the proximity of the bus terminals. Many a confused-looking, newly arrived migrant are also present on a daily basis. This is where young men from Bangladesh who just arrive from home in KL are likely to first visit – if they have not already been taken to their places of employment. On several occasions, I came across young Bangladeshi men who would ask me for help getting to a different part of the city. Some of them would be looking for colleges where they had enrolled as international students. In some cases, they would be workers from different parts of KL (or even

outside the city) who had decided to use their day off to visit, shop and dine in Jalan Silang, a community in which many of them felt to be a 'home-away-from-home'.

This sense of 'community' is nowhere more strongly felt than at the 'ethnic' cuisine restaurants around this area. I visited several of these restaurants, including three Bangladeshi/Indian restaurants and two Burmese ones. These were almost entirely occupied and visited by migrants – there were times when I would not be able to find even a single local Malaysian here. During initial visits, my experience at the Burmese restaurants tended to be ones where I was greeted with looks of genuine surprise and confusion by people. Most seemed to assume I had gotten lost looking for a different store or office, judging by the friendly suggestions I would be given. Still, these represented spaces of security and comfort for people, where they could enjoy certain simple 'luxuries' that a lot of us take for granted – namely, being able to speak and converse in a familiar language.

Language in this multi-ethnic, multi-lingual context can be a controversial and sensitive issue. Particularly in new 'migrant' communities such as Little Bangladesh and Little Burma, the visible presence of Bengali, Burmese or Nepali signage, amongst other things, can be and is used as a powerful justification of migration 'invasions'[17] in popular discourse. Some of these signs (usually small billboards and name plates) have been subjected to take-downs and confiscations by the City Hall, due to being 'unlicensed' – that is, for not using Bahasa Malaysia (Malay language) as the 'prime language'. According to City Hall Deputy Director General Mhd Amin Nordin Abdul Aziz:

> "We inspected 132 premises and found that many business operators used foreign languages on their signboards instead of Bahasa Malaysia, in contravention of the law. We don't want this part of the city to turn into a foreign country. Every business operator must give priority to the use of Bahasa Malaysia in their signboards and advertisements." (New Straits Times 2013)[18]

Physical signage becomes an important political 'device' (Marres and Lezaun 2011) which engenders mobilizations of various sorts, collectively and non-collectively. The signs that feature prominently on buildings and alleys near Jalan Silang represent different things to different groups. For those who live and work in this area – predominantly poor migrants – these signs in Bengali, Nepali and Burmese represent the familiar and offers some form of comfort through belonging. During conversation with patrons at one of the Burmese restaurants, where mostly male migrants come in

[17] http://www.nst.com.my/streets/central/overwhelming-presence-1.363106

[18] http://www.nst.com.my/streets/central/blitz-on-foreign-lingo-sign-boards-1.360184

groups for lunch, I would frequently be told that this space not only provides cheap, affordable food (and the prices were quite a bit lower than regular cafes and restaurants), but, just as importantly, it gives the Myanmarese migrants[19] a safe space where they can converse in a familiar language. The signboards advertising this restaurant, *Burma Tastes* (pseudonym), were in both Bahasa Malaysia and Burmese, which, according to the restaurant manager, was required by law.

> "It's just the law – otherwise *Bandaraya* (City Hall) comes to question us and removes the signs if they were only in Burmese. But only migrants come here most of the time, not locals. Only migrants around this place, so there's no need for Malay signs. But it's not our country, so we have to follow the law." (Interview with restaurant manager)
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> "*Burma Tastes* is one of the more popular and well-established restaurants in Jalan Silang, and not the only such place. During an average lunchtime period, the restaurant gets fully packed with patrons very quickly, with upwards of 50 or more people sitting close together and having their meals of *danbauk (*rice), minced meats and curried vegetables. My own experience being there was very much one of feeling like an outsider and a foreigner. I struggled to communicate with the servers for not being able to speak Burmese and their mastery of Malay was very basic. The restaurant had about 10 workers – five servers, four cooks and one person who watched the cash register at all times. Most of the workers were men, except for one woman who stood close to the buffet trays and prepared dishes for customers. All the workers were migrants from Myanmar. Patrons were overwhelmingly male and young – the majority were Burmese but I occasionally counted a small number of Bangladeshi men as well" (excerpt from field notes)

The amount of traffic this restaurants sees everyday marks it out as an important place for urban sociality for the predominantly migrant population. It also seemed to be an exclusive space for male migrants from Myanmar, even if there were no formal restrictions placed on patrons. According to the manager, this was not because they did not want to have any other patrons except Myanmarese ones, but is mostly because of the fact that most migrants who came from Myanmar happened to be young men. There were women, as well, but they tended to be in other jobs that did not really allow them the freedom to come to places like Jalan Silang. However, during several late evening visits to the restaurant, I noticed there were more women who came to eat and enjoy the company of people who speak their language. Milli (pseudonym), a 25-year-old woman from Myanmar, sometimes came to Burma Tastes for dinner. She spends her days working as a prepaid card/ sim card vendor at one of the kiosks along Jalan Silang.

Milli seemed more than happy to talk with me, although we had some difficulties with language and had to resort to stuttering Malay. She knew enough Malay to understand my questions and was able to reply, albeit with brief answers. Milli comes from a family of six, which includes her

[19] I am using Burmese and Myanmarese interchangeably – best to be more consistent

parents and four younger siblings. Her family were all back in Myanmar, and she was their main source of income. She has been in Malaysia for three years now, having initially come to work in a local restaurant as a temporary foreign worker. That first job was so bad, apparently, and she could not stand her 'very bad employer', so decided to stop, after she found out from a 'friend' that she could work as a vendor instead. So she had returned to Myanmar and come back to Malaysia as a temporary visitor, sponsored by her local boyfriend. This boyfriend had helped her set up in a 'condo' with three other women from Myanmar, and helped connect her to the person who provides her with the prepaid top-ups and sim-cards.

> "The money is okay… I am comfortable with my room and roommates. But it's hard a lot of the times because there's constant disturbance by 'gangsters' and men who think I'm *ayam*[20]. Here (in the restaurant), it is a lot better and safer because here, there are a lot of people who come from home and we can speak to each other. So, I come here to relax"

Similar to *Burma Tastes,* another restaurant in the same area serves a rather similar purpose of providing a 'familiar' space for another group of migrants, albeit a more prominent one. The Bangaldeshi community is arguably the more established migrant communities in this district. Many of the businesses here cater specifically to this community, although not exclusively. Bangladeshi cuisine restaurants range from tiny, highly informal set-ups along the alleyways, to larger, well-established ones. In either case, these places tend to be very popular and frequented by a lot of people, most of whom were migrants. One restaurant, *Fazrul Café*, was located in the alleyway between shop-lots which connected to Chinatown. This alleyway was mostly poorly maintained, yet had a large number of pedestrians passing through. Some would stop to buy and eat food at the café. The café itself consisted of a few plastic tables under a large umbrella. Patrons would sit and eat on small plastic stools set up on one side of the alley. The men who worked as cooks and servers were all from Bangladesh. Some of them would spend time talking and serving customers, while another works on food preparation and cleaning (which is basically washing dishes and utensils in a plastic pail next to an open drain).

The men frequenting Fazrul Café tend to be other migrants who lived and worked close by. One of them, Haniff, is a privately contracted street cleaner – one of the workers tasked with sweeping up the streets late at night in Chinatown. Haniff and his three room-mates (who were also

[20] Literal translation is chicken – *ayam* is a very commonly used Malay slur for sex-workers

cleaners) come to the café to get their breakfasts at 3 p.m. in the afternoon. Haniff has been working in Malaysia for a little more than a year now, and is one of the many Bangladeshi migrants who are helping to keep the streets of KL clean and free of litter. He is young, in his early 20s, and had a decent command of English enough to be able to understand my questions and reply. When I had first met him, he had been sweeping and picking up trash from the Chinatown markets. Haniff lived in one of the apartments located on the second floor of a nearby building.

> "Haniff's apartment, or rather the apartment he was sharing with the other migrants, was not too far from where he works. The place was on the third story of a shop-lot building, with a restaurant at the bottom floor. Haniff explained that this was his second place of residence after having initially been sent to stay in an apartment in Klang- due to the long bus-ride and frequent traffic delays, commuting had been really difficult so he had requested to move closer to where he works. His Malay is improving, but he still struggles to understand many of the locals, which often leads to looks of irritation and annoyance on the part of the latter. Haniff said that he comes from a village close to Dhaka, from a family of rice-growers. His parents were old, and he had come to Malaysia to be able to earn a better income that he could send home. His is a fairly 'typical' migrant experience- as a remittance-sending, temporary contract-based worker. After breakfast, Haniff takes me to his apartment, where two of his four roommates were still present and in various states of having just woken up. I felt more than a little uncomfortable at the way he was asking me in and inviting me to explore and look around. His roommates, who should really have been angry and annoyed at having a stranger barge in on them when they were not even ready, instead smiled cheerfully and asked me how I was, and also started inviting me to look around. They were both Bangladeshi, young men barely in their 20s it seemed. Their apartment was small - barely the size of an average single room apartment, and quite old, by the looks of it. The walls were badly painted with splotches and cracks, and there was severe water damage along the kitchen wall. The kitchen itself was microscopic- the five of them shared a single stovetop with a rice cooker and fridge. There was no kettle that I could see. The living room was also where a couple of them slept, with mats of the cement floor. The arrangement reminded me somewhat of my grandparents' old house in the colonial rubber plantation up north, when they used to live in little more than a ramshackle structure of wood, brick, cement and zinc roofing. The bathroom that these men shared was hard to describe - they had no proper toilet, just basically a hole-in-ground version that is still common in Malaysia. A '*jamban*', as locals would call it. Their 'shower' was basically a rubber hose and a pail with a bucket, and some soap bars. I was feeling very uncomfortable and invasive but Haniff and his roommates did not seem even remotely perturbed or annoyed by my presence. Haniff was even asking if I wanted to take photos to show what their lives were like. I got the distinct feeling that he was harboring some deep feelings of anger and frustration at the conditions he was being forced to put up with and did not mind having it exposed." (Excerpt from field notes)

The cafes and restaurants of Jalan Silang, as well as the sidewalks and alleyways nearby, become spaces that are deeply expressive, in political terms. They are contested in terms of what Bayat differentiates as 'passive' versus 'active' use of public space – active use being those actions and practices specifically prohibited by authorities (setting up businesses on sidewalks and alleyways, for example). However, these spaces also happen to be critical resources for the migrant communities

here, who express a strong desire and need to have some access to familiar faces, familiar voices, and familiar environments. Restaurants like Burma Tastes are actively built to provide this environment, where local inhabitants are able to come together to speak and socialize in a space that feels familiar and safe, even if it goes against the wishes and rules of the authorities.

These 'non-collective' encroachments on urban public space may seem trivial when looked at individually, yet they do produce very significant and powerful political changes as they very quickly provide a medium through which collective action can be mobilized. Both 'Little Bangladesh' and 'Little Burma'[21] have become important sites for political contests in recent years. In most of the country's mainstream media, liberal and conservative, these communities tend to be represented as spaces that have been 'overrun', 'flooded by migrants', or 'invaded' by young and dirty foreigners. However, these communities also represent strong claims-making acts of active citizenship in that they are able to transform urban spaces into sites of political contestation. The use of non-Malay signs on billboards and stores, for example, are motivated mostly by necessity because of the need to cater to populations who do not speak or read the dominant languages of the country. The use of alleyways and sidewalks to gather and socialize, to set up restaurants and cafes, help in the creation of a new identity for this urban space that goes against the plans of the City Hall and the State (ETP 2010).

The close presence of Chinatown, Central Market and the Urban Transformation Center to Jalan Silang means that this district is a center for tourist activity. The businesses in Chinatown and Central Market, for instance, target tourists extensively, as do the numerous motels, backpackers' lodges, budget inns/hotels, and 'reggae-style' beach pubs[22] in the surrounding area. These are places that have been heavily earmarked as crucial for attracting tourism. The presence of largely poor migrant communities such as Bangladeshi and Myanmarese ones presents a complicated conundrum from a state and urban planning perspective because of how important poor migrants are in sustaining and rejuvenating this tourist economy. Yet, their very visible presence and the emergence of 'Little Bangladesh' and 'Little Burma' are deemed to be counter-productive because of the detrimental effects they may have on tourism. Unsurprisingly, this narrative is laced with the discourse of who a 'preferred' foreigner is – the rich, Western 'tourist'. Although it is little less than

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[21] Essentially, these two communities exist within the same district and it is quite difficult to identify any distinct physical separations. But the ethnic/national distinction is still important due to the strong lack of inter-mingling between different migrant groups, aside from necessary day-to-day needs.

[22] A very common and popular type of alcohol-serving establishment in KL and other tourist centers

five minutes away by foot from Chinatown and Central Market, very few of the 'Western' tourists wander into Jalan Silang, unless they happen to be confused or turned around. Jalan Silang is very much an example of what Simone and Roy (2010) refer to as an 'in-between' space.

Politics of Gender in Jalan Silang

Why is there such a large discrepancy in terms of gender within the different migrant communities? Why is little Bangladesh predominantly occupied by male migrants? From my own observations, it seems as though there are only men who come to Malaysia from Bangladesh in search of work in places like Jalan Silang. The few female Bangladeshi migrants that I have encountered happen to be highly educated professionals working in higher education - usually as administrators or faculty. Men make up the vast majority of service sector workers (servers and cooks), cleaners, construction workers and vendors.

Dannecker (2010) attributes this difference to a relatively understudied process of gendering of transnational migration, within which a host of factors contribute to creating conditions favorable and unfavorable for women from particular countries to migrate. The case of Phillipiines and the exportation of care work is well documented (someone), but in the case of Bangladesh, a combination of global labor marker competition and traditional gender norms are partly responsible for discouraging women from migrating in search of opportunities in other countries. Dannecker's interviews with Bangladeshi migrants in Malaysia reveals, for instance, the importance of ' purdah' - a term implying the need to maintain control and supervision (that is, male authority) over women- to male Bangladeshis who perceive the need to ensure they have the best possible competitiveness in global labor markets because of competition with other migrant groups. Purdah becomes even more useful as a controlling tool, as it is reinforced through national governance and the influence of the Islamic religious orders in Bangladesh that cites morality and proper behavior as necessary reasons for prohibiting the mobility of women who seek to work outside their homes. This, however, is not entirely unchallenged, as Bangladeshi women who do migrate often highlight the contradictory practices amongst Muslims in Malaysia, where Malay-Muslim women do not face similar restrictions or impositions on their right to work and be employed outside of the home.

In my own interviews with Bangladeshi men in KL - mostly but not limited to residents of Jalan Silang - the issue of gender and the lack of women migrants coming to Malaysia was raised a

number of times. Most of my informants expressed similar sentiments concerning the need for women to stay home, usually to take care of children or the elderly. Interestingly, none of the men I spoke with mentioned religious or traditional morality specifically (i.e. the need for women to respect purdah, for instance) as reasons for women to stay home, but their explanations were very much couched in a clear-cut gendered division of labor where women are primarily seen as belonging in the private-sphere as care-takers. This was not limited to wives or mothers, but also to female siblings, although a few of the men who happen to be fathers did express strong desires to have their children (regardless of gender) to be able to 'study in Malaysia someday'.

> "My daughter is already in school and is in her third year. She studies hard and is always top of her class. I don't think I can stay in Malaysia for more than twelve years (as he has already been in the country for over ten), but I would really like to bring my wife and daughter to settle down here. It's so much more modern and beautiful than Bangladesh and I think my daughter would be able to be well-educated and successful here. She would have better opportunities, better schools and work. It is a dream, but I don't think it will happen." (Interview with Mamoor)

Mamoor, for instance, believes that Malaysia would be a good place for his daughter to grow up in, because of the presence of schools and universities. His hope is to one day be able to bring his wife and child over to Malaysia, although this is not the easiest task to accomplish due to the limitations of his temporary work permit that prohibits family members and spouses from visiting the country. He works as a server at a local 'mamak' Malaysian restaurant close to Chinatown and has been in the country for close to eight years now. His daughter just started going to school back in Bangladesh. Similar expressions about the desirability of KL as a destination amongst migrants from Bangladesh occasionally came up, which suggests a possible shift in how some migrants view the country, from a place that is usually seen as potentially immoral or inappropriate (Dannecker 2010) to one that could be a viable settlement. Unsurprisingly, most of the migrants who expressed this feeling about Malaysia - and specifically KL- were those who lived and worked in close proximity to the growing migrant communities here.

However, there were still many migrants who clearly still saw Malaysia as an unsafe' or inappropriate place for their families. These were often qualified with statements about their own capacities to handle and manage difficult and challenging conditions, as well as the ability resist temptations. The ubiquitous presence of consumer outlets, entertainment and sex-work tended to feature prominently in the narratives of men, most of whom insisted that these required strong

willpower and clear-headedness in order to resist. Some of the men, often as a joke, mentioned that their wives would never have been able to resist all the shopping that could be done in KL, unlike themselves. This particular narrative also featured prominently in Dannecker's research. For them, KL was still a place that is rife with moral corruption and vices that had to be negotiated with a great deal of self-control.

The gender discrepancy poses some challenging questions for emerging communities such as Little Bangladesh. Much of the traditionally gender-segregated labor of household chores has to be carried out by men, who also work for significant portions of the day. This means the work of cleaning, cooking, and maintaining the home is done entirely by men. This is a situation and reality that many of the men I spoke with simply did not prepare for, based on their descriptions. Many had to quickly learn skills such as cleaning and ironing their uniforms, cooking simple meals, and cleaning toilets. At the same time, most of them would have to be getting acclimatized to an entirely new culture and whichever form of employment they were supposed to be performing, thus creating very drastic and stressful adjustment periods the moment they arrive in the country.

> "Usually, I do all my cleaning when I wake up… at 2pm. The same cleaning every two days – I have to wash my uniform (which he wears while working as a street cleaner) and other clothes as well. This is the same for the others as well. Yunus and Zaid do their washing on different days, so we don't have to wait for others. It's crowded in our room so we need to make sure we do things on time. (for food), none of us are good cooks – sometimes we just boil rice and make a simple stew, but mostly we just buy from the restaurants nearby" (Interview with Haniff)

> "It's very boring to be at home (in the flat above the restaurant where he works). All we can do is sleep and maybe sometimes drink tea, because otherwise we're downstairs working. We all have one day off, but on different days, so whenever I'm not working I catch up on sleep. Sometimes, we talk about buying a cheap TV, but then we can just sit in the restaurant and watch the big screen they have down there" (Interview with Ali, a restaurant worker)

Since many poor migrants tend to live in shared apartments, often in groups of five or more people, much of the household work gets shared and distributed. This means taking turns to cook, purchase groceries, cleaning and washing. The tasks are often shared based on time and work schedules, and in some cases it becomes a point of humorous discussion about who is able to cook better and who is best at ironing clothes. Having a growing community of migrants from the same country and ethnic background means that newer migrants are able to learn these life skills more easily than those before them, and are thus better able to prepare for the challenges ahead. Migrants

who leave to return home also become important resources for those who are seeking to migrate to Malaysian in the future - a prominent feature of most transnational networks of temporary/circular migration.

Making Claims and Political Contests in Little Bangladesh and Little Burma

Political consciousness is facilitated when there are clear needs to be addressed or collective rights that are being threatened – but the kind of mobilization that emerges largely depends upon the spaces and communities that make up particular places. Practices, particularly the type of mundane and everyday activities that lead to the gradual changes central to a community's capacity of make certain gains upon public space, are what allow the formation of new political opportunities. The opportunities that manifest for communities of temporary migrants, such as in Little Bangladesh and Little Burma in KL, are very much fostered by the spatial, cultural and economic gains these communities have been able to make through informal and apolitical means – by being present in a space, by seeking out opportunities to work and make a living, by catering to lifestyles and demands closer to home. These activities – street vending, opening new restaurants, and the peaceful (non-political) occupation of sidewalks and public streets – prove to be important catalysts for further, more organized forms of political mobilization among the Burmese and Bangladeshi communities of temporary migrants.

Muslim-Buddhist relations amongst different major ethnic groups in Myanmar is a deeply tense and often violent one. The predominantly Muslim Rohingya communities from the southern region of the country tend to be move to countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia in search of refuge in the face of persecution in their homelands. The Malaysian state, for its part, does not recognize refugees and asylum seekers, and instead has adopted several policies towards turning these vulnerable populations into potential labor forces, i.e. by joining the growing pool of temporary migrant workers (Azizan 2013). Most Rohingya groups live in poorer slums and shanties in KL, though many have started to move to areas such as Little Burma where they come in increasing contact with their Buddhist compatriots.

While largely peaceful, this new 'encounters' between Muslims and Buddhists has begun to produce 'spillover effects' of the ethnic-religious conflicts in Myanmar (The Malaysian Insider 2014). In mid-2013, four Buddhist migrants from Myanmar were killed in KL, sparking suspicions of 'revenge attacks' by Muslims. In February 2014, the activist Aung Gyi was stabbed and left in the trunk of a car, further stoking political unrest which led to protests and mobilization, both by

Muslims (Burmese and Malaysians) and local migrant Buddhist organizations. The tensions were quite well-documented in local and regional media, to the extent that even ASEAN commentators begin to describe the 'Rohingya' situation as potentially destabilizing for the whole region (The Malaysian Insider 2014).

While these political ramifications are indeed important, they are largely exceptional to the everyday realities of these communities. Many of the migrants from Myanmar- including Rohingya and Buddhists – tend to live and work in the same areas, often under same employers. The blame for tensions and feelings of insecurity tend to be directed at the authorities rather than the other group – Buddhists would accuse the local police force as being biased towards Muslims, while the Rohingyas would criticize authorities for not providing enough security and protections. In particular, for the latter this involves having to take extra precautions during late nights when they would have to move around alone, for fear of harassments or other potential threats.

Political claims-making for the Bangladeshi community follows very different lines but is equally important. Theirs follow along the form of mobilizing that draws from 'quiet encroachment' practices (Bayat 2013), where the informal presences and everyday work of the poor in transforming urban space provide platforms for formal claims and movements. In the case of Bangladeshi migrants in KL, the most prominent example of this would have to be the massive street 'prayers' that have been organized over the past three years in Jalan Silang. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of migrants assemble on this street during *Aidilfitri* (Eid) at the end of Ramadhan for prayers in the evening, effectively closing off the street to traffic. The primary organizers for this event is the Malaysian Bangladesh Business Association (MBBA), a local migrant-led organization whose stated intention is to create a space for Bangladeshi Muslims to pray in Bengali, the primary language of Bangladesh.

This is both a practical necessity and a political statement on the part of the migrant Bangladeshi community, again placing language as the focus. Mosques in Malaysia are predominantly, and for the most part exclusively, Malay/Arabic, and there are no formally established Bengali mosques in the country (known ones, at least). Use of particular languages, even English, is very often controversial when it comes to religious matters. An infamous recent debacle that turned into a national obsession was the right to use 'Allah' as a reference to God in Malay-language Christian Bibles, a legal battle which eventually led to an Apellate Court ruling banning the use of the word in the Bible (BBC 2013). The issue reflected long-standing issues and sensitivities

between various religious communities and interests in the country. Migrant communities such as the Bangladeshis, who are predominantly Muslim, tend to be pushed even further to the margins in such matters.

Consequently, the particular and specific needs of these migrants – Bengali language mosques and services, for instance – are not given much attention, especially considering their 'temporary' statuses. The MBBA's organizing of *Aidilfitri* prayers on a public street represents a visible and highly political form of claims-making in order to bring attention to the needs of this particular community. The scale of this event, which involves closing off the street and setting up prayer matts all along the tarmac for people to gather and perform prayers, forces engagement and cooperation by the local police and authorities, including *Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur* (DBKL) (Menon 2012). It also captures the attention of local media and those who frequent the area, including tourists and local shoppers. While public gatherings for prayers is common and unexceptional in Bangladesh or other Muslim-majority countries such as Egypt, Lebanon, and other Middle-Eastern states, it is quite exceptional in Malaysia. This 'exceptional' event further highlights Jalan Silang's identity as a 'political street'.

Migrants and the Production of the Urban

Jalan Silang and Chinatown, in different but equally important ways, reveal the important roles played by migrants in the transformation and everyday reproduction of urban life in Kuala Lumpur. They perform a great portion of the day-to-day work that makes economic, social and political life thrive, through largely informal means. These are not simply migrants who have chosen Malaysia as their new home for settlement – instead, the migrants who make 'Chinatown', 'Little Bangla' and 'Little Burma' exist are predominantly those who are 'temporary' in different senses of the word; temporary migrant 'workers', international students, 'tourists', and those on 'social visits', just to name a few. These groups tend to be relegated as marginal or inconsequential in terms of having any great impact on transformations of urban culture and society.

However, thanks in large part to global processes generating conditions of competitiveness between 'cities' in which scalar positioning becomes so important, temporary migrants for whom the possibility or perhaps even inevitability of transnational mobility is a constant reality become key agents in rescaling of cities like KL. Migrants from Bangladesh engage with transnational networks of trafficked goods that stretch all the way to Taiwan and further establish KL's position as a lucrative market for commercial activities. The same applies to young Hong Kong youth who are

able to identify KL as an alternative place where demand for cheap goods is high but competition is not as high as their homeland. The 'hot-spot' of Chinatown – as tourist hub, commercial district, center of cultural activity, sex-work, and leisure- further repositions this urban space as uniquely important to the identity of 'Malaysia Truly Asia'.

As my findings suggest, however, the work of migrants in reproducing a place like Chinatown is not without highly unpredictable and unplanned consequences (at least for the state and local municipality). This 'hot-spot' is buttressed by the transformation of nearby 'in-between spaces' which are spaces of tremendous communal activity and political energy among the urban poor. Places like Jalan Silang come to embody this 'in-betweeness' partly because they are largely ignored by authorities but become important community centers for poor migrants. Whether it is to find a 'safe' space for conversations in a familiar language, sites of tension between ethno-national groups, or spaces for organizing collective religious prayers, Jalan Silang is thus transformed into powerful sites for political expressions of urban migrant poor.

CHAPTER 5: OUTSOURCING CULTURAL REPRODUCTION OF MODERN URBAN MALAYSIA: MIGRANT WORK IN THE SHADOW OF NEW ASIA

Agents of Neoliberal Culturalisms

> "Ali, a young migrant from Bangladesh, works at a popular local Malaysian franchise restaurant in a suburb of Kuala Lumpur. Having been here for almost seven years, he is completely comfortable speaking in Malay - in fact, his control of the language is almost native-like, even down to a particular urban accent. When asked, he says that Malay and English were extremely easy languages to learn, as opposed to Mandarin or Cantonese, which he could never pick up. Ali struggled to adapt when he came to Malaysia, particularly with the completely different languages commonly used here. English was not thought in the schools he went to in Bangladesh, so even that was not a viable option at first. Considering how good his Malay was now, I was curious to know what steps he had taken in order to become so proficient and fluent. Ali said that he spent most of the first few months working at the sundry store carrying around scraps of paper wherever he went. He would write down every new word that he did not know down on that paper, and then ask around, usually to his boss, about the meaning of those words. He would then write those meanings under the words in Bengali, and spend portions of his late evenings studying those scraps of paper. He had to build his own personal dictionary, and learned Malay and English that way. This truly impressed me, even more so when he explained how it took him about five months to become quite fluent in Malay. Proof of his fluency with local languages and his charismatic personality was plain to see in the way he interacts with people who pass by, customers who immediately recognize him as a friend and acquaintance. He says that he has a good rapport with many customers, who seem to enjoy his cheerful, jovial and open personality. Even the contact who had asked me to speak with Ali for this project had described him as a very open and intelligent person with a lot to share." (Excerpt from field notes)

Ali's experience is one example among many in which migrants who work within Malaysia's expansive and fast-growing service sector are being shouldered with the responsibility of acting as public characters and cultural ambassadors – not for their homelands or cultures of origin, but for the culture and society they find themselves currently in! Workers like Ali spend up to 12 hours a day working as servers, cooks and cleaners in local restaurants, both independent and franchised ones, which populate the city of Kuala Lumpur. Their roles extend beyond the 'back-room' labor of restaurants – unlike the ways in which migrant workers (especially from Mexico) are employed in food-service sectors of the United States and other Western countries where they tend to be hidden away in kitchens and have little interaction with customers and patrons, migrant workers like Ali are front and center as the public faces of Malaysian restaurants.

Service sector migrant workers are, directly and indirectly, tasked with learning about the new culture and society as part of their work. In many cases that I came across, this learning process is very specific in the sense that workers are required to know about the 'uniqueness' of Malaysia—whether it is picking up the Malay language (and the attendant colloquialisms), understanding the particular ethno-cultural distinctions of the country, or knowing in detail the various local foods. The process of learning can be both formal and informal, as some of my informants revealed, but in all cases there are implications concerning the 'duty' that these migrants are being handed. They are not simply learning about the culture and language of the society they are working in, but they are also expected to be the implicit 'carriers' and agents of this culture. Restaurant workers (like Ali) are expected to socialize and interact with customers with extensive knowledge of local cuisines (with a lot of emphasis on 'authenticity'), while other migrants such as young Myanmarese boys are increasingly employed to carry out embalming services as traditional Hindu funeral services (which requires very detailed knowledge of religious rites and practices).

During numerous visits to some of the many local restaurant franchises located in KL, I found very strong emphases on cultural authenticity, nostalgia and memory, especially when it came to food. History, or at least a very nostalgic version of history that highlights 'old-town' Malaysian culture, plays a significant role in the branding and marketing practices of these restaurants. In the two major urban centers I visited, KL and Georgetown, these restaurants were ubiquitous in both presence and popularity. Almost all employed temporary migrant workers exclusively, with the exception of managers. The walls and décor of these places showed very similar images of historic urban townships and cultural life in Malaysia, with a special place given to *kopitiam* culture (coffee-shop). These are very obviously meant to evoke a fondly-remembered past that highlights the unique historical narrative of urban Malaysia – ethnically diverse, working-class, harmonious and humble, amongst other things. The imagery is also meant to evoke the hybridity and originality of local Malaysian cuisine, whether it's the varieties of Chinese-Indian-Malay foods, the popular 'white coffee', or *ABC* (a local dessert).

While these images and representations of cultural difference and authenticity can be conveniently situated within a broader frame of creating market niches and furthering the appeal of Malaysia as a unique tourist destination, the fact that much of the day-to-day work of sustaining and reproducing this cultural 'products' is being carried out by temporary migrants has largely been ignored or gone unnoticed, aside from as marginal consequences of globalization. In fact, there is

already a significant body of scholarship on 'cultural commodification' within globalization studies, which tend to focus on the role of corporations and commercial enterprises in the packaging and dissemination of cultural 'products', but this perspective is but one part of the picture. What of the actual work of producing and distributing 'culture'? What of the people who are actually involved with this work—those whom Daniel Bell calls the 'cultural mass'? Last but not least, what if the members of this cultural mass were not even members of the particular culture they are tasked with representing, as in the case of temporary migrant workers in Malaysia?

In this chapter, I present some of my findings from observations and interviews that specifically highlight the importance of migrant workers as interlocutors and ambassadors of Malaysian culture. I situate my empirical analysis within broader debates about the centrality of culture, identity, difference and memory in the development of what some scholars call a 'New Asia', where authenticity and uniqueness has come to be seen as a critical resource for achieving global competitiveness. Going back to Glick-Schiller and Caglar's (2011) suggestion that 'cities' be viewed as continuously being rescaled in networks of global flows, the heightened attention given to cultural products in Asian countries like Malaysia that rely heavily on tourism and foreign investment for economic development, makes analytical sense, an phenomenon which I refer to as a form of neoliberal culturalism. The empirical data I present in this chapter focus heavily on the experiences of service sector migrant workers in restaurant franchises, public open-air 'car-washes', and that of religious funeral parlors. In these findings, I highlight workers who can be seen as 'public characters' (Jacobs 1961, Duneier 1999), those who inadvertently become interlocutors, practitioners and transmitters of culture in Malaysia.

The work of temporary migrants like Ali as part of the 'cultural mass' in Malaysia speaks to a different facet of the politics of temporariness, urban transformation and neoliberal globalization that remains shadowed. With the continuing growth of Malaysia's modern middle-class, whose sensibilities and cultural orientations become more hybrid and 'globalized', if not altogether flexible (in Aihwa Ong's sense of the term), the work of sustaining the artefacts and products upon which Malaysia's uniqueness and difference (or Otherness, as Richard Wilk describes it) inevitably falls upon those left out of the benefits of hyper-modernity and middle class life, i.e. the urban poor, including migrants. Yet, this process is not without contradictions – the increased responsibility placed upon temporary migrants as agents of cultural authenticity obviously goes hand in hand with increased public presence and exposure for the poor workers who find themselves woven into the

socio-cultural fabric of urban Malaysia in unexpectedly new ways. Migrant workers who are traditionally not identified as 'typically Malaysian' are becoming more and more the public faces of 'Malaysia Truly Asia'.

Urban Nostalgia, Identity, and Memory in the Production of 'New Asia'

In a special edition of *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, T.C. Chang highlights how the rapid rise of Asian 'societies and landscapes, especially since the mid-1990s, has engendered much conjecture of the "Asian Renaissance" and rise of a "New Asia."' The introductory piece goes on to examine how different elements such as collective memory and cultural identity, all located within the context of urban change and development, have come to play significant roles in the construction of this New Asia. A lot of the emphasis is placed on planning and governance, that is, the role of states and sectors such as tourism and travel, in producing very selective, distinct cultural identities for people and places.

Reconstructing, reformulating, selectively narrating history and memory for the purposes of nation-building is nothing new, especially from the perspective of post-colonial societies (of which Malaysia is one). The key difference between contemporary practices of cultural production and that of the postcolonial nationalist period (post-1950s) is that this current form seems geared as much towards an external market as it is to those who live in a particularly society. This is the crux of the issue with the specter of a 'New Asia' – that it is for achieving a competitive position within a global circuit of power, as Richard Wilk (1995) puts it. Contemporary processes of cultural commodification undertaken in the countries pursuing these visions of an Asian Renaissance reflect a growing recognition of the value (in commercial terms) of marketing distinction and difference. Wilk, in his analysis of Belizean beauty pageants, shows how Otherness can be used as a tool to generate interest and thus engender new types of commercial interest for developing countries. In other words, reinforcing and reproducing difference, uniqueness and Otherness becomes just as crucial within the neoliberal globalization project as the free-flow of commodities and money. This, obviously, implies very profound contradictions in the logic of neoliberalism.

David Harvey (2002) highlights some of these contradictions concerning cultural commodification by questioning how the 'specialness' or uniqueness of certain cultural products can simultaneously be treated as commodities, i.e. to possess value for trade. He suggests that the primary drive within cultural production under current capitalist conditions is to secure the rights to

that which is different, unique, special and distinct, whether it be 'exotic' music, food, fashion, or art. However, upon being secured (via monopoly and rent-control), the resultant commodification of these special products renders them as commodities that can be shared and disseminated freely to everyone. They become 'no different from commodities in general.' This underlying contradiction can be seen prominently in the marketing and promotion of various 'New Asia' projects, such as Malaysia's own 'Malaysia Truly Asia' project. Malaysia for the past two decades since the invention of the Vision 2020 project in the mid-1980s has been engaged with mutating and evolving forms of cultural projects aimed at reinforcing a distinct national identity and culture. These includes attempts to construct the country as a truly 'modern Islamic state', efforts to categorize Malaysian-born citizens (regardless of ethnic or racial backgrounds) as part of a Malaysian race (*Bangsa Malaysia)*, and most recently a national campaign called 1Malaysia to express unity and harmony.

These expressions of cultural identity appears most prominently in the public sphere of urban Malaysia, and nowhere more so than in the food-services sector. Food is a tremendously important aspect of Malaysia's collective history, culture and memory – it remains one of the strongest selling points, from a rather cynical point of view, for the country when it comes to tourism. Few things act better as 'cultural products' for Malaysia than local food, with perhaps the exception of its natural landscapes of beaches and tropical islands. For many locals, Malaysian food and cuisines symbolizes the hybridity, fluidity, originality, and rich diversity of the country, natural resources and its people – in similar ways that football (soccer) can be seen to be a shared cultural symbol of certain countries such as Brazil and Argentina. Popular Malaysian food tends to be hybrid and very unique fusions of indigenous, Malay, Chinese and Indian fares – deep fried *mamak* Indian noodles (*Mee Goreng)*, *char kuey teow,* and the aforementioned white coffee, just to name a few. More than just cuisines, such food items hold historical symbolism for local Malaysians and harken back to memories (often selective) of mythical pasts and small-town life.

Thus, food becomes a rich resource for the pursuit of cultural commodification for a mixture of state and corporate interests. Businesses such as chain restaurants are quick to capitalize on this historical memory by designing spaces and services aimed at promoting and glorifying this nostalgia. The state itself is also actively involved with the promotion of this nostalgia as shown through the enormous investments put into redeveloping cultural centers such as Central Market in KL. Christine Chin (2013), refers to these projects as part of a city's 'branding practices'. They are not always benign, as many rebranding practices that are reliant upon memory, shared histories and

identity can be both creative and destructive, as Chang (2005) points out—they can reinforce marginalization of poorer communities and groups, which is sadly not an unfamiliar legacy in Malaysia for members of ethnic minorities such as many indigenous groups and South Indians. There can be a great deal of what Chang refers to as 'selective remembering', which entails erasures and censorships of difficult, controversial and unpleasant aspects of a so-called 'shared history'. Visions and memories of the old 'small-town' life in Malaysia tend not to include the complicated history of race-relations that go hand in hand with the realities of colonial life, for instance.

Neoliberal Culturalism

Chinatown's 'Green Dragon' canopy, the hundreds of electric red lanterns along Petaling Street, the 'Old-Town' wall art and posters in restaurants and cafes are representations of cultural branding practices that serve to highlight, accentuate and reinforce perceptions of difference and Otherness, both for insiders and outsiders. The particular connection between this cultural difference, or 'specialness', and commercial enterprise which David Harvey regards as contradictory is a form of neoliberal 'culturalism'. More than just attempts at identifying and turning unique cultural products into commodities, it is simultaneously an exercise of historical revisionism and selective remembering that follows the logic of neoliberal capitalism – seeking and carving out market niches through monopoly and rent based on the rights to determine what counts as 'local' culture and ensuring that these cultural products have market value of some sort. On the part of the state, through the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, this culturalism is best regarded as a safe and clean product that can be used to promote the country to visitors, especially tourists.

Private businesses and enterprises have been quick to hop on board this project of promoting cultural distinction and difference, particularly in the food services and retail sectors. Neoliberal logic and the quest for global competitiveness is well exemplified by the message from Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz, the Minister of Tourism and Culture:

> "Undoubtedly, Malaysia's tourism sector is one of the 12 National Key Economic Areas (NKEAs), which has been identified as one of the contributing prime sector in Malaysia economy achievement. Being the top 10 tourism destination, undeniably, Malaysia has proven its ability in the tourism industry. Thanks, to our rich and diverse culture and heritage inherited from our multiracial society. The Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia will continue its strive to push the tourism and culture sector to a greater heights and, subsequently, make Malaysia as the most preferred holiday destination in the world. This is in line with the government's aspiration via Malaysia Tourism Transformation Plan which is

> to attract 36 million tourists to Malaysia and generate RM168 billion for the country by year 2020." (MOTAC 2014)

The rhetoric of 'proving its ability' (in reference to Malaysia), 'economic achievement', and 'pushing for greater heights' are seamlessly melded with a narrative of cultural 'diversity', 'inheritance', and multiculturalism in this quote. It is not surprising that while very little definition is given to what makes up 'diversity' and 'culture', there is a much clearer target in mind when the minister refers to the Malaysian Tourism Transformation Plan (to 'attract 36 million tourists and generate RM 168 billion). In slight contrast to Harvey's (2002) suggestion that the monopolizing of cultural products leads to cultural commodification, here what is interesting is that it is an 'idea' of a unique cultural Otherness that is being promoted for the sake of achieving an economic target. In fact, the generation of RM 168 billion (about USD 50 billion) is not necessarily from the sale of 'cultural products', but also from revenues coming from tours, services, food consumption, airlines, hotels, entrance fees to heritage sites – the list is extensive. The state holds no monopoly rent on these sites, services and products, consistent with the neoliberal push towards deregulation, but it is still actively engaged with promoting and fostering an environment for economic growth. Consequently, a synergy emerges between state and private interests, especially small and medium businesses, where this neoliberal culturalism manifests, as more and more entrepreneurs promote their services as 'authentically' Malaysian in some way or another.

> "After two hours of walking in the hot sun and browsing through several of these migrant traders' stores, I went to a local 'Malaysian cuisine' restaurant which was part of large national franchise, one of several of its kind. This is not different from countless other restaurants that are present and very popular in KL and other parts of Malaysia - immediately recognizable and ubiquitous to Malaysians. This one, like a lot of the other restaurants, puts a lot of effort into tapping into a nostalgia for the 'olden days' of small-town life in Malaysia. The walls were covered with images and photographs of historically important and iconic port and mining towns like Malacca, Ipoh and Taiping. There were pictures of elderly men working in kitchens, preparing traditional ethnic cuisines, roasting coffee and filtering tea. The aesthetic tone of the restaurant - all brown and beige, rustic wood-like - evokes a sense of the traditional and the 'good old days'. Even the utensils, dishes and cups that were being used are part of this aesthetic - the combination of forks, spoons and chopsticks provided together to patrons a distinctly Malaysian practice (as opposed to the either/or in most other countries). As I looked through the menu, it was quite obvious that the entire aesthetic was aimed at invoking a powerful sense of authenticity, presumably to recreate the truest and purest form of classic, traditional Malaysian urbanity. The food selection was mostly 'pure' versions of famous local favorites - nasi lemak, mee jawa, rendang, roti canai, Penang prawn mee, laksa, curry mee, white coffee, etc - The images accompanying different food items emphasize this 'authenticity', such as the packaging of nasi lemak in a sheet of 'oil paper' and strip of banana leaf." (Excerpt from field notes)

From a personal point of view, much of the imagery on display at the restaurant referred to above evoke very familiar and consistent memories. Some of the towns mentioned – Ipoh and Taiping especially—are places I spent my childhood years. The imagery and the attendant nostalgia is intentional and very purposeful, even if incomplete and out-of-context for the most part. I recall the numerous times a parent or guardian would take me to a small coffee-shop in the middle of Taiping town to have a meal and with friends to have casual conversations with. The smell of roasted pork, coffee, and all manner of food, coupled with poorly cemented floors, men talking away loudly and excitedly in multiple languages are some of the memories that are brought to life in these symbols of a mythical past – the 'good old days'. This does not always work as effectively though, as a visit to a similar type of establishment in Georgetown revealed:

> "I was at a local Georgetown 'café' franchise outlet, very similar in aesthetic and concept to the ones in KL. Immediately upon entering I noted that all the workers at the restaurant were migrants - Nepali and Myanmarese, with our waiter being from Pakistan. Somehow, it felt even more incongruous because most of Georgetown's local restaurants and diners were still predominantly local in terms of employees, at least the smaller businesses. This particular franchise has put a lot more emphasis on the whole aspect of 'authenticity' and originality of Penang culture and history. In fact, the first two pages of the menu goes at length to depict the cultural 'heritage' of Penang and Georgetown, and one of the walls was adorned with a large timeline conveniently educating interested patrons about the island's history. It is on this poster that I discovered when the famous Swettenham Pier was completed, when the Anti-Opium Movement began, and when Georgetown became a World Heritage Site (2008 by the way). According to UNESCO, the city has a 'unique architectural and cultural landscape without parallel anywhere in East and Southeast Asia'. Malaysia Truly Asia. Almost every item on the menu has the words 'Penang', 'George Town', or 'Original' in front of its name, further bringing attention to the authenticity of the food being served. This almost overbearingly obnoxious attention to 'authenticity' is so at odds with the fact that our waiters and servers could not understand Malay and were all migrant workers from Bangladesh, most likely on temporary permits. The experience feels like an exaggerated and far more elaborate version of the "I love Penang" t-shirts and memorabilia being sold everywhere that carry 'Made in China/India/Bangladesh/Indonesia/Thailand' tags." (Excerpt from field notes)

The Georgetown restaurant is a perfect illustration of neoliberal culturalism brought to life – a distinct and bizarre merging of the logics of neoliberal capitalism (free market flows, unfettered mobility of people and goods) with that of nationalism, tradition and culture. These establishments are not simply selling food and beverages, but also the idea of Malaysia – or to be more precise, urban Malaysia-- as a unique and distinct place with its own socio-cultural heritage and legacy not to be found anywhere else. That culturalism also means that this idea is being 'sold' outside the country where some of these franchises have been able to find new markets (in countries as distant as Europe and the Middle East). On islands and beaches such as those in Penang and Langkawi, it is

possible to find entirely new strips of shops, malls and restaurants that take up this cultural consumerism to extreme lengths. *Batik* factories and artists, pewter crafts, Malaysian memorabilia, 'white coffee' restaurants – literally, everything and anything that can somehow be tied or linked to a cultural past, tradition, memory, history or legacy that is authentic is turned into commodities that can be traded. This is the cultural core of a 'New Asia' and 'Malaysia Truly Asia'.

Migrant Work and Cultural Reproduction in Urban Malaysia

> "When I look around at the several waiters, servers and cooks that I could see in the restaurant, I realized that the only faces who could be deemed 'authentically' Malaysian (and I am saying that in a very critical and politically conscious way) happen to be in pictures and photographs. To put it more accurately, the people working at the restaurant seemed very different from the people in those photographs, the latter supposedly the 'true' representatives of Malaysia, I assume. The people who were actually working there were four Myanmarese migrant workers and three Bangladeshi migrant workers, in addition to the single supervisor/manager who is likely local. For all the emphasis on traditional and authenticity, the presence of obviously temporary migrant workers as the labor power running this restaurant is sharply at odds, incongruous, discombobulating, and very contradictory. The authentic, 'pure' and classic Malaysian cuisines were all being prepared by people who are themselves not Malaysian by law, who are only in the country 'temporarily' to work. They suddenly, in a strange way, have become the bearers and preservers of Malaysian authenticity, the ones who have to ensure that only the 'correct' and real versions of local favorite foods, drinks and snacks are faithfully reproduced. Their labor, being as it is due to the way the structures and institutions work, also contribute to keeping the costs of this local cuisine down, hence enabling prices to be really low on the menu. These migrant workers are not just actively reproducing, day in day out, the 'authentic' tastes and smells of Malaysia, but they are also inadvertently maintaining the low 'street' prices of these items. How did migrant workers, and temporary migrants in particular, come to be so deeply embedded as bearers of local culture? To what extent are we (so-called 'local Malaysians') aware of the irony and strangeness of this picture?" (Excerpt from field notes)

The key question that I am trying to address in this chapter relates heavily to the 'odd, incongruous, discombobulating and very contradictory' experience referred to above. It starts with the question of who does the work of producing and reproducing this 'cultural authenticity' in urban Malaysia, and, following this, what implications arise from the reality that a lot of this work of cultural reproduction is being carried out by temporary migrants. Much of the empirical findings presented here are drawn from interviews with migrant workers primarily working in the service sector, mostly at restaurants and cafes. I have also included my own ethnographic observations of the different ways in which temporary migrant workers are drawn into 'cultural' work in various spheres of life, beyond just food service – this includes public car-wash services owned and run by local Malaysians and, curiously, religious embalming services for funerals.

Between September and January 2013, I visited around 25 different cafes and restaurants around Kuala Lumpur and another 5 in Georgetown, Penang. These were mostly small, independent 'street' restaurants and medium-sized franchise restaurants – almost all were exclusively employing migrant workers from India, Bangladesh and Thailand, with a few exceptions that include Burmese Rohingya, Indonesian, Sri Lankan and Nepali migrants. The restaurants I visited ranged from cheap 'street-style' *mamak* and Chinese food stalls to more expensive local cuisine restaurants. I intentionally varied and broadened my search area to the larger metropolitan territory of Kuala Lumpur in order to include restaurants and sites in surrounding 'satellite' cities such as Subang Jaya and Puchong. Much of KL tends to be clusters of hyper-modern infrastructure in close proximity to poorer slums and villages, which usually entails sharp differences and inequalities in living standards even between neighbors in the same area. It was possible for me to walk a short distance from an expansive and posh shopping district to a small, working class Malay village in one part of the city, for instance. This geospatial reality is reflected in the diversity of restaurants and other services even within a small radius.

Despite these differences, it became very clear that in almost all cases, restaurants in Malaysia employed temporary migrant workers. Amongst some of the sites I visited was an expensive Chinese vegetarian restaurant that only employed workers from Thailand, several outlets of a '*kopitiam*'-style franchise that employed Bangladeshi and Myanmarese workers exclusively (with rather strange racially determined employee-training practices and policies), and numerous smaller restaurants that tend to have a more diverse mix of migrant employees. All the restaurants that were visited were providing variations of 'local' Malaysian cuisine. The *kopitiam* franchises were particularly prominent in terms of the promotion of authenticity and originality of the 'local', hence my special focus on these sites for analysis. Temporary workers are not just visible for their work in the local food service sector, however. They are also important labor power for other low-level service sector work such as car-washing. This is a particularly popular and common service in KL, especially so in densely populated commercial and residential districts. It is very common, for instance, to find large parking lot buildings (for shopping complexes, hotels, and corporate buildings) where there would be groups of migrant men occupying special parking spaces that are meant for washing cars. Many similar set-ups can also be found in open-air public lots as well – two of the car-wash sites I visited were located on corners of major intersections near Imbi, a prominent shopping and food district. The cases that I present in the next sections are meant to illustrate, on one hand, the work of

reproducing Malaysian cultural 'authenticity' and difference, and on the other, the ways in which temporary migrants have become increasingly embedded and woven into public socio-cultural life in urban Malaysia.

The Food Service Sector and Reproducing Authenticity

At the very start of this chapter, I presented an excerpt from field work describing the experience of Ali, a migrant worker from Bangladesh who was one of my most important sources of information. Ali works at one of the outlets of a major *kopitiam* franchise in Malaysia, located in a middle-class 'suburb' of the city. He has been in the country for more than seven years, but only recently started working for this particular establishment having initially worked at a sundry store in Klang. Ali was initially employed to be a server, a task which he still carries out, but thanks to his excellent customer service skills and worker supervision, he was 'informally' promoted to a supervisor position, which entails monitoring, training and helping the other migrant workers at the restaurant in addition to entertaining patrons with conversation.

The *kopitiam* restaurant where he works employs two groups of migrants – Bangladeshi and Myanmarese. The restaurant itself was separated into a back kitchen, a bread/roti preparation area, and a drinks and beverages area. The workers were divided based on these sections, with most of the Myanmarese workers either in the drinks or bread sections, while all the waiters and servers were Bangladeshi. All the workers were men, between the ages of 20 and 30, with the exception of Ali who was in his mid-thirties. The restaurants aesthetic style was very much in line with the 'uniquely' Malaysian narrative – dark brown earthy tones accentuated with dashes of green (typically a traditional 'Malay' aesthetic), images of 'old-town' life usually in black and white, and photos of authentic local food items. All the workers wore special uniforms and hats emblazoned with the franchise's logo, and were very obviously trained extensively in food preparation and service work:

> "While talking about his place of work, Ali tells me that all new workers who come to this franchise would need to have undergone training at a facility somewhere in KL. Training of workers is tailored based on specific tasks which they are pre-assigned to, whether it is mixing drinks and desserts, cooking food, or preparing local breads. The training can be intense and takes about three months, during which new employees must learn how to prepare entire sections of the menu by heart. I ask if workers are paid during this period of training, and he replies yes. Ali feels that his bosses are good people. The branch where he works at is owned by three shareholders - two of whom are local Malaysians while the other a Korean national. All three are liked and do not cause grief for their workers. Ali explains that having bosses that treat you well means having the obligation and duty to treat the bosses 'property' and businesses with respect and proper care. He also tells me how

important it is for the workers to maintain good service to customers, as their own income is so dependent on the success of the store. Any disruption or problems that may lead to fewer customers or the shop closing for lengths of time has an impact on the workers and the bosses. Ali says that he likes working at his current place to the extent that he does hope his permit gets renewed and he gets to continue working there. He does not really want to have another change in jobs anytime soon." (Excerpts from interview and field notes)

The training that these employees undergo occurs at the very beginning of their time in Malaysia, usually within the first few weeks. At another outlet of the similar franchise, I found a very similar working arrangement in which migrant employees were divided based on their tasks and duties, and had to undergo similar training at 'facilities somewhere in KL'. Neither Ali, nor any of the other workers were able to identify clearly the location of these training facilities, because they were taken there having just arrived in the city and did not have any idea of orientation. According the one of the managers at this second outlet,

> "They (migrants) have not caused us any big problems whatsoever, and are very good at learning from mistakes. The restaurant would be doing so well without the workers. Most of the Bangladeshi and Myanmarese workers had been recruited via agencies, which is normal. I had not been responsible for the applications and filing of paperwork, but as employers we are in charge of holding the workers' passports and making sure they don't get in trouble with the authorities. All the workers are required to undergo intense training before they can begin working. They are trained to specialize in the different areas of the restaurant's services. I'm very impressed by how well these workers adapt and learn the skills that they need, which are considerable. It must be quite tough and I feel quite lucky that we have such great staff. The training is important for our franchise because of our focus, which is to provide fresh local cuisine at a price point that is competitive and even better service than the numerous food joints in the vicinity. The franchise's reputation as one that only prepares freshly made food and beverages also helps win over customers who can be extremely picky and fussy about their food around here." (Interview with store manager)

Like Ali, all the workers at these outlets work at least 12 hours each day and are given one day off per week. They work in overlapping shifts between 7am and 2am (for this particular franchise). While the hours seem harsh and exploitative for most of us, most workers that I interviewed found it to be almost the opposite – that it was normal and perfectly acceptable.

> "(Concerning working hours) this is not really that much of a problem for me. I'm okay with doing the work that I'm doing now, even with the long hours and intense labor involved, because it's good money. (Repeats several times) As foreign workers, we are generally not too concerned with long working hours or intense labor, because our entire reason for coming to Malaysia is to make an income which we can save up to go back home and live comfortably. This is why migrant workers rarely complain about their working conditions - they are aware of what they are getting into and accept these conditions. For example, I get a day off each week which I spends most of the day in bed, trying to catch up on sleep and rest, instead of going out for leisure. This is necessary in that it helps me get through six days of work from 8 am to 8 pm. I also understands and accepts that as a migrant, I have less freedom to say or do what I wants, even if I am in the right. Most of the time, I will need to just accept what is being told by others, especially employers and authorities, and not argue, because arguing achieves nothing productive and only puts my employment and source of

> income at risk. Most foreign workers try to stay out of trouble and keep their heads low, for this very reason." (Interview with Ali)

This narrative, of accepting long work hours and restrictions on freedom and rights, is one that I heard echoed and repeated in all the interviews that I conducted with restaurant workers, as well as migrants in other sectors such as construction. It was, however, a narrative that came from the predominantly male migrant population of workers – and differed sharply from those of migrant women, which I will explore further in a latter chapter. A key consequence to the presence of migrant employees and long working hours is that workers such as Ali inevitably become the public faces of urban Malaysia. For the vast numbers of tourists and others who frequent outlets such as this franchise (including local Malaysians), these temporary migrant workers are important sources of information, beyond their immediate service as waiters. Ali, for instance, mentions numerous occasions when he would sit and socialize with 'expat' businessmen and their families and friends, explaining the intricacies of local foods, places to visit and the 'economy'. On his part, this requires a strong command of local languages (Malay and English, in this case) *and* a strong knowledge of current affairs, local cultures and locations of places. Learning on the go is a vital skill for Ali, as shown by his ability to build his own personal Malay-Bengali dictionary while working.

In food services, the emphasis on local authenticity and originality translates into rather stringent and specific training practices for workers. Many of the franchise outlets that focus on serving 'typical', 'authentic' local Malaysian cuisines tend to ensure their workers are fully aware of the need for precision, not just in terms of preparation of food, but also in terms of performance. In one of the more illustrative cases, I noticed several outlets similar to the one where Ali works in which there would be a Myanmarese worker engaged in very public display of preparing *roti canai*, a type of Indian pancake. There is a level of dramatic performance that goes with the preparation of this bread, similar to spinning a slice of pizza, except with greater acrobatic flair. This 'performance' is a distinctly Malaysian Indian practice that used to be associated with street hawkers and public food courts, carried out by South Indian men. Witnessing this performance in the clean, sanitized setting of a franchise restaurant carried out by a non-Indian worker proved to be a rather illuminating experience, a testament to the ways in which so many aspects of cultural life is being used for marketing purposes.

However, outside of franchise restaurants like the ones mentioned, there are other, independent ones where the reproduction of the 'authentic' is not as important. Examples include

smaller *mamak* style restaurants and cafes located on public sidewalks and working class residential neighborhoods. For restaurants such as these, menu items are flexible, even if workers are expected to be able to reproduce the basic 'staple' local cuisines – *roti canai, teh Tarik, nasi goring,* etc. In one case, at a restaurant-cum-convenience store located at a condominium complex in Imbi, I found that a largely migrant population of customers and patrons leads to a greater diversity and flexibility among employees when it comes to service practices. Two of the workers here, a married migrant couple from Patani in Southern Thailand, were employed specifically for their experience with cooking local Thai-Malay cuisines, yet were quick to highlight how they have had to adapt and learn 'off-menu' items at the request of different customers:

> "This restaurant, the people who come here every day, are very diverse and come from everywhere. Usually they live in the nearby flats and apartments – Nepal, Pakistan, Myanmar, Vietnam, Bangladesh, India… so many places. They come here for cheap, delicious 'local' food. My husband (Mal) is quite famous here for being a very good *tom yum* chef and for a lot of Thai food, so a lot of people always request that he be the one who cooks whenever they come here. Still, a lot of them also like to make requests that are 'off-menu', expecting him to be able to prepare whatever it is they are asking. This sometimes is a problem for both of us because we don't always know what a particular taste of a dish is supposed to be when it's completely unfamiliar – we have no point of reference, but we can't say no to the customer, can we? We also have problems when customers who are unfamiliar with tom yum or Thai cooking, order dishes without explaining dietary restrictions such as intolerance to spiciness. Many times we have to repeat to people that some dishes simply cannot be made without spices or chilies. On occasion, people would be offended, but this is rare. We've been slowly learning to manage these situations as best we can, while at the same time, it actually gives us the opportunity to diversify their menus and offerings." (Interview with Lina)

Public Characters and Cultural Interlocutors

Learning about specific cultural intricacies of Malaysia turned out to be a vital element of many temporary migrant workers' experience while in working as service sectors. They are asked, often implicitly, to take on the roles of cultural interlocutors and ambassadors – the most curious of which happened to be those employed as restroom cleaners in some of KL's massive upscale shopping hyper-malls. My interviews with some of the migrants who were employed as cleaners, usually Bangladeshi or Nepali, revealed that many of them had to deal with daily encounters with people from all over the world, who often would assume they were local Malaysians and therefore knowledgeable about local cultures. This creates anxiety for the workers, who were not generally prepared to play out these roles, and for some, this meant seeking out information and knowledge on their own time. Mirshad, a young man from Bangladesh who works as a cleaner in an upscale mall in Bukit Bintang, describes his learning process as follows:

> "I didn't know anything about KL when I first came here, just that there were lots of Muslims so I thought I would be okay. I didn't realize there were so many Chinese and Indians and other foreigners, especially Europeans. A lot of them start thinking I'm from here, because I work (as a cleaner), and would ask me for directions to places, and try to talk to me in Malay or English. I didn't know how to speak (English or Malay) when I started, so I had to learn very quickly. Thankfully, my friends here (fellow migrant co-workers) who have been here longer than me were helping me pick up the basics, so now I can at least reply in Malay and English a bit. Most important thing I learned to say is how to guide people to information kiosk, but nowadays I'm a bit better, and I know more of the place, so I can try and help more." (interview with Mirshad)

As implied in the quote above, initial perceptions of Malaysia (as a predominantly Muslim country) is often subject to reassessment and reevaluation the moment migrant workers like Mirshad step foot in KL's highly cosmopolitan setting. This is not uncommon or unusual, as many of the migrants interviewed during this field work expressed similar experiences of being surprised at the actual demographic and cultural realities of Kuala Lumpur. Many migrants, from South Asia in particular, stated that they were very surprised by the high proportions of ethnically Chinese Malaysians in the city, something they had not been aware of. In some cases, my informants even went as far as suggesting that KL was a far more 'Chinese' city than it was Malay, because the 'richest and more powerful people all seemed to be Chinese, except the politicians' (interview with Guroshan from India).

In an important ethnographic study of New York City's urban poor and 'sidewalk life', Mitchell Duneier references a concept introduced by Jane Jacobs (1961) in her seminal *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. This concept called 'public characters' is described as follows:

> "The social structure of sidewalk life hangs partly on what can be called self-appointed public characters. A public character is anyone who is in frequent contact with a wide circle of people and who is sufficiently interested to make himself a public character. A public character need have no special talents or wisdom to fulfill his function—although he often does. He just needs to be present, and there need to be enough of his counterparts. His main qualification is that he *is* public, that he talks to lots of different people. In this way, news travels that is of sidewalk interest." (Duneier 1999)

Without wanting to draw too many similarities or parallels with the life and practices of urban poor in NYC to that of Kuala Lumpur, I find that this idea of 'public characters' as agents of cultural production at the level of daily life is particularly strong and appropriate in discussing the politics of temporary migrants in Malaysia. People like Ali, Mirshad, and so many others who find themselves thrust into the public gaze are put almost in a 'sink or swim' situation where learning on the go and

improvisation seem to be very important skills for adaptation and relative success. Nowhere is this more so than in the experiences of restaurant workers such as Ali, Mal, Lina and cleaners such as Mirshad. The same applies as well to the many poor migrants who work as public 'car-wash' employees scattered all around the city and its suburbs.

> "Knowing that most car washes in the city are staffed by migrants working under fairly poor conditions, I decided to spend some time at one of the bigger gas station car washes I could find located as centrally in KL as possible. The one I found is actually quite close to where I live. It is a large petrol station which is on one of the busiest intersections in the city, one that links several major traffic arteries including Jalan Tun Razak, Jalan Ampang, Jalan Yew and Jalan Sultan Ismail. Traffic is always heavy and always noisy, with high levels of exhaust pollution added to the mix. The gas station in question was recently rebuilt within the past two years, as it is much larger now than it used to be a few years back. There were more filling stations and a much larger convenience store, as well as a larger space for waiting vehicles. At the back of the station was a 6 foot brick wall that blocked off access to the large predominantly Indian shanty-town/slum that existed there. All the staff and workers at the gas station were Bangladeshi migrant workers, although only those working at the filling stations and convenience store were wearing uniforms with the petroleum company's logo. The men working at the car wash were not wearing uniforms. All the workers were male, of varying ages, though those who worked for the gas station were all in their mid-20s. Those who worked at the attached car was were far more diverse in terms of age, with one worker barely out of his teens while others looked to be above 50. I have known some of the men who work here for at least 10 years (which is almost as long as I have been driving a vehicle in Malaysia), and many of them immediately recognize me as a regular. I have made efforts in the last three years to get to know some of them, though only two workers have ever really felt comfortable having conversations with me. One of them no longer works at this car wash, and I have not seen him in three years. The other workers, all being migrants from Bangladesh, rarely spoke in Malay or English and most of the time relied on their 'captain' to do most of the talking with customers. This captain is the other man with whom I've been able to develop somewhat of a rapport with, as we often ask each other about how we're doing and banter about politics. When the workers identify me as a regular, there is an immediate hierarchy of power that is established, where they would always immediately defer to my actions and words. It's a power dynamic that occurs between all customers and workers at car washes, and one that is very difficult to overcome. With me being so obviously local, the power inequality is further exacerbated - this also means that I would never be able to be accepted as an equal even if I tried to work alongside these migrants. I walked up to where most of the workers were and started to say hi to a number of them, those who I knew would recognize me. They immediately lit up and nodded their heads, smiling and waving salutes in welcome. I smiled and salute back. The aforementioned captain was there as well, and he walked to give me his hand in salam. We exchanged pleasantries and he asks me if I had come back 'for good' this time, having known that I am only in Malaysia for brief one or two month periods per year. Captain (not his real name) has been working here at this same car wash for more than 15 years now. When I ask him how he was doing, he simply replies with a smile, '*macam biasa*' (as usual), a reply he has been

> giving me for the past five consecutive years that I have been travelling back and forth between Malaysia and the US. Captain is in his early forties now. He is a short but stocky man, skin darkened excessively by being overexposed to sunlight. He always has a pleasant, well-mannered charm to him, always welcoming people with a disarming smile. He is the Captain because he is the face of the car wash, even though he does not actually own the place. The other workers often turn to him for help and guidance, and, due to language difficulties, tend to let him do the greeting and talking with customers. Captain's Malay is fairly competent, and he speaks a little bit of broken English as well. The workers communicate entirely in Bengali with each other, and I sense that more of the new workers have very little knowledge of any of the local Malaysian languages. As such, Captain happens to play a very important role in engaging customers and making sure that the car wash has a firm base of regulars who come back to them when their vehicles need a wash."

The Captain does more than just engage with customers of the car-wash – he is also considered to be a constant, fixed presence for those who frequent this public space of the car wash. Residents of the nearby neighborhoods tend to have some awareness of him, and he is often a good source of gossip, news and stories. Interestingly, the Captain often tells me of how people's tastes in cars and vehicles have changed over the past ten years, thanks to his experience of washing cars. Local Malaysians have increasingly gotten weary and tired of 'local' car such as Proton and Perodua, and are far more interested in foreign brands despite the heavy import taxes. He also frequently expresses his thoughts on the 'strange' status conscious lifestyles of Malaysians, especially 'rich people with expensive cars who are still too cheap to take their cars for "proper" car-washes, where they can get full service'. This particular quirk is something he attributes as being very 'Malaysian'.

Migrant workers such as Ali, Mirshad, and the Captain are quite obvious examples of 'public characters' whose knowledge and insights about the 'local' functions as a useful asset, perhaps even as micro-forms of 'social capital'. This is reflected partly in the fact that both Ali and the Captain have been able to find some degree of stability in terms of employment relative to other temporary migrants, despite having the specter of work-period limitations and lack of formal citizenship. In Ali's case, his role as 'supervisor', employee trainer and customer relations skills makes him almost indispensable to his employer, in a context where most temporary workers come and go with alarming regularity. Of more than forty temporary migrants that I had the opportunity to interview during the curse of my fieldwork, many who had managed to secure some form of job security were those who managed to successfully position themselves as dependable sources of cultural knowledge – by learning the local languages, the 'quirks' of local practices, and as informal interlocutors and educators (for newer migrants).

An Hindu Funeral Service

The extent to which migrant labor has become part of the cultural life of urban Malaysia is not entirely limited to the public sphere, however. In contrast to the 'public characters' such as Ali and the Captain, there are also others who have become more deeply embedded into more intimate and private cultural practices in very unexpected and startling ways. One of the most surprising moments I came across during my time in Malaysia occurred during a, Hindu funeral service, where the extent to which 'cultural outsourcing' was occurring truly stuck home.

Hindu funeral rituals and practices are very unique and hard to describe. Unlike Christian or other more well-known cultural practices, at a Hindu funeral, there is an expectation of noise, intense activity and rituals to be performed. Crying -"wailing" - is very common and almost a required element amongst women and girls who come to say their farewells. Close family members and loved ones are expected to remain close and awake to the body of the deceased throughout the entire funeral, until the body is taken away for cremation, which in this case would be the following day. Many guests often stay the night, sitting in porches and on the living room floors.

> "At this particular funeral, there were two women who were working as 'domestic helpers'. They were migrant workers on temporary work permits who are only allowed to live and work at this particular home (like the vast majority of women employed as 'domestic helpers' or maids in this country). One of the women was from South India, while the other was from Indonesia. On normal days, the work of domestic workers such as these women might involve anything from washing clothes, cleaning the home, baby-sitting, nursing, cooking, and general upkeep (all except 'washing cars', which is for some inexplicable reason prohibited under immigration law!). A death at home represents an extraordinary event, however, which would inevitably have implications for the lives of these women - not just in the immediate sense of confusing and new tasks that may need to be carried out, but also in terms of what it might mean in terms of their long term employment. For their part, both women remained quietly going about their work, mostly as instructed by family members. I noticed that the Tamil-speaking Indian helper was primarily the person receiving instructions on how to prepare the house for the funeral services and rituals. She was busy carrying things such as small furniture, photos and other decorative items out of the living room, where the body will be kept and displayed for guests until it is taken away. No photos and other furniture is supposed to be left in the living room at this point. Large display cabinets were covered with old bed sheets and *sarees*. At the same time, the other migrant helper remained mostly in the kitchen, out of the way. She seemed very unsure and confused as to how to help, but would very quickly come forward if spoken to. Occasionally she would pick up glasses and plates, and offer drinking water to guests, perhaps out of a need to do something to occupy herself. Due to the large and growing number of guests arriving, my chances to go to the kitchen and to observe the work of the helper was rather limited.

Soon, a group of men made up the sons of the deceased, and close relatives, collectively carried the body down from the bedroom upstairs to the kitchen, where they bathed and cleaned the body. This is done by a collection of older women, while the migrant helper stood and watched from the side. In the living room, a bet of mattresses and sheets was set up while they waited for the coffin to arrive - coffins were not used for burials but cremations among Hindus. The men then carried the body to the living room and placed the deceased upon the mattress. Soon, a van arrives with the name of an Indian funeral and embalming services agency printed on its side. A group of men came out of the van and began carrying lots of bags and supplies into the house. These men were led by an Indian male in his thirties, who seemed to be their employer. The workers were all very young men from Myanmar. There were five of them in total, and three of them barely looked out of their teens. The men carried plastic bags filled with things I could not be sure of and boxes as well. They put these down on the floor of the living room, and without any questions or comments, began to unpack. One young worker pulled out items that are necessary for the various rituals that need to be carried out, including packets of camphor, stringed jasmine, incense, and small oil lamps. He took out all these items and neatly arranged them on the small table set up at the head of the mattress where the body lay, next to lamps and other items already placed there by the family. The service provides these items as part of the package, I later found out - things like camphor tablets which are used as fuel for prayer lights are essential and needed in large quantities as the lights would need to keep burning for days on end. The young man, who could not possibly have known such details about Hindu funerals before his employment at the embalmers service, knew precisely where and how to arrange the various items, and seemed to possess an amazingly sensitive eye for attention. This despite the fact that he could not speak much Malay or English, as I noticed when his response to one of the family members asking him a question in either language was to stay silent and shake his head in confusion.

The Myanmarese men were very quiet and solemn throughout the whole process. Their only form of communication with their 'boss' was through nods and hand gestures, mostly from the latter. They generally remained close to the boss, unless they had to bring specific items from the van or were unpacking. Eventually, when the coffin arrived in a different vehicle, they helped to carry the heavy polished wood box into the house, setting up a platform in the living room where they could safely place the coffin. Two of the young workers began placing packs of ice (I think) at the bottom of the coffin and along the sides of the body, which they then covered using white sheets. The level of care and attention to detail was amazing - they were so careful as to not maintain the neatness and orderliness of the arrangement. Their boss begin gently indicating to the guests that they were ready to start the embalming process, which meant that they would need to take the body back into the kitchen. Guests, if they so choose, could stay and observe, but understandably only a few decided to stay.

I stood outside with most of the other guests as the embalmers rolled the platform into the kitchen. I did not keep track of the time, but after what had felt like half an hour, a few of the men walked back out, their shirts pulled up to cover their noses. One of them had

> teary eyes, which is probably a result of the embalming. They return inside and eventually wheel the coffin back out to the living room, and guests slowly started going back inside. Once their work was done, the Myanmarese men stood together at a corner of the porch, occasionally whispering to one another, while their boss spoke with members of the family who were leading the preparations and organizing things. The workers' presence was seemingly barely noticed by most of the guests, except for a few who commented on how efficient and knowledgeable these 'Myanmarese boys' were at handling a Hindu embalming service. As a personal feeling, it was amazing just how seamlessly and smoothly the presence of these group of migrant workers was interwoven into such a delicate, private and deeply traditional process. My own memories reach back to funerals in the past where I have only seen other Indian men who carry out the embalming - this is the first time that I have come across migrant workers in this job." (Excerpt from field notes)

I later found out that the embalmer and funeral services agency that had been working here were owned and operated by local Malaysian Indians, and had for a long time employed mostly other local Indians. Recently, they too have begun employing migrant workers, usually from Myanmar, for reasons that I could not verify yet. This experience remains one of the more curious and indicative representations of the myriad of ways in which basically temporary migrant workers have become so well 'fitted' into diverse local cultural practices in Malaysia. The simultaneous push for freeing up the mobility of labor across transnational channels and reproducing cultural authenticity for the purposes of reaffirming Malaysia's distinction and Otherness is responsible for the production of these strange, unexpected new realities in which the actual work of producing cultural product is becoming increasingly globalized – that is, no longer exclusively performed by those who are 'supposed' to be the authentic bearers of such cultural practices and performances. This *cultural work of migrants* is an important and widespread product of the locally-specific syntheses of new modes of transnational migration flows and global cultural commodification tendencies, yet is a largely invisible form of work.

CHAPTER 6: MOBILE LIVELIHOODS OF INVISIBLE MIGRANTS

Introduction

> "If it were true . . . that the flow of immigrants and refugees was simply a matter of individuals in search of better opportunities in a richer country, then the growing population and poverty in much of the world would have created truly massive numbers of poor invading highly developed countries, a great indiscriminate flow of human beings from misery to wealth. This has not been the case. Migrations are highly selective processes; only certain people leave, and they travel on highly structured routes to their destinations, rather than gravitate blindly toward any rich country they can enter (Sassen, 1999)"

What does it mean to be 'mobile' under current conditions of globalization? Does it mean being able to pick and choose where we would like to move to, for work and settling, without too many obstacles along the way? Does it mean having a choice to live a life of constant movement from city to city and country to country, with very little friction in terms of border controls and transportation? In this so-called 'age of migration' (Miller and Castles 2009), human mobility – or more precisely, *labor* mobility - is often compared directly to the mobility of other elements, such as finance, capital, information and commodities. This comparison, inevitably, results in a commonly accepted belief within policy and academic circles that the mobility of labor (actual people) is rather lagging behind the free and unfettered mobility of those other elements. On the surface, such an assumption can be easily taken for granted primarily because it is much simpler to look at information, capital, and financial 'flows' as seemingly smooth and unstoppable in terms of mobility whereas, as political scientists are quick to remind us, migration is still stuck in the realm of international politics, border-security and migration regimes.

In this chapter, I take up a critique of this particular perspective of 'mobility' on the basis that a) the binary treatment of labor mobility vs. other 'factors of production' reinforces a flawed perception that these other factors do indeed flow unfettered, and b) that it is not possible, logical or wise to compare human 'mobility' with other forms of mobility using the metaphors of neoliberal globalization. There are distinct and very problematic effects that emerge from taking up this assumption, most concerning of which is the possibility of reducing 'labor' migrants to the status of commodities – to be 'better exported, imported, and measured for economic impact or gain'

(Leighton 2013)[23]. Another aspect of this perspective on labor mobility is both a process and outcome of the prevailing discourses on migration – the rendering invisible of various different groups of migrants, trans-migrants, and other non-citizen actors, many of whom are left out of discussions because of the ways in which they are categorized and classified, as well as for moralistic purposes (as in the case of sex-workers) (Raghuram 2009). As a result, the conceptions of mobility that emerge from existing studies of migration tend to focus strictly on narrowly defined groups – 'unskilled'/'low-skilled migrant labor, high-skilled professionals, and those who are lumped under the 'brain-drain' discussions.

Mobility is not a singularly defined process or characteristic. We define mobility based on what we perceive to be the movement of things, people and other entities, material and immaterial. Mobility is also something that can be hidden or ignored. The problem with comparing the mobility of migrants with the mobility of capital and finance is that much of the complexity and contingency of these various types of 'movement' get lost – we will not be able to understand how these networks of flows and linkages actually interact and influence one another in different ways. Treating people's mobility in terms of their freedom of movement across borders as something that can exist independently (i.e. in the form of free, unfettered movement) sounds positive in theory but is deeply problematic in practice as the foundational premise for this free movement is the presence of free markets for labor. 'Free' movement of people in this context veers closer to Weber's notion of 'formally free labor' – that is, people who are free of their ties to a land and are able to sell their labor power. In other words, the free movement of migrants today works in the same rational of the free movement of commodities and capital. As a result, we find that the current logics of migration governance very often push for more states to adopt a model of temporary and circular migration that is meant to 'free' migrants to be the independent, private service- providing labor power highly in demand in developing and developed countries.

My own findings in Malaysia offer plenty of alternative narratives and evidence to the contrary that challenge the prevailing perspective outlined above. Many of the migrants who are generally understood or viewed to fit within particular categories of identity and experience, such as women engaged in care-work and domestic labor, experience and go about daily life in very

[23] Michelle Leighton, of the International Labor Organization (ILO) is one the few voices working in a large INGO who has identified and highlighted the problems inherent with the migration-development paradigm, notably the potential reduction of migrants into labor commodities.

surprising and unexpected ways which challenge these categorizations and the assumptions that come along with them. Through observations and interviews, I discovered just how important entrepreneurial and creative practices are to migrant women who seek out opportunities to be part-time maids or vendors, for instance. Similarly, there is a very profound diversity in the experiences and activities of migrants working in the sex-tourism industry – from well-paid 'upscale' social escorts, cosmopolitan travel 'companions' to numerous 'guest relations officers' (GROs) in the city. Much of this diversity is drowned and silenced in broader literatures, largely due to a prevalence of a victimization narrative built upon a problematic moral politics of what Agustin (2009) calls the 'rescue industry.'

Mobility is a very important element of the lives and work of migrants such as the ones mentioned above. Information and opportunity, particularly those afforded by emerging urban networks and communities of fellow migrants, lead to greater degrees of flexibility and movement which tend to go unnoticed or are perhaps willfully ignored due to their sheer complexity. How, for instance, do we account for young women from rural Myanmar who come to work, formally, as domestic helpers, yet are able to seek out different opportunities such as becoming vendors of sim-cards and mobile phones or as 'part-time' maids working for different households despite it being illegal? How do we account for young women from Ukraine and Hong Kong who are able to tap into an extensive network of information and make use of online social media outlets to identify Malaysia as a lucrative destination for short-term sex-work and escort services? The latter in particular underline one of the biggest problems with comparing 'labor mobility' with other forms of mobility- these are not exclusive elements, but are operating in synergy with one another, with certain forms of networks (information, technology) enabling others (money, tourism and migration). These 'mobilities' foster and enable one another.

With this in mind, I detail and highlight the experiences of migrant informants whose experiences in their daily lives offer alternative narratives and understandings of mobility beyond that 'labor mobility' perspective. This is meant as a 'from-below' perspective of actors who have largely been rendered invisible, as Raghuram suggests (2009). In the next section, I go into a more detailed discussion of the existing scholarship on labor mobility under the 'age of migration', followed by an examination of how some actors becoming left out of mainstream discourses. This examination prompts further questions that concerns the gendered character of some of these migration discourses – how is it that the majority of invisible actors happen to be migrant women

who come from poorer countries and backgrounds? Related to this first question, I also touch upon the significance of particular perspectives – such as the 'global care-chain' and moralistic 'victimization' narratives – on the gendering of global migration discourses. The experiences of women who migrate in search of work and opportunities tend to be lumped into one or the other end of the structure-agency spectrum. They are either the freely moving, liberated and independent agents able to control their own decisions and futures, or they are seen as passive victims of trafficking and exploitation. In either case, the binary categorization of women leaves out much of the complexity of experience that actual people go through and negotiate. Following this, I present and discuss some of the findings from the field that highlight the experiences of 'mobile' temporary migrants such as part-time maids and social escorts, many of whom I found to be exercising, in various ways, forms of *agency under constraints*.

Along with my own empirical research findings, I also draw from the work of Christine Chin on migrant domestic workers and cosmopolitan sex-workers in Malaysia, as well as Laura Agustin's work on global sex-work, to further the theoretical and conceptual critiques and arguments put forth in this chapter. Finally, I discuss some of the implications that the various forms of hidden mobility highlighted in this chapter have in challenging and transforming existing assumptions.

Mobility in the Age of Migration - Some Contradictions

One of my objectives with this project is to pose the notion of human mobility as a problematique. Specifically, I argue that current understandings and conceptions of mobility serve to hide as much as show the real politics and practices that are experienced by people living as migrants. Mobility is about visibility – who is seen as being able to 'move' physically, socially, politically or economically. Taking migrants categorized as they are today – 'circular' migrants, refugees, foreign workers, expatriates, unskilled, low-skilled, high-skilled, and so on – we are taking for granted assumptions about their mobility. Circular and temporary migrants (or even more broadly, economic migrants) are seen as opportunity-seekers who are expected to move on or return home, refugees are seen as uprooted victims in need of protection, expatriates as a highly mobile, privileged cosmopolitan globe-trotters, and so on. These categories and the assumptions that come with them serve as useful analytical tools in developing policy instruments, defining migration laws, rationalizing NGO and grassroots activism, and legitimizing international interventions.

Unfortunately, these categories and the related notions of mobility have also emerged as powerful discourses that drown out the reality of peoples' mobility. For example, the assumption of a difference between refugees and economic migrants implies a false dichotomy that fails to account for how migrants often straddle this divide constantly, such as Burmese Rohingya migrants who live and work in KL who are often seen as refugees escaping religious persecution in their home country. My intention is to disrupt some of these assumptions about migrant mobility by showing, through my interviews with migrants in Malaysia, how dynamic and complicated the movement of people, things, information, money and commodities actually are. Key to this analysis of mobility is the active decision-making process, creative strategies and innovative practices that people undertake while negotiating the restrictions upon movement that are imposed upon them.

A number of key migration scholars have insisted that a major concern with contemporary globalization is that there is a lag effect with regards to how quickly and freely labor is able to move in contrast to capital and finance (Overbeek 2002, Pecoud and Guchteneire 2006, Favell, Feldblum and Smith 2006). This concern is framed largely within a current period which Castles and Miller (2009) have referred to as the 'age of migration', where the emphasis is placed on the very 'global character of international migration'. This is meant to turn our attention to ways in which migration is affecting significantly more countries and is a deeply interconnected phenomenon. Overbeek (2002) suggests that under neoliberal transformations that have been taking place over the past three decades, it has been 'trade and capital flows' that have been prioritized as in need of liberalization (i.e. greater freedom of movement and lesser restrictions) while labor mobility has been ignored.

However, Overbeek also argues that this does not mean that labor has been stuck or fixed to the 'local' while capital is able to move unfettered – rather, this means that labor becomes integrated into a 'global labor market' through a combination of processes. These are the commodification of labor power, the integration of national labor markets and the emergence of new forms of international labor mobility. In the last, temporary labor migration regimes are a particularly prominent form. Overbeek goes on to state that the new 'international regime for regulation of migration' is simultaneously restrictive (i.e. states exercising greater control and regulatory power over migration) and liberal. Restrictions appear in the form of obstacles and legal conditions that limit what migrant workers are allowed and not allowed to do, which in many cases manifest as severe impositions on their rights to move freely, join organizations and seek out alternative employment. At the same time, the 'liberal' aspect of this international regime refers to the further

deregulation of the private sector – lesser state-mandated protections for workers, greater openness to investment and capital growth. Fundamentally, Overbeek points out that this regime lacks democratic legitimacy – most states that adopt such regimes of migration regulation do so with a concern towards meeting private market demands for cheap labor, as is the case in Malaysia.

This apparent contradiction between liberalization and regulation of migration is not entirely accurate. For one thing, we are taking as a given that capital and finance do indeed move in an unfettered fashion. This is notion that has already been shown to be inaccurate in the works of Sassen (1991) and Ferguson (2006). Ferguson in *Global Shadows*, for example, reveals how the supposed free-flow of capital actually skips over large swathes of places that are deemed under-developed or just ignored in the African continent. Sassen, even earlier, has already shown how the seemingly utterly free-flowing character of trade and finance actually require very real and physical infrastructural developments ('global cities') for its maintenance. Despite claims to the contrary, we do not live in a world that is flat. Pitching labor mobility as lagging behind capital and finance in terms of mobility simply reinforces a flawed assumption about these other factors of production.

Secondly - and this is quite possibly a much larger issue - treating 'labor' in the same sense as trade and finance, that is as possessing some shared characteristic of 'mobility', runs a very real risk of falling into the trap of commodifying the very thing we are trying to avoid commodifying: people. Money, goods, information and people are very different things that cannot and should not be treated as if they could be measured using the same metric or instrument (mobility), because the concept itself loses any relevant meaning in the process and the movement of these elements do not follow the same channels or modes. Information that is shared through social media (Facebook, Twitter, Craigslist or Whatsapp) cannot possibly be compared with a person moving or trying to get plane tickets to get to a different country. Wiring remittance money through online bank accounts or money transfer agents cannot be compared with bringing materials or things home from a foreign country as if they were somehow operating on the same channel.

On the surface such a comparison seems benign, but a deeper critical reflection would reveal that this treatment reduces people into vehicles for material transfers. It is a dehumanizing view, devoid of the complex politics and decision-making processes that actual people deal with. Essentially, what a lot of this existing scholarship on labor mobility is asking is why isn't the trade and exchange of human beings (labor power) matched by that of money and goods. The answer is

simple: that only becomes possible if we are somehow able to email or tweet actual human bodies through the Internet, or perform human wire transfers internationally. My argument here is that this is a fundamentally wrong question to be asking in the first place. There is only a contradiction between labor mobility and the mobility of capital if we so construct and reinforce such a dichotomy.

Taking this contradiction as a given leads the way, inevitably, into policy and research agendas that are specifically oriented towards addressing migration as a problem of governance. Within that approach, these agendas have a tendency to inadvertently reduce migrants into commodities that can be traded and exchanged 'freely', which is something Michelle Leighton of the ILO recently warned as a distinct possibility within the Migration-Development paradigm. There are already some examples of research work where an uncritical acceptance of the 'contradiction' of mobility has produced recommendations for further adoption of temporary labor migration regimes and greater support for the completely 'free' movement of people (Hugo 2009, Zientara 2011), which translates into calls for stronger, more organized 'managed migration' policies that enable and foster greater temporary and circular migration flows. There needs to be a far greater degree of nuance and subtlety when we examine and talk about human mobility, especially the mobility of migrants in a deeply interconnected and complex transnational reality. In order to begin to touch upon that complexity, the problematic linking of labor mobility to capital mobility has to be set aside.

In order to clarify, I am not arguing against the free movement of people across borders in search of opportunities and a better life. However, I am trying to highlight the dangers of a neoliberal model of 'free' movement – this movement is primarily economistic and oriented towards fostering an efficient free-market model for global capital. This view does not emphasize human development, equality or equal opportunity in a holistic sense, but prioritizes development of markets and economies. All the same, mobility remains an important element – human mobility in this 'age of migration', to be precise. However, this is not a new phenomenon. Taking a broader historical view at transformations that produce conditions that lead to a growth of surplus 'labor' populations, the 'free' movement of migrants that is being championed by states and international organizations alike is actually identical to a classical Weberian notion of 'formally free labor' – free in terms of being expropriated from their means of production so they may 'freely' sell their labor power in (global) markets. The logic of expropriation and creation of surplus labor populations is

quite obvious and apparent in many states where migration has become the 'key' to development, with the case of Mexico an oft-cited example (). The free movement of so-called economic migrants is premised on the basis that they are willing to sell their labor, and this is well-illustrated in the WTO's description of 'natural persons as service providers in any of the service sectors on a temporary or non-permanent basis' under the General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS) Mode IV. The mobility of temporary 'service providers/suppliers' is as direct a manifestation of formally free labor as one can get, and is in direct contradiction to the discourse of 'agents of development' that come out of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) or the World Bank. Crucially, it is the instrument of the WTO GATS Mode IV that informs much of the logic of temporary migration governance regimes.

Following through that logic of formally free labor in thinking about labor mobility, the contradiction that lies in existing understanding of 'free movement' of migrants should be clearer. There is no authentic or utopian notion of free movement across borders that is being presented, but a neoclassical version transformed to fit the logics of neoliberal capitalism that prioritizes liberalization and deregulation of global labor markets. It is one thing to say free movement of people as opposed to the free movement of 'service providers', and unfortunately much of the policy and research approaches are skewed towards the latter. This is what Leighton (2013) has been warning about – the potential treatment of people as commodities to be traded and exchanged.

One of the most difficult tasks I have encountered during my analysis of 'mobility' of migrants in this study arose while trying to avoid the very comparisons that were critiqued above. This meant that I struggled to identify actual and real forms agency in terms of how many migrants exercised and embodied their 'mobility'. For instance, my prior understanding and assumptions about migrant domestic work is heavily shaped by the framework of 'global care-chains' (Hocschild) and the feminization of migration literature (Hoschchild and Ehrenreich, Parrenas, Piper). While I largely am in agreement with the analysis and contributions that emerge from those studies, I realized that I was unprepared to account for all the women who were actually able to take advantage of their seemingly restricted working conditions to market their services to a more extensive network of clients. It was only upon repeated attempts at critical reflection of the data that I was able to notice the significance of entrepreneurialism and creativity in the production of mobility for migrants who are often deemed the most 'immobile'.

Christine Chin (2013) and Laura Agustin (2007) have both recently highlighted some of the profound contradictions between representations and actual lived realities of many migrant women, particularly in the globalizing transnational sex-work industry. Migrant sex-workers continue to be seen firstly as victims of sex-trafficking because of how useful this narrative is for human rights NGOs and other organizations located within a powerful 'rescue industry' (Agustin 2007). They tend to be represented as passive, trapped, and disempowered – in need of rescuing. Agustin's research with actual migrants who engage in transnational sex-work and related services reveal that this narrative serves not the purpose of highlighting reality but as a discursive construction aimed at sustaining that particular rescue industry. In her work on migrants in Malaysia, Chin shows us a glimpse into the lives of people she refers to as 'cosmopolitan sex-workers', revealing the complex interconnections and relationships between the Malaysian state's global 'branding' practices (as a tourism haven), a thriving sex economy, the diversity and heterogeneity of migrants and migrant experiences, and the networks that emerge within this fluid and dynamic context.

In both Chin's and Agustin's works there is a strong critique of representing migrant women, especially sex-workers, as passive victims or immobile subjects. They bolster this critique with evidence drawn from the actual lived experiences of migrants who are very much aware and capable of making choices and taking responsibility of their decisions, which appears as a troubling disruption of the victim narrative. Agustin goes further by arguing that the discourse proliferated by the rescue industry is a product of a very old tradition of moral crusades against women's sexuality, where prostitutes tend to be regarded as symbols of complete moral bankruptcy and thus in need of rescuing by selfless others. While this moral crusade inclination was not something I necessarily encountered while engaging with NGO and activists in KL, it did become swiftly apparent that the victim narrative is profoundly important for those who are working with sex-workers, at least in terms of providing an alternative against the state and law enforcement's often brutal, dehumanizing and violent treatment of migrant women in this sector. As one unnamed activist confided in me, even if a lot of migrant women are not necessarily victims of 'trafficking' in the strict sense, the vast majority run the real risk of becoming victims of 'brute' police and enforcement units, and as victims of media sensationalism of 'evil, immoral' foreigners corrupting the moral integrity of the country[24].

[24] Examples of this type of state brutality against sex-workers, particularly migrants, are plenty and can quite easily be found through various local news and media outlets (MetroNewsKL and Berita Harian, for example). Some of these are disturbing video documentation of police raids on red-light districts and brothels in which 'herding up' of

To return to Agustin's work, she also raises another important consideration that is often left 'on the margins' when we talk about sex-work and migration – the economic impact that migrant sex-workers can have, especially in terms of remittances. Due to the 'victimization' discourse, sex-workers are very rarely, if ever, discussed in the same sense as other 'non-victimized' migrants, i.e. formal temporary migrants. Their economic contributions are not taken into account because they are not visible as 'agents of development' (Raghuram 2009). On one hand, this invisibility reinforces another dichotomy between victims and non-victims, which is problematic in itself. This is not to say that sex-workers or other migrants doing different things should all be lumped together in one category (which is explicitly NOT what this project is about), but the point here is that in order for the 'positive' migration narrative about development to be justified, there happens to be a tremendous amount of erasure and obscuration that goes on where the experiences of different migrants are ignored. For many states and societies, it is unacceptable to acknowledge that remittance money from transnational sex-work is actually important and significant, just as it is unacceptable to acknowledge how important migrant sex-work is to maintaining the tourism appeal of countries like Malaysia. I will explore further the complexities of the sex-work industry in Malaysia in the next chapter.

These contradictions that are highlighted above with regards to how we understand human mobility bring to the fore a troubling question: why is it that in almost every case of migrants' experiences being marginalized, hidden or obscured, it is the experience of women migrants? While not entirely exclusive to women, as I will show through cases from my own fieldwork, there is nonetheless a strong tendency to portray and represent women migrant as either bastions of 'good' and 'dependable' agents of development or as passive victims. In both cases their actual experiences go missing. While the accepted understanding of 'feminization' of migration is that more women are participating in transnational labor migration, I suggest that it is this double-process of valorization and moralizing of different migrant women that actually represents 'feminization' – in a strictly exploitative sense. Migrant women, especially those who enter into domestic care work, healthcare (nursing) and sex-work, are part of the growing pool of flexible and cheap 'temporary' labor – even more so because these are women who come from countries and societies where the 'moral' imperative acts as a coercive structure regulating and controlling their choices and decision-making.

GROs and pimps takes place – women are held and questioned with impunity and complete disregard for their safety or rights, on the basis that they are foreign.

The most obvious examples of this condition would be how the Philippines state constantly presents women as 'national heroes' saving both the country and their families, and the ways in which migrant women from Bangladesh are subjected to intense moral scrutiny upon return and are consequently viewed as lesser by others (Dannecker 2006). In seemingly every case, migrant women are intensely subjected to narratives and discourses that aim to present them as one thing or another, yet very rarely are any of these narratives concerned with representing a crucial aspect of their migrant experience – what they actually do in terms of decision-making, working and living every day.

'In-and-Out' Migrants

In the following sections, I present the cases from my field research of migrants whose lived experiences of 'mobility' provide alternative understandings that disrupt existing assumptions about migrant mobility. There is a heavy and intentional emphasis on migrant women working in KL, an emphasis that will carry forward into the subsequent chapter on Malaysia's sex-work industry. Migrant women's mobility is often perceived to be either extremely limited or examples of empowerment and new forms of agency.

Here, the experiences and narratives of Lina (a short-term 'foreign cook' from Patani, Thailand) and May (a 'part-time maid' from Manila, Philippines) challenge that binary categorization of women's experiences by showing how they are able to exercise creative and innovative strategies to negotiate the structural and institutional restrictions they face every day. They do so by traversing the lines of formality and informality, engaging with fellow migrants through religious communities, seeking out information and making use of their knowledge of banking, transfers, legal enforcements, and even currency exchanges. Both women, while essentially living under formally restrictive and unjust conditions (still being considered a 'foreigner' after 26 years of work in May's case), display strong sense of pride and determination in their ability to control and plan for their future and life trajectories, even while constantly experiencing potentially exploitative and predatory circumstances.

Life as 'Visiting' Workers

My first meeting with Kak Lina and Mal, a married couple from southern Thailand, was at the restaurant where they worked. I had been introduced to them by their employer and owner of the restaurant-cum-convenience store, whom I knew through my network of friends in KL. The

restaurant where they worked was located in one of the oldest districts of Kuala Lumpur, where a vast majority of the local residents were migrants from different countries. The restaurant's prime customer base was made up of foreign nationals who lived in rented apartments and low-cost flats in the surrounding areas. My meetings and interviews with Lina and Mal were generally pleasant and illuminating experiences. They worked as cooks and servers, specially employed to prepare popular Thai meals. Most of my sessions with them would be accompanied by the delicious and aromatic tastes and smells of *tom yum* and varieties of Thai fried rice, which they would insist on preparing for me during interviews. This gave me the wonderful opportunity to spend hours with them at work and having conversations during their time off work.

> "Kak Lina has been working in Malaysia since 2009, having left Patani because there was no work available that would help her support a very large family. She and her husband were responsible for taking care of both sets of parents, siblings (of which she has nine!), and their child, who had just started school in Patani. To my surprise, both of them were younger than me by at least three years, despite their working experience! Many people from Patani migrate to Malaysia in search of better jobs and opportunities, though in sheer numbers, they remain a relative minority. Most migrants from the southern border of Thailand are familiar enough with Malaysia that most speak Bahasa Melayu fluently and have relatively fewer problems adapting, and even assimilating, to live in Malaysia. Most are 'ethnically' Malay - if we take the category to include people who are Muslim, speak Malay, and were born into families that have been here for generations. Work in Patani, according to her, was barely '*cukup makan*', enough to feed on a day-to-day basis. There was never going to be enough to start a savings or help educate their younger siblings and children. Malaysia represented a far better option, especially because she really wanted to find a way to save money so she and her husband could build a new house and support their entire family. According to Lina, the money they were both earning now was more than enough to have a savings account back in Patani, and undertake the expensive task of building their house. Lina explained that her employer, who she refers to as 'Boss' had been extremely generous with helping them in building the home, which they would never have been able to complete otherwise. Lina said that he had given them money, on multiple occasions, to help finance construction of roofs, tiling, and other parts of the house. Her Boss is 'as good as can be', in her words, and she is very thankful and grateful for having such an excellent employer. Many employers can be very uncaring and selfish here, she explains, but she has been very lucky."
> (Excerpt from field notes)

Building and having a home of their own for their family obviously means a lot to Lina and Mal. The details of the process of constructing the home is something Lina described to me extensively, almost every time we had a conversation. It was something that she delighted in talking about, not just in terms of the pride it gave her but also the humor that comes from funny experiences emerging during that process. The house is a tremendous representation of the complex web of

relationships, meanings and networks that Lina and Mal engage with, and the consequent strategies and practices they undertake. At one level, having a home of their own, especially one they constructed from scratch themselves, functions as an important signifier of independence and stability, raising their status as responsible parents and care-takers for their family and community. The house is a physically rooted connection that represents a strong link to their hometown, along with their family members – Lina explained that the house is a 'reassurance to her parents and siblings that they would always come home to take care of everyone'.

At the same time, the house that Lina and Mal built also represents the relationship they have with their Malaysian employer, 'Boss', as migrant workers. Lina's repeated emphasis on the generosity of their employer, without whom they do not believe the house would ever be completed, reveals a confusing narrative of charity that somewhat contradicts or undermines the empowerment that the home is supposed to represent. In a way, Lina and Mal's status as independent and responsible working adults and providers that they acquire in Patani exists alongside their dependence on the benevolence of their 'Boss' in Malaysia. Their employer, to whom I interacted and spoke with on multiple occasions, often reiterates their own concerns and awareness of the challenges faced by their migrant workers, from the difficulty of getting permit renewals, planning trips back home, and the daunting acclimatization process they have to go through upon coming to a country like Malaysia. For some, like Lina and Mal, some of these processes are relatively easy and straightforward – fluency in Malay, for one, and being familiar with the ethnic-religious cultural practices and norms of local Malaysians which is not too far different from their hometown.

> I am surprised that she and her husband were able to support such a large family and have a savings, in addition to building a new home. She explained that she does not save money in a Malaysian bank account. Instead, she carries the money with her each time she returns to Patani, which is about once a month or so. They travel home by tour vans which frequent between KL and Thailand. Back home, she said that the money goes into a local savings account. This is a strategy to make the most of the exchange rates between the two countries. Both Kak Lina and her husband were on visitor passes, not temporary work permits, which means they are required to return home to Thailand every 30 days. While this is not the most ideal arrangement, both Lina and Mal insist that they make it work by planning and budgeting accordingly. Lina goes home every month, and tries to maintain a legal presence in Malaysia, though they did not seem to clarify if this was the case with Mal. I did not ask them about this. Lina travels home by tour van, with the help of travel agents from Thailand, to whom she has to cough up close to RM500 each trip. This cost weighs heavily on their ability to save and budget, they both explained, and is a sum that they will never see any returns on. It is what they refer to as *gaji mati* (dead income), and is utterly

unnecessary as there are no fees required for travel between Malaysia and Thailand, except for transportation. Lina went into detail explaining how officials at the border between the countries, particularly Malaysian officials, take advantage of low-income migrant workers by charging 'service' fees in order to expedite the stamping of their passports, which by law should be free. Sometimes, these fees run into the hundreds, depending on time of day and the number of officials on duty. It is a purely corrupt practice aimed at workers. In the past few years, that cost has just shot up, and officials are now far more explicit in demanding to be paid exorbitant fees, mostly because travelers like Lina and Mal have very few options and recourse. They cannot afford to be held up at the border, especially when they have visit restrictions and are travelling with money and important things for their families. They end up paying whatever fee that the officials charge out of desperation, and simply have to accept it as an unavoidable cost. To put the fees into perspective, a bus trip to Patani only costs about RM 60, and a local Malaysian is able to fly to Thailand for less than RM 200 (round trip) with no attached visa fees. In contrast, the hundreds paid by the likes of Mal and Lina is truly absurd. When I asked if they have considered other methods of travel (such as flying into Bangkok and then taking a bus down to Patani), they explained that flights costs tend to be too unpredictable, especially considering how frequently they travel home, which means that the costs can easily skyrocket." (Excerpt from field notes and interviews)

It is not uncommon to find large numbers migrants like Lina and her husband who work in Malaysia on visitor passes. The categories and conditions set for these passes by the Immigration Department tend to vary and change constantly, in addition to being hierarchical and favorable to 'professionals' and wealthier groups. Professional foreign visitors, for example, are allowed to stay and work for a period of twelve months under a 'long term visitor's pass' while others might be issued a short-term pass for shorter periods[25]. Lina and her husband, Mal, work in Malaysia on passes for temporary foreign workers that are quite different from those for other nationalities – their Thai citizenship means that they are not subject to nationality and gender quotas imposed by the state on migrant labor – but only because they are employed as cooks! (Immigration Department 2013). Migrants from Thailand, especially from Patani, tend to be employed specifically for their knowledge and skills at preparing popular local dishes – Tom Yum, Thai fried rice, tomato rice, and so on. Many smaller dining establishments such as the one Lina and Mal work at would have at least one or two Thai migrants on their staff, while all the other workers would be either from India or Myanmar.

She is the only female worker at the eatery, amongst a mostly Indian staff. Having her husband in the same place also helps provide a sense of security and safety. Lina's daily work, in her words, involve cooking, preparing drinks, waiting tables and taking orders. She

[25] These passes are restricted by sectors of employment and other specific reasons for visit. They are not the same as visas, which carry their own conditions and fee structures (Source: Immigration Department of Malaysia, imi.gov.my)

> also does other miscellaneous tasks in daily running of the eatery, where she is needed. The only work she does not do is serve alcohol to customers, for religious reasons. That is left to the other workers. She generally stays friendly with restaurant and shop customers, most of whom are residents of the apartment complex, and very frequently migrants themselves. However, Lina is quick to point out that she does not try to acquaint with them outside of the workplace, because many of them are involved with less-than-savory types of work, including prostitution and illegal gambling. Kak Lina says they are mostly very friendly and harmless, and have no problems with anybody. She simply does not approve or understand why so many of them, especially migrant women, would seek illegal and immoral opportunities to make money, rather than legitimate work.

Lina's story highlights much of the complexity inherent to living as temporary migrant workers in Malaysia. On one hand, there is quite a lot of instability and vulnerability to the type of mobility and working conditions she experiences, whether it is from having to work as the only female employee in and otherwise all-male staff or from the constant commuting to Patani and the obstacles she encounters while travelling. Crossing the border and dealing with security checks is a particularly harrowing and difficult process for migrants like Lina and Mal, as they explained to me – despite the fact that they both have full legal rights to travel between Malaysia and Thailand. The degree of informality and corruption that they describe happening at these border 'tolls' is fairly alarming and indicative of how little policy and laws matter when it comes to practices of enforcement and the protection of migrants.

On the other hand, Lina and Mal also describe their own decision-making and life choices as very empowering for them, especially in terms of how they have been able to work and build towards improving their lives back home. For Lina, building the new house in Patani is something she is extremely proud of, and she repeatedly expressed how grateful she is for the opportunity her 'Boss' had given her and her husband. Her detailed explanations of the process of house-building were both illuminating and at times hilarious, as she would explain different stages of finding the right contractors, hunting for the right material for rooms and structures, having to wait months to find the right person to build a porch, and how they decided to paint the house and build the roof themselves. Unsurprisingly, finances played a fundamental part in this process for Lina and Mal. Lina's creativity and ingenuity with making the most of their income by not using bank transfers and accounts between Malaysia and Thailand is built upon her knowledge of currency exchanges and how to avoid exorbitant fees. Exchanging currency in Patani itself tends to be far more profitable compared to transferring it through agents and banks.

This does however put Lina at substantial risk whenever she has to travel back to Patani carrying money. Security officers at the border tend to target travelers who might be moving with large amounts of money, which is common for migrants returning to Patani. As such, Lina described some of the precautions she has had to take in the past to avoid this targeting, including handing over her money to the tour bus driver for 'safekeeping' during these checks. Migrants from Patani travelling together in these buses often have to work together to get through these checks and not be completely exploited by the predatory practices – like searching bodies - of security officials at the borders.

Kak Lina's experiences as a temporary migrant worker in KL is not unusual or unique, yet is certainly not one that is often taken into account. As a migrant woman working in the food service sector, she is largely relegated to an almost non-existent status in migration studies, even though migrant women from Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar and Indonesia do quite often work as cooks, cleaners and servers. This is true both for informal and formal establishments, such as some of the franchise restaurants I visited. Although women are vastly outnumbered by migrant men in such establishments, they are still an important presence and do make significant contributions both in Malaysia and to their homes. Their narratives are unique in the sense that it does not fit into the pre-existing discourse around female migrants. As they are neither victims of trafficking nor working in 'care' sectors – domestic help, maids, nursing, etc. – women like Lina cannot easily be categorized as being in need of protections or rescuing. It is unfortunate, misrepresentative and highly problematic that these narratives are the only ones we seem to have available for describing the lives and experiences of migrant women.

In terms of discussions about remittances, the decision-making around finances described by Lina highlight not just the problems with formal channels of money transfer (which are well-documented and recognized), but just as importantly, the rationale and strategic solutions that migrants are able to device based on their own knowledge and awareness. The latter tends to be subsumed or drowned out within a broader generalizations about the 'problems' and 'evils' of using informal means of money transfer, where migrants like Lina are likely to become victims of exploitation. Lina, contrary to that narrative, is fully aware of problems with both formal and informal channels of 'transfer' – financial mobility, one might say – and shows that she knows exactly what she is doing based on assessment of different options. The main problem, from the perspectives of the World Bank, IOM, and the United Nations, is that the monetary transfers of

migrants like Lina cannot be tracked and measured efficiently and thus contribute to very incomplete pictures of remittance flows between countries. In reality, Lina's choices and practices illustrate an interesting case where a person's mobility as a migrant becomes the main channel for financial mobility, and while her own transnational movement is largely unrestricted and free between Malaysia and Thailand by law, it is the informal levies placed on the mobility of finances that act as potential causes of delays and barriers. It is much easier for Lina and Mal to find means of travelling then it is for them to find ways to move their income safely and cheaply.

Finding transportation back and forth from Patani usually involves calling a small, private tour company which sends a van or small bus for mostly migrants and backpackers. These are significantly cheaper than flying or renting a vehicle. Travel across Malaysia and even Thailand is for the most part, quite cheap, yet there are significant financial barriers that are imposed upon certain groups, such as migrant workers. These barriers, like the 'border fees' are informal and arbitrary, as Lina describes, and are primarily corrupt. As a tourist, one would not have to worry about such fees flying or even driving to Thailand. Complaining or trying to report incidences of corruption and exploitation by border officials is often too much trouble and effort-requiring on the parts of the victims, as Lina explains – "we are already paying those fees, and complaining means risking our permits being denied or having to pay lawyers, which we can never afford."

Lina and Mal's mobility is mediated in different ways by the unique temporariness of their status in Malaysia. They are by no means the only migrants from Thailand who are working as cooks in KL – in fact, I met or came across at least twenty other 'Thai cooks' like them at various similar restaurants and establishments, both women and men. In some cases, this included teenaged boys, as young as 14 and 15, working in small, badly ventilated kitchens. Due to ethical concerns and restrictions, I was not able to interview any of these migrants. I did get to spend hours at some of these places observing the workers and their daily routines. At one such restaurant located close to the commercial district of Bukit Bintang, a similar restaurant to the one Lina and Mal work at also employed Thai cooks, a young man named Noor and a woman named Hafiz, along with a group of men from India. I was able to observe their routines from the start of the day till closing time.

> The preparations for cooking - especially making sure that ingredients such as meat and vegetables were ready for the really fast cooking that needs to happen - seemed like the most important process right before lunchtime. I went back inside to stand by the side of the kitchen, trying to be out of everyone's way as much as I could. Another Indian man,

Maniam, had joined Hafiz and Noor in the kitchen. Maniam was in charge of most of the other, non-Thai, food on the menu, which included mostly popular local fare - roti canai, mee goreng, roti telur, fish curry, chicken curry, etc. However, I knew that Maniam was also a migrant from Chennai, which meant that he had to learn how to prepare a lot of the local dishes from a former worker here, who had been a local Malaysian Indian. Maniam was already working at the stoves, preparing the dough rounds for roti. He had a large flat skillet in front of him, as he worked at pressing and folding a very sticky and gooey mixture of flour and ghee used to make the quite famous Malaysian roti canai.

Hafiz and Noor eventually finished working on the floor, cleaning vegetables. They had placed the cleaned ingredients in multiple baskets, which they carried on to the table space next to the stove, where Hafiz proceeded to start chopping and cutting sawi, kangkung, tomatoes, onions, carrots, and peppers. There was a scary-looking pile of green 'cili padi' - infamous for burning mouths and causing severe digestion issues. Hafiz worked with incredible precision and discipline with the terrifying looking chopping knife, which he used to slice vegetables at great speed. His fingers which held down the various vegetables were mere millimeters away from the knife, a sight that was making me very uncomfortable to watch. It did not help at all that I knew these workers had no medical insurances whatsoever, and would be forced to pay for any injury-related treatment out of their own pockets - unless their employers are generous enough to pay for them instead. Hafiz, however, seemed completely in control and practiced. I suppose fifteen years working as a Thai-food chef would do that to a person. Still, all it really takes is one slip, one accidental push, for very painful injuries to occur. There was no overt signs of tiredness or slowing down amongst the workers in the kitchen. Hafiz moved on to cutting and cleaning the meat and seafood. The restaurant, being staffed by Indian and Thai Muslim workers, did not serve pork or red meat in general, only poultry and seafood. Noor was cleaning everything from chicken, 'puyuh', shrimp, and anchovies.

The kitchen in particular was badly ventilated and felt so stuffy that it was difficult to breathe in. Within an hour I felt my entire body was coated in oil. There was one ventilating fan that was futilely sucking smoke out of the kitchen but it was hardly enough. The three cooks, Hafiz, Noor and Maniam, must surely be covered in at least an inch of oil by now. I had to switch constantly between the inside and outside just to be able to have access to fresh air, which made me realize that I never actually saw Hafiz leave the kitchen the entire time. I may be wrong, though, since there was a back exit which he could have used when he needed to. Despite the fact that there was nothing but cooking oil to breath inside the kitchen, there was very little hint of tiredness or exhaustion displayed by the workers. (Excerpt from Field Notes)[26]

By contrast, Lina and Mal's work life is a fair bit more reasonable, albeit still requiring a lot of hard and exhausting physical work. Their work spaces – the kitchens, the tables – were much better

[26] Due to some ethical considerations, I was not able to interview these workers – my observations were limited to that of a paying customer at the restaurant, which is quite conveniently located and open to the public. The employer claimed otherwise, but I had strong doubts that Noor (pseudonyms) was not in fact in their mid-teens

ventilated and generally cleaner, and despite not having any insurance in Malaysia, both of them had been covered by their employer during times of illness. The arbitrariness of these experiences for migrants, the lack of guaranteed security and the high level of dependence on the 'generosity' of employers is well-known but surprisingly marginalized problem. As Lina puts it,

> "*Abang* (Mal) and I have worked in different places in Malaysia before, and so we know how lucky we are with our Boss. Sometimes, if you're unlucky, you can end up working for someone who is strict and very uncaring about you. I had to share a room with four other men on top of a convenience store once, because that employer did not want to rent another room for the workers (despite a legal requirement for women workers to be not have to share living accommodations with their male colleagues). On top of that, he wouldn't pay us properly, always skipping weeks and paying less than what he was supposed to. He would complain that we were stealing from the cash register as well, even though only one of the workers knew how to operate the register. Now, with our current Boss, I don't feel like I want to leave or work anywhere else. We're lucky (*nasib baik)* to have found this Boss, and I'm always *syukur* (thanking fate) and praying that we never have to leave this job."

Lina's descriptions of past experiences as a migrant worker further highlights a problem that receives very little attention in both research and policy circles – the arbitrary nature of migrant employment practices and outcomes. A high level of informality fostered by poor enforcement, lack of regulation and unfair privileging of employers is one contributing element to the unpredictability of migrant workers' experiences. Workers like Lina, Mal, Noor and Hafiz literally do not have any clue as to where they might end and what sort of conditions they may have to be working under, to the extent that some consider themselves extremely 'lucky' for not being completely exploited. This arbitrariness of experiences is constant characteristic of the narratives that almost every migrant I interviewed shared with me, and seems to be one of the more 'predictable' elements of their lives. This arbitrariness and informality of experiences enables as much as it restricts – new opportunities open up for some while for others life can become an imprisonment of sorts. In the next section, I present and discuss the experiences of migrant women working as 'domestic helpers' who have been able to take advantage of arbitrary employment practices and informality to find alternative sources of income as 'part-time maids.'

'Part-Time Maids' – Living as Foreign Domestic Workers in Malaysia

The title of this section contains what is strictly a wrong term – there are officially no domestic 'workers' in Malaysia, as those who perform household labor such as cleaning, cooking, child-caring, nursing and so on are not recognized as workers by the state. Under Immigration laws, such groups

of people can only be referred to as 'helpers'. Not being recognized as workers have severe implications on the rights and working conditions of vast numbers of predominantly migrant women who are employed in the homes of local middle-class Malaysians. They are barred from being part of formal collectives or unions, and in many cases are not allowed to leave the supervision of their employers. In fact, there is still no law requiring that 'foreign domestic helpers' in Malaysia to be given a day off, despite active campaigns carried out by NGOs such as Co-ordination for Action Research on AIDS and Mobility (CARAM Asia) and Tenaganita calling for this change. Domestic helpers, in short, are possibly one of the most vulnerable and exploited groups in the country, as well as one of the most hidden.

Research on most migrant domestic workers is near impossible to carry out without severe conditions and requirements to be taken. Most of these migrants are not even allowed to leave the homes of their employment, and are thus not able to be interviewed for concerns of lacking privacy and protection from their employers. In an earlier work, Chin (1998) refers to domestic labor in Malaysia as a form of indentured servitude. There are strong parallels and similarities between domestic work in Malaysia and the practice of *kafala* in Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and the emirate Gulf states – domestic workers are brought in to Malaysia via highly problematic 'sponsorship' systems, under which employers have almost full control over migrants to the extent of holding on to their travel documents and passports. This system leaves many workers at risks – from overwork, lack of compensation, and abuse, of which there have been numerous cases in recent years. *Kafala*, as is the case with the foreign domestic helper system in Malaysia, leaves migrant women (and men, of course) at risk of the same forms of arbitrariness of outcomes. A worker from Nepal looking for better opportunities for work could just as easily end up in a decent-paying position in Singapore as a sales representative as they could living (and dying) in slave-camps without any compensation in Qatar. That arbitrariness, unfortunately, is not as extreme or as uncommon as it sounds. Women who come to work as maids in Malaysia might easily find themselves trapped and abused in homes of tyrannical employers or they might be able to experience a whole new level of autonomy and independence they would never have been able to find back home. This section focuses on the latter in particular.

Domestic workers in Malaysia tend to originate from Philippines and Indonesia, who are the largest 'suppliers' of migrant women to the country. The Philippines is already renowned for its labor-exporting practices, particularly within the 'global care-chain' (Ehrenreich and Hocschild), but

other countries such as India, Sri Lanka and Indonesia are similarly important in this sense. There exists a hierarchy of favorable and less favored foreign domestic helpers based on nationality in Malaysia, with women from Philippines, for example, considered to be better than their Indonesian counterparts. This hierarchy is sustained by lazy racist stereotypes about unreliable Indonesians who are likely to 'run away' or mistreat children, which in turn enables a level of status competition between local families based on who they are able to employ to do their housework[27].

The surreal and bizarre reality of domestic work in Malaysia is best encapsulated by an inexplicable condition under Immigration law which explicitly states that Foreign Domestic Helpers (FDH) are 'assigned to domestic chores (not including car wash)' (imi.gov.my), presumably because washing cars involves stepping outside the boundaries of a house. The connections between racialization of migrant workers and globalized capitalism is fairly obvious here – these are women whose identities are used as instruments of commodification based on some strange, fictional racial attributes that either enhance or degrade their market value – hence the fact that employers are required to pay different scaled 'levies' for their Indonesian or Phillipina or Indian maids.

The experiences of many migrant women employed as domestic 'helpers' are hidden and very hard to bring to light. Securing interviews while guaranteeing full privacy and confidentiality proved extremely difficult, for ethical reasons. For my part, I had to limit my interviews to migrants who were able to leave their homes of employment and be interviewed in safe, private settings. I was also able to meet a number of migrant women working in the domestic sector during visits to a prominent local Catholic church which holds special services for migrants. While I was grateful that I was able to find and speak with these groups, they are quite obviously part of slightly more fortunate group who happen to be employed under relatively reasonable conditions and sympathetic

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[27] The history of racial stereotypes based on nationality has its roots in the colonial legacy of Malaya and Southeast Asia. The segregation of work by race and gender which is still practiced today was reinforced since the 1920s under British migrant labor practices – the *Kangani* system under which South Indian men were brought to work exclusively in plantations and Chinese migrants came to work in mines and city centers, while local 'Malay' indigenous communities were left to agricultural traditions under a racist assumption and myth that they were too 'lazy' to be industrialized (For more, see Alatas (1969)). Following years of such racialized systems, the assumption that different ethnic and racial groups were good for certain types of work and not others, as well as having inherently negative traits (drunk, violent Indians, untrustworthy Chinese, lazy Malays), seems to have carried forward to new groups of migrants – hardworking but effeminate and dirty Bangladeshi men, wild and unreliable Indonesian women prone to running away, dependable Philippina women, and, most recently, 'brutish and loutish' Africans. Such systems of racial stereotyping are strongly institutionalized in various spheres of life, including the immigration system discussed throughout this research.

employers. They were, to revisit Lina's words, 'fortunate' to have the Bosses they had that they could even leave the homes where they were employed.

It is through a church visit that I discovered the profession of 'part-time maid' services – a primarily informal practice in which migrant domestic workers are able to extend their services beyond their immediate home of employment through a mixture of networks (their own and their employers'). I was surprised to find that this was a very popular and common practice among migrant women, although it is specific to those who are permitted to leave the home by their employers[28]. All of the migrants that I met this way were from the Philippines, which is understandable because the majority of Philippines citizens are Catholic. One of the women I interviewed who works as a 'part-time' maid is May, a 57-year-old originally from Manila who has been working in Malaysia for 26 years. Throughout those 26 years, she has been employed as a foreign domestic helper and still remains a non-national with little prospect of ever attaining residency or citizenship status. She is the longest-serving 'temporary' migrant that I had met during my fieldwork period. May's temporariness is as permanent as it gets.

May had initially been working for over 15 years in the home of one family. Her employer had brought her in to help take care of their young children as they grew up, but one those children were adults and had become independent, they no longer required her services on a regular basis. Instead of sending her home, they had offered to keep her on as their 'maid' if she would prefer to stay and work in KL. It seemed that May would have many opportunities to continue working part-time, and her former employers were more than happy to help her renew her permit every year as necessary. In other words, they were willing to 'sponsor' her just so she could keep working in Malaysia. According to May, she was able to find work mostly through the networks of her permanent employer:

> "Normally, I just get calls from friends and associates of my employer and family, usually 4-5 times a week. A lot of them are close friends and work colleagues who do not want permanent maids but are happy for someone just to come and clean their homes once a week, or twice a week. It's much cheaper for them to do this, and since I work on my own, I'm not as expensive as cleaning companies. Sometimes, for bigger homes, I will offer to

[28] For purposes of clarification, FDHs are not barred legally from going outside their homes or taking days off – the state simply does not provide any requirements for employers to allow their helpers to take days off. Whatever freedom to move outside that FHDs possess either comes from gaining their employers' permission to do so, or by 'running away', which can be punishable by law.

> bring one of my friends who is also a part-time maid. We charge by the hour, about RM 15 (USD 4.80 approximately) but if the person likes our work then they will usually give tips and bonuses. I think it's a stable job because there are regular employers who always ask me to come every week, and it is definitely a much better pay then working just at one home. Usually, I move around by bus or train and public transport, but some of the people who ask for my help would be kind enough to drive me to and from home." (Quote from interview)

May's choice of profession as a part-time maid puts her at risk of running afoul of the law – foreign workers on temporary permits are strictly not allowed to seek employment outside of their primary one. Like most migrant women engaged in this line of work, May has to use informal channels in order to find these opportunities. She also has to depend on the goodwill of her primary employer for her safety and legal status in the country. Others also make use of the opportunities to work as part-time maids, but sometimes this is not entirely of their own volition or choice. It is possible to find 'agencies' that offer the services of migrant maids – very often individual employers who 'sell' the services of their own maids for a side-profit. These agencies advertise their part-time maids through word-of-mouth, stenciling phone-numbers on public spaces (public restrooms, under flyovers, bus stops, etc), and advertising online. May was aware of many of her friends who found work this way, but it is not an experience she ever had to deal with:

> "I've been working for so many years with this family that they treat me like a family member – I trust them, and I am very grateful for them, for helping me stay and work. They asked me whether I wanted to go back since they didn't need my services after their children were grown up, and I asked if it would be possible for me to stay and work with other people, and take care of them as well. They are the ones who suggested that I could help with their friends who needed house-cleaners, and that they could continue to help me maintain my permit in the country."

The startling fact about May is that she has been working for so long in the country and has yet been able to have her permit renewed so many times. Migrant workers in the domestic sector are not generally known to have long periods of stay in the country, due to high rates of employee turnover. In some cases, such as May's, strong bonds and relationships formed with the family seems to have an important effect on employment stability and longevity. During an interview with an associate who employs a domestic worker at home, I learned that part of the process of renewing permits involve explaining why a particular employer would like to retain their helper – generally, if employers and their families gave good relationships with their migrant employee and are happy to pay the renewal fees, this makes the process fairly straightforward and unproblematic. During a visit

with to the Immigration department in Putrajaya with another contact who needed to renew the permits for their workers, I found that this was indeed the case.

May's story becomes even more curious upon listening to her background and personal life back in Philippines. She has four children, all of whom are grown up and employed, quite successfully in fact. Her children work as an engineer, an accountant and a computer specialist in Australia, all with good salaries and financial independence. It is really surprising that she has not simply retired and gone home! As it turns out, May is strongly determined not to rely on her children to take care of her for as long as she is able to stand on her own two feet and work. She claims that being a burden for her children would reflect badly especially when they will be having families of their own to take care of. Her kids have always been asking her to quit her job as they can more than take care of her, but she still refuses.

> "My children are fine and happy, and they always ask me to come home and stop working. But what am I going to do if I go home and have no work? I'll just be sitting around and getting bored. I want to work as long as my body can take it. Plus, working here means I can save and buy gifts for my friends and family back home. I'm happy to be working. I won't be happy if I was not working. I want to work as long as I can."

Interestingly, May no longer sends any remittance monies to Philippines. Instead, she collects items and things that she either buys or are given away by other people, and keeps them in her home. She would then ship them in large packages back to her house in the Philippines. A lot of these things will be given to her extended family and friends, those who are more in need. May does not feel that sending money back home makes much practical sense, since the currency of Malaysia is much more stable and she would rather be in control of her own finances anyway. She does however prefer to ask people back home if there are actual things they need, and tries to help them in this way.

> "Sometimes, when I talk to friends and relatives, they would tell me that they are looking for a new rice cooker, or radio or things like that. So I will tell them that I can buy them here, in KL, and send it to them. Things that are made here or sold here are so much better anyway. They last longer and work better. When I can do this, I don't feel like the money is going to waste. Shipping is expensive, yes, but that's why I try to collect as many things as I can pack into a large box and send it in one shipment rather than multiple. I send it back to my home in Manila, and then everyone can come and pick up their things there."

Without trying to pose a generalization, I found that more than half of the Philippina 'Part-time maids' that I interviewed and met shared similar stories to May. Most of them were much younger, however, yet they are also active in seeking out informal arrangements through which they can

supplement their income. There is a lot of cooperation and mutual assistance within this community of migrants as well, who are exclusively women. As May's description suggests, many of them try to seek out opportunities where they can invite their friends who also working as domestic helpers. The church where they meet every Sunday for service is an important space for social activities, sharing stories, making friends and getting together. One major cathedral, close to the Chinatown and Pudu districts, organizes special services every Sunday which brings throngs of people in the morning, mostly migrants from African countries and Philippines. The crowds that gather here often run into several hundreds and always overflow out of an already very large cathedral space. This is where I was able to meet May and her group of friends who were working as domestic 'helpers'.

Some of the younger migrant women employed as domestic workers mentioned that they were even advertising their services through online forums and websites, which they could do for free. This was a resource that they found extremely useful and powerful, as it allows them to protect themselves further while extending their services to a broader group of people. May herself seemed less than impressed about the use of such mediums, for surprising reasons:

> "Yes, a lot of them try to advertise online, but they are not advertising to be cleaners. These young girls are doing something else on the side, and a lot of them are actually hoping to *catch* some rich local guy who they can marry. They advertise all kinds of things online, but they won't tell you the truth of course. I always tell them not to do such things, that it is immoral. It's very sinful, but so many of them do it anyway. They give us (Philippinas) such a bad name. That's why everyone here thinks all foreign women from Philippines are trying to be whores or be gold-diggers. Sometimes I think that's why bad things happen back home (referring to Typhoon Haiyan)… maybe it's punishment for these sins."

May's opinions about the younger generations of migrant women from Philippines who come to Malaysia are, for the most part, quite critical even though many of them are her friends. She explain that she tries to take on the role of a maternal figure or an older sister in trying to get them to 'not take advantage of their presence in wrong or sinful ways'. May's attitude seems partly informed by another prominent stereotype about young migrant women – 'gold-diggers' who seek to seduce and marry wealthy Malaysian men. While mostly hyped-up to reinforce xenophobic assumptions and attitudes, this is one stereotype that is far more complicated then it appears. According to May, some of the women are open about their intentions and claim to have made attempts at seducing their male employers, even those who are already married.

From my own interviews with different women from different countries, some do express a hope that they might be able to find someone local who they could marry and thus not have to be a temporary migrant, though the sentiments attached to these narratives are very different from those informing stereotypes. 'Gold-diggers' opportunistically seeking wealth and riches is quite different from wanting to 'not deal with constant problems with immigration and living under constant supervision'. To be fair, no one that I personally interviewed ever expressed any sentiment about wanting to 'seduce' and marry a local rich person for the purposes of becoming rich, even though it is a narrative I kept frequently encountering while talking to migrants and local citizens alike, always in reference to 'other' migrants. This does not however preclude the other aspects of the politics of temporary migration such as the sex-work industry and companionship services offered by many migrant women, something that will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Invisible Mobility

What do the experiences and practices of the migrant groups discussed in this chapter inform us about human mobility? For one, mobility of people across borders is not something that exists in parallel or in competition with the mobility of money, capital, or information. In many ways, information sharing through a variety of networks and channels plays a critical role in determining and influencing the decisions people make as to where they go and what kind of work they engage in. Migrant women brought in as 'Foreign Domestic Helpers' are not always stuck or trapped within their homes of employment – many are indeed able to take advantage of lax enforcement and informal employment opportunities with the help of fellow migrants and even their own employers to supplement their incomes. Where and how information – about how to find work as 'part-time maids', how to advertise oneself as escorts and companions, and so on – 'travels' is inextricable from people's own movement.

In the case of Lina and May, their experiences of mobility is transnational but also very much rooted, or anchored, metaphorically and quite literally. For Lina and her partner, the house that they built in Patani represents a powerful symbol of investment in the present and the future, and it is a locus that influences and informs much of their life-decisions and practices, including their mobility. The narratives of Lina, May, and many other migrant women who work in KL help reinforce a type of politics of 'anticipation' that AbdouMaliq Simone describes as being a facet of informality in non-Western cities. This type of politics is about being aware and ready to take

advantage of opportunities that may arise unexpectedly, and constantly being ready to face changes and challenges wrought by constant transformations. Migrants in Malaysia who are temporary, in one form or another, have to constantly deal with arbitrary changes in rules, uncertainty over status changes, constantly changing immigration law, capricious enforcement practices, and conditions that leave very little formal opportunity for empowerment or political mobilization. Instead, they are having to rely on largely informal opportunities for economic and social betterment. As I have shown through some of the empirical cases, informality is by no means 'local' or restricted to parts of the city or certain communities, but can indeed stretch out transnationally, through various networks and channels.

It is not surprising that migrants who face difficult formal obstacles to their mobility would have to seek out informal opportunities. What is surprising, however, is the degree to which so many of the migrants who are able to find these opportunities that lead to their empowerment in different ways are the ones who are largely invisible to most of us. Perhaps a more accurate analysis would be that these migrants – part time maids, cosmopolitan sex workers, and other visitors – are not so much invisible by themselves but are usually lumped into the same categories of largely victimized or disempowered groups. It is their actual mobility and freedom of movement and practice that are invisible within that framework. This framework reduces all sex-workers to the status of victims of trafficking, all domestic workers as indentured servants or part of a care-chain.

CHAPTER 7: THE EVERYDAY WORK OF SECURING A 'GATED COMMUNITY'

Introduction

It is 1 a.m. and the streets are empty. Most of the residents have turned in for the night within the safety and comfort of the posh, expensive luxury homes which the likes of Ankit, Prabhu, Mirshan and Ramu are tasked with guarding. At the end of one of streets lined by these posh homes, a man wearing a security uniform sits on a small plastic chair and looks bored. He has a whistle hanging from his neck and a cheap cellphone in his hand. His name is Ankit and he is part of a team of temporary migrant workers from Nepal employed by the private developers of this particular gated residential neighborhood to be security guards. Currently Ankit is working the night-shift, along with three other men. Ankit sits alone keeping an eye on the streets and the large swimming pool and community recreation area situated across from the row of three-story houses. After some time had passed, another of the guards, Ramu, arrives on an electricity-powered bike – a mode of transport the guards are required to use while patrolling the neighborhood without making any noise. Ramu switches duties with Ankit, who gets on the bike and rides off. Ramu takes his seat at the guard table.

This residential neighborhood – or gated community – is located on top of a hill at the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. It is a newly developed project, intended to be a self-sufficient retreat from the urban bustle of KL – quiet, secure, and full of luxuries such as natural landscaping, community pools, breathtaking skyline views and the latest amenities such as 4G broadband coverage, keyless access, and high quality air filtration systems. The location of the neighborhood, which I shall refer to as Jaya Hills, adds to its image of both wealth and security. There is only one entryway to the residences, through a security checkpoint staffed by migrant workers such as Ankit and Ramu. The single road that leads through this checkpoint winds upwards and into the cleverly fortified neighborhood. It would be near impossible to get to the top of the hill on which this development is built aside from through this checkpoint.

The houses that are built on top of Jaya Hills are a sight to behold – hypermodern, efficiently designed and very expensive-looking. Buildings here are designed to look high-end, with accents of glass and dark metallic tones lining the concrete structures. Each unit comes with its own gate and exterior wall separating the neighboring homes, with enough space for at least three

vehicles for each one. The cheapest of these properties begin in at the RM 1 to 1.2 million (USD 350,000- 400,000) range. Even the smallest houses are two story buildings that come with their own yards and large porches, as well as balconies. Security – in the form of surveillance and personnel – is omnipresent. Every street has high-powered surveillance cameras, while each house comes with multiple security cameras fed directly to the homes of residents.

Conversations with agents at the developers' main office informed me that all the properties have been sold within a year of the start of the development, which was five years ago. Even the houses that were currently being constructed at one end of the neighborhood were all sold. This leads me to one of the most surreal aspects of this gated community – the fact that a vast majority of the homes were largely uninhabited. The people who buy these homes do not necessarily live here on a permanent basis. In fact, many chose to buy these properties even before they were completed for the purpose of securing lower prices and watching their investments grow in the form of the real estate increase. Half the homes at least were empty of its residents. The most visible and present people in this gated community on a daily basis were not the actual residents, but the mostly migrant security, domestic and construction workers tasked with the upkeep and maintenance of this neighborhood!

The phenomenon of gated communities as manifestations of increasing neoliberalization in the developing world is a relatively under-studied one, although notable scholarship from Caldeira (1998), Leisch (2007) and Chase (2008) have discussed at length the prominence of these types of communities. New development of residential suburban-style neighborhoods are rampant, particularly in societies experiencing rapid capitalist growth in the form of increasing privatization of the economy, burgeoning middle-classes with greater demands for conspicuous consumption, growing westernization of lifestyles. In some cases, it is not just individual communities of wealthy residents or neighborhoods, but entire gated 'cities' that emerge, in the form of what Martin Murray calls "city doubles" (forthcoming in Miraftab, Wilson and Salo). These 'gated' spaces are predominantly expressions of the desire to escape the chaos and dangers of urban life, away from the dirty, the insecure and the unpredictability that comes with living in cities like Kuala Lumpur, Rio de Janeiro, Jakarta, Johannesburg and many others around the world. The development of gated communities is driven by the desire to live in 'American-style homes' – namely the life in suburbs of California.

As Chase (2008) highlights, there is a profound contradiction that marks out these gated communities of the global South – these spaces are not necessarily the fortified enclaves free of outside influence and the presence of the urban other, but are very much dependent on the work and mobility of poorer, working class people who are presumably the ones meant to be kept out of these spaces of wealth and status. In her study of a Brazilian gated community, Chase shows how the image of gatedness is actually reliant not just on formal surveillance and physical walls, but on the informal arrangements made between homeowners and people such as gardeners and domestic workers who are tasked with maintaining homes and security. I regard this as an obscured consequence of neoliberal urbanization (or in this case, suburbanization). These housing developments also experience the bizarre but increasingly common reality of absent homeowners. In Chase's case study, she describes the community as one of a weekend retreat or vacation residence. People are simply not there most of the time and need the help of others such as domestic workers and gardeners to maintain their homes for them. Subsequently, the kinds of services provided by the workers require a great deal of mutual trust with the owners (Chase 2008). The 'trust' in this instance is tied to the power relationship between owners and employees, of course – it is a trust and understanding that is necessary to sustain these new opportunities to work.

So who are the actors and what are the types of labor that are required to maintain gated communities such as Jaya Hills? More generally, how does this speak to the broader questions of temporary migration? In this chapter, I present findings and discussions stemming from my research on the migrant workers who are engaged with the daily maintenance and upkeep of this particular neighborhood in Kuala Lumpur. Jaya Hills - as well as other similar housing developments in Malaysia – are unique in the sense that their everyday maintenance and reproduction as 'gated communities' are primarily dependent on the services of temporary migrant labor, rather than the local working-class groups. The confluence of multiple elements - temporary migration policies (foreign domestic workers, construction workers, sub-contracted security workers), privatized real estate development, and the strong consumption demands of the new middle classes - generate particular outcomes and mobilities that characterize this gated community, where Nepali men patrol the streets and staff security checkpoints, Indonesian men work to construct new buildings and conduct repairs, and women from Philippines work within the homes themselves as maids and nannies.

In the specific case of the Jaya Hills gated community, I found that the everyday work of reproducing the image of a secure, lavish, and fortified neighborhood is actually highly dependent upon the work of a host of temporary migrants, who themselves are present and visible in large part due to the informal arrangements they make with the homeowners. These take the form of personal relationships with residents, 'gifts' and favors, the use of personal networks to find other service providers (particularly for finding part-time domestic helpers), and a degree of reciprocity between owners and workers. 'Gated-ness' is thus an image produced on the contradictory reliance on mobility and informality of transnational actors and the transnational networks they are engaged in. This fortified, secure and exclusive neighborhood, like many other luxury gated communities in Malaysia, relies on groups of flexible low-income migrant workers to move in and out regularly, from other parts of the city to the most intimate spaces of the home.

Gated Communities and Fortified Enclaves

How is 'gatedness' produced at Jaya Hills? According to one brochure the neighborhood is located in an 'exclusive' area with picturesque greenery in its immediate surroundings. It is also advertised as being close enough to the center of the city so as not to be too far away from urban life. The target market is wealthier patrons with families, as the brochure goes on to detail the location and quality of nearby schools (both primary and secondary) as well as shopping districts. Sales agents at the developer's office were keen to emphasize the level of 'high-tech' security that permeates the neighborhood. They highlighted that crimes such as break-ins and vandalism were entirely absent in the community, thanks to '24-hour surveillance and control of access points'. According to one agent,

> "We wanted to make sure that children could actually go out and play without parents always feeling they had to supervise, so that's why we make sure there's always a guard and security cameras at the community playground and pool area. All the guards who work are supposed to meet and introduce themselves the residents so that they can immediately recognize who the families are and make sure no outsiders without permission are there. This is something the residents care a lot about these days, and we want to make sure we provide that security. Actually, this is something we do at all our new property development (shows me brochures of different residential developments in other parts of the city). I think this is very important – that's why every interested client asks for security and surveillance… and the value of properties are higher but people will still buy very quickly" (Interview excerpt)

This emphasis on security – particularly with references to family and children – echoes the desire to return to family life, as Low (2001) and Chase (2008) describe. This desire builds upon the

perception of communities as 'compilations of self-sufficient nuclear households'. The image is fortified even further through the establishment of networks that link shopping districts, supermarkets, and schools in the surrounding areas. These networks, as the brochures and advertisements display, even go to the extent of highlighting new highways and routes that avoid the busier urban areas and older working class neighborhoods and districts.

An image of fortification entails as well the notion of self-sustainability and private governance – which usually takes the form of homeowners associations and resident organizations (Caldeira 1996, Genis 2007), though often this is can be misread as a predominance of the privatization of public space as a totalizing outcome. Caldeira, for instance, understood the fortified enclave as an expression of destruction of public space in favor of enlarging 'specific private domains so that they will fulfil public functions, but in a segregated way.' She classifies these transformations as part of the 'new concepts of residence and security'; that is, the building of 'total ways of life' in separate worlds. In cities as far ranging as San Francisco, New York, Sao Paulo and Istanbul, the descriptions of emerging gated communities tend to fall into very similar patterns; 1.homogeneity of the residential populations, usually in terms of wealth and class (which inevitably implies racial divisions as well) 2. The totalizing discourse of surveillance and security that distinguishes itself from the perception of danger and chaos in urban centers 3. Preponderance of enclosures and 'walling off' in some form or another of entire neighborhoods rather than individual homes or properties.

Gated communities, seen through this lens of 'fortification', can often produce incomplete images of how they operate and exist on a daily basis. In the instance of Caldeira's work, while the growth and prominence of these enclaves are very obvious, the outcome and consequences that she tries to highlight – namely, the attack on public space and redrawing of spatial segregation in favor of private interests – inadvertently overlooks an two important and inextricably related questions: who actually inhabits gated communities and what kind of actual networks and practices are needed for the maintenance of these spaces. Caldeira (1996), Low (2001) and Serife (2007), among others, focus heavily on the narratives and discourses proliferated by homeowners, residents and developers of gated communities. It is perhaps unsurprising that focusing on these particular voices reinforces the discourse surrounding fear, violence, and the need for security – away from the urban 'other'. In contrast, Chase (2008) shows how the actual actors and practices of people present in these types of communities, which include not only homeowners but also workers such as maids and gardeners,

contradict the very image of gated-ness they work to reproduce. The key difference here is the recognition of labor and mobility of people as well as the arrangements that are made between them that are necessary for sustaining communities.

As a way of situating my analysis of migrant labor in the gated community of Jaya Hills within this scholarship on the neoliberalization of residential spaces, I offer a treatment of these emerging 'global forms' of gated communities as a generative of new subject identities, new practices, and new relationships that incorporate rather than exclude heterogeneity. These fundamentally neoliberal spaces that emphasize the private family, private ownership of space, and flexible sources of labor are symptomatic of neoliberal globalization trends of drawing diverse groups together only to produce new forms of inequality and privilege. This space of a gated community thrives on the work of diverse migrant workers, but is by the very definition an exclusive space built to keep the unwanted parts of urban society out. In this analysis, I show how the discourses around fear, crime, security and keeping others out are often in direct contradiction with the actual heterogeneity and informality present in daily life.

Visiting Jaya Hills

May, whom I had met and spoken with during my visits to a Catholic Church in KL, works occasionally as a part-time maid at one of the large bungalow homes in Jaya Hills. It was through her suggestion that I had decided to visit this neighborhood. According to the advertisements and brochures I found at the office of the land developer for Jaya Hills, the neighborhood was 'peacefully tucked away' from the bustling 'concrete jungle' of the city. It was indeed so, with its hill-top location and emphasis on lush green landscaping. I made over 20 visits to the neighborhood at various times between November and December 2014, at various times of day and night. Gaining access to the community was relatively simple but tightly enforced – I had to surrender my national identification card (MyKad) temporarily at the security checkpoint in exchange for a permit to enter the neighborhood. After a few initial visits where I introduced myself to some of the residents and the numerous migrants who worked there – including the security guards and construction workers, access became easier as people would recognize me.

During my visits to Jaya Hills, I would follow and observe the daily work routines of some of the migrant workers. I spent time by the security checkpoint, which was located close to a small convenience store/café observing the interactions and practices of the guards, during the day and at

night. My formal interviews included those with three construction workers from Indonesia, four Nepali security workers, and two women from Philippines working as part-time maids in the homes. I also engaged with some of the residents who lived here. A majority of the homeowners and their families were ethnically Chinese Malaysians, along with a small number of Indian families. I did not come across any Malay families at all in this neighborhood. I was able to establish friendly and trusting relationships with two of the local homeowners, a medical professional and a lawyer. Both of them took an interest in my work and were open to conversations about politics and state of current affairs. They shared some valuable insight into the daily interactions and arrangements that take place with the migrants, especially the security guards and domestic workers, which shed light on the importance of informality and trust.

I also visited the community several times late at night, upon the invitation of my Nepali informants who worked in security. They had offered to let me observe their night-time duties, which was permitted as long as I was there as a guest of the residents. In one corner of the community, where there were rows of new houses still being built, I met and spoke with some of the construction workers, who were all from Indonesia under the employ of the property developer. Many of these men worked long hours during the day usually under very hot sunlight. Their interactions with the residents and other workers proved quite interesting and telling – some residents would ask for their help with home repairs and moving furniture, by making under-table arrangements and agreements with the supervisors and migrants themselves. Two of the construction workers I interviewed had actually been working to fix a clogged sewage pipeline in the home of one of the aforementioned residents – the lawyer.

During my time with the community of Jaya Hills, I encountered numerous moments which highlighted the importance informal arrangements between homeowners, families and the different workers. Mobility and movement – both within the physical boundaries of the community and the larger metropolitan area (not to mention transnational movements) – were crucial. Homeowners are not always present as many of these homes function as weekend retreats or second homes rather than primary residences. The migrant workers – part-time domestic workers, security guards, and construction workers – spend most of their time in the neighborhood but also commute every day from the surrounding areas. Domestic workers, all of whom were women, have very intimate access to the homes of their employers, something which Chase (2008) noted in her own study as well. They are responsible for the daily upkeep and well-being of the home during the day when the

owners and parents are working. Security workers very often enter and check upon individual homes with the permission of absent homeowners. They are also often asked by families to watch over children playing in the playground, returning from schools, and are compensated, informally, in the form of cash 'tips' or other gifts. Residents who experience menial problems that require repairs such as faulty wiring, stuck pipes, or help with heavy lifting often enlist the help of the construction workers during their break or free time.

Even the use of public areas, or more accurately *shared private collective use areas,* such as the playground, pools, streets, sidewalks and bike paths are heavily reliant on these workers. Sub-contracted cleaners come in three to four times a week to maintain these spaces. The residents, including the elderly who go for early morning walks and participate in 'tai-chi' fitness groups, often banter and converse with security workers who help them to and from their homes. Some of these residents express a deep level of trust and gratitude for the presence of the workers – in some cases even accepting them important members of the community.

> "You know, every time my friends and I go for tai-chi… usually around 6 o'clock in the morning, Prabhu would always make sure to come by and check if we need help… because we're all old farts (laughs)! But it's good, because we can feel a bit safe in case we need to get home, that he and the other guards can help us in case of anything. Already twice Prabhu walked some of my tai-chi friends back home. Of course, we usually give him '*duit makan*' (literally, food money). Sometimes, I ask my son (the homeowner) to buy packed breakfast or lunch for the guard"

Securing the Neighborhood

Jaya Hills' security systems are multi-layered and complex. As mentioned previously, surveillance is carried out 24 hours and seven days a week, as all the street cameras are fed to the security checkpoint near the entrance to the community. The cameras and DVR infrastructures are advertised as weather and hack-proof – none of the shared areas in the neighborhood is hidden from view in that sense. Individual homes are equipped with surveillance cameras as well, as standard, while some residents even choose to install additional alarms and measures such as establishing private online clients so as to be able to monitor their surveillance cameras off site. All streets and sidewalks are lined with streetlights. Open drains are absolutely prohibited here, something which is quite uncommon for neighborhoods and urban areas in KL.

The monitoring and supervising of these surveillance and security infrastructure is largely the responsibility of the group Nepali migrant workers subcontracted by the developers through a private security firm. There are around 15 security workers in total, although they generally work in teams during different shifts (night, evening and day). They take turns patrolling the neighborhood and working at the security checkpoint. At all times, at least two security workers are required to be at the checkpoint. Their primary tasks are to monitor the coming and goings of residents and visitors, while keeping an eye on the security cameras.

> "Working at the gate is boring, but we take turns so it's not so bad. We do this between ourselves… each of us only has to be here 2 hours each day, then we get to switch with patrolling or the different guard tables around the *taman* (neighborhood)." (Interview with Ankit)

The security workers are all employed under temporary foreign worker permits. They are not directly employed by homeowners or the developers, but are in fact sent by a security firm that operates more as a labor broker by sponsoring work permits for foreign workers. One of the men, Ankit, who has been in Malaysia for more than six years working at different security jobs, claims that there is a 'special' cultural reason for the preference of Nepali nationals in this line of work:

> "You know, brother, we always get asked to be guards here in Malaysia because of history… history of 'Gurkhas' here in Malaysia. From long ago, a lot of the military and army here used Gurkhas as soldiers. When they were fighting the communists… it was with Gurkha soldiers. I think if you go to a lot of the army camps in this country, you still find a lot of Gurkhas and their families. Here, there is a lot of history and people still think of us from Nepal as the same as having a Gurkha, so that's why we always get this kind of work."

The association between a colonial and postcolonial history of armed forces in Malaya along and that of contemporary labor migration was a revelation in this sense, as I had not realized this as a potential link. It proved difficult to find legitimate connections between current hiring policies in security and the history of Gurkha participation in the Malaysian army. 'Gurkhas', or 'Gorkhas', was a term used in reference to a very old, perhaps even medieval, lineage of warriors originally from Nepal. There has always been a strong mythical character bound to this particular group, and members have always been identified as excellent soldiers and fighters, at least in the context of Malaysia and South Asia. When Ankit and his colleagues make this connection to the Gurkha and Malaysian history, they are very much invoking a connection that ties them to this land in which they are deemed foreigners. It is a powerful connection, one that means something profound to the men,

which can be seen as an expression of resistance against the imposed identity of being 'temporary' workers.

Some of my other informants, including the homeowners, were aware of these historical associations, while others did not seem to have any knowledge of it.

> "Yeah, of course. Makes sense… I remember when I was growing up in Taiping (a northern coastal town in Malaysia), we used to live next to an army training camp, where there used to be a lot of these scary Gurkha guys. They would be so tough-looking. My dad kept telling stories about how they would go into the jungles bare-foot, they would eat *biawak* (monitor lizards) and snakes, and they would drink animal blood to be tougher and impossibly strong. No one would mess with them" (interview with an elderly resident)

> "I don't know*lah* about the Gorkha… but I remember reading in *sejarah* (history) textbook that they were part of the army, and that they were all from Nepal. Yah, I think that's why all our security guards are from Nepal… but they are very nice, very soft, not like soldiers at all. So maybe it's wrong to think they are the same?" (Interview with resident)

The reference to a particular historical link between the Gorkha participation in armed forces and today's migrants is an interesting but highly ambiguous and tenuous at best. However, it is something that the workers themselves are quite aware of, and are cognizant of the ways of using this to their advantage when it comes to finding work opportunities. In several other gated communities and residential compounds that I visited, the preference for Nepali security guards was quite obvious. This was also prevalent in security workers at malls, banks, jewelry stores, and various other places. Ankit, whom I interviewed at length, provided some detailed insight based on his own experiences in Malaysia:

> "I used to work in Klang for the first three years since I came to Malaysia, at a condo building. It was not bad, but very busy area… you know Klang, right? There were so many more people, especially those who live around there. I liked it, and miss it sometimes, because there were more things to do, and I had more friends there to talk to and spend time while working. But there were also a lot of problems. I don't know if you know, but this was a place with a lot of gangs and also prostitutes. The condo I worked at was close to a very popular, busy market and shopping area. Also lots of nightclubs. Then I got transferred to another *taman* like this one in PJ (Petaling Jaya), for a short while. It was a bit like here, but of course with a lot more people. I had to commute from Klang by train and bus every day, which takes so much time, because I was still staying near that old condo. Now, the company asked me to come and work here, and they gave us all a flat nearby (points to the bottom of the hill) so we don't have to worry about commuting anymore. The only thing is it's quite dull here, very quiet, and so few people. So many new big houses, but only half have people… but apparently all the houses have been bought!"

Similar experiences of shifting between security jobs around the city were expressed by a few of Ankit's colleagues, including Ramu and Prabhu. Ankit lives with three other migrant workers in an apartment above one of the nearby shop lots, and they commute by walking to the residential neighborhood each day. The commute he says, takes about 20-25 minutes, and he usually walks quite fast to get 'exercise', since it involves going up a hill for quite a stretch. His flat-mates are also security guards at the same community. The agency had placed them there in order to make the commute closer and more convenient for them, which he was thankful for as otherwise he would have had to find a way to commute from Klang (which is quite some distance away and requires going through KL traffic to get to). Ankit informs me that the room the four of them share is not very big, but it has basic necessities and he does not really need a lot of things anyway.

He is single, the oldest in a family of four. He has both his parents a younger sister, all who live back in Nepal. He has not been home since coming to Malaysia, but says that he occasionally sends home money to his family. He does not need to send too often because the money is usually enough to last two months sometimes, thanks to the exchange rate and the relative costs of living. He says that he is happy and proud to be able to support his family so well now. His sister is still in school, and he thinks that she will likely finish and graduate properly. I ask him if his remittances are a burden on his own needs here, and he very quickly shakes his head and emphatically replies with a no, telling me that it is not a burden as he makes more money than he needs to use. He does not spend a lot at all and usually just saves up the money he earns. He does not have to pay rent (as his employers are required to provide basic accommodations), and only pays for food and basic personal items. Working as a security guard at Jaya Hills is a complex and challenging task:

> "Most of the time, it is a very boring job. I spend half the time sitting alone under an umbrella, and the rest either riding a scooter or walking around the residences. The scooter riding is the best part. I would walk alone around the houses that are still being constructed with torchlight, making sure no one was there at night. Sometimes, there would be a few workers still working even late at night. The construction workers building and working on these houses are all 'Indon' (Indonesian migrants), which can sometimes be a problem for the residents who are scared or worried around migrants from Indonesia. Some people are paranoid about 'break-ins' and theft, and are frequently telling me and the other guards to keep a close eye on the 'Indon' (slur for Indonesian) workers. Personally, I've never had any trouble whatsoever with the other workers. The whole neighborhood is a very safe place. Some people are just scared because of stories they hear about theft and crime in other parts of KL. Not all residents are like that. Some are very friendly and nice, even when others can be rude. One family is always very nice to me and the other guards, always buying us food and drinks. Some of the people would even give the guards 'pocket money' just to get us to

> keep a closer watch on their homes, usually because they have children. Once, I was invited to a house party at one of the homes where the family offered me food that I could take for myself and my guard friends."

Ankit's narrative here suggests some of the complexities and informality that contradict the assumptions we have about gated communities to a large extent. His experiences with the residents and other migrant workers shed light on how relationships between very diverse and heterogeneous groups of people can emerge even in supposedly enclosed private spaces. These relationships are not free of racial stereotypes and inequality, but at the same time, they are also unique to the space of this gated community which brings together particular groups together in the first place – wealthy residents, Nepali guards, Indonesian construction workers, and others. The necessities of work and the informality engendered by the everyday needs of maintaining this 'community' encourages, and in some instances coerces, different people to establish connections and relationships with others, even those who are poorer, or seen as potentially threatening.

The task of maintaining security in a gated community may be, on the surface, be attributed to the employment of private security and high-tech surveillance, but as the practices of residents and workers reveal, there is a strong reliance on mutual trust and relationships as well. In the most explicit way, guaranteeing security and safety takes the form of friendships and 'gift-giving' to the migrants. As Ankit's narrative, as well as that of his fellow workers, show, residents do make attempts to engage with the workers on a regular basis, despite their formal 'outsider' or temporary status. The guards are very much recognized as 'members' of the community, and in many ways happen to be the most recognized faces of the neighborhood. Ramu, who often works the evening shifts, describes how parents and children in the community treat him as a figure of safety during schooldays:

> "I normally start waiting near the main gate (security check) when the school buses and vans would come with the children. This is between 5 and 6 pm in the evening… the bus would have to stop a bit further because drivers can't come up the hill usually, so someone has to make sure to accompany the children. Some of the parents or their maids would come and wait, but sometimes they would ask if I could make sure the children get home safe, so I would wait as well. I remember the parents would tell their kids to not go anywhere until they see "Uncle Ramu", or "wait for Uncle Ramu to come fetch you". Then I walk with the children to their houses. Their parents sometimes give me tips each week for doing this."

The visible presence of the guards do indeed offer some form of reassurance and security, but not exactly in the sense of keeping out threats and preventing violence. The reassurance and

security offered by men like Ramu, Ankit, Prabhu and others are embedded in the everyday routines of families and households – they are part of the daily life, in other words. Their presence is less about keeping order and peace, but more about adding convenience and reliability to life at Jaya Hills. Accompanying children, helping the elderly move around, and making themselves visible to everyone are practices that provide this different form of security, largely obscured by the more overt technologies, infrastructure and discourse of surveillance and gatedness.

Intimate Access and Domestic Work

The presence of migrant workers within gated communities in Malaysia, like Jaya Hills, extends deeply to the intimate spaces of the home, particularly through the work performed by migrant women as a domestic workers. The women who are employed in the homes of residents are tasked with taking care of children, the elderly, cleaning, and chores. As mentioned before, my visits to Jaya Hills were originally motivated by the suggestion of May, a migrant from Philippines who often works as a part-time maid in one of the homes here. May herself had found employment in Jaya Hills through her network of fellow migrant women who meet during church mass on Sundays. She is one among many women working as either full-time or part-time domestic workers or care-providers. Full-time workers tend to live in the homes where they are employed, and do not have as much mobility as those such as May, who move in and out of the community frequently. 'Part-time' domestic work carried out by temporary migrants is an informal practice that is not legally allowed, but is a form of work that becomes seen as a crucial necessity for local residents and families.

Migrant women working as domestic labor in a gated community in Malaysia is close to being the perfect illustration of the complex transformations brought about by neoliberal globalization and developmentalism. Foreign domestic labor, as noted by Christine Chin (1998), provides an 'opportunity to conceptually bridge the household, national, regional, and global levels on the basis of the construction and pursuit of what can be called the "good life."' Nowhere is this significance of bridging multiple levels of analysis more relevant than in the intersection of these two prominent global forms – feminization of transnational migration and the growth of gated communities. Both gated communities and foreign domestic labor are products of the transformation to a consumer based society, where private wealth and conspicuous consumption become primary markers of status.

Jaya Hills, in this sense, is a powerful manifestation of these trends. Conspicuous consumption and private wealth is expressed not just by large and lavish homes, extremely expensive cars (Porsches, Aston Martins, and Range Rovers, to name a few), but also by who does the chores inside the home. The preferred migrant woman to carry out domestic work is the one from Philippines – a consequence of racial stereotypes that reproduce a status 'ranking' of migrant workers from different countries. Not a single domestic worker I encountered in this community came from Indonesia or India, for instance. Migrant women are not just important suppliers of in-demand domestic labor in Malaysia, but they also unexpectedly find themselves as status symbols.

> "What I like about my maid is that she's quite smart and talks well… you know, she's been able to find all these different part-time jobs with different people and make quite a lot of money that way. She told me that this is something Filipina maids do – that's the problem with the Indonesian ones. Usually they are not being smart enough, and always get stuck with bad jobs and don't know what else to do except run away or cause problems. I know it's sad that they have to work like that, but it's true, isn't it? How come women from Philippines can find their way so cleverly and actually do well, but the others can't?" (Interview with resident)

Employing 'part-time maids' was a common practice among the residents of Jaya Hills. This had much to do with the relationships that form between women like May, her employers, and the community itself (neighbors and other workers). May, as mentioned earlier, found this job through another friend who works at a different home in the community, who had suggested her to a neighbor looking for a part-time maid. May herself has invited and found jobs for three of her friends from church here at Jaya Hills. Their work as part-time maids is largely facilitated by their relatively easy availability and lower cost (compared to that of a full time, live-in maid), while the working arrangements are all made informally through phone calls and mutual contacts.

> "I come here to clean the house once or twice a week… depends on ma'am (referring to her employer). She will usually call me when she needs help cleaning here, then we arrange so she can pick me up from the train station nearby. They don't need a full time maid because it's just three people – husband, wife and teenage son – but it's a big house and they always have visitors, so ma'am needs help cleaning. Usually, I come for half a day either in the morning or afternoon, and the work will be done in four or five hours. Normally, I get paid by the hour, but with ma'am I switched to just weekly fixed pay… because the family is very nice and helpful to me and also saves me from having to keep track of how many hours…" (Interview with May)

May's narrative suggests clearly a strong sense of mobility experienced by migrant women working as part-time maids that contradicts further the image of a gated community. Residents of this

community in practice actively demand and seek out foreign domestic workers, and are more than happy to enlist such labor through informal networks and arrangements. The movement of migrant women like May, metaphorically and physically, cuts right across transnational borders, urban-suburban boundaries, and into the most intimate of domestic spaces (bedrooms and bathrooms, for instance). They quite effectively undermine the image of fortification and reveal these 'gated communities' to be transnationally embedded spaces connected to multiple formal and informal networks of information and people.

When May's part time employer at Jaya Hills organized a house-warming party soon after they moved into their new home, they enlisted May's aid in finding two additional people to help with setting up and cleaning for the party. They were aware of May's networks through her church, and were keen on seeking her help finding a few of her friends – who were also Philippina migrants. May was able to find two young women – Jane and Nuri – to come in as the extra help. Both were employed full-time in Kuala Lumpur but, like May herself, were able to seek out part-time opportunities because of their primary employer's relaxed supervision and permission. According to Meena, the homeowner who had asked May to find additional helpers, without May's assistance they 'would have not been able to organize the party':

> "We wanted to have the house-warming three months ago, but it was simply too much work… it's such a big house and just me to do all the work cleaning and preparing. I think that's why we kept putting it off. But my friends and family kept insisting that we have the party because they really wanted to see the house and the neighborhood. So we tried looking for other maids… even asked some friends at work if I could borrow their maids for one day… but then May said she could ask her friends at church who are always looking for part-time work. We thought this was a great idea, because May is a great help and we trust her… so we just let her ask her friends, and we paid them for helping us for the party. It was so, so helpful… even though one of them was actually not very good at listening to instructions, but just having extra hands to clean and cook makes a big difference…" (Excerpt from interview)

Part-time 'maids' are providing services as a very flexible workers, specifically for families and residents who would prefer to avoid the more bureaucratized and expensive option of employing full time domestic helpers. That is not to say that this is becoming a norm – in many of the homes both in Jaya Hills and the larger metropolitan area, full time 'foreign domestic helpers' are very common – May, Jane and Nuri are legally still 'full-time foreign domestic helpers' under the employ of a single sponsoring employer, after all. What is becoming more common is the practice of

enlisting the services of more flexible 'temporary migrants', in a form of human 'just-in-time' service provision. The phenomenon brings into perspective one of the key trends in neoliberal globalization – that of precarious forms of increasingly short-term employment and livelihoods that people have to turn to (Standing 2011). However, growing precariousness is not just a consequence of how neoliberal capital and transformation strips people of more stable long term securities, but, as the case of the part-time 'maids' like May, Jane and Nuri imply, there is also a degree of anticipation and preemptive agency involved on the part of the so-called 'precariats'. Migrant women here are not mere victims unable to stem or resist the tide of exploitation – they also possess resources and enough knowledge to be able to take advantage of the uncertain and the unpredictable.

May, for instance, understands the possibilities and probability that many of her employers will need additional help at some point or another- she anticipates these possibilities and looks for opportunities to enlist her migrant friends in search of work. Wealthy residents with large homes will always 'need help cleaning up after their celebrations', as she describes it, and they cannot always depend on just one maid at all times. In this sense, the kind of practices taken up by the migrant women, along with those of homeowners and residents seeking timely flexible domestic help, symbolize Simone's notion of a politics of anticipation – 'a way of thinking about what is taking place, of positioning oneself to events and places in preparation to move quickly, to make one's situation and actions more visible, or to maintain them under some radar' (Simone 2010). The practice of anticipating opportunities for the temporary migrants are by and large contingent to the political, social and economic conditions and changes that lead to the production of privatized neoliberal spaces and a growth in demand for flexible domestic labor – in other words, these are practices that are shaped and informed by the restructuring and increase of urban and global inequalities. There is opportunism and agency on the part of working class women, but one very much conditioned by the power and resources of privileged employers.

Encountering an Unequal Heterogeneity

At the beginning of this chapter, I argued, based on the study of the Jaya Hills gated community, that homogeneity does not have to be a necessary defining characteristic for these globally popular residential spaces, as suggested by many scholars. On the contrary, production of 'gated-ness' (the image of boundedness, security and surveillance, and a 'safe private neighborhood') relies on the labor of a very heterogeneous and diverse community of workers – from domestic helpers to

security guards. However, the notion of heterogeneity here does not imply that different people are on equal footing. It does not imply that the trust and mutuality between workers and residents are built upon a level playing field with no divides in terms of power. Heterogeneity here is multi-faceted because it is not simply referring to racial, ethnic, gender and national differences but also class, wealth and status.

The original argument concerning the homogeneity of gated communities stems from the assumption that these communities are meant for specific classes of people – the middle-classes, the elites and the mega-wealthy. On the surface, the primary objective is to keep out the dangerous urban others, which usually translates to the poor and the working classes (including migrants). Yet, as the presence and practices of people at Jaya Hills show, there is in actual reality a high level of negotiated heterogeneity at work. The residents, developers and homeowners recognize that value of the labor of temporary migrants and proceed to allow varying levels of access and participation to the latter.

The workers often have surprisingly intimate access to the homes and lives of the residents, such as the domestic helpers' presence within the houses of their employers and the security guard's monitoring capacity through surveillance of residences. However, this access granted to workers is a highly calculated one that is allowed because of the vast difference in power and rights between residents and workers. The access granted to workers is allowed because 'temporary' migrants are rarely in a position of any long-term stability themselves. Their dependence on local employers is such that even changing jobs (as in the case of the Nepali guards) is not something they can control or have much say in, while part-time maids like May, Jane and Nuri are only able to work by virtue of their primary employer's benevolence.

Herein we can perceive the seductive appeal of a particular neoliberal global product – the private gated residence that blends the more desirable aspects of both urban and suburban life. The desire to live in these spaces where residents can roam freely without being bothered by the inherent 'chaos' and dangers of urban centers, where their security and lifestyles are protected, is strong enough to drown out some rather obvious contradictions and ironic realities that make these spaces possible – including the dependency on the very people and groups that are presumably supposed to be kept out. A gated community such as Jaya Hills thus can be seen as a node that inhabits the intersection between neoliberal globalization which transforms urban spaces and generates the

consumerist demand for luxurious private enclosures as alternatives to urban public life, and the politics of temporary migration which both enables and shapes those processes.

CONCLUSION

At its core, this work is an attempt to write about the ephemeral subjects of neoliberal globalization – people leaving their families and homes to find themselves becoming migrants with only temporary anchors within a built world that continuously seeks the exploitation of their labor while suppressing their political agency. There exist numerous words in our vocabulary describing them – nomads, sojourners, slaves, migrants, and most recently, *precariats*. The names and labels abound but very little is written about the migrants of today in terms of their histories, experiences and practices, with the exception of writings focused on their 'agency' as actors in the sphere of national development, as harbingers of social erosion and danger, as dependents and freeloaders of the welfare state, or as a people without a voice, victims of trafficking and slavery.

Today, we find more countries and states adopting new regimes of migration that are enforced through immigration regulations and 'managed migration', and further facilitated by private actors such as recruitment agents and labor brokers, as well as international organizations such as the World Bank, World Trade Organization and the International Organization for Migration. These new regimes of migration foster new forms of impermanent and unsettled movements of people across borders, and are predicated on two principles – 'sponsorship' and subcontracting. Temporary migration overwhelmingly affects the poor from the Global South, even those who are well-educated, as the case of tech workers from India in Silicon Valley reveal. When I talk about temporary migrants – be it domestic workers, construction workers, sex-workers, entrepreneurs – I'm referring to people who are in one way or another bonded to some form of relationship of indenture to their masters. The means through which their dependency and subservience is secured is through their immigrations status- that is, as non-resident aliens, as temporary foreign workers and helpers, as contract laborers, and as seasonal workers. Their legal ability to be in a country, along with whatever limited sets of formal rights they may have, is subject to the will of their employers and recruitment agents, as well as immigration officials.

I chose to study temporary migration because I wanted to find out how people managed to deal with this precariousness and vulnerable status in their daily lives. The difficulty of writing about migrants and migrant life lies in the almost overwhelmingly diversity, heterogeneity and fluidity of

experiences, identities and practices. Nothing can be nailed down as an empirical certainty aside from notions of dynamism and transformations. Such attempts, as that detailed by AbdouMaliq Simone in his concept of a 'politics of anticipation', aim to capture not a categorical element or a fixed/stable subject, but a profound ambivalence and uncertainty of being that characterizes life in many major cities of the global South. I have found it difficult and pointless to arrive at any theoretically or conceptually bounded argument or hypothesis that speaks to the character of everyday life in urban Malaysia, specifically because the opposite is the dominant reality – that what marks the 'development' of urban space and social life in a country such as Malaysia is the certainty of rapid change and transformation. Migrants, including those who are deemed 'temporary', do indeed play very important and substantial roles in facilitating and fostering those transformations – and, as shown in the chapters of this work, they are very much the catalysts for those changes from below, even if not as part of collectively organized political movements.

Due to the complex and fragmented nature of this project on temporary migration, my findings were inevitably very diverse and broad-ranging. In the dissertation, I chose to focus on four case-studies of contemporary migrant experiences in Malaysia – the growth of new 'temporary' migrant communities in urban spaces, the role of temporary migrants in the reproduction of local Malaysian cultural 'authenticity' (especially in food and services), the importance of informality and informal networks for migrant women seeking better opportunities and mobility beyond their formal restrictions, and the work of migrants in the security sector for new gated communities.

The legacies of contact between different cultures and peoples, the hybridity of identities woven into the cultural fabric, the traumas of colonial encounters and the racial-ethno consequences bear their weight upon how we experience social life – from the way we produce and reinforce new norms about racial or ethnic others, how we act upon pre-existing and newly-produced stereotypes, to how those who are subjected to these externally imposed identities negotiate, respond and resist them. One struggles to enter the 'field' with even a semblance of a conceptual or methodological framework when the field is prone to constant shifting, where even basic expectations of normalcy or predictability can be shifted at any given moment, and ordinary people suddenly appear as caricatures, at best, or monsters, at worst. There is a duality at the heart of cities like Kuala Lumpur and Georgetown – a difference as obvious as day and night that is simultaneously unpredictable.

From the standpoint of someone who grew up in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, trying to understand this duality is painful. Familiar places of my hometown easily shift between sites of safe

shelter and leisure into sites of sex-work at the blink of an eye. The everyday working-class routines of the urban poor can at any given moment become a site of political struggle over the right to speak and utter in particular languages or practice one's cultural traditions. This duality extends into the sphere of everyday life in truly bizarre and absurd ways – such as coming across groups of young migrant Bangladeshi men washing dishes and utensils sitting across an open drain in an alley next to a street café, while a few feet away young Vietnamese girls and Thai transgendered sex-workers give blowjobs to local Malaysian men.

The discombobulating experience affects everyone who lives in the heart of the city, including those tasked with 'maintaining order' and 'security'- i.e. harassing and terrifying the vulnerable and racialized urban poor. As a result, the civilian watchdogs of RELA and even the police do not distinguish between fellow citizens and foreigners – preferring instead to profile on the basis of skin tone and mere presence in a particular area, district or neighborhood. The neoliberal changes brought upon certain sites such as Chinatown exist in contradictory fashion to the actual work and heterogeneity of everyday life there, a further representation of the absurd and the bizarre, where people from very different parts of the world all live and work under a canopy of symbolically 'Chinese' identity. Such contradictions and dualities are also present in the marketing and services culture geared towards selling ideas of cultural authenticity and national pride – by placing the daily labor of being cultural interlocutors and guardians of the culturally 'authentic' squarely upon the shoulders of temporary foreign workers in restaurants, cafes and even religious funeral services.

The one tether in the midst of this roiling mass of discordant and disorienting experiences arrived when I recognized the key roles played by actors marked by a particular label – temporary migrants. Whether by choice or coercion, temporary migrants, specifically through their labor, have become embedded within the transformations shaping contemporary Malaysian society and urban life, from the formation of new urban migrant communities and economies to the facilitation of new lifestyles within private 'gated' communities. Migrant labor is part of sustaining the sense of normalcy necessary for everyday life in urban Malaysia yet migrants themselves are also involved in the reshaping of social norms, the shifting of demographics, and adoption of new practices, tastes and lifestyles.

The urban spaces of Little Bangladesh and Little Burma are very important sites of struggle between the authorities and these new communities. They are considered unexpected and undesirable by

local Malaysians and the municipality, and there is a constant presence of RELA - civilian volunteer police who tend to be particularly aggressive towards migrants and foreigners. The people who perform the everyday labor that goes into producing these communities do so under precarious and sometimes dangerous conditions, due to the poor maintenance of roads, the dilapidated nature of some of the older buildings, smog and pollution from chaotic traffic. There are constant arguments between city municipality officials (*Bandaraya)* and store owners or managers over the use of signs and advertising, particularly those that are considered to be in 'foreign' languages. In fact, these signs are a powerful symbolic site of the struggle between the urban poor and the state – with the proliferation of these new migrant communities who bring their own slices of home, there is also significant push-back by the state in terms of new laws over what counts as permissible language in advertisements and business fronts. Largely driven by complaints over the 'foreign' nature of many of these new businesses by local Malaysians, the state has instituted regulations that require all businesses to only use the Malay language on their signs as the primary language.

I found that spaces such as Little Bangladesh and Little Burma, through the active and informal practices of the migrants who live there, become critical sites for larger, collective struggles and demands for recognition. Despite not being 'immigrants' in the traditional sense – in that they are not afforded any of the rights and pathways to settlements that are generally available to other communities – these temporary migrants are still able to exert strong public presence and to build communities in spite of their individually precarious and transient formal status. The people who live and spend their time in these communities are hardly what Guy Standing describes as 'denizens' – that is, the lowest rung of the 'global precariats' who have next to no rights and are largely subaltern to the point of complete anomie. On the contrary, despite very harsh structural and institutional constraints that render their status extremely precarious, the migrants here display a strong sense of solidarity and will to build a community and live more normalized and comfortable social lives.

The type of neoliberal temporary migration regimes referred to in this work is intensely segregated along gender lines. This is a context where the combination of sex-work, tourism and human trafficking has historically exacerbated the exploitation of migrant women from poorer regions. As detailed in previous chapters, especially in the fourth, formally, women are only allowed to work as domestic helpers, or in some special cases, as cooks in restaurants as long as they are

coming from Southern Thailand. Migrants in domestic work in countries such as Malaysia are little more than indentured servants almost completely subject to the will of their employers.

Yet, at least in Malaysia, formal restrictions on mobility and rights are not necessarily enforced particularly effectively or thoroughly. Extra-legal opportunities, often through informal networks, practices and arrangements, are available to migrant women who happen to be more fortunate in terms of having more benevolent employers. While there are no laws that require domestic workers to be given days off in Malaysia, many employers give their helpers time to go to church and be with their friends occasionally. In the cases of the migrant women I interviewed, many of them were working as 'part-time maids' – offering cleaning and nanny services on an hourly basis to homes and families outside of their primary places of employment. This type of work is strictly not allowed under the conditions of their work permits, but is a practice that is quite common and widely-adopted.

The women who work as part-time maids have a degree of mobility and independence that many domestic helpers in general do not. Some of them are able to rent their own apartments and live away from their employers, again despite of the legal restrictions that prevent them from doing so. The women are able to exert more control over the terms of their labor – at least in terms of wages and hours, partly because of the strength of the demand for this work. Many Malaysians – young couples and families in particular – want the efficiency and convenience of a domestic helper without the responsibilities that come with employing a full time live-in migrant worker, so the prominence of 'part-time maid' services continues to rise. The women I interviewed often spend their days travelling and commuting to different parts of the city, from suburbs to high-rise condominiums and luxury apartments. The informal networks they form with different employers and their fellow compatriots help improve their capacity to move and choose alternative opportunities.

In one of my final chapters, I discuss my findings from work at a large residential 'gated' community that is fairly new and caters to upper-middle class families. For those who study neoliberal urban transformations, the history of gated communities and 'fortified enclaves' should be fairly familiar, following the important works of Theresa Caldeira, for instance. I was particularly interested in the work of securing these neighborhoods, which I knew very well in the case of Malaysia is carried out by temporary migrant workers.

From an analytical viewpoint, the work of 'securing' these gated community's raises some very interesting evidence of the sheer contradictory character of such spaces. These communities are built largely as 'safe spaces' away from the hustle and bustle of the city, from the 'urban chaos' so to speak. These are codes for maintaining spaces of exclusion where the urban poor cannot access. Owners and families who live in these communities carry special tags and permits that grant them access, while guests and visitors (such as myself) are carefully monitored and put under constant surveillance.

However, part of the work of maintaining and securing these spaces require very intimate and unrestricted access to the very same groups that these enclaves are interested in keeping out – that is the urban poor. During my time in these communities, it is the presence of migrant security guards and the domestic helpers that are more common. The guards walk and ride along the homes, constantly checking on empty buildings, while also performing other tasks such as walking children from the school bus-stop to their respective homes and making sure the elderly are safe during their morning walks and exercises. They also have access to the huge number of surveillance cameras that are equipped in every conceivable location – on trees, the community pool area, each and every backyard, and intersections. Guards are also given access to private homes where the occupants might be away on holiday, further granting them an incredible amount of access into the private spaces of the wealthy.

Additionally, a lot of migrant women who work as part time maids also go to work at these residences. They would come through the security checkpoints every day, to work for a few hours as cleaners in the different homes. This every day work of maintaining the gated community involves a great deal of porous movement between the 'outside' and the 'inside'. While still largely an exclusive environment – there are limits and regulations on how the common areas can be used enforced through afore-mentioned surveillance – this porosity and the level of intimate access that the migrant poor have to some of these absurdly wealthy and posh homes is surprising, to say the least. The work of migrants is so important in maintaining these communities that the residents are more than happy to pay for and allowing their security guards and domestic helpers that level of access, even though there is still this massive gulf in terms of economic inequality that separates these groups, obviously.

Temporary Migrants – Global Nomads or the Emerging Precariats?

On the surface, the migrants studied here are experiencing the types of impositions and restrictions Guy Standing highlights as defining the emerging class of precariats – populations who are suffering from growing precariousness of work through the neoliberal stripping away of labor securities. The forms of labor securities that Standing regards as the backbone of Fordist labor models include employment security, clear job descriptions, safety and regulation, ability to gain new skills, security on income over life course, and of course, representation in the form of labor organizing. Many of these securities are indeed absent or in the process of being denied to greater numbers of workers, and migrant workers (whom Standing classifies as 'denizens' rather than citizens) are the most vulnerable. Indeed, a cursory examination of Temporary labor Migration policies and practices today exposes these trends towards rendering cheap and flexible workers even more precarious is undeniable. However, Standing suggests that these trends towards ever-more precarious conditions are producing a new class of precarious proletariats, or precariats, who could potentially engender dangerous and explosive forms of reactionary movements – such as neo-fascism.

These claims about what increasing precariousness (or precarity) will bring about in terms of political activity and mobilization have taken the up a lot of attention in most recent academic debates on globalization and labor studies (Seymour 2012; Breman 2013; Standing 2013; Frase 2013). It has also flavored and influenced new discourses and narratives emerging from grassroots activism such as Occupy, which Richard Seymour regards as a form of Althusserian 'interpellation' (naming) rather than an emergence of a new class consciousness. To put it in simple terms, the basic contention of these white male leftist intellectuals is about whether or not the precariats are an actual 'class' in a Marxist sense. A 'class', according to Seymour, cannot be defined purely in terms of what they lack (i.e. forms of labor securities), but by their relative position within a relations of production. As such, due to the lack of a positive identity, precariats cannot really occupy any particular class positions. What is of interest to me, pertaining to the study of temporary migrants, are the debates surrounding implications and outcomes of increasing labor precariousness

It is not just that the state and private demand for labor in Malaysia turned towards cheaper and more flexible migrants that generates this new type of temporary politics, but it is also how the

turn towards temporary labor migration entails new institutional approaches that are precisely adopted to curtail opportunities for long-term stability for the urban poor – stability in terms of having a job they can rely on in the future, a home they can count on as an asset, the ability to own or run a business as a long-term investment, and even the opportunity to secure permanent residency in the future. As a result, the people I interviewed and studied often, if not always, find themselves having to resort to informal opportunities, clandestine trades, interpersonal networks and third-party brokers just to be able to secure really basic securities. The migrants from South Thailand who work as cooks in KL have to rely on travel agents and tour bus drivers to get them (and their hard-earned savings) through security and customs checkpoints at the border, just so they can build a home in their hometowns, while many migrant women working in domestic labor have few options but to seek out informal work opportunities outside their home of employment in order to supplement their income as part-time maids,in the process risking their legal status as temporary migrants.

The reality is that 'precariatization' – a structural and systemic trend of taking away employment securities and creating more precarious forms of labor – is a very real process that has been growing for over thirty years now. This is evident by looking at how impermanence has become systemic to production and labor in ways that actually does move away from older forms of industrial labor, even in the case of Malaysia, where the establishment of Export Processing Zones (EPZs) and industrial estates that were meant to facilitate a shift from agricultural production to stable, urban-based wage labor for local populations gradually gave way to more 'flexible' forms of labor, and eventually to the shift towards temporary migrant labor.

Temporariness in this sense became – and is continuing to become – a structural component of global capitalist production systems, and by extension, the increasing of precariousness. Temporary labor, while not novel or new in historical terms, is unique in its contemporary institutional form – it's one of the most globalized of transnational phenomena, one in which similar practices of flexible recruitment are being adopted in different countries, from the restrictive contracting of Indian tech workers in Silicon Valley, the persistence of *kafala* in the Middle East and Emirates, to the contract substitution practices in Southeast Asia.Institutionalized TLM continues to garner powerful support and endorsement from major international organizations and bodies, despite ever-more reports of the abusive and exploitative character of contemporary precariousness experienced by millions of migrants – the latest estimate placing the number of modern slavery at 35

million (Guardian 2014). While slavery or indentured labor is rightly seen as a permanent structural problem, there is also a need to understand how instances of modern-day slavery and indentured labor is based around the politics engendered by temporariness, or the status of being 'temporary'. This impacts migrant sex-slaves, including women and children trafficked into countries under 'visitor' permits or short-term work permits to different countries.

It is the ways in which these practices systematically erode and strip away the rights of workers by dovetailing with global capitalism and labor migration that are in particular need of further examination. As argued in chapter 3 and elsewhere (Muniandy and Bonatti 2014), the powerful Migration Development Nexus (MDN) propagated and endorsed by the World Bank, IOM, WTO and even the United Nations further provides a basis for the adoption and perpetuation of Temporary Labor Migration (TLM) around the world, making it a core part of global production and economies (Hugo 2013). The very basis of TLM rests on inequality, not just between the North and the South, but just as importantly between countries of the South. The system rests on a foundation of increasing inequality, as 'sending' countries thirsty for remittance monies compete to make their citizens more appealing as sources of cheap, flexible labor and impose a downward pressure on worker's rights, mobilization and protections.

Communities in Indonesia, Philippines, Bangladesh, Nepal, and India (to name a few) are today even more reliant upon the incomes and remittances of their members living and working abroad, and these does not only refer to workers in the formal sector. This includes young teenage girls from Vietnam and Thailand working in brothels and massage parlors who left their homes for the promise of education and formal work they had been originally promised, who still try to remit their incomes to their families without the latter's full knowledge of the nature of their actual work. For many Nepali migrants, the chance of securing long-term stability is a pipe-dream, tempered by the knowledge that they will constantly have to move back and forth at the whims of their employment agencies to whom they become unfairly indebted financially.

Learning to See the Trees for the Forest

Trying to develop a critical understanding of transnational migration in the context of the MDN paradigm necessitates an exercise of constantly reminding oneself to step back and forth with multiple perspectives. It is fundamentally an examination of systems and networks that are by virtue of definition, transnational, but one that also requires paying very close attention to the minutiae of

daily life wherein these systemic elements coincide with histories and cultures in ambivalent, unexpected and contiguous ways, to the extent that the actors and agents that are involved defy narrow characterizations and labels ('agents of development', 'foreign workers', 'illegals', 'domestic workers', 'victims of trafficking', '*PATI*'). One of the clearest implications of temporary migration is the rapid burst of diversity and heterogeneity of emerging societies like Malaysia, and while I may have relied heavily on national markers to identity different subjects and groups, it should be highlighted that this was merely for analytical convenience and should not be taken as a definitive to any extent.

No one, let alone in this study, is defined purely by their nationality, gender or ethnicity – these markers are always produced, transformed, shifted and reproduced. Systems of temporary labor migration enables and fosters new markers to be produced, including new racialized ones based on people's jobs and the places they live. Migrant men who come from Bangladesh to Malaysia encounter deeply xenophobic stereotypes about how 'dirty' they are in general, while Indonesian and Philippina women have to deal with being regarded as 'gold-diggers' and unreliable. All African migrants who are dark-skinned are seen as prone to violence or crime. None of these national racial markers were common or even present before the latest period of labor migration during which the country opened up to more diverse migrants, yet the logics and rationales by which these racialized forms get produced bear their links to similar racial projects stretching back to colonialism, when stereotypes and 'myths' were produced about different ethnic groups.

At the level of the 'grassroots', or the 'everyday', or the 'micro', new forms of unequal heterogeneity and diversity of practices emerge through the politics of temporariness this study focuses on. There is tremendous informality at the heart of people's experiences today, which by itself is not necessarily new or novel, in the histories of developing economies, but is important nonetheless to their lives and the broader society in general. Capturing some of the slices and pictures of that diversity and informality is what this work has been about, concentrated as it is to a number of urban centers in Malaysia. Nonetheless, even this geographically limited study is able to reveal the dynamism, fluidity and flexibility under which contemporary migration operates – something which the MDN paradigm and broader structural debates about migration tend to obscure, ignore or suppress, usually for prioritizing the remittance economy and development.

Looking at TLM from a top-down, structural perspective, with the consequent obscuration of diverse practices and heterogeneous actors, is a perfect example of seeing 'like a state' from the

perspective of the global (Scott 1998). From a theoretical standpoint following the debates about precariatization, one major issue with this perspective is that we can see and predict growing precariousness, but are not able to see and understand how ordinary people actually resist and negotiate these conditions in very context-specific ways. This is where the discussions about emerging 'dangerous classes' suffering from rampant anomie and alienation fall flat and expose the blind-spots of labor and migration studies.

As the substantive discussions of preceding chapters have shown, those groups most exposed to the vulnerabilities of precarious labor conditions – temporary migrants – are not as prone to anomic tendencies or alienation as we are wont to believe necessarily. Instead, most, if not all, of my interview subjects share stories and experiences of relationship building, new friendships and loyalties, and even forms of mutual dependencies which, while not free of power differences and inequalities, are quite contrary to the notion that they might be heading in a more violent direction. Similarly, while there is a lot of attention given to rising xenophobia and anti-migrant sentiments (another 'effect' of precariousness), I have shown in this study how local citizens, communities and even businesses incorporate and include migrant workers in novel and innovative ways, and are very open about their trust, gratitude and reliance upon the labor of migrants.

Forms of agency under the conditions engendered by temporariness are not merely regressive or reactive. The people in this study engage and negotiate through their temporary statuses in ways that are also productive of new opportunities, such as securing a community of migrants in the heart of Kuala Lumpur through largely non-collective forms of resource mobilization, engaging with private businesses and encroaching upon public spaces. Entire communities of formally 'temporary' migrants are able to develop businesses, services and resources through largely informal means, even in the face of state repression and violence. What emerges from these spaces of migrant economic activity is not a 'class' of precariats but communities linked not only by sheer necessity, but also by ethnic and cultural bonds, as well as by faith, through which new political mobilizations may emerge. This is what happens near Chinatown in KL, where communities of Bangladeshi Muslims are able to collectively carry out public religious prayers as a way of making demands of the state to provide for them. It is in these instances where the groups Standing regards as denizens actually express collective rights of citizenship through very ordinary, distinctly non-violent, non-dangerous, non-revolutionary practices.

These details of everyday practices and experiences shed light on the actual lived realities of people who carry the label 'temporary' in one form or another. They are not just 'agents' in development terms via their income and money transfers and they are not just victims either. They are also important actors capable of shaping and transforming the social fabric of urban life, in creative and unintended ways. Their presence, the need for their labor and trust, compels new relationships of dependency across different racial and class divides, which in turn transforms those divides by reinforcing existing hierarchies or generating new ones (as in the case of the gated communities). Migrants seek out and engage with networks that exist as transnational conduits for the transfer of information, money and other resources, and in many cases establish newer ones as well, such as online, mobile chat-rooms and posting boards for those interested in finding opportunities to travel for work in Malaysia. These are some of the ways in which people do resist their growing precariousness and potential alienation in the real world, by subverting their own 'temporariness' as a means to build and secure their lives.

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