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Culture in the Borderlands:

“Stories“ of Southeast Asian Domestic Workers in Taiwan

Ph.D.Dissertation

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Introduction

The Asia-Pacific Version of Labor Migration

Migration and mobility is not a new phenomenon in human society. Historically, people have moved from one place to another either for reasons of survival or due to force in terms of slavery. Towards the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, migration began to be prompted by industrialization and urbanization. In past decades, international migration has increased in dimension for both the sending and the receiving communities. Compared to other types of migration, labor migration is in pole position.

According to the United Nations, in the early 1980s, approximately 77 million people lived outside their native countries. In 1990, international migrants were 80 million in number. At the end of the twentieth century, more than 100 million people did not live in the nations in which they were born. The UN's International Migration Report 2002 estimated that there were 175 million migrants, defined as persons who reside outside their country of birth or citizenship for 12 months or more. They are categorized according to the duration of their migration (temporary/permanent), their level of volition (voluntary/forced), their level of acceptance by receiving countries (legal/illegal), etc. Sixty to sixty-five million of them were economically active, with or without a permit. In other words, contemporary migrants are predominantly workers moving from areas where they were born and raised to other locations where they can obtain a higher return for their labor. The movement of people to search for economic benefits is not new: Venice merchants in medieval times, colonialists in the past centuries, and European immigrants to America in the nineteenth century are all examples of labor migration. The kind of migration that I discuss here is however relatively new in the history of migration, namely that of overseas contract workers.

The term ‘contract worker’ refers to workers who “move between countries with strict contracts for specified periods of time with severely limited benefits and rights and few possibilities (usually none) of bringing their families along” (Gulati 2006: 51).

The International Labor Organization has estimated that twenty-two million Asians work outside of their home country. In the mid-1900s, women comprised approximately half of all migrants worldwide, and constituted just a small proportion of migrant workers. This pattern began shifting in the late 1970s, most dramatically in Asia. While mere thousands of Asian women migrated annually in 1970, by 1995, this estimate has now risen to 800,000. The feminization of labor migration is particularly pronounced in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka. In these countries, national-level estimates indicate that women comprise 60-75 percent of legal migrants, a significant proportion of whom are employed as domestic workers in the Middle East, and Asia Pacific (Human Rights Watch 2005).

The intra-Asian migration movement began with an initial exodus to Middle Eastern countries in the early 1970s, as oil prices and the demand for skilled and semi-skilled workers rose dramatically. Initially, most workers came from the neighboring Arab countries, later from South Asia, and then from Southeast Asia. At first, males dominated this movement, yet since the 1980s, females have been increasingly joining them. In 1990, approximately 20 per cent of the estimated six million workers in the region were foreign female domestic workers (Brochmann 1993). Whereas hiring domestic workers in the Middle East is regarded as a status symbol, the demand for female domestic labor in the newly industrializing countries of East and Southeast Asia has risen due to the high rates of economic growth and female labor-force participation. Employing cheap migrant women workers has been one solution to reconciling the traditional responsibilities of women (taking care of the elderly and children, managing the household, etc.) with the demands of the

workplace.

Place, Voice and Culture

Although place is a vital part of human culture, it has only relatively recently become a theme in anthropological research. This does not mean that the anthropologists of earlier periods did not mention where they sedentarized and conducted their research or did not represent the lives of people in relation to place. But by contrast, ethnographers had to refer to locations in their works. To them, culture was congruous with place. Culture was found in a set place, knowledge of which was required for it to be studied and described. Culture could be read as a map (Bourdieu 1977). The problem of place in the anthropology is “the problem of the culturally defined locations to which ethnographies refer” (Appadurai 1988:16), namely a fiction of an authentic culture as a localized stability.

The conceptualization of place as a cultural boundary marker was not suspended until about twenty years ago, when displacement had taken place on a large scale, for example, in the form of migration and the seeking of asylum. Mobility in the contemporary world compels anthropologists to reconsider the relationship between culture and place and to be confronted with the conventions of writing. Anthropologists are starting to inquire whether place can be more than merely a setting for activities. What role does place play in the experience of border-crossing people? Is it still possible to identify the contours of a culture without clear boundaries?

In addition to being immobile, cultures are described as timeless, coherent and homogenous in classical ethnographies. Diverse ideas and interests represented by individuals of different classes, ethnicities or genders within communities were mostly ignored. As Appadurai has recounted, there is a curious double ventriloquism

in fieldwork and ethnographic writing (1988). We have been taught to be the transparent medium for the voices of those we encounter in the field and we speak for the native point of view. In fact, however, “our informants are often made to speak for us” and it is difficult to say “who really speaks for whom” (Appadurai 1988: 17). He poses a question: how many voices are concealed beneath the generalizations of reported speech in much of ethnography? And how many voices clamor beneath the enquiries and interests of the single ethnographer? How can we construct in anthropology a dialogue that captures the encounter of our own many voices with the voices we hear and purport to represent (Appadurai 1988: 17)? The problem of voice is not only a problem within communities, but also between the researcher and the researched in fieldwork and at home.

My study here attempts to represent the different voices of local people – the Taiwanese – as well as of migrant women from Southeast Asia. It proceeds not from culture-to-culture confrontation nor woman-to-woman communication, but, instead, from the stories told by one individually situated commentator to another. Are migrants just exemplars of their home cultures despite their movement? Or are they swinging between cultural spaces like trapeze artists in midair (Rosaldo 1988)? Can migrants create their own cultural space after displacement or are they doomed to remain inaudible?

Methodology

Although a methodology for researching migrant workers is far from apparent, and the practices in field do not always run according to plan, generally speaking, my research was based primarily on participant observation and informal and in-depth interviews. The informal and in-depth interviews were conducted either in English, Chinese, or, with the help of a translator, in the domestic workers’ own languages. In

addition, this investigation was also supported by an open-ended questionnaire survey[1] of 183 foreign migrant workers, which I helped deliver. The surveys were conducted at different public locations where migrant workers gather during their days off.[2] The gathering sites in this study are located in Taipei. The main aim of the survey was to supply more detailed background data on migrant workers in general.

I chose to interview migrant domestic workers from four countries (the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam and Thailand). All the women interviewed in depth were asked who had been consulted about the migratory project, how it was organized and financed, and were asked about their migration practices, including their experiences of work in Taiwan and other countries, their contact with homeland communities and networks in Taiwan, and their plans for the future. The interviews lasted one to three hours each time. Some of them were interviewed more than once. All interviews and communication with Filipino domestics were conducted in English. The other interviews were conducted in Chinese, in some cases also in their mother tongue. Informal interviews were conducted while I was in regular contact with them, either while congregating with them in the park, accompanying them on their way home, or participating in their parties or outings. All of the names used in this study are pseudonyms to ensure the anonymity of my interviewees. Moreover, I collected relevant information from historical archives, current reports and survey data from newspapers, magazines and other publications.

I have very often interwoven individual experiences and my own perception of them in this writing. As a Taiwanese woman and researcher I experienced marginality

[1] An English example of the questionnaire is in the appendix.
[2] The questionnaires were translated in three languages: English, Thai and Indonesian. Among the 183 participants surveyed, 126 were domestic workers. Only one of them is male, the others are female. Of the 183 interviewees, over half (54.6%) were Indonesians, 42.1% Filipino, 2.2% Thais, 1.1% of other nationalities (Indian, Malaysia). In general, most of the domestic workers were in their twenties and thirties, single rather than married. Educational level amongst domestic workers does vary by nationality, while more than 70% of the Filipino domestics were college educated, and about half of the Indonesian workers had the equivalent of secondary school education.

and border-crossing not only among migrant workers from Southeast Asia, but also during encounters with my Taiwanese compatriots. As a Taiwanese "outsider", once in a while I got artificial stories from migrant women and after a while felt that the narratives were more fantasies than reality. By joining the parties of migrant workers, becoming fair game to males or a rival to a female, which I mentioned in chapter five, alerted me to my self-righteous status as a detached observer and an innocent onlooker. Being a friend of a Thai domestic, I was exposed to a sexual harassment by her Taiwanese employer. I include this experience in my writing here to demonstrate both the constraints and possibilities of my study. I introduce this individual experience and perception into my work to show the "gendered opportunities and constraints" (Tsing 1993) in the narration of stories.

Methodological Considerations

I intentionally apply the term "story" in the title of this study. In the past fifty years narrative has emerged as an autonomous object of inquiry in the social sciences. As the popularity of this term increases in diverse fields, so expands definition. A decisive influence on the current uses of narrative was Jean-François Lyotard's concept of "grand narrative". For him, "grand narratives" of modernity impose a general, supervening pattern of meaning, explanation and direction upon the variety of ways men and women think and act. He takes this universalizing impetus to be insensitive to the heterogeneity and incommensurability exhibited in language games that compose the social bond. Thus, Lyotard sees the role of grand narratives "in legitimating knowledge in the modern world as redundant in the light of the advent of postmodernity, a condition in which synoptic perspectives give way to heterogeneity and invention" (Browning 2000:1).

Although the terms "narrative" and "story" are often used interchangeably and

have many similar characteristics, such as chronicle order and thematic ordering of event, there are, according to Lyotard (1984 [1979]), three features that distinguish “grand narratives“ from little stories: They corncern abstract entities rather than concrete individuals; they may exist as collective beliefs, rather than as the message of particular texts; they inherit the foundational role of myth with respect to society, rather than being told for their anecdotal or entertainment value (Ryan 2005).

My study makes use of individual stories not only to understand how an abstract system of labor migration influences personal everyday life, but also to understand the migrant women’s interpretation of this process. Stories are not just facts, but as Ricoeur’s (1983:150) summarization of Gallie (1964) explains:

> A story describes a sequence of actions and experiences done or underdone by a certain number of people… These people are presented either in situations that change or as reacting to such change. In turn, these changes reveal hidden aspects of the situation and the people involved, and engendered a new predicament which calls for thought, action, or both. This response to the new situation leads the story toward its conclusion.

People distill and reflect a particular understanding of social and political relations by telling their stories. Stories provide rich data that express movement, interpret ideas, and describe from the storyteller’s perspective how things were, are, as well as how they should be. By using “stories“ in the title of my study, I not only want to imply that social actors engage in stories in order to make sense of their reality and to guide their actions, but I also want to indicate that understanding the stories of social actors requires an act of interpretation on the part of researchers. This has been refered to as the double hermeneutic (Giddens 1984). This methodology is based on the presumptions that we live in a social world characterized by a multiplicity of events and perspectives and that the social practices are inassimilable and the reality is

intractable. Although researchers are mindful to search for multiple meanings embedded in a story, it should be acknowledged that researchers cannot extract all possible interpretations. An author's knowledge, like that of the people about whom I write, is always partial, situated, and perspective (Tsing 1993). In contrast to a case study surrounded by generalizing explanations, stories are neither data nor laws. They can be swapped and disrupted by differently situated observers (Tsing 1993). Inevitably, the study I have put together is a story about migrant women's stories.

Fieldwork

In the autumn of 2001, I began my field research for this study. The fieldwork incorporated participant observation in multiple settings and semi-structured interviews with groups and individuals. Firstly, I made observations about migrant workers at St. Christopher's Catholic Church, where many Filipino women went to Mass, and at Taipei Grand Mosque, in which a few Indonesian migrant workers worshiped Allah. Secondly, in order to know more about workers' leisure activities outside their religious practices, I made contact with them at Taipei Main Station, where many foreign workers gathered on Sundays. Initially I went there to conduct a survey of migrant workers' leisure activities on behalf of Taipei's Labor Bureau over the course of several Sundays. Over time, I began talking with the migrant workers after conducting the questionnaires. I asked them about their work, the relationship with their employers, and their lives back home.

The migrant workers I talked to at Taipei Main Station were at first astonished at my interest in them, but then most of them were willing to talk about their jobs and lives. I was surprised at their frankness and confidence. They showed me photos of their children or sweethearts, and shared stories about the sunny as well as the dark side of their everyday lives. Many of them told me that they were satisfied with their

jobs; they said employers treated them like one of the family; they were always receiving small gifts from them; Taiwan is by the far the most friendly among countries where they have worked.

Sometimes, however, I heard or perceived the tension between migrant domestic workers and their employers. They told me that they had to strive for the right to have a day off, for the freedom to have friends (one domestic complained: "Even in prison, one can have friends!"), to refuse to conduct work beyond the contracts, to maintain their dignity or to preserve the control of their bodies (e.g. what they put on, when they take a shower). They complained that their employers shouted and criticized too much, that their working hours were too long, they had no regular days off, and some even suffered physical or sexual abuse. Once I was emotionally very struck by an encounter with a newly arrived Indonesian domestic. She told me falteringly that she was actually not free on that day and had come in secret to make a remittance for her sick brother. She said she had to work both as a domestic at her employer's home and as a worker at her employer's factory. She could handle the housework well, but she suffered from the carrying work she had to do in the factory. The heavy labor gave her back pain. I suggested that she should carry only a little at a time. She said, "It won't work". Her employer would get angry with her, if she worked too slowly. She said her officially registered work was as a domestic helper[3], and not as a porter, and asked why she had to work as porter in a factory. She didn't understand. She repeated the sentence "It really gives me pain", and burst into tears. Finally, she asked me whether

[3] Unlike in Hong Kong, domestic workers in Taiwan were in two categories- domestic helper and caregiver divided. The former does the housework, and is also responsible for taking care of children and the elderly while the latter are responsible for taking care of patients or disabled persons in the household. There is quota limitation for recruiting domestic helpers but no limitation for caregivers according to the policy of the government (Lin 1999). Moreover, the government assumes that there is more need for caregivers than for domestic helper in the society, so one must pay more regulation fee for application for a domestic helper. Therefore, often women on a carer work contract are actually forced to be domestics or to be both. The term domestic worker in my research refers to both domestic helper and caregiver.

her employer would be informed of this talk. I answered no, and she became relieved.

Along with the two sites mentioned above, the main site for my fieldwork is a district park in Taipei, which I named Spring Park in my study and which I visited to get to know foreign domestic helpers and caregivers on the job. These domestics came from the neighboring area of the park and accompanied their charges to get a breath of fresh air or to do some exercise. These moments also gave the domestic workers a chance to have a breather because most of them didn't have regular days off. During this time they had the chance to make acquaintance with other foreign workers, especially their own nationals. Every nation had its group and place. They chatted in their mother tongue, shared national food (especially in the case of the Indonesians) and exchanged tips on everyday life in Taiwan. Thanks to the relatively regular gathering and the leisure atmosphere in the park, I was able to acquaint myself with several migrant domestics, some of them very well. I spent time with them once or twice a week and took part in their activities, including chatting, picnicking, and celebrating birthdays. Sometimes I asked to go with them, if I knew they had planned shopping tours or outings; sometimes they invited me to join them.

My fieldwork did not take a smooth course at the beginning. It cost me more energy to approach migrant domestics in the park than elsewhere. I found that it was easier to approach Filipino workers than Indonesian workers. Most of the Filipino workers were interested in my research and were willing to talk about their life in Taiwan, once I had explained my research. On the contrary, most of the Indonesian workers placed no trust in me and ignored my presence. I thought their different response might be a result of their knowledge of language and education level. Filipino workers are generally educated and relatively fluent in English, so we were able to understand

each other better.[4] For this reason, I hired a translator, Imelda, who is Indonesian Chinese and was studying in Taiwan. Although it became easier to approach the Indonesian workers with Imelda's help, we still didn't earn their trust. Most of the Indonesian workers came from Java. Sometimes they talked about us in Javanese, not in *Bahasa Indonesia* (Indonesian official language), so that even Imelda couldn't understand their speech. On and off we had luck and found someone who was eager to talk to us. Some of them told us more details or even secrets; of course these were only secrets they were willing to confide in us, such as sexual harassment from their bosses. Due to the presence of their employers, these secrets were not translated immediately but rather at a later point. Although I profited from the assistance of my translator, I found I had to establish a personal relationship with them without the translator, if I were to become closer friends with them. So I decided to learn a little Bahasa Indonesia and ask the Indonesian workers to be my teachers. They taught me gladly, and later I learned that they could speak more Mandarin (the official language in Taiwan) and *Minnanhua* (a dialect of *Fujian* province, South China, the dominant dialect in Taiwan) than I suspected. Unlike Filipino workers, most Indonesian workers are not proficient in English. Precisely due to that, they have more motivation to learn the local language of the host countries. Sometimes I was requested to help them with difficulties in spoken language and to decode information that was written in Mandarin or *Minnanhua*. When we greeted one another with "Apa kabar?"("How are you" in Indonesian) and "Baik"("Fine" in Indonesian), a closer relationship was established. In addition to the mutual aid of languages, I played another role in our relationship. I took part in the project that was in charge of research on foreign workers' leisure activities for the foreign worker center of the Labor Bureau of Taipei City. I conducted the questionnaire for the project and began to pay more attention to

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[4] I will discuss this topic in detail in chapter 3.

immigration and labor laws and regulations. I found that many domestic workers were not well informed about their rights and the approaches to appeal. Therefore I brought them publications regarding migrant worker rights in their language. I told them about a few broadcasts for migrant workers. Most of the programs were on a weekly basis and sponsored by the government. Reports on current affairs in their homelands as well as the news of Taiwan were broadcasted. Moreover, legal advice for migrant workers was provided. The program for Indonesian workers was called “Hallo Taipei”, and then they nicknamed me “Sister Hallo Taipei”. The district park become my major field site and the Indonesian workers who gathered there became the main figures in my research, not only because I had access to them in the park and had earned their trust, but because the sum of Indonesian domestic workers and caregivers had overtaken that of their Philippine counterparts since 2001. Of course, I have not excluded the migrant workers of other nationalities, such as the Thais and the Vietnamese whom I also got to know in the park.

Furthermore, being a volunteer with the Migrant Workers’ Concern Desk which enabled me to visit the inmates in the Shan-shia detention center for foreigners, I became acquainted with migrant women in extremely serious situations. Most of the inmates were runaway migrant workers, who were waiting for the passports (numerous employers and recruitment agencies retain their domestics’ passports) and tickets to be repatriated. Some of them had also been accused of theft by employers and awaited trials. On the other hand, some runaway domestics had accused their employers or agents of sexual harassment or rape. The judicial process was time-consuming. A stay of several months was not unusual. All of the female inmates, often more than one hundred people, slept in bunk beds and lived in a hall, which had no partitions except for the toilets. The inmates had to pay the board and lodging themselves and had no chance to earn money during their period of detention. The

financial and physical stress for them was understandably enormous. Once a week we brought them some articles for daily use and listened to their problems and provided some voluntary aid of our own, for example by making some calls to police, agencies or employers to ask about the dates of repatriation, prosecution, or to inquire about detained personal belongings. Although it seems odd, if they received the information about how long they would serve their term of imprisonment, they were disburdened and "happy" about it.

Overview of Chapters

This study focuses on the migration experiences of female domestic workers within Southeast Asia and the travel practices with which they are associated. Thus, travel practices and the travel-related forms of knowledge that are essential to understanding their experiences are the principal components of my study. The study is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 1 outlines the theoretical underpinnings that guide my study and relates it to previous research on migrant domestic workers.

The second chapter observes the negotiation of meaning and power between migrant workers and the Taiwanese community in a public space, the so-called "foreign worker weekend enclave" in Taipei, Taipei Main Station. Unlike the area around Statue Square in Hong Kong and Lucky Plaza in Singapore, not only have large numbers of female migrant workers sprung up in Taipei Main Station, but their male counterparts too. In what ways do migrant workers present themselves in public spaces? Are migrant domestic workers able to create their "own" public spaces? Additionally, I am interested in how people might contest the meanings ascribed to public spaces by the dominant social order, and how they attach their own meanings to a space.

In order to understand the nature of labor migration from Southeast Asia to

Taiwan, an inquiry into the social context of Taiwan, the relationship between Taiwan and Southeast Asia, and the respective contexts of migration in the countries of Southeast Asia, is an indispensable prerequisite. Chapter 3 delineates and analyzes the shape of gendered migration and the Taiwanese constructions of domestic worker. Furthermore, I illustrate diverse routes migrant women's to Taiwan and their community within the context of their mobility.

Chapter 4 deals with the intermediaries that facilitate migration from the household to the proliferation of employment agencies and brokers that have created an international labor market of "supermaids", while chapter 5 reveals the more intimate and underrepresented aspect of migrant women's experience: sexual harassment in the workplace and romantic attachments. This chapter not only attempts to retell such stories but also to explore the gender conventions behind them and the changing meanings of gender in the interethnic context.

The incident which is central to my discussion in chapter 6, occurred in February 2003 in Taiwan, between an Indonesian domestic, Vinarsih, and her wheelchair-bound charge, Liu Hsia, a well-known writer and advocate of the rights of the underprivileged. On an early morning in February 2003, Liu's mother heard Liu scream from her bedroom, rushed to her and saw Liu lying on the ground and Vinarsih seizing Liu's legs. Liu's mother called an ambulance and Liu was rushed to hospital. The next day Liu died of an atrial flutter. After that Vinarsih was detained and requested to attend a medical inspection in a Hospital. According to the report from the hospital, she was suspected of suffering from conversion disorder, a type of hysteria. The Indonesian domestic was ordered to be repatriated owing to the incapacity of the courts to dispose of justice. Drawing on Austin's notion of performative speech act theory and the derivative discussions of different authors, I attempt to rethink this incident.

In chapter 7 I conclude my thesis by reiterating its main arguments and by summarizes the findings of the chapters in support of it.

1 Approach and Theory

This study focuses on the mobility of female domestic workers within Southeast Asia and the practices which make up their everyday life in Taiwan. In order to evaluate my data and interpret my observations, this chapter outlines the theoretical underpinnings that guide my study and relates it to previous research on migrant domestic workers.

1.1 Gender, Migration and Domestic Work

The first part of this section reflects on the theoretical assumptions guiding most of the scholarship on gender and migration in the past decades. In the second part of the section, I review the most important themes and approaches in the literature on migrant domestic workers.

1.1.1 On the Gender Trail in Migration Research

Although it would nowadays be unthinkable to omit a gender-based perspective in the contemporary scholarly literature on migration, this has not always been the case. With the efforts of feminists in the 1980s, migration studies that consciously sought to focus upon the presence of women and gender in the migration process gained salience. It can nonetheless be said that even as late as 1990, as documented in the report of a group of UN experts: The extent of female international migration has been a largely neglected subject. Lack on readily available information on the participation of women in international migration is probably at the root of the conventional view that the typical migrant is a young economically motivated male. Although in the course of the last two decades gender has been recognized as a variable in migration studies, female migration has only recently been included within

the rubric of general migration theories. Consequently, the reasons for and characteristics of gender-differentiated mobility have not yet been adequately addressed in conceptual terms.

To appreciate why women were largely absent from the migration studies which emerged in the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s, it is useful to reflect on the theoretical assumptions guiding most of the scholarship on migration during that period. Early migration studies were dominated by economic theory. An essential assumption made about migration was that the migration of labor is a response to a wage differential or inequality between the source and destination countries, caused by a difference in their relative levels of socioeconomic development. Migration was therefore reduced to the mere circulation of labor force, while the social, cultural, political and institutional dimensions of the phenomenon were subordinated to economic logic (Glick Schiller et al., 1992). Neoclassical theory, structuralist or Marxist approaches, and world-system theory constitute examples of these approaches.

Neoclassical theory depicted migration essentially as a function of wage-rate differentials between regions (Todaro 1969). According to this portrayal, the term “migrant” carried a masculine connotation. It was males who were assumed to be the breadwinners, heading off to work in the cities. The migration research of this period also suffered from the more general tendency to disregard women’s contributions to economic, political, and social life, and appraise women within the confines of stereotypical family-related and reproductive roles (Nash 1986). During this period, women were either ignored or treated as dependents of their male family members (Boyd 1989; Chant and Radcliffe 1992). Researchers assumed either that only male immigrants’ lives were worthy of official documentation and scrutiny (Handlin 1973) or that the experience of male migrants was gender-neutral, thus making it unnecessary to include women at all, except in short accounts of the men's families.

Structural Marxist approaches were concerned with the global penetration of capitalism into peripheral, non-capitalist societies. They placed special emphasis on the reorganization of production, which arises from the spatial distribution (and redistribution) of labor requirements among the different sectors of national and international economies (Potts 1990; Sassen-Koob 1984). For example, Claude Meillassoux (1981), in his pioneering work, pointed out that the broad range of activities assumed by the migrant wives who remained in rural African communities was essential to the social reproduction of male migrant labor on a seasonal and generational basis. Although he acknowledged that women who engaged in non-capitalist activities within the household and the migrant community were situated in a contradictory and exploited relationship vis-à-vis the capitalist economy, Meillassoux did not go on to analyze the equally exploitative social and economic relations within migrant households (Pessar 1999). Most structuralists regard migrant workers, in the first instance, as the working class of the global market. Their primary focus is on production, while the relations of reproduction in which women are mainly involved remain marginalized.

The historical-structuralist approach draws broadly on Marxist thought and more specifically on the work of dependency theory such as André Gunder Frank (1967) and world-system theorists such as Immanuel Wallerstein (1974). Whereas dependency theory concerned itself with the relationships between nations and their colonies and between "developed" and "underdeveloped" nations, world-system theory expanded the area of analysis to a global space within which nation-states were relativized vis-á-vis other units. Furthermore, while dependency theory divided the zone of analysis into centers and peripheries, world-system theory supported a more complex, less polar imagery of space-time, with a "semi-periphery" interposed between the centers and the peripheries (Kearney 1995: 550). The focus was on the

New International Division of Labor, which is achieved by flows of capital and labor.

All three of the neoclassical, structural Marxist, or world-system perspectives focus on the macroeconomic process which produces regional inequalities or the necessary conditions for migrants. Migration is seen as the result of sociospatial inequalities, systematically reproduced within global and national economies. Gender is conceived of as a mere variable rather than as a central theoretical concept (Morokvasic 1984; Gurak and Kritz 1982). When gender is included in neoclassical studies, it is treated as one of many determinants in a wage regression analysis. The assumption is also made that the way in which human capital is translated into wages is the same for women and men (Taylor 1987). These approaches are clearly inadequate to the task of understanding why men and women often adopt such different forms of mobility, and why female mobility itself is so differentiated. Similarly, the structuralist framework's emphasis on relations of production, and the relative lack of attention to the relations of reproduction in households and communities, means that particular reasons for and correlates of female mobility tend to remain ignored or inadequately explained. These approaches provide a placement for the individual, but the individual is expected to behave in a specific way, i.e. he decides rationally and deliberately, and there is no difference between the behavior of men and women.

Among the scholars of this economy-oriented tradition, the concept of household strategies is very popular, since it mediates between the micro and macro levels of analysis (Rouse 1989: 4). The household is defined as a social institution which organizes resources and recruits and allocates labor in a combination of reproductive and productive tasks (Wood 1981). Gender-based divisions of labor are crucial to livelihood and provide a basic template for household decisions about who migrates and who stays. Critics of this approach do however claim it to treat the household as a

monolithic, altruistic unit and to obscure intra-household conflicts (Wolf 1992).

Anthropologists have been at the forefront in theorizing on the significance of gender in migration (Brydon 1987; Buijs 1993; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992, 1994; Morokvasic 1983, 1984; Phizacklea 1983). They focus on the role and experience of migrating women, on the changes that occur in family and on kinship patterns as a result of migration (Brettell 2000). Much of this research draws on analytical models at the heart of feminist anthropology, e.g. the domestic/public model, the opposition between production and reproduction, and issues of power and resistance (Fernandez-Kelly 1990; Lamphere 1987; Mills 1998). In the past twenty years, a multitude of case studies on migrant women in different parts of the world have been published. They highlight the significant role of women in the process of migration and indicate a set of influences of cultural factors (including gender ideology), class differences and economic constraints on the migration. I explain their efforts and results in more detail below.

1.1.2 A Review of the Literature on Migrant Domestic Workers

In the wake of the civil rights and women's movements in the United States, the research on women's labor in the home flourished. Research in the 1960s and 1970s focused on the oppression of women's unpaid work in the home, and later, in the 1980s, directed more and more attention to paid domestic service. Most of these studies are historical explorations and focus on the USA and Western Europe. Although there are considerable works on paid domestic work in the United States and Western Europe, followed by those focusing on Latin America, Southern Africa, and finally Asia, paid domestic work has not been viewed as an area of prestige in the world of academia, since it often relates to inequalities among women. Rollins expresses this very succinctly: "In no other work arrangement is it typical for both

employer and employee to be female" (1985: 6-7). Thus, only very recently have book-length studies about migrant domestic workers in Asia and from Asia become available (Moors 2003).

Domestic workers are very often assumed to be "oppressed". Both unpaid and paid household work, which was predominantly reserved for women, was thought to be an aspect of oppression of all women. It was only in the mid-1980s that many studies acknowledged that women should not be looked upon as a homogeneous group and that the experiences of all women are not identical. As a result, scholars became aware that not only gender factor, but also other factors, contribute to the asymmetrical relationships inherent in paid domestic work. There has been increasing interest in the independent and combined significance of gender, class, race/ethnicity, and migration in relation to paid household work (Dill 1980, 1988; Glenn 1986, 1992; Katzman 1978; Palmer 1989; Rollins 1985; Romero 1988). Palmer's *Domesticity and Dirt* (1989), for example, examines women's complicity in maintaining the gendered construction of housework, along with the different experiences of domestic work and the meanings associated with housework and "race" in the period 1920-45. Glenn (1986) challenges what she calls the "additive model of race and gender oppression" through an examination of the racial divisions of reproductive labor which highlights both hierarchy and interdependence among women (Anderson 2000: 10).

Since then, the relationship between migration and domestic service has been gradually addressed. Research on the USA, however, focuses on why the migrants of specific ethnic groups inland have little or no choice of occuptions other than stigmatized domestic work, as is for instance the case for Japanese American women in California and Hawaii (Glenn1986). Although there are some parallels between the situations of women of racilialized groups, whose immigration took place either recently, or a longer time ago, and the situations of the women in my study, who are

temporary migrant workers, I argue that the problematique in these two cases is differently constructed. The two groups are dissimilar in terms of both migration process and immigration status, and thus also in job opportunities, working conditions, resources and networks. Over recent decades, the scale of female migrants who engage in paid domestic employment has increased. The new forms of this global migration and the associated growing ethnic diversity of international labor markets are related to fundamental transformations in the economic, social, and political structures in the postmodern and post-Cold War epoch (Castles and Miller 1998: 2). My review thereof concentrates on studies which directly relate to migrant domestic workers. Due to the different approaches and focuses, I demarcate the research on migrant domestic workers into four categories:

1) Internationalization of reproductive labor

Some scholars conceptualize migrant domestic workers in relation to the internationalization of the division of labor. They emphasize the way in which reproductive labor has been increasingly commodified transnationally and the consequences this shift has had in the host and source, or the sending and receiving, countries. The commercial character of migrant domestic workers has been emphasized for the first time. Scholars term this phenomenon "the trade in domestic workers" (Heyzer 1994), or "maid to order" (Constable 1997). Furthermore, they highlight both the inequalities among regions and countries, and the inequalities among women. Most migrant women work abroad as nannies and housekeepers, while their children remain in their countries of origin and require care as well. At the same time, "the global nanny chain" (Hochschild 2000) produces "transnational mothering" (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). Hochschild illustrates it so: a typical chain ends with a woman in a rich country pursuing professional employment and

finding herself unable to fulfill her obligations within the family. She regards the migration of domestic workers as part of a global care chain, a series of personal links between people based on the paid and unpaid work of caring. The zones of professional employment within the field of industrialized employment still require “finding someone else to deal with domestic chores”. In the past, the professional was a man, and this “someone else” was his wife. The increasing numbers of dual-career households have been forced to seek someone else further down the global chain. Many of these women have children of their own at home. In most cases, their husbands do not take over their work. For migrant women, the solution to this problem is to employ a live-in domestic worker from a non-migrant family to care for her family. In the non-migrant family, an older daughter takes over this work, while the mother is away. The problems created by the gender-based division of labor in industrialized countries are not solved, but passed on to other women (female relatives, e.g. mother, mother-in-law, or female domestic workers) (Phizacklea 1999).

Furthermore, Hochschild (2002) regards the global chain of caregiving work and domestic labor, which most migrant women are engaged in, as the extraction of emotional resources, and parallels them with the extraction of material resources in imperialistic era. Unlike imperialism in its classic form, the main protagonists are virtually all women. Even without “colonial officers in tan helmets, no invading armies, no ships bearing arms sailing off to the colonies”, the extraction of emotional resources seems no less brutal than the extraction of material resources.

Parreñas (2001) emphasizes the way in which a global commodification of caregiving produces a hierarchical chain of reproductive labor. Furthermore, the transnational mother-child ties are often reduced to commodity-based relations, with love shown through material goods. Overseas employment results in a lack of intimacy and an increase in emotional insecurity for the affected children. Gamburd

(2002) describes the migrant mothers from Sri Lanka as being confronted with the same problem – "the fragmentation of motherhood". Although these women have to deliver mothering to other people, who are often female relatives, they are proud of earning money with which to broaden the spectrum of acceptable ways to love their children and care for their families. The perceptions of the women in the village and those who take care of the children of migrants has also changed, as they are aware of the market value of women's domestic work.

The research on "the global nanny chain" and 'transnational mothering" highlights the gendered division of labor and power relations within the household (Chant 1998; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997) and the consequences for migrants' families. Scholars engaging in this approach raise questions about the meanings, variation, and inequalities inherent in domestic work and motherhood in the late twentieth century, and, furthermore, they address the issues of migration and emancipation.

Essentially, almost all contract workers are obliged to migrate on their own and leave their families behind, whether they are male or female. Nevertheless, women's migration is deemed more problematic for families than men's migration, especially where the woman's role as a mother is concerned (Asis 1994). The "disruption of family" as well as the destruction of gender norms are commonly associated with women's migration. The association of family dynamics with contract migration would appear to be an issue of import following the emergence of the feminization of contract migration.

2) Strategies of resistance

In no other form of labor like domestic service is the worker-employer relationship so fraught with tension, since paid domestic work brings people from very different backgrounds together in realms of intimate and highly personalized interaction in the

domestic sphere (Moors 2003). The ways in which employers deal with migrant domestic workers and the responses of the domestics are often the focus of studies. Many previous studies underline the causes and manifestations of oppression in the workplace and the means by which employers dominate household workers. Recent scholars acknowledge the tensions and the unequal power relationship between employer and domestic worker, but emphasize that migrant domestic workers are not by all means passive victims, but attempt to act strategically, not only in the workplace, but also in the entire process of migration (Chell 2000; Constable 1997; Lavie and Swedenburg 1996; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Mitchell 1997; Tacoli 1999; Yeoh and Huang 1998; Yeoh and Willis 1999).

Constable's (1997) book concentrates not only on the control and discipline exercised by agencies and employers, but also on the subtle everyday ways in which Filipino domestics respond to such modes of control. The forms of discipline range from physical abuse to intrusive regulations including restrictions on hair length and the prohibition of lipstick. Filipino domestic workers themselves reflect upon and partake in negotiations of difference and power in a great variety of ways. Domestic workers may passively acquiesce in their employer's every desire yet alleviate their stress with jokes and pranks. Some of them resist oppression more vocally through legal action and political protests.

3) State control and labor migration

In earlier decades, when much of migration involved permanent movement out of countries, governments had little interest in intervening in the process (Gulati 2006: 54). However, since the demand for domestic labor and temporary migrant workers has increased globally, governments have become directly involved in migration, both at the sending and the receiving ends.

Sending countries have a strong interest in maintaining relations with labor migrants as they are a major source of foreign currency. They establish some institutions which market their female nationals as global service providers and attempt to cash in on this “vital export commodity” (Rosca 1995: 524), for example, in the form of departure tax. The governments of receiving countries center on controlling the employment of foreign domestic workers. They decide from which countries migrant workers can come and which types of families can employ them, and stipulate employment and working conditions, in many cases allowing migrant domestic workers to work on a live-in basis, tied to a certain employer, limiting the duration of the labor contract, and prohibiting the workers from permanent settlement and family reunification (Moors 2003). Due to the central figure of governments in international labor migration, many scholars make efforts to illustrate a variety of structural and legislative restrictions. Studies on receiving communities include Anderson (2000) on Europe; Bakan and Stasiulis (1997) and England and Stiell (1997) on Canada; French (1986) and Constable (1997) on Hong Kong; Wong (1996) and Yeoh and Huang (1998) on Singapore; Chin (1998) on Malaysia; and Lin (1999) and Lan (2000) on Taiwan. Studies focusing on the sending countries include: Enloe (1989) on the Philippines; Robinson (2000); and Gamburd (2002) on Sri Lanka.

4) Identity politics and migrant domestic workers

Some researchers are interested in how migrants “engage in complex activities across borders that create, shape and potentially transform their identities in multiple ways” over time (Glick Schiller et al 1992: 4). The research on this topic highlights the fact that today's migrant worker does not sever the connection with their past and their homeland completely, but inhabits two worlds simultaneously. Many scholars are devoted to exploring the ways in which a migrant woman constructs her identity.

Recent scholars share a concept of identity as a dynamic, ongoing process that is "politically contested and historically unfinished" (Clifford 1988: 9). Identities are fluid and multi-layered. As migrant domestic workers, their identities are not only influenced by the intensely personal interactions with employers and determined by hierarchies in the host countries, but also by a "back-linking" with the past and the homeland, whether this is in terms of religions, values, relationships or family ties. Scholars are attempting to explore how the multiple dimensions of identity interact and come into play in settings where competing hierarchies are manifest.

Constructions of ethnic or national identities seem to be a core concern of many studies on transnational labor migration. Constable (1997; 2000) observes how Filipino domestic workers articulate, embrace, and reject certain images of their national identity which are entwined with gender and class identity. Robinson (2000) examines the ways in which gender, along with family and religion, is called upon to assist in the construction of national identities and transnational relations.

Yeoh and Huang (2000) examine the ways foreign domestic workers in Singapore configure their social identities under the conditions of diaspora. Lan (2000) observes that Filipino domestic workers, often holding advanced educational degrees or having professional backgrounds, experience conflicting class identities when they perform socially stigmatized domestic work in Taiwan.

Sexuality is also a facet of identity politics (Dickey and Adams 2000: 11). Few articles dealing with this aspect of identity are available. Constable (2000) portrays the intertwining of sexuality with identity politics and Philippine national imagery in Hong Kong. She illustrates how the demonstrations of lesbian Filipino domestic workers have prompted debates about what should constitute the "proper" display of sexuality and sexual orientation for Filipino women representing their country abroad.

Although the insights contained in the aforementioned studies allowed me to expand my methodological scope, the way in which I frame my exposition of migrant domestic workers in Taiwan is particularly inspired by the following theoretical approaches, that is, Foucault's and de Certeau's conception of the dynamic connection between power and resistance, Rosaldo's concept of borderland, and Butler's notion of gender and performativity.

1.2 Power and Resistance

In this study, I by no means deny the marginality of migrant domestic workers in Taiwanese society, but at the same time I acknowledge their potential for creative transgression and their struggle for rights in everyday life.

According to Foucault, power is productive, constituting the subject rather than simply constraining it, and resistance is never external to power but reinstates its norm in the very process of subversion (Mills 2003). In his view, power manifests itself not in a downward flow from the top of the social hierarchy, but flows through society in a kind of capillary action: "Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (1978: 93). Furthermore, Foucault contends that "every power relationship implies, at least *in potentia*, a strategy of struggle, in which the two forces are not superimposed, do not lose their specific nature, or do not finally become confused. Each constitutes for the other a kind of permanent limit, a point of possible reversal" (Foucault 1982: 225).

Although Foucault reveals the dynamic connections between power and resistance, he is more concerned with institutionalized formations of power relations than with individual cases of resistance. In *Discipline and Punish* (1979), Foucault proclaims a new form of power mechanism – discipline, which began to develop in Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The new form of control was

more subtle, abstract, and indirect than the harsher and more directly brutal forms of discipline found in slavery. Slavery, according to Foucault, is based on “a relation of appropriation of bodies” which was inefficient, “costly”, and “violent”. In this system, service involved “a constant, total, massive, non-analytical, unlimited relation of domination, established in the form of the individual will of the master” (1979: 137). The modern form of discipline—different from service or slavery—involves a larger “scale of control”, a “subtle coercion” of the various parts of the “mechanism itself” including such minutiae as “movements, gestures, attitudes, rapidity” (136-37). This modern, covert discipline also involves a different “object of control”, no longer the end product but the “mechanism”. The “modality” is also different, in the sense that the form of discipline involved uninterrupted, constant coercion (137). Discipline is aimed at creating not only the growth of skills, but also at “the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful” (137-38). In contrast to the previous form of control, which was full of exclusion, repression and constraint, the modern form provides technologies of self, or the ways in which individuals can “affect by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, their own souls, their own conduct, and this in a manner so as to transform themselves, modify themselves” (Foucault 1982: 210). The subordinate must behave as if under surveillance at all times, thus becoming his/her own guardian. Nonetheless, Foucault’s conception of power implicates possible modes of resistance from the margins, in Foucault’s words, “Where there is power, there is resistance” (1978: 95). But he does not discuss in detail how resistance is realized.

De Certeau takes this omission as his starting point for his attempt to show how the marginalized majority operates. For de Certeau, a society is composed of foreground practices and of innumerable other “minor” practices. While foreground practices organize its normative institutions, minor practices do not organize

discourses and remain silent (1984: 48). According to de Certeau, these practices are articulated in the details of everyday life and bring to light the clandestine "tactics" used by groups or individuals "already caught in the nets of 'discipline'" (de Certeau 1984: xiv-xv). In his research on "the practice of everyday life", de Certeau advances a decisive concept, namely "consumer production". De Certeau points out, on the one hand, that systems of production no longer leave consumers any space in which they can indicate what they do with the products of these systems; and, on the other hand, that consumers, despite this, are not at a loss of what to do, but undertake another form of production – a hidden one, refered to as "consumption" (de Certeau 1984: xii). In contrast to the mighty production system, consumption is devious, dispersed, but "it insinuates itself everywhere, silently and almost invisibly, because it does not manifest itself through its own products, but rather through its *way of using* the products imposed by a dominant economic order" (de Certeau 1984: xii-xiii). As unrecognized producers, consumers produce through their signifying practices something indirect, or errant, but they obey their own logic (de Certeau 1984: xviii). The resistance of consumers is clandestine and inconspicuous, but not non-existent.

Taking the argument one step further, I argue that the new forms of the covert mechanisms of discipline have also redefined the forms of resistance. The modes of resistance themselves also seem to have achieved a new level – they adopt a more covert approach and are primarily concerned with justification. In contrast to mechnisms of power, resistance remains sporadic, provisional and very often unorganized. In its improvised ways of operating, the effects of subversion are often deemed incalculable.

1.3 The Concept of Borderland

Inspired by Gloria Anzaldua's (1987) discussion of the imaginative and empathetic

use of a dual perspective as a “consciousness of the Borderlands”, Renato Rosaldo developed the concept of “border crossing” to describe border crossers as “complex sites of cultural production” and then addressed a renewed concept of culture, which “refers less to a unified entity (‘a culture’) than to the mundane practices of everyday life” (Rosaldo 1989:217). Ethnographers should “look less for homongeneous communities than for the border zones within and between them. Such cultural border zones are always in motion, not frozen for inspection” (1989: 217). His concept turns our attention to the creative projects of individuals without neglecting power and difference both within and across the interests of nations, classes, and local communities. The borderlands have no typical citizens; experiences there undermine the safe ground of cultural certainty and essential identity (Tsing 1993: 225). Within this framework, culture is freed from assumptions of the stable community, and we can begin to attend to “our daily lives are crisscrossed by border zones, pockets, and eruptions of all kinds” (Rosaldo 1989:207).

1.4 Gender and Performativity

The “sex and gender” debate relates to the ontological basis of the differences between men and women: are these differences determined biologically or socially? Many feminists are of the opinion that sex refers to what is biological while gender is a social construction. Women are a certain sex but they learn or perform certain gender roles which are not predetermined or tied rigidly to biological sex. Butler notes that feminists rejected the idea that biology is destiny, but then developed an account of patriarchal culture which assumes that masculine and feminine genders would inevitably be built, by culture, upon “male” and “female” bodies, making the same destiny just as inescapable (Gauntlett 1998). Butler does not deny certain kinds of biological differences, but she is concerned with the question of “under what

conditions, under what discursive and institutional conditions, do certain biological differences…become the salient characteristics of sex" (Butler 1994). Thus, sex itself is also a constructed norm and is subject to constraints in its production. Butler prefers "those historical and anthropological positions that understand gender as a relation among socially constituted subjects in specific contexts" (Butler 1990). In other words, rather than being a fixed attribute in a person, gender should be seen as a fluid variable which shifts and changes in different contexts and at different times (Gauntlett 1998). Butler claims: "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender;…identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (1990: 25). In other words, gender is a performance; it is what you do at particular times, rather than the substance of your all-embracing identity. Butler argues that we all put on a gender performance, whether traditional or not, thus it is not a question of whether or nor to "perform" a gender, but a question of what form that performance will take.

Butler adopts Foucault's conception of power as productive and Derrida's notion of performative speech acts to establish her theory of performativity. Following Foucault's conception of power, Butler argues that power works through discourse. But discourse becomes productive in a fairly specific way. Thus, Butler turns to the Derridean rewriting of Austin to produce her notion of performativity. According to Derrida, every iteration of convention is an innovation and the breaking of the utterance from prior, established contexts constitutes its force (Butler 1997: 141). Production occurs through a certain kind of repetition and recitation. For Butler, performativity is always a kind of subversive repetition. Drawing on this concept of performativity, Butler attempts "to explain how the deployments of the body through acts and gestures, especially in terms of gendered sexuality, are through a process of reiteration, productive of a discursive identity that is both open and constrained"

(Shildrick and Price 1999: 9).

2 My Place or Yours?

The Taiwanese and Their Migrant Workers at Taipei Main Station

2.1 Introduction

In the autumn of 2001, when I began the field research for my doctoral dissertation on migrant workers in Taiwan, I spent a significant amount of time at Taipei Main Station observing their recreational activities, since many migrant workers gather here on their off-days, primarily on Sundays. The majority of them originate from Southeast Asia. Labor migration from Southeast Asia to Taiwan has become a typical development among newly industrialized countries in East Asia since the 1990s. These migrant workers are primarily engaged in jobs that are characterized by low skills, low pay and low status, and which locals are no longer willing to do. They are factory workers, constructors, or live-in domestic workers. During the day, they work in factories and construction sites; in the evening, they go into their dormitories. Domestic workers are confronted with the severest lack of space in their everyday lives, because they often spend their week in their employers' cramped apartments and seldom have a chance to go out. Private space, for all of them, is almost nonexistent. Only on Sundays are they able to flee from their daily routine and the surveillance of their employers, and enjoy some relaxation and privacy. Therefore many of them seek a place to loll around and thus stream into a crowded place – Taipei Main Station, which would occur to no local as a place for relaxation. The presence of this "weekend enclave" surprises locals not only because of the intensity of the crowd, but also because of the vastly different appropriation of this public space by the Taiwanese and the migrant workers, respectively.

2.2 Sundays at Taipei Main Station

Taipei City is a metropolis with 2.6 million residents, and approximately one million people commute to the city to work every day. Taipei Main Station is the largest Taiwanese railway station and also functions as the nexus for Taipei's public transport system, MRT (Mass Rapid Transit). Outside the station building there are bus depots whose routes extend throughout Taipei City and Taipei County. Taipei Main Station itself is a large building which houses multiple rail services as well as serving as the headquarters of the Taiwan Railway Administration. The railway platforms are located on the B2 level, while the B1 level serves as a waiting area. Ticketing services are on the first floor, while the second floor contains a food court and several stores. On workdays, this building and its surrounding area always embodies stress and haste. It is a brief stopping place prior to departure, a meeting-place, a place of transfer, and a thoroughfare. However, on Sundays, Taipei Main Station acquires a different face to its usual one. Once a week, Taipei Main Station appears to metamorphose into a tourist attraction. We see more migrants than locals. They are smartly dressed, in good humor and busy themselves by taking snapshots. They frequently spend their off-days in and around the main station. They settle in the lobby and assemble themselves along ethnic lines. The Filipinos gather on the southern side, while the Indonesians claim the northern side. The Thais, most of whom are men, tend to congregate on the sidewalks around the building, if it is not a rainy day. Some of them cluster together in a stationary group, sitting, drinking, sharing a meal and chatting amongst themselves. Others stroll around from one side of the station to another to visit their compatriots situated in various corners of the station. A number of them queue for the public phones, while some pose for photographs. Others hang around and watch silently as the crowds pass by. The different groupings are constantly in flux and amoeboid. They drift from one place to another within the station. Nobody wishes to be alone. On

Sundays, the railway station is occupied by cheerfulness rather than by haste. The major transfer hub becomes a playground.

The popularity of Taipei Main Station among migrant workers can be explained in several ways. A typically large railway station such as that in Taipei accommodates a variety of amenities: snack bars, bakeries, groceries, photo studios, boutiques, a post office and countless telephones, not to mention air-conditioning throughout the whole station. Its location is also advantageous: the station is centrally situated in a transportation network which combines the train, subway and bus systems. A lot of amenities together under one roof serves as another convenience. The workers can remit money home, send packages to their families, buy products from their homelands, and meet their friends at the same time, all without leaving the station. In addition, the regular gathering of a large number of migrant workers makes the main station much more attractive. It is possible to meet many peers and compatriots here, even without prior arrangement. They share news from home, have a meal or go on an outing together. Where there are people, something is always going on. Not surprisingly, the workers return again and again, Sunday after Sunday. The influence of the migrant workers on the station infrastructure can be detected in, for example, snack bars which offer Southeast Asian dishes, and some shops supplying Southeast Asian groceries. Surrounding the railway terminal, discos and other entertainment, such as karaoke, which cater to the tastes of migrant workers can also be found.

Week after week, the migrant workers' use of the station deviates from the rules that the authorities expect to be followed. Initially, as the number and visibility of migrant workers increased, so did complaints about their "taking over" of Taipei Main Station, with one even coming from a member of Parliament. The Taipei City authorities attempted to encourage the weekend enclave to move to a stadium. The Filipinos the first to be persuaded to change location, because the stadium is situated

on the route to St. Christopher's Catholic Church, where many Filipinos go to Mass, just several stations further. But the attempt failed. The stadium is situated away from the center and boasts none of the conveniences of Taipei Main Station. For migrant workers from other countries, meeting at this stadium would mean going out of their way. Place is not equal to place.

2.3 The Problematique

As a result of my observations, I focus on the following questions: firstly, what differentiates the behavior of migrant workers from that of the locals in the station? For example, through their choice to loiter rather than pass through the station, and their collectiveness versus the locals' individualism? Secondly, how do migrant workers create their own space in the station? Additionally, I am interested in how people might contest the meanings ascribed to public spaces by the dominant social order, and how they attach their own meanings to a space.

2.4 Theories

There have been different approaches to the *problematique* of space and society. Michel Foucault, in his work on the prison (1979) and in a series of articles on space (Foucault 1986), takes a historical approach to the spatialization of social control through the analysis of the human body, spatial arrangements, and architecture. He examines the relationship of power and space by positing architecture as a mechanism of political "technology" with which the power of one group is maintained over another at a level that includes the control of movement and the surveillance of the body in space as well as the transformation of spatial ideologies. In this process, as Foucault argues, "the gaze" plays an important role. The gaze is a mechanism of disciplinary power and controls order in such a way that, at a glance, we can

determine the appropriate ways of behaving in a given situation. The public bodily performance is regulated not only by the gaze of others but also by the gaze of our own self-reflection. The gaze is potent because it gives "power of mind over mind", so that individuals exercise self-discipline, producing subjugated, or what he terms "docile", bodies. Through Foucault's studies of such "microphysics of power", "the grid of 'discipline' is everywhere becoming clearer and more extensive" (de Certeau 1984:xiv). In Foucault's spatial theory, resistance from the margins is possible, in Foucault's words, "Where there is power, there is resistance" (1978:95), yet he does not discuss in detail how this resistance is realized.

Like Foucault, the Marxist Henri Lefebvre (1991) argues that absolute command over physical space ensures "invisible" control over the social reproduction of power relations. Control cannot be understood apart from conceptualizations of space which legitimize and naturalize socio-spatial relations and which are manipulated in conflict situations. Notwithstanding viewing space as a product of extensive social control, Henri Lefebvre hints at a capacity and permission to resist, but in reality, he laments "the silence of the 'users' of this space" who "allow themselves to be manipulated in ways so damaging to their spaces and their daily life without embarking on massive revolts" (1991:51).

Most approaches emphasize the role of a hegemonic power in the organization and regulation of places, and obscure any potential for the contestation of such a power. By contrast, the French philosopher and historian Michel de Certeau offers a different insight into this social encounter. Although he does recognize the fact of asymmetrical power relationships which reign over the practices of society, at the same time he emphasizes the opportunism inherent in a potential. He argues,

it is all the more urgent to discover how an entire society resist being reduced to it,

> what popular procedures (also 'miniscule' and quotidian) manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them, and finally, what 'ways of operating' from the counterpart, on the consumer's (or 'dominee's'?) side, of the mute processes that organize the establishment of socioeconomic order" (de Certeau 1984:xiv).

De Certeau points out how the mass of society defends itself from the exterior mechanisms of discipline through "ways of operating". The term 'way' refers to "the clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical, and makeshift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of 'discipline'" (1984:xiv-xv). "Pushed to their ideal limits, these procedures and ruses of consumers compose the network of an antidiscipline" (1984:xv). De Certeau considers resistance to be neither an arbitrary affair, in the way that Foucault does, nor a unique occurrence, as Lefebvre conceives of it. Resistance, as de Certeau contends, has its own logic of action and is articulated in the details of everyday life by means of a multitude of "tactics". According to this thesis, de Certeau develops a theory of inhabited space which deals with spatial issues.

Regarding space, de Certeau reveals that "it is the partition of space that structures it" (1984:123). He suggests that almost all separations in the world concern this kind of distinction:

> From the distinction that separates a subject from its exteriority to the distinctions that localize objects, from the home…to the journey…from the functioning of the urban network to that of the rural landscape, there is no spatiality that is not organized by the determination of frontiers (de Certeau 1984:123).

Where "the progressive appropriations…and the successive displacements…of the acting subjects meet" (1984:126), there are limits, partitions. Due to various encounters, a dynamic distribution of goods and functions emerges and an

increasingly complex network of differentiation, a combinative system of spaces, is established. Such separation characterizes not only a frontier but also a bridge. There is "a dynamic contradiction between each delimitation and its mobility" (126). The determination of space is dual and operational, and like an interlocutory process (126). Boundaries are not fixed but "transportable limits and transportations of limits" (129). How can subjects displace boundaries, shape their outlets and fulfil their expectations of spaces?

At the outset of his research on *The practice of everyday life*, de Certeau advances a decisive concept, namely "consumer production". De Certeau points out, on the one hand, that systems of production no longer leave consumers any space in which to indicate what they make or do with the products of these systems; on the other hand, that consumers, despite this, are not at a loss what to do: they undertake another form of production – a hidden one, called "consumption" (1984:xii). In contrast to production, consumption is devious, dispersed, but "it insinuates itself everywhere, silently and almost invisibly, because it does not manifest itself through its own products, but rather through its *way of using* the products imposed by a dominant economic order" (1984:xii-xiii). As unrecognized producers, consumers produce through their signifying practices something indirect, or errant, but in doing so obey their own logic. Furthermore, to elaborate upon the scheme of the relation between consumers and the mechanisms of production, de Certeau resorts to a distinction between *tactics* and *strategies*. Along with the idea of production and consumption, according to de Certeau, lies the analogue of strategy and tactic. By "strategy" he means:

> the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific

> institution) can be isolated. It postulates a place that can be delimited as its own and serve as the base from which relations with an exteriority composed of targets or threats (customers or competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, objectives and objects of research, etc.) can be managed (1984:35-6).

By contrast, a "tactic" is:

> a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. No delimitation of an exteriority, then, provides it with the condition necessary for autonomy. The place of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a migrant power. It does not have the means to keep to itself, at a distance, in a position of withdrawal, foresight, and self-collection (de Certeau 1984:37).

"Strategy" also differs from "tactic" with regards to "time":

> The "proper" is a victory of space over time. On the contrary, because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time – it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized "on the wing". Whatever it wins, it does not keep. It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into "opportunities" (de Certeau 1984:xix).

The tactics of the weak involve slices of time. Using but not possessing, the "nowhere" characteristic of the tactic asks for renewed action time and again:

> It must vigilantly make use of cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the propriety powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse (de Certeau 1984:37).

Lacking its own place, lacking a view of the whole, limited by the blindness resulting from combat at close quarters, and restricted by the possibilities of the moment, a tactic is determined by the absence of power just as a strategy is organized by the

postulation of power (de Certeau 1984). Tactics insinuate themselves into the place of another without the privilege of separation; they are not a frontal assault on an external power, but makeshift, temporary infiltrations from the inside through actions of thefts, hijacks, tricks and pranks. As an example, de Certeau takes the indigenous Indians under Spanish colonization:

> Even when they were subjected, indeed even when they accepted their subjection, the Indians often used the laws, practices, and representations that were imposed on them by force or by fascination to ends other than those of their conquerors; they made something else out of them; they subverted them from within—not by rejecting them or by transforming them…but by many different ways of using them in the service of rules, customs or convictions migrant to the colonization which they could not escape. They metaphorized the dominant order: they made it function in another register. They remained other within the system which they assimilated and which assimilated them externally. They diverted it without leaving it. Procedures of consumption maintained their difference in the very space that the occupier was organizing (de Certeau 1984:32).

Subordinates cannot escape the dominant order, but they can adapt it to their own ends. Discipline, as de Certeau asserts, is constantly deflected and resisted by those who are caught in its "nets", and their "dispersed, tactical, and makeshift creativity" constitutes an "antidiscipline", which Foucault's analysis ignores. It concerns clever tricks, legerdemain, hunter's cunning and the age-old ruses of fishes and insects that disguise or transform themselves in order to survive. In short, a tactic is an art of the weak.

The same goes for the use of urban space. In the chapter "Walking in the city", de Certeau asks us to imagine looking down onto Manhattan from the 110th floor of the World Trade Center (which was still in existence at the time de Certeau wrote the article). The skyscraper affords a "totalizing" perspective and the scopic "pleasure of 'seeing the whole'" (1984:92). Spatial rationalizations are determined from a

delimited place, a “base from which relations” can establish “exteriority” (de Certeau 1984:36). This distance affords a strategic perspective, an eye from above, which is a fiction of Renaissance painters who “represented the city as seen in a perspective that no eye had yet enjoyed” (1984:92). This view does not correspond to the actual lived experience of citizens. The ordinary citizens of a city live “below the thresholds at which visibility begins” (de Certeau 1984:93). De Certeau succinctly expresses such difference in one sentence: “What the map cuts up, the story cuts across” (1984:129). Power in spatial practices is about territory and boundaries in which the weapons of the strong are classification, delineation, and division – which he calls strategies – while the weak use furtive movement, short cuts and routes – so-called tactics – to contest this spatial domination. The tactic is consigned to using the space of the powerful in cunning ways. The tactic never creates nor relies upon the existence of a place for power or identity. It never produces ‘proper places’ but always uses and manipulates these places. The tactic has no place to be “at”. The tactic is an art which will “circulate, come and go, overflow and drift over an imposed terrain like the snowy waves of the sea slipping in among the rocks and defiles of an established order” (de Certeau 1984:34). The spatial tactics of the weak are mobility and detachment from the rationalized spaces of power. Spaces are determined by historical subjects, but also by the users of places. Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into space by walkers.

De Certeau makes a distinction between space (*espace*) and place (*lieu*) to open his discussion on spatial practice in everyday life:

> A place is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. It thus excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location. The law of the “proper” rules in the place: the elements taken into consideration are beside one another, each situated in its own

> "proper" and distinct location, a location it defines. A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability (1984:117)

"Place" is a sort of locatedness. It is geometrical space and accounts for the fact that two things cannot occupy the same place at the same time. By contrast, "space"

> exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities. On this view, in relation to place, space is like the word when it is spoken, that is, when it is caught in the ambiguity of an actualization, transformed into a term dependent upon many different conventions, situated as the act of a present (or of a time), and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts. In contradistinction to the place, it has thus none of the univocity or stability of a "proper" (de Certeau 1984:117).

"Space" is a practiced place. Why do users try to subvert the prospect of urban planners, authorities and proprietors? Because the prospect of producers does not just coincide with the demands of users, or, in other words, the demands of users are not borne in mind. The interests and desires of mass users are driven to the margin. The "subversive" modes of usage emerge from the marginality of a majority. In a word, De Certeau terms the alienated spatial practices of urban planners, authorities and proprietors as "place" and the re-creation of mass users in a established spatial system as "space".

In drawing inspiration from de Certeau, the recently celebrated French anthropologist Marc Augé develops the concept of "non-place" from de Certeau's analysis of spatiality to characterize the anthropology of supermodernity. By the term "supermodernity" he means a world "characterized by the acceleration or

enhancement of the determining constituents of modernity" (1996:177) and the emergence of three figures of excess: firstly, "an excess of simultaneous events" or time, as there is a speeding-up of communication and the flow of information, an "acceleration of history"; secondly, and rather paradoxically, "excess space", as this speeding-up and increasing connectivity results in a "shrinking of the planet"; and thirdly, "excess individualism", whereby the forces of supermodernity open "each individual up to the presence of others" yet also "fold the individual back on himself, close her off, constituting him or her as a witness of rather than an actor in contemporary life" (Augé 1998:103-105). What kinds of environments may be described as "non-places"? "Non-places" are transient spaces for traffic, communication and consumption, from inside a car on the freeway, the transit zones of an airport, to the more abstract spaces of communication and media technologies, like inside cyberspace and chat-rooms. They are places of transit, places of perennial deferral, but not places of intrinsic meaning.

Although the term "non-place" (*non-lieux*) derives from de Certeau, it possesses quite a different relevance in Augé's analysis. In order to comprehend Augé's "non-place", we must firstly realize what his "place" means. For him, "place" is:

> (t)he one occupied by the indigenous inhabitants who live in it, cultivate it, defend it, mark its strong points and keep its frontiers under surveillance, but who also detect in it the traces of chthonian or celestial powers, ancestors or spirits which populate and animate its private geography (Augé 1995:42).

Augé argues that "place" is inscribed with history, relations and identity. The power of "place" has to be sustained either through the erection of monuments or through the celebration of feasts and ceremonies at regular intervals. The elements of a "place" exist in relation to each other and in their own space and as such form a sense of

location, a sense of the unique. “Place” operates through its existence in a defined location, and through its connection to memory as histories are taken from and prescribed to it by the person who experiences it. The opposite of this anthropological sense of place is “non-place”. He writes:

> If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place (Augé 1995:77-78).

“Non-places” are places designed for one specific function and sites of excessive policing and simulation, where consumers are enmeshed in a hyperreal, spectacular landscape that promises fantasy, escapism and freedom, but are devoid of the kind of semantic layering traditionally inherent in places. Whereas “place” or “anthropological place” is seen to be localized, familiar, known, organic, occupied and meaningful to its occupants and observers, “a space where identities, relationships and a story can be made out” (Augé 2000:8), “non-places” generate solitude instead of relationships. “Non-places” effect a certain detachment between the individual and the spaces he or she traverses: “They are the spaces of circulation, communication and consumption, where solitudes coexist without creating any social bond or even a social emotion” (Augé 1996:178). They are thoroughfares on the way to somewhere else, leaving no impression. Augé considers “non-place” a “supermodern” product:

> Supermodernity produces non-places, meaning spaces which are not themselves anthropological places and which…do not integrate the earlier places: instead these are listed, classified, promoted to the status of “places of memory”, and assigned to a circumscribed and specific position (1995:78).

And the typical experiences of detachment in non-place:

> (It) causes a break or discontinuity between the spectator-traveller and the space of the landscape he is contemplating or rushing through. This prevents him from perceiving it as a place, from being fully present in it, even though he may try to fill the gap with comprehensive and detailed information out of guidebooks (1995:84-85).

Users in “non-places” are unable to fully recognize their presence (Augé 1996), and while they may encounter others and witness past and present events in these spaces, they are, at the same time, paralyzed. They become “merely a gaze” (Augé 1998:103), “encountering their surroundings…through the mediation of words, or even texts” (Augé 1995:94). Screens, signs and texts mediate and facilitate the individual’s relations with other people, other times and other places, actively creating and maintaining the individual’s sense of “solitary contractuality” (1995:94). People experience a new form of urban solitude defined by passwords, pin-numbers and card-numbers. Our sense of identity is mediated by passwords. These texts and interfaces “fabricate the ‘average man’”, the user of these “non-places” (1995:100).

Is the distinction between Augé’s “place” and “non-place” parallel to de Certeau’s “place” and “space”? Augé indicates that

> (the) distinction between places and non-places derives from the opposition between place and space. An essential preliminary here is the analysis of the notions of place and space suggested by Michel de Certeau. He himself does not oppose “place” and “space” in the way that “place” is opposed to “non-place” (Augé 1995:79).

In other words, Augé defines “place” and “non-place” as polarities, whereas de Certeau’s partition between “space” and “place” is more of a membrane-like boundary than a wall. For de Certeau, a street can function as geographical place as well as personal space. The former cannot prohibit the latter from constructing and using the places in another ways. Thus, despite the reduction of the street to a disciplined and

sterile space, the pedestrian can reclaim, albeit contingently and fleetingly, a measure of control over material and symbolic space through an escape into memory and imagination. De Certeau's differentiation between "space" and "place" is not dependent on the separated types of locatedness – "place" and "non-place" as Augé argues, but on "everyday practices", "arts of doing", and "tactics". The different demands of producers and consumers and the different perspectives between urban planners and pedestrians produce a different logic of action or modes of behaviour. While de Certeau provides an insight into the potential of heterotopias to enact a utopia for the weak, and elaborates on how it is practiced by the weak, Augé extracts the contradictive properties of "heterotopias" and observes the emptiness and fragmentation of "supermodern" life. Unlike de Certeau, who addresses the question of the possibility of subversion, Augé affixes meaning to "places" and makes an effort to describe the solitude and identity-loss in the "non-place" – the alienating, individualizing, contractual aspect of urban spaces.

Drawing on de Certeau's ideas, I assert that a location is a "place" for people if they make use of it by simply and unconsciously obeying the instructions of an authority and overlooking their own desires. By contrast, if people consciously attempt to redefine and re-organize the place according to their own wishes, and make decisions about how to use a location, it ceases to be a "place" for them, and becomes instead a "space".

2.5 Spatial Stories of Migrant Workers at Taipei Main Station

In the light of the discussion on Foucault's, de Certeau's, and Augé's theories, I attempt to elucidate the phenomenon of the differing appropriations of Taipei Main Station which are attributable to locals and migrant workers. On the one hand, Taipei

Main Station was devised by urban planners and is experienced as a non-place by locals. Just like other large railroad stations, Taipei Main Station has a spacious lobby, which is intended as a thoroughfare on the way to somewhere else. Apart from a seating block in front of the ticket office, there are hardly any seats in the lobby. It is a place in which we encounter screens and texts in voluminous quantities: advertisements, instructions, transfer information, and up-to-date news bulletins. It is a site of modern rationality. It is a functional space of modernist planning and capitalism for the facilitation of transit and the maximization of consumption. The spacious and nearly vacant vestibule makes it an ideal medium for moving people and things, a perfect artery for the emerging modes of fast and heavy traffic (Berman 1988). It is tied up with the tension between order and control. It is dominated by haste. While marching through the station, passengers are constantly dazzled by multifarious messages and pictures, used as a medium by authorities and entrepreneurs to remind and impress them. As potential consumers, they are simply amused by certain adverts aimed at increasing their desire to buy, and in another instant, they, as possible benefactors, are moved to the verge of tears by miserable scenes of natural catastrophes before their eyes. They have no time to digest what they see and no time to understand what they feel. We are very well informed about events at a great distance, but we are not capable of perceiving what is going on in our immediate surroundings. People are so busy dealing with this contrast stream of media that they are unable to conceive of their sense of place. At Taipei Main Station, more often than not, passengers avoid eye contact with one another or they look but do not see.

In contrast, the migrant workers in Taiwan have identified the potential of Taipei Main Station in creating their own space, including talking, meeting, making friends and loitering. They enliven the space at a loose and uncommitted pace. The

engagement is temporary and intermittent. They find themselves congregating with a degree of shared practice. They share moments of reflection and a range of emotions. Taipei Main Station is thus a focus and a conveyer of their activities. It offers an opportunity, a space to be, a space to share, and a space of confrontation. The migrant workers subvert the image and normal experience of the locals. Taipei Main Station is not only a place of transfer according to the will and power of an urban planner and the authorities, but also a space full of meanings and actions in accordance with the wishes and interests of "weak" users. They talk, gaze, celebrate and lament together, in a manner which is in short supply in "modern" society, especially in public. These practices render Taipei Main Station no longer a diffuse and non-place of transportation, but a space of united action and solidarity, a space of anticipation and disappointment, a space of events and engagements, a space of emotion, and a space of memories. They provide a window of time – even though it is less than twenty-four hours — for sense and memory.

The aim of the authorities is to organize an orderly place; for the migrant workers, it is to create an expected space. Can different expectations be combined in one and the same place? Is the initial delimitation contestable? The weekend practices of migrant workers seem to have contradicted the dominant modes of spatial arrangement successfully. How do these "unrecognized producers" open up a new road in the jungles of a functionalist rationality? According to my observations, they reconstruct the place not by offending against the rules, but by using them in the service of rules, customs or convictions. Like other passengers, they use the trains to reach the station. Like other consumers, they patronize the shops and restaurants there. Besides the snack bars and groceries that are specialized for migrant workers, other businesses also make a profit from their loitering in the station. They consume, sometimes, even more than locals do. The consumption in the station does not by all

means develop into solidarities between the locals and the migrant workers, but it more or less reduces their possible mutual repulsion. This symbiotic relationship exists not only between migrant workers and settled businesses in the station. Some local vendors rove stealthily in the lobby and look for phone card customers among the migrant workers. In addition, forms of reciprocal exchange, though few in number, also emerge between migrant workers, especially among female workers and one or two old men. Old men bring them artificial flowers in exchange for invoices with which money can be won, in a similar way to a lottery, which is drawn by the government every two months. In the light of Bhabha's concept, the subordinates can parody the culture of their superiors, but can never remake culture (1990). In my opinion, migrant workers at Taipei Main Station are beyond parody. They play a double game. They behave, according to the spatial arrangements, like local people, but in the meantime they create distortion. On the contrary, sometimes I saw locals imitating the migrant workers. Migrant workers remain within the system, while they dissimilate for a short time. They exit the system by binding themselves to it. Under the cover of passenger, consumer and participant of other exchanges they create their space in the station. But the effect cannot be permanently upheld and must be enacted again and again. The movement of migrant workers in the station reinscribes the urban topography, as de Certeau describes: "the opacity of the body in movement, gesticulating, walking, taking its pleasure, is what indefinitely organizes a *here* in relation to an *abroad*, a 'familiarity' in relation to a 'foreignness'" (1984: 130).

Another interesting aspect in this "creative transgression" is photography. Like the enthusiasm of tourists for photography, photos for migrant workers serve as a kind of "surrogate-memory", a verification of "I was there" which resonates in the complex construction of passing time and the traces of events that once took place there. These images speak of memory as the most personal of cultural constructions, the subjective

pointing-out of events. The place in these images becomes, in effect, the illustration of their travelling stories and signals the authenticity of their stories. Photos and souvenirs are becoming witness to their wonderful narratives. Analogically, Taipei Main Station, in the photos of migrant workers, becomes a tourist place for them, not because Taipei Main Station provides a soupcon of exotica and a few key images (perhaps this is so, however, at the beginning of their visit), but because it can evoke the cheerful side of their everyday life in Taiwan. The station is merely a space in between, a cut-out of intermediary zones, anonymous, with no specific qualities, but it becomes an invented "place" in their photography and storytelling. The station is on the way to becoming a monumental place, and a visit to the station on a Sunday has gained the air of a pilgrimage. It will be endlessly reproduced and recaptured, and moreover, the story will be retold. They migrant workers thus construct their own sense of meaning and place.

2.6 Conclusion

Spatial practices give voice to social boundaries. The presence of the "weekend enclave" of migrant workers at Taipei Main Station makes a statement about their marginalized social position in Taiwanese society. These marginals recognize their constraints, but at the same time, also their possibilities. The spatial stories of migrant workers at Taipei Main Station demonstrate that there is no unquestionable hegemony over space.

On Sunday evening, migrant workers leave Taipei Main Station one after the other. The station becomes still and empty, once again a familiar place to locals. Yet, the next Sunday undoubtedly awaits, when migrant workers from the different regions of Taiwan will once again make their way to the station. Each makes their own impression on the station and gathers their own experiences there. Perhaps the myth

of a paradise for migrant workers — Taipei Main Station — exists somewhere in Southeast Asia.

3 Life as a Migrant Domestic Worker in Taiwan

Every migration practice is embedded in a particular historical context. In some instances, the practice is founded on slavery, as in the case of the Caribbean connection with Britain and the United States. In other cases the relationship is one of colonization, Somalia and Britain, and between France and Senegal. In some instances, the international relationship is one of migration itself. This is true for Turkey and Germany and for Sri Lanka and the Gulf States. In the case under investigation here, the background is active labor recruitment by a richer country seeking temporary contract labor from an economically weaker country. In order to understand the nature of labor migration from Southeast Asia to Taiwan, an inquiry into the social context of Taiwan, the relationship between Taiwan and Southeast Asia, and the respective contexts of migration in the countries of Southeast Asia, is an indispensable prerequisite.

3.1 A Snapshot of the Taiwanese Context

3.1.1 State Policy on Migrant Workers in Taiwan

After World War II, Taiwan, detached from the People's Republic of China and the recipient of massive financial aid from the United States, began a rapid process of development that quickly brought it to the forefront of newly industrialized countries. Taiwan has transformed its traditionally agricultural economy into an industrial one. In 1997, its per capital GNP had reached US$ 13,819 (Council for Economic Planning and Development, Executive Yuan, R.O.C. 1997). Taiwan became one of the "Four Dragons" of East Asia. Due to improvements in education and expectations of high income levels, the founders of Taiwan's "economic miracle" – millions of small and medium-sized enterprises that exported labor-intensive manufactured products – were

increasingly confronted with a shortage of cheap labor and a lack of workers willing to undertake menial tasks. In addition, due to the increased participation of women in the labor force, the care work for elderly people and children, formerly allocated to women, demanded new resources. The call for foreign domestic workers was becoming louder and louder.

Due to a shortage of labor both in the production and reproduction sectors, in October 1989, following Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong, the Taiwanese government laid down a foreign labor policy permitting the recruitment of migrant workers from a limited number of countries. This policy was a response to the demand of the capitalists for a cheaper workforce in order to ensure surplus accumulation in the manufacturing industries. Migrant workers were first permitted entry to the construction and labor-intensive manufacturing sectors, such as the textile industry. Later, a wider variety of industries were allowed to hire migrant workers. In 1992, the government also began providing work permits to foreign domestic helpers and caregivers. Since then, the number of foreign workers has been growing steadily in Taiwan. In 1991 there were 2,999 foreign workers, 100,765 in 1993, 326,515 in 2000, and the number had reached 333,477 by May 2006. Among the first workers were Filipinos, Indonesians, Thais, and Malaysians. The majority, 52%, today works in manufacturing. The next highest category is that of domestic helpers and caregivers, comprising 39.1% of the total migrant workers. Despite a drop in the total numbers of foreign workers in Taiwan between 2001 and 2003, the domestic worker sector is constantly growing.[5] By 2003 their combined number had reached 120,598, and in May 2006, 148,754. At the beginning, the Philippines dominated the Taiwanese

[5] The drop was in response to a pledge made by President Chen Shui-bian. Under the pressure of unemployment, especially among indigenous and blue-collar workers, the President promised to cut the number of foreign workers by 15,000 annually. In contrast to the goal of reducing the number by 60,000 by 2004, the total numbers of foreign workers has increased further since 2004.

market, supplying half of all domestic workers, followed by Indonesians (supplying about 40%), and then Thais. When migrant Filipino workers were reduced in 1999 by the Taiwanese government because of a dispute over bilateral air traffic, Indonesian workers took over the dominant position in the domestic labor sector. In the same year, Vietnamese workers were permitted entrance into Taiwan. The number of Vietnamese workers has steadily increased, especially since the drastic 2002 expansion resulting from a ban on Indonesian workers.[6] Domestic Workers from the Philippines are now regaining their position as the largest group, followed by workers from Vietnam, Indonesia and Thailand. The number of workers of a particular nationality fluctuates due to a banning mechanism employed by the government whenever its relationship with a sending country turns sour. The labor policy is not dictated by market forces but by political events (Fr Bruno Ciceri 2003).[7] By December 2004 the suspension was lifted and the number of Indonesian domestic workers increased again.

With regard to domestic workers, the Taiwanese government firstly granted work permits to so-called "domestic caregivers", who are employed to take care of patients or disabled persons in the household, and later also gave permission for "domestic helpers" to work in households with two or more children under the age of six, or a dependent person over the age of 75. In addition, caregivers can work with chronically ill or paralyzed family members in the family setting as well as in institutions such as nursing homes and hospitals caring for patients suffering from one

[6] According to statements made by the authorities, Indonesians constitute the highest number of runaways. Two other reasons for the ban were that the brokerage fees levied on Indonesian workers were too high and the Indonesian government had failed to address the problem, and the submission of false documents by brokering agents. Although these were the reasons given for the ban, inter-country diplomacy and politicking would seem to play a significant part, just as it did when migrant Filipino workers were reduced in 1999 by the Taiwan government owing to a dispute on bilateral air traffic (*Migrant News* 2001).

[7] China has denied that Taiwan has been a separate political entity, Republic of China (R.O.C.) since 1949 and has repeatedly claimed Taiwan to be a renegade province of China. Given its ambiguous status, Taiwan's government develops a so-called "economy diplomatic policy". The allocation of quota migrant workers is thus often applied as a political tool.

of the 32 diseases listed by the state (Battistella 2001: 7). There is a quota for the recruitment of domestic helpers but no limitation for caregivers.

Taiwan's decision to import foreign labor represents a cautious move within a tightly controlled arena rather than a throwing open of the doors to all (Loveband 2003). In practice, it includes introducing both a migrant levy for various categories, and quotas on the employment of unskilled migrants. On the one hand, the introduction of foreign labor keeps Taiwanese manufactured goods competitive and eases the pressure to move offshore. On the other hand, this policy has been blamed for undermining the local job market and impeding industrial upgrading. In practice, the Taiwanese government has attempted, on the one hand, to regulate the quota of foreign workers and prohibit the changing of employers[8] in order to control the job market. On the other hand, the government has extended the duration of stay to a period of six years. The Taiwanese government thus greatly restricts who and which sectors may employ foreign labor in order to control the influx of "outsiders" and protect its own workers.[9] Migrant workers are employed on a three-year contract (to be exact, firstly for two years, which may be extended for a further year) and repatriated when contracts are terminated or expire. The contract was at first was non-renewable, but since 2002, it can be renewed for a further three years provided the worker leaves the country for at least 40 days between contracts.[10] Under this design of state policy on labor migration, migrant workers are defined as temporary

[8] This regulation has been loosened since 1998. On the conditions: if the person being cared-for dies or the employer emigrates, the caregiver can have work as a domestic helper in the same household arranged or be transferred to a new employer.

[9] When Taiwan first opened the gate for migrant workers, Chao Sho-buo, the present of Council of Labor Affairs (CLA) in 1989, compared the issue of foreign workers with the issue of the race problem in the United States in the following statement: "Look at Black people in the United States now. In fact, they were "foreign workers" before…The race problems in the United States today exactly resulted from the introduction of foreign workers…Taiwan is such a small and populated country… We have to consider this very carefully" (Chao 1992: 145, cited from Lan 2000). This characterizes the attitude of Taiwan's government towards migrant workers. The Taiwanese authorities have regarded it as a temporary expedient and took into consideration foreign infiltration and other social problems.

[10] This is to prevent eligibility for citizenship.

migrants, with very limited rights and no entitlement to settlement or family reunion. During their stay in Taiwan, they are not allowed to marry or become pregnant.

The demand of domestic service is a gendered opportunity for women to migrate to work in Taiwan. At the same time, the discrimination against domestic workers is becoming a gendered problem. According to the Taiwanese "Employment Service Act", all blue-collar and clerical workers in Taiwan, regardless of nationality are entitled to the rights and welfare stipulated in the Labor Standards Law,[11] including minimum wages, working hours, acceptable tasks, social insurance, etc. In contrast to migrant workers in other sectors, the labor rights of domestic workers are legally only in part guaranteed, such as minimum wages and access to health care. Unlike migrant workers in other sectors, domestic workers are bound to a particular type of employment and to a particular employer (only in a few cases are exceptions made). This separate treatment of state policy predestines these workers to a dependent and disadvantageous position vis-à-vis their employers. Migrant domestic workers are less protected, because they are "domestic" workers. This exclusion makes the life of migrant domestic workers, which is already difficult, even harder. Only from April to December 1998, were migrant domestic workers fully included in the Labor Standards Law.

In sum, Taiwan's foreign labor policy is controlling in nature, especially in terms of immigration and the labor market. Taiwan's authorities stipulate the kinds of industries and the kinds of families that may employ foreign workers, as well as the countries from which labor can be sourced. Of all migrant workers, the category of

[11] The rights include a minimum wage (NT$15,840, equivalent to US$480), set working hours (8 hours a day and not more than 84 hours two weeks), leave (2 days a week plus 7 days of annual leave), and health insurance (the employer is responsible for 60%, the government for 10%, and the worker for 30%).

domestic worker is especially discriminated against. Without a standard contract and the protection of the Labor Standard Law, working conditions for domestic workers are challenging. As a result, the working conditions experienced by a foreign domestic worker depend almost entirely on the mercy of her employer.

The hesitation of the Taiwanese government to interfere with the employment in domestic work can be traced back to the prevailing social construct of the domestic worker, which I will explore in the next section.

3.1.2 The Social Construction of the Domestic Worker in Taiwan

In her comparative study of domestic workers throughout Asia, Heyzer (1994) argues that the question of whether a domestic worker is treated as a family member, an employee, or a slave depends on "how domestic work is culturally conceived" (xxviii). Thus, in this section, I try to trace the historical and sociocultural factors that conspire to form the current social construction of the domestic worker.

Although the introduction of foreign domestic workers is up-to-date, the job is none-the-less informed by traditional conceptions of the occupational role. Because Chinese migrants have constituted the majority among Taiwanese and the Chinese tradition has dominated Taiwanese society over centuries, I consider it meaningful to draw on the traditional Chinese notion of maid in this discussion.

In Chinese history, a maid was considered as property rather than a person of low status. We find the most obvious manifestation of this evaluation in the legal system. From antiquity, a sex offence was defined basically as heterosexual intercourse outside marriage and was always considered a serious offense. Female slaves and bondservants, married or not, were sexually available to their masters, a fact explicitly recognized by law. The only offense identified in this area was intercourse with a

female slave belonging to another man, suggesting that the offense was not against the woman herself but against her master. However, if a male of debased status committed an "upward" offense, by engaging in sexual intercourse with a woman of higher status (especially a woman of his master's household), this act was punished far more severely than illicit intercourse between commoners would have been. The contrast between different standards of sexual morality (especially the relative availability of women) played a fundamental role in marking status strata as distinct from one another. The moral norms of marriage and family, especially female chastity, were simply attributes of free status. Female slaves (even married ones) possessed no legally recognized chastity—they were sexually available to their masters, whether they liked it or not. Even after the decree of Emperor *Yongzheng* (1723-1735) of the *Qing* Dynasty, a fundamental shift in the organizing principle for the regulation of male-female relationships took place: a uniform standard of sexual morality and criminal liability was extended across old status boundaries. All individuals were expected to conform to gender roles strictly defined in terms of marriage. Since this time, a master who engaged in intercourse with a subordinate's wife would be also regarded as committing a sexual offense. Nevertheless, unmarried female domestic servants continued to be sexually available to their masters (Sommer 2000). For thousands of years, in the Chinese legal system people of low status were not perceived as persons, but rather as property.

In a discussion of the situation of foreign domestic workers in Hong Kong today, Nicole Constable (1997) attempts to trace the history of female household labor –the institution of *muijai*—back into the past. Before becoming a crown colony in the 19th century, the practice of selling young daughters –*muijai*– had been common in southern China for centuries. Although slavery was officially abolished in Hong Kong

under the British Empire, when Queen Victoria decreed that English law against slavery must also be upheld in the colonies, the practice of *muijai* remained largely unaffected until the 1940s. Among wealthy Chinese, the practice continued under the guise of "adopted daughters" even longer (Jaschok 1988). *Muijai* were bought by people from different social strata, and their situations varied according to their masters. Among the wealthy households, benevolent motives have been cited as part of the justification for purchasing *muijai* (Watson 1991; Jaschok 1988). By contrast, poorer masters expressed the reason that they viewed these girls as a cheap source of labor or a kind of investment (the sale and resale of *muijai* was not uncommon). The term of a *muijai*'s service was not specified, but it was expected that her master would arrange her marriage at a later time. The choice of a marriage partner for a *muijai* was "almost exclusively motivated by money considerations" (Jaschok 1988: 107). In many cases she was married as a concubine rather than a wife (Stockard 1989; Topley 1975). Constable (1997) observes that "there are certain similarities between *muijai* and foreign domestic workers. Both resemble 'commodities' in the way they are inspected, bought, traded, owned, generally objectified, and treated as economic investments" (47). Moreover, the male members of wealthy and elite households often entered into sexual relations with *muijai* and other Chinese domestic workers. The sequel to the traditional evaluation of female household labor is the basis of popular fear in Hong Kong that foreign domestic workers will go to any length to find a man to marry for economic benefit (Constable 1997).

How is female household labor in Taiwan historically shaped and culturally conceived? A similar practice of selling young girls as domestic servants, known as *chabo-kan*, a parallel to *muijai,* can be traced back to the Qing Dynasty (Chuo 1993). Wealthy households usually purchased and owned a number of male and female servants.

Sometimes they were part of the dowries of brides from rich families. The terms of a *chabo-kan*'s service ended at marriage, just as for *muijai*. This seemingly human management differed in theory from other more extreme forms of slavery, but in reality a *chabo-kan* was treated as if she belonged to her master. Like *muijai*, a *chabo-kan* had no family name and worked as an unpaid domestic servant.

In addition to *chabo-kan*, there was another form of "trade" in women: so-called "minor marriages" – *sim-pua*. This custom prevailed in Taiwan, as well as in parts of South China such as southern Fukien, from the seventeenth century. Minor marriages were contracted through the expedient of "adopting" a daughter-in-law at an early age, raising her with marital family, and marrying her to a son when she came of age (Wolf 1972; Thornton and Lin 1994). This form of marriage, represented on the one hand an important strategy for reducing the monetary costs of bringing in a daughter-in-law as well as the risks of alienating a son's affections, which often led to the division of households. Yet on the other hand, most *sim-pua* generated female labor to carry out work at the farm and in the household. The status of *sim-pua* was ambiguous. It comprised a mixed role of servant and daughter-in-law-to-be. In many cases, the relationship of potential spouse remained unknown to the children involved until their wedding day. If the adopted daughter-in-law showed signs of being incompatible with the family, she would be simply married out and the process of arranging a major marriage for the targeted son would be initiated. Actually, some girls were adopted in the name of *sim-pua*, but were treated like domestic servants, as is evidenced by the fact that many households without sons also adopted *sim-pua*. *Sim-pua* often encountered ill-treatment in their adoptive families and experienced a great deal of hardship. Thus, the Taiwanese refer to a bitterly crying child as *sim-pua* even today.

The practices of *chabo-kan* and *sim-pua* continued even during the initial phases of Japanese colonial rule over Taiwan (1895-1945). It was only in the early 1920s,

that the practices were abolished and domestic service was turned into paid work. At that time, domestic employers were mainly Japanese, but also upper-class Taiwanese (Yio 1995). Taiwanese women constituted the majority of domestic workers. In the 1950 and 1960s, with the return of Taiwan to the Republic of China after World War II, the majority of domestic employers in Taiwan shifted from Japanese colonizers to rich Chinese mainlanders. Now as before, most of the domestic workers were young single girls with little school education. Working as a live-in housemaid was only a temporary occupation for the girl before her marriage. As Taiwan joined the ranks of Asia's "miracle" economies in the 1970s, the number of women prepared to work as domestics on a live-in basis dwindled. Young women preferred factory employment to domestic service because it provided regular hours, a more independent lifestyle, and higher social status (Salaff 1981). In addition, as in Hong Kong, Taiwanese young women avoided work in private households because it evoked images of bonded servitude (Constable 1997). During the 1970s and 1980s, the recruitment of young women as domestic workers in Taiwan became very difficult. To obtain any kind of domestic help at all, the type of domestic service in the 1970s had to change from live-in to day worker. Housewives, who had had no chance to take on such jobs previously because of the demand for live-in workers, were now able to take up the positions. The convenience of looking after both the employer's and their own household made such positions attractive to housewives. Since the 1990s, foreign brides who have increasingly been migrating from Southeast Asia or China to Taiwan, have built up the main resource for household labor besides the employment of foreign workers.

In sum, since the 1920s, domestic work has become a new occupation for women. It has never been a favorable choice for women, but rather an expedient, since domestic

service is a job that is tainted by political, economic, ethnic and gender-based inferiority. In the age of *chabo-kan* and *sim-pua*, the domestic worker was a kind of bondservant, such as the *muijai* in Hong Kong, "who were to a large extent considered the property of the master or mistress to do with as he or she pleased" (Constable 1997: 41). They not only left the nature of their labor to the hand of their masters but also their lot. This kind of master-servant relationship designates economic and gender inferiority. During the period of Japanese occupation, the master-servant relationship reflected the political as well as economic hierarchy between the colonizers and colonized. In the post-World War II decades, the composition of mainland employers and Taiwanese domestic workers symbolized the generally discrepant power relations between the two different ethnic groups, socially as well as economically. Housewives of the 1970s and 1980s and the new immigrants of the 1990s accepted domestic service jobs because of their lack of education and language difficulties. Throughout the centuries, whether commodified or not, domestic work and care work has been constructed as low-wage, dead-end, marginal and female. Domestic work has never been regarded as "normal" wage work, and domestic workers are regarded more as servants than workers. Domestic work does not enter into the ranks of modern occupations, but remains a job full of the stigmas of the past. This evaluation and conception of domestic work and domestic worker is transferred onto migrant domestic workers.

Furthermore, this historically burdened image of the domestic worker renders the relationship between employers and migrant domestic workers a delicate matter. It does not resemble the clearly defined employer-employee relationship of other sectors. The employers of domestic workers correspond to the masters of the past. They are more powerful than employers in other sectors. Accordingly, a housemaid is not a

normal employee, but is expected to be more submissive than ordinary employees. She is stigmatized either as a candidate for the position of concubine or a potential seductress. Domestic work has not yet been integrated into wage work, but remains an old fashioned occupation. In addition, the employment relationship takes place in the private domain, which has traditionally been set apart from the realm of public power. According to the Chinese saying: "It is difficult even for an honest and upright official to judge a household affair". This to some extent reveals the government's attitude towards domestic work and explains why it is reluctant to interfere in conflicts between employers and their domestic workers. Despite appeals for increased rights for migrant domestic workers by NGOs, the Taiwanese authorities prefer to remain on the fence. If the authorities intervene, they are less active in punishing employers who abuse their domestics than in punishing migrant domestics who run away because of mistreatment. One example of this is the readiness of Taiwanese authorities to reward the informants of runaway workers but not those of bad employers.

3.2 Different Ethnic Pathways to Taiwan

The new forms of global migration and the growing ethnic diversity of international labor markets associated with them are related to fundamental transformations in economic, social, and political structures in the postmodern and post-Cold War epoch (Castles and Miller 1998: 2). What is the specific nature of this phenomenon in Southeast Asia? A large surplus of labor characterizes all the four of the southeastern Asian countries that I discuss here. Indonesia has a labor force of 99 million, Vietnam 38 million, Thailand 34 million, and the Philippines 33 million. High rates of unemployment and underemployment are the result. Low wages seem to be another inevitable outcome. Indonesia, the fourth most populous nation in the world, is a quintessential case. With 40 million Indonesians unemployed out of a population of

220 million, overseas employment is highly coveted.[12] The large labor surplus makes Indonesia's low-wage economy possible. According to the Bureau of Statistics, in March 2000, production workers earned a median wage of between Rupiah 68,500 (US$7.21) and Rupiah 214,900 (US$22.62) per week depending upon the sector in which they were employed. Among Southeast Asian countries, the Philippine government was the first to find a prompt resolution to the problems of addressing unemployment and generating foreign exchange: the export of labor. In 2004, Filipino migrants sent US$8 billion home and their Indonesian counterparts US$2 billion. In Taiwan alone, migrant workers earned more than NT$40 billion (about US$1,2 billion) in 2001. Because of these fruitful results, other countries followed suit.

A characteristic development of labor migration in Asia is the increasing feminization of migration. While thousands of Asian women migrated annually in the 1970s, by the mid-1990s there were between 1.3 and 1.5 million Asian women working abroad. About half of Philippine overseas contract workers (OCWs) in 1994 were female (Amjad 1996). From 1984 to 1994, two thirds of Indonesian migrants from 1984 to 1994 were women. This development has been particularly pronounced in the Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka in the past decade. In these countries, national-level estimates indicate that women comprise 60-75 percent of legal migrants, a significant proportion of whom are employed as domestic workers in the Middle East and other Asian countries (Human Rights Watch 2005). The growth of domestic labor as a field of employment is a crucial factor in this development. Labor migration from Southeast Asia to Taiwan is correspondingly high. Most of the workers in

[12] Official Indonesian unemployment figures are highly deceptive. In 1999, the official unemployment rate was under 7 percent, rising to just under 10 percent in 2004. These relatively low figures mask serious underemployment and relatively low labor force participation rates. For men, the employment to population ratio (a measure that is similar to labor force participation) is approximately 80 percent, while for women, it ranged from 40 to 50 percent. However, almost 50 percent of employed women and over 20 percent of employed men work fewer than 30 hours per week, while almost 8 percent of employed women and almost 4 percent of employed men work fewer than 10 hours per week (Ford 2005).

Taiwan are female (55 percent) and most female workers are domestic workers. The proportion of workers varies according to nationality Indonesia contributes the greatest share of female workers and approximately 90 percent of these are domestics. The next biggest proportions are those of Vietnamese (65%) and Filipino (50%) workers. Thailand has the lowest female share, and only about 20 percent of these are domestic workers.

Below, I divide my description into four groups according to their countries: the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam and Thailand. In doing so, I do not assert that migrant women from the same countries share a unanimous culture pattern, but claim that certain similarities exist within each ethnic group of migrants. The reason may be that certain cultural and political dimensions shape every country, which then characterise migrant women's travel practices and their lives in Taiwan. The basic concept here is not "that of culture occurring in certain patterns which determine its fabric and are of influence on the lives led by all individuals under a culture" (Kroeber 1935: 689) like that of Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture* (1934). My study here does not attempt to generalize the diversities of four different cultures and establish their culture patterns respectively, but rather to show a vignette of their situations which I can be certain of in order to help us to imagine life as a migrant domestic worker in Taiwan. I will concentrate upon the following questions: What and how are women driven to migrant work? What does migration mean for them? How is female labor migration perceived in their countries of origin?

3.2.1 The Philippines

In February 2003, the Philippines had surpassed Mexico as the chief source of migrant workers in the world (Elias 2003). In 2001, the Commission on Filipinos

Overseas (CFO) estimated that there were approximately 7.29 million Filipinos abroad, of which 2.98 million were overseas workers. Since the mid-1970s, temporary overseas employment has been a vital part of the Philippine economy and the lives of Filipino families. In 1975, the number of overseas contract workers deployed was less than 50,000, but in 1994 this figure reached nearly 800,000. During this period, the gender balance of emigrants shifted markedly, from 30% females in the 1970s to 60% females in the mid-1990s (Lim and Oishi 1996; Gonzalenz 1998). Bernardo Villegas, Dean of the University of Asia and the Pacific, said migrants "will be the focus of the Philippine economy at least for the next 100 years" (Elias 2003).

The role of the state in the process of contemporary labor migration has expanded with not only the labor importing countries, but also the labor exporting countries (Phizacklea 1996). Although the intercontinental emigration of Filipinos had already begun by the beginning of the 20th century, labor export as a political program was an occurrence under Marcos' direction in the 1970s. The birth of this policy was related to the deterioration of the Philippine economy from the 1950s onwards. According to the Philippine Statistical Yearbook (1978), the proportion of the labor force employed in industry has decreased since the 1950s. The number of those dependent on the land actually "doubled from 4.5 million in 1956 to 8.1 million in 1976" (French 1986:48). The price of land climbed and the proportion of landless laborers went up (French 1986). The outflow of capital was extremely high and it created a serious shortage of foreign exchange. In 1974, the International Labor Organization estimated the unemployment rate to be over 25 percent (Andres 1984). In 1975, over 40 percent of families in the Philippines could not afford "basic nutritional requirements" (Trager 1984: 1273). By the early 1980s, inflation had reached an average of 32 percent. The real value of industrial worker's wages decreased by about 40 percent and that of agricultural workers dropped over 50

percent between 1976 and 1979 (French 1986: 51). In the 1980s, about two-thirds of the Philippine population lived below the poverty line (CIIR 1987). Labor export policy was one of the measures aimed at improving the economic situation in the Philippines. In 1972, the Marcos government adopted this policy at first as a "temporary measure" to ease unemployment and to bring in foreign currency. Initially, the Philippine government intended to monopolize the whole business by cutting out employment agencies, but it failed. Thus the government changed its plans, establishing an institution with which to control the activities of agencies through licensing (Goss and Lindquist 1995: 338-9). In 1982, the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) was established, which became responsible for negotiating with different ministers of labor around the world and promoting the flow of emigration. The migration flow first concentrated on the oil-exporting countries in the Middle East and Europe. The goal was achieved and the development exceeded even expectations. The labor export policy of the Marcos government has been continued by his successors. Meanwhile, the temporary measure has become permanently temporary.[13]

Almost all Philippine migrant workers are placed by private agencies. The brokerage fee is very high and is composed of two parts. Filipinos must first pay a down payment in the Philippines. Although the Philippine government stipulates that the brokerage fee must not exceed one-month's salary, migrant workers pay more than this sum. Officially, overseas employers must recruit through licensed recruitment agencies and any subsequent contracts be approved by the Philippine Overseas

[13] Philippine Senator Bobby Tanada said, "The Marcos government encouraged the labor export industry as a temporary (stop-gap) measure to reduce the country's unemployment problem and balance of payments deficits….Today the temporary labor export industry has become permanently temporary" (Asian Migrant Centre 1992:20).

Employment Agency (POEA). Thus POEA-recognized recruitment agencies not only get licences, they get preference for contracts received directly by the POEA. One of the services for would-be migrant workers is the pre-departure training program. In host countries, the Philippines has special officials at its consulates in labor-importing countries that help migrants who get into difficulties. Yet these are too few to be effective: in 1993 there were 31 labor attachés, 20 welfare officers and 20 coordinators to respond to the needs of 4.2 million migrant workers in 120 countries (Lim and Oishi 1996: 120). However, Philippine officials often find themselves powerless against unscrupulous agents and abusive employers, who may have the backing of the police and other authorities in countries such as Saudi Arabia. The intervention of the Manila Economic and Cultural Office in Taipei (MECO), relatively powerful among all migration institutions in Taiwan, in some disputes between Taiwanese employers and Philippine workers "force" the Taiwanese brokers to switch to Indonesians who lack the support system from their government and NGOs.

Most Philippine migrant workers are highly educated and overqualified for their jobs abroad. Two-thirds of the Filipinos in Taiwan have a junior college undergraduate or graduate degree. Filipinos are the best-educated group among migrant workers in Taiwan. Their acquaintance with English is especially appraised, not only in the countries where English is the common language for communication, such as North America, Singapore, and Hong Kong, but also in the countries where English is a foreign language, such as Taiwan. Many employers with children prefer a Filipino domestic in expectation of their children learning English. A lot of them have already worked overseas, for example, in Singapore, the Middle East or Hong Kong, before they come to Taiwan. They come to Taiwan, because the wages are higher than elsewhere. Overseas employment for many Filipino women today is a rule rather than

an exception. They move from country to country with their contracts. A few of them seize the opportunity of an interval between two contracts to marry and bear children, and then resume their transnational journey again.

The majority of Philippine domestic workers had been employed in their country in a wide variety of occupations; as teachers, cashiers, nurses, midwives, cooks, etc. Although most of their husbands worked too, their incomes in the Philippines were not able to make ends meet. Most of them related in the interviews that meager salaries and high inflation rates drove them abroad. While the government tends to praise them as national economic heroines[14], they are more likely to consider themselves responsible mothers, wives and daughters who help improve family well-being. Some, most single, related that they went overseas to "meet other people", "experience cultures from other countries" and to embark on "a quest for adventure". Sometimes, escaping an unhappy marriage was the reason for their departure. Maria (thirty-four years old, Catholic) said that she and her husband had four children together. Her husband had a girlfriend and she was very sad, but due to her religion she could not divorce him. So she decided to work overseas to better the family's financial situation and forget her problems with her husband.

Approximately 80% of the Philippine population is Roman Catholic. For Filipino workers in Taiwan, religion is very much alive. In Taiwan, there are currently at least seven active church-based organizations.[15] Catholic churches throughout Taiwan are the place they are most likely to frequent on Sundays. Besides providing religious solace, the churches set up counseling services, and hold events every once in a while.

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[14] It was former President Cory Aquino who first used this expression in a speech to a group of domestic helpers in Hong Kong in 1989, telling them that "you are the new heroes" and declared the month of December as "Month for Overseas Filipinos".

[15] They are Hope Workers' Center, Rerum Novarum Center, St. Christopher' Church, Migrant Workers' Concern Desk, Hsin Chu Migrants' Concern Desk, Stella Maris International Service Center, and Missionary Society of St. Columban JPIC Office. All of these churches welcome any migrant worker, regardless of religion.

The gathering on Sundays also offers migrant workers a chance to unwind, meet new friends and find out what is happening around them in Taiwan and in their home countries. The vicinity of the church is often a focus of commercial activity. The intersection of Chungshan North Road and Tehui Street, next to St. Christopher's Catholic Church is Taipei's "Little Philippines". There is a convenience store selling Philippine products, a CD shop broadcasting Filipino music and some Filipino cafeterias providing traditional dishes. Underground businesses also flourish, such as underground banks, job placements for the runaways, and the exchange of health insurance cards for mobile phone chips, etc.

As a way of self-help, the Philippine migrant workers publish their magazines such as *Tinig Filipino* to exchange information about working conditions in different countries and to encourage each other. Recently they even established their own websites, for example www.ofw-connect.com for Filipino migrant workers around the globe.

Most Filipino domestic workers in my study related that they worked abroad to "get money". The women I interviewed were trying to provide their families with financial assistance. The majority of married or divorced women entrusted their children to female relatives of their natal families or to their mother-in-laws during their overseas stay. They remitted the majority of their earnings to their families every month. Why did they take the decision to go and not their partners? Some explained that it was easier for women to find a job that pays well; some said that their partners were not ready to go; some related that they were separated from their husbands and had to earn money to pay their children's tuition, other living requirements or some other pressing need. Single women more or less supported their parents, brothers and sisters, and even the sibling's families. A lot of them saved money in accounts to amass capital with which to later run a small business. Most single migrant women

had no plans to marry soon and wished to work overseas again. Canada and the United States of America were their next favorite destinations.

3.2.2 Indonesia

Large-scale labor migration from South and Southeast Asia to the Middle East developed rapidly after the oil price rise of 1973. India and Pakistan became the first source of skilled and unskilled labor; in Southeast Asia, the Philippines and Thailand were quick to enter this labor market. Indonesia missed out on the initial boom, but by 1983 had organized itself to enter this market (Robinson 2000: 253). Between 2001 and 2004 there were close to 1.5 million workers working abroad (Depnakertrans 2005). Women constitute approximately 80 percent of the Indonesian migrant labor force (2002). Until the 1990s, legal labor migration out of Indonesia was predominantly to the Middle East, but increasingly significant numbers have since moved to other Asian countries. Today, Indonesians in the Asia-Pacific region account for over half of total legal overseas migrant workers, with 48 percent going to neighboring Malaysia and Singapore. Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea have become more significant destinations in recent years (Hugo 2002).

Similar to the Philippine government, the Indonesian government regards labor migration as an "inexpensive and rapid method of alleviating unemployment" (Stahl 1986: 81) and a way to earn valuable foreign exchange. In the 1980s, the government began to integrate labor export into its five-year development plans. By the sixth five-Year plan (1994-99), the government set a target of sending 1,250,000 workers overseas (Spaan 1999), the results of which seemed to exceed all expectations.

The job situation in Indonesia appears to be more difficult than in the Philippines. Unlike their Philippine colleagues, most Indonesian domestic workers have had no work experience outside their families. Susie (22, single) regarded working abroad as

a good life opportunity. After high school, she sat at home all day, did nothing and felt bored. Through this overseas job, she was able to support her parents and young siblings, and garner experience for herself. In my study, it was not unusual for single Indonesian women to register themselves with placement agencies without informing their parents. Some of them informed their families of their migration upon arrival in Taiwan and some only years later.

The migrant Indonesian domestics I met supported elderly parents, younger brothers and sisters, and even married sibling and their families, if they needed money urgently. Otherwise, building a home, buying a plot of land or livestock were other favorite forms of investment. The women I knew had already built a house in their home countries or intended to do so with their remittance. They showed me the houses proudly during my visit to their hometown. They told me stories of other villagers who also worked overseas. Some only had money to build part of house; some had finished the building, but then had no money for the furniture; some had nothing but the bare walls in their houses, because their husband had squandered the money she had sent. Most single migrant women had no plans to marry soon, but their parents urged them to marry and tried to arrange a husband.

My survey of a sample of 100 Indonesian migrants in Taiwan in 2002 has a similar profile to Cremer's (1988) survey of the Middle East. Both surveys revealed that 78 percent of the migrants were women and almost of them worked as domestics. Most of the Indonesian women in my study were in their 20s and 30s, and more of them were single than married. According to Cremer's Survey, their reported ages were between 25 and 34. In comparison to the migrant women who went to the Middle East in the 1980s (26 percent of them had never attended school, while 63 percent had some primary school education), migrant females since the 1990s have been better educated. About half of them have the equivalent of a secondary school

education. Almost all of the migrant women in both studies come from the rural areas of Java. Most of them had no previous employment experience. Married women with children are present in both studies.

Most of the Indonesian workers in Taiwan are Muslims. Indonesian women in Taiwan veil themselves only when visiting the mosque, and hardly ever in ordinary life. A white head scarf is a symbol of mourning in Taiwan and recruiting agencies discourage its usage from the beginning of employment or even confiscate it. In general, Indonesian workers can seldom attend the *Juma* congregation, which takes place on Fridays. Most of them only go to the mosque for the great festivals, such as *Lebaran* (*Idul Fitri*) (the end of Ramadan, feast of fast-breaking). After performing their religious duty, most of them leave. The social contact takes place elsewhere, for example, in Taipei Main Station. Indonesian supermarkets, discos and restaurants have now been open inside and around Taipei Main Station for several years. Recently, the mosques, at the invitation of local authorities, run shelters on behalf of Muslims in emergency situations to provide timely assistance.[16]

Almost all of the Indonesian domestic workers come from rural Java. There are hardly any Chinese-Indonesians working as migrant workers in Taiwan. In my study, I knew just one. She was in her late thirties and came from Medang, Sumatra. She said she and her husband had a small grocery in Medang, they were well-to-do, but after the riot against the Chinese in town, they could neither get back credit nor run the business as before. Thus, she and her husband looked for jobs abroad. She said other Indonesian workers had no problem with her Chinese origin and they got along.

[16] By and large, the mosques in Taiwan attended meetings about migrant issues at the invitation of the government or other NGOs. They hardly played any role in the initiation of migration, possibly because they are of the opinion that Indonesian women should not leave their families simply to make money.

3.2.3 Vietnam

Until the 1980s, Vietnam was one of the poorest countries in the world. It is estimated that up to 25 million people – 60% of the total workforce – are either unemployed or underemployed (World Bank 1999). Since the late 1980s, the impact of economic reforms or renovation (*doi moi*) was spectacular: per capita economic growth was 6-7% per year between 1990 and 1997. In 1993, 58% of the population was still living in poverty, after five years this was lowered to just 37%. Moreover, the great wage differential between Vietnam and receiving countries serves as a "pull" factor for overseas labor migration. In substance, the average wage in Vietnam is only about one twentieth of those in Taiwan and South Korea, which are currently the favorite destinations for Vietnamese migrant workers. In this context, the Vietnamese government has followed the lead of other Southeast Asian countries in actively promoting overseas migration.

Vietnam's experience in overseas employment had already begun in the early 1980s, and was predominately shaped and directed by the government. In this period, the destinations of workers were primarily socialist countries in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. In the late 1980s, thousands of Vietnamese were sent to East Germany, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia. The year 1989 marked the highest number (167,503) of Vietnamese overseas workers, of whom 45% were female. Following the collapse of the East Block the Vietnamese government searched for an alternative market for its workers. The government signed new agreements with countries in the Middle East and Asia. Since 1994, Vietnamese labor migrants have been sent to Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Japan and Korea. East Asia has since become the major destination for Vietnamese migrant workers. Taiwan and Malaysia currently constitute the primary destinations, followed by South Korea and Japan. The number of Vietnamese overseas workers increased from fewer than 4,000 in 1993 to more

than 46,000 in 2002. In April 2005, the number of Vietnam migrant workers in Taiwan alone, reached 93,513. This occurred when the Taiwanese government placed Indonesian workers under a ban and Vietnamese women were promoted to be the most promising alternative, since their culture is similar to that of the Taiwan Chinese.

Because of the demographical imbalance after the war, Vietnamese women were actively encouraged into the workforce. In the north almost all women between the ages of 15 and 55 were in the workforce and in the south the figure reached 80 percent in the early 1980s. Hence, it is not surprising that women have dominated among Vietnamese migrant workers since the beginning of the labor export program (between 67% and 87%). Official and unrecorded remittances are estimated to be the equivalent of about 6% of the country's total export value and comparable to the amount provided under international loans (Dang et al 2003).

Overseas migrant workers are on average better educated than non-migrants in Vietnam. One of the selection criteria is the requirement to complete lower secondary school. Their reported ages are between 25 and 34 (Dang et al 2003). The Vietnamese domestics that I know are a little above the average. Most of them are married with several children. All their husbands still work in Vietnam. These women call their families regularly and send their families money every month. Like their Philippine counterparts, most Vietnamese domestic workers had already worked outside their homes in a wide variety of occupations – storekeeper, teacher, nurse, shop owner, etc. All of them related that the economic profit was their most important reason for working in Taiwan.

Approximately one fourth Vietnamese are Buddhist. For most of the Vietnamese domestic workers I became acquainted with, religion does not play an important role in their everyday overseas life.

Returning migrants are more inclined to speak about their successes and gains

than about the problems and obstacles they had to face whilst abroad. Indeed, labor migration brings economic profit to Vietnam, but also creates heavy emotional stress through the separation of spouse and children (Dang et al 2003). Female migrant workers are often blamed any detrimental impact on the family. The Vietnamese domestic workers I was familiar with told me that the worst problem they suffered from in Taiwan was their yearning for their children. Whether they would work overseas again after this contract depended on the well-being and opinion of their families.

3.2.4 Thailand

Four out of five of the Thai nationals deployed overseas are males; the age range is broad, although about 56% of them are between the ages of 26 and 35; the average level of the migrants' education is low (Huguet and Punpuing 2005). In the early years of the 1990s, a great majority of them migrated to the Middle East, especially Saudi Arabia. Since 1995, about 85% of them have also begun migrating to destinations in East and Southeast Asia. Taiwan is by far the major destination of Thais migrating for employment, and Thais account for the half of foreign workers in Taiwan. Only around 12% of the Thai workers to Taiwan are female. One sixth of them are domestic workers, so Thai women are the minority among migrant domestics. Like most foreign workers in Taiwan, very few Thais migrate to Taiwan on their own. Most of them are recruited by the Thailand Overseas Employment Administration and private agencies. Most of the migrants pay at least 80,000 Baht (US$2,164), and a quarter of them pay twice that amount in recruitment and travel costs (Chantavanich 2001).

The Thai women I became acquainted with told me that they worked in Taiwan because of the need for a higher income to improve the well-being of their families. Some of them had previously worked in their country and some had not. Some

married women decided to go abroad because they were divorced or had been let down financially by their husbands. Most of them got information on migration from a close relative who worked overseas.

These Thai women took the duty of a daughter very seriously. A single woman told me that she would willingly give up her marriage in order to take care of her old parents because they had gone through much suffering to raise her and her sibling. It was almost taken for granted that they would send their parents money, even though they were married.

Approximately 95% of Thais are Buddhists, as are most Thai workers in Taiwan. Many Thai workers in Taiwan are worshipers of *Phra Phrom Erawan*. There are a few Phra Phrom Erawan shrines in Taiwan. Some factories or construction companies with many Thai workers often also set up Erawan shrines. Regular frequenting of the temple is not essential to their religious life. A Thai domestic told me that she and her female compatriots exchanged Buddhist pamphlets after they had finished reading them. She said she prayed to the gods everyday to bless her life in Taiwan.

Compared with female migrant workers from other Southeast Asian countries, it is especially hard for Thai women to fight for their good name. One of the causes for this is the Western erotic imaginary, which conceives of Thailand as a bordello and Thai women as the image of commercial sexuality. Another cause is the intensification of such misconceptions by Thai people themselves. They cast suspicion on all female compatriots who leave their home to earn a living. More often than not, families with migrant women would be viewed with a distrustful gaze in the hamlet.[17]

[17] I will delineate the situation by way of example in chapter 5.

3.3 Migrant Domestics' Community within the Context of Their Mobility

In this section I attempt to explore the way in which complex "ethnoscapes" are formed, whereby people from diverse cultures are thrown together, and how their interaction progresses on a daily basis (Appadurai 1991). Although migrant domestic workers with different backgrounds travel from different countries and arrive in Taiwan alone, they are not necessarily prepared to live in isolation in Taiwan. They attempt to make contacts and establish their networks. How is their community constituted? How do they gain entrance into communities? What is the meaning of community in such a context?

In anthropological approaches, several types of criteria are used to define the concept of community. These include affective criteria, which stress the existence of solidarity among the members of a group; structural criteria, which emphasize the functional interdependence of roles and institutions; and cultural criteria, which posit a common tradition as indispensable to community life. The migrant women's community I observed included all three criteria and could not be easily classified. I explain it in more detail below.

The community discussed here is the community in Spring Park, the major site of my fieldwork. A lot domestic workers living in the neighboring area of the park had the opportunity to accompany their charges to get a breath of fresh air or to do some exercise in the park almost everyday, or even twice a day (once in the morning and once in the afternoon). The domestic workers used the chance to make acquaintances, preferably with their own compatriots. It did take not long for them to enter into a conversation and confide in each other. They chatted in their mother tongue, shared national food and exchanged tips on everyday life in Taiwan. In fact, the community in the park was not a typically localized one, but the park was the most important

intersection of the community. This convergence in the park had evolved into an institution, a source of no matter what kind of support they searched for, whether it be solace-finding or financial aid. There was no obvious leadership role in the community, but one or two older and more experienced women would be often asked for their advice. The only one specified function of a person I was aware of was that of Ruth, an Indonesian woman in her late thirties. She always said the prayers at birthday and thanksgiving parties[18]. Food-sharing was a popular activity among Indonesian migrant women. Some of them were allowed to cook for themselves and if they made extra portions of their home cuisine, they would share it with their compatriots in the park. The food seemed to mean more than a mere pleasure for the palate and carried with it a sense of belonging and home. Some Filipino women also took home cooking with them to church and shared the food after the service.

Migrant women in the community were very supportive of each other. For instance, if one of them needed money urgently to support her family or to pay for her own medical treatment, she could likely find someone in the group to lend her some money. If she required a large sum, she might be introduced to a Taiwanese employer, who frequented the park and had befriended many of the migrant domestic workers. Most loans would be repaid, only in few cases was this not the case. Drawing on the help of their own employer seemed a usual and effective strategy with which to help another domestic worker. One domestic worker helped another domestic worker, who never had a day off, by arranging one through the friendship between the two employers.

There were not only an intra-ethnic solidarity but also an interethnic one in the

[18] Some Indonesian domestics prepared some food and organized a thanksgiving party after they had worked in Taiwan for two years. This meant they had paid off their brokerage fees and were able to retain most of their salary from that time onwards. For more information on the complicated issue of brokerage, cf. chapter 4.

community. One Indonesian had to struggle with a worn-out wheelchair every day, if she brought her old charge to the park. The Indonesian domestic asked her employer to buy a new wheelchair for the grandmother several times, but the employer refused because he considered the grandmother so old that he did not think the new wheelchair would see much use. One Thai domestic worker, who got a higher salary and often tips from her rich employer, bought the Indonesian domestic worker a new wheelchair for the grandmother. The Thai domestic worker said that she could understand how toilsome the work was for the worker and how dangerous it was for the grandmother. Thus, she was more than willing to help.

There were hardly any tensions, apart from some differences of opinion. For example, now and again some love affairs between the women of the community and men from outside were the subject of whisperings in the group. Although not all migrant women shared the same opinion about alien romances, nobody would be rejected or excluded from the group on account of their personal romantic affairs.[19]

Entry into the community was not strictly guided by ethnicity, but there had to be some basis of sameness, for example, background, work, the residential quarter, or acquaintance between the employers. Indonesian domestic workers seemed to be the most enthusiastic members of the community, and their community was far more present than any other. This perhaps explains why I had more difficulty in gaining entry into the Indonesian group than the Philippine one at the beginning of my fieldwork. The intention and ability of the Indonesians to impose boundaries, or to exclude those who were not “the same”, was stronger.

3.4 Conclusion

The stream of foreign domestic workers into Taiwan is an aspect of globalization and

[19] I will explore this aspect in detail in chapter 5.

a result of a prospering labor migration system in Asia.[20] Through detailed investigation, we see the complex connections between a global phenomenon and personal lives. There are mechanisms active in the process but also personal choice and effort.

The rapid economic development after World War II brought Taiwan to the forefront of newly industrialized countries. The subsequent improvement in education and expectations of higher incomes invoked the shortage of labor both in the production and the reproduction sectors. Employing cheap migrant workers has been one solution to this shortage. As a result, migrant domestic workers are called upon to take over the traditional responsibilities of women (taking care of the elderly and children, managing the household, etc.). Workers are not equal to workers. In relation to immigration and the labor market, Taiwan's foreign labor policy is controlling in nature and ensures the pathways to Taiwan are only just open. Every barrier provides a chance for a given mechanism to manipulate the movement.[21]

I argue that discrimination against domestics among migrant workers is rooted in the Taiwan Chinese tradition of female household labor. Domestic work is such a burden that it cannot be regarded as "normal" wage work, and domestic workers are viewed more as servants than workers. Moreover, this historical image of an overburdened domestic worker infuses the relationship between employers and migrant domestic workers with a certain degree of uncertainty.

The female migrant workers in Taiwan come from a wide variety of backgrounds.

[20] cf. chapter 4.
[21] I will discuss this topic in detail in chapter 4.

Some come from poor landless families, some are middle-class. Being a migrant worker for some women serves as a unique way to survive, but for some it is simply a chance to improve their life. Some want to earn money to support their parents, to finance the education of their siblings or children, and some describe migration in terms of survival. Sometimes working overseas can be a way out of personal problems, such escaping an unhappy marriage or a family breakdown and sometime it is based on the need to join husbands abroad. Most women have to convince their families and battle with local values and prejudices before their plans to go abroad can be realized.

The governments of the respective countries of origin play an important role in the migration process and also in the matter of the welfare of migrants. For domestic workers, the protection of their government is especially crucial, since domestics usually work in isolation and are at negotiating with their employers. By contrast, the government has a better bargaining position on behalf of the individual worker. Among four countries of origin, the Philippine government is relatively well engaged in the improvement of the welfare of its migrant workers. Unhappy cases of Filipino domestic workers abroad give society cause for grievance and lead to public outcries. Solidarity from the home society and undertakings by the government increase the respect for Filipino workers and allow them to obtain more justice in the receiving countries, also in the case of Taiwan. For instance, Philippine domestic workers are the most likely to enjoy regular rest days than their Indonesian, Thai and Vietnamese counterparts. The Vietnamese and Thai governments are less concerned about the welfare of female workers. The most helpless are Indonesian domestic workers, should they experience difficulties during their employment. If they suffer abuse overseas, they are often themselves blamed. The government imputes their

ill-treatment to their ignorance and incompetence. It provides hardly any support systems at the destination as well as in the home country (Hugo 2002). Generally, the state policies of the countries of origin, on the one hand, have promoted migration, but on the other hand withdrawn any assurances of protection and support.

Although migrant domestic workers with different backgrounds travel from different countries and arrive in Taiwan alone, they are not necessarily prepared to line in isolation in Taiwan. They attempt to make contacts and establish a community. The migrant women's community I observed displayed several of the criteria used by anthropologists to define communities. Entry into the community was not strictly guided by ethnicity, but there had to be some basis of sameness, for example, background, work, residential quarter, or acquaintance between employers. Otherwise, one was initially excluded, something I have experienced for myself.

Nuances in the intensity of solidarity and commitment existed not only between migrant domestic workers from different countries but also within their own country. The ethnic conflict in the country of origin (e.g. the conflict between Malay and Chinese in Indonesia) did not retain its salience overseas. Differences of opinion were allowed and nobody would be rejected or excluded from the group on such a basis.

Overseas employment could serve as a window to the world for the women of Asia. But if the landscape on the other side remains opaque, working as a domestic worker overseas can quickly become a nightmare. Among some of the causes of adverse circumstances, an intermediary institution – the brokerage system of labor migration – often can be held responsible. I will elaborate on this aspect in the next chapter.

4 Positioning the Supermaid:

Transnational Labor Brokering from Southeast Asia to Taiwan

4.1 Introduction

Over the past three decades, labor migration in Asia has developed into a gargantuan industry. Currently, the International Labor Organization estimates that twenty-two million Asians work outside their home countries (ILO 2004). Nine out of every ten foreign placements in most of the major labor-sending countries of Asia are conducted by private recruitment agencies. A range of institutions and practices surround these recruitment agencies, encompassing various mechanisms at different levels in the processes of the provision and delivery of labor from one part of the globe to another, including local agents, rural- and urban-based agencies, and foreign manpower agencies. These mechanisms are fundamental to the understanding of the diverse experiences of Asian migrant workers.

Migrants obtain employment as domestic workers in Taiwan in one of two different ways: either through direct hiring by the employers themselves or through arrangement by licensed agencies. Today, the latter place almost all migrant workers. Recruitment practices and legislation vary greatly by country. In general, the recruitment process adheres to the following procedure: contact is made with potential migrant workers through one or two well-informed persons in the village who have connections to either registered or unregistered labor sending companies. These local agents are mostly known to the families of those recruited. Although potential migrant workers get very little concrete information about what they can expect before departure, during their time abroad, or upon returning home, an initial fee must be paid. In retrospect, many migrants consider local agents to have acted misleadingly and to have overcharged them. Thus, women from urban areas or who have already

gained some overseas experiences often bypass the local agent and take their photos and documents directly to the recruitment agency. Accordingly, agencies send a copy of their passport, their photos, and their bio-data to their business partners abroad. Employers in Taiwan then go through the bio-data of available maids and select the maid they deem most suitable. The next step is for the relevant agency in Taiwan to obtain a visa for the maid in question and forward it on to their partner in the sending country. The agency in the sending country will then arrange for a full-body physical examination for the maid. This includes a chest X-ray, a urine test (aimed at identifying pregnancy and drug use), as well as tests for syphilis, HIV antibodies, hepatitis B, malaria, and intestinal parasites. If the woman passes the medical examination, her journey can begin. Occasionally, the application for passports and visas takes a long time in the home country. It is at this point that bribe-money comes into play. Bribery is especially rife in Indonesia. One Indonesian broker maintained that it took usually three months or more for government officials to issue a passport, but if he provided them with an additional "payment", it would take only one month or even less, according to the deal. Agencies usually pass the cost of bribes on to the migrants themselves. Each migrant pays a down-payment in her home country, though the sum varies. The majority of Philippine and Thai agencies demand the entire broker fees even before migrant's departure. Other agencies require a percentage of the fee to be paid in cash before departure and their Taiwanese partners collect the rest later from worker's salary. If the agencies in the sending and receiving countries are run by the same owner, in such cases usually a Taiwanese, it does not matter when the agency fees are paid. Taiwanese brokers usually collect their share through a monthly deduction from the workers' salaries.

In order to pay the recruitment and processing fees, several migrants borrow the money either from relatives, friends, moneylenders or even brokers, and pay

extortionate rates of interest for it (Anderson 2000: 32). The result is that foreign workers become heavily indebted even before they set foot in Taiwan.

By and large, the recruitment process is rather opaque and complicated, leaving the migrant totally dependent on the agent, who may be the only access she has to employment, her only contact in the receiving country, and the person who arranges her entire journey. Some migrants suffer abuse even before leaving their home countries. The situation is especially drastic in Indonesia, where thousands of licensed and unlicensed labor agents operate with little monitoring by the government. After registration, Indonesian workers are often confined in an overcrowded holding center while waiting for placement abroad. Many migrants report inadequate food, physical abuse, sexual harassment, and restrictions on their freedom, including being locked in training centers, having their hair forcibly cut by agents, and having their prayer materials taken away (Human Rights Watch 2005). The migrant workers nonetheless have to pay a fee for such a stay. Their passports are in many cases retained by the employer or the agent, and their working visa tied to a particular employer. This means that the migrant worker cannot simply transfer to another position, even if working conditions are unsatisfactory. They may also not be able to return home, since work contracts generally stipulate that if the contract is broken, the cost of returning to the home country are the responsibility of the migrant worker. Should a worker apply to go home, the returning process promises another adventure. Returning workers face artificial exchange rates, threats of extortion and even physical violence at airports (for example, the notorious Terminal 3 at Sukarno-Sumatra) and at land borders in Kalimantan. I have heard about the menacing behavior of brokers towards runaway migrant workers and their families when they return to their home countries, on occasions when the former have not paid off their brokerage fees.

4.2 Money Matters

Increased demand and high wages has not made Taiwan a migrant domestic's paradise. Instead, it has actually succeeded in strengthening the hand of the brokers. While the movement of these workers is facilitated in both the sending and the host countries by labor brokers, the latter are cashing in on the expansion of the business. The placement and brokerage fees vary from case to case, depending on the country of origin and the sector in which the migrant seeks to work in. Factory and construction workers pay more than domestic workers, since the former is assumed to earn more money as a result of overtime and regular working hours; males pay more than females, since male workers are in low demand abroad. As previously above, migrant workers are involved in a chain of fees and charges from the very beginning of the emigration process. According to Taiwanese government regulations, brokerage fees collected from workers should not exceed NT$1,800 (US$55) per month during the first year of employment, NT$1,700 (US$51) during the second year, and NT$1,500 (US$45) during the third year. According to the regulations of the Council of Labor Affairs (CLA), migrants are not supposed to pay more than NT$60,000 (US$1,800) altogether in Taiwan, but in practice, the commission charged by brokers is far more than this. Many report that they pay between NT$150,000 and NT$200,000 (US$4500 to US$6,000). Many brokers invent items such as "service fee" or "credit" to avoid directly violating the regulations of the CLA. In 1991, Taiwan-based middlemen charged US$550 per placement. According to Aldrich's (2000) survey, migrant workers who arrived in Taiwan before May 1996 paid an average of NT$66,754 (US$2,022), while those arriving after May 1997 paid NT$82,599 (US$2,503), roughly five months of the wages they earned in Taiwan. According to Lan's survey in 1999, a migrant worker has to pay a placement fee ranging from NT$70,000 to

110,000 (from US$2,121 to 3,333). Brokerage fees tend to increase continually. According to my study of migrant domestics between 2001 and 2003, Filipinos pay the lowest fees on average, from NT$60,000 to NT$80,000 (from US$1,818 to US$2,121), whereas the Vietnamese pay the highest fees prior to employment (US$1,000). The fees for Indonesians are the highest, both throughout the course of their employment (US$3,600 to 4,242) and overall.

A breakdown of the costs might take the following form: NT$1,000 for the renewal of the worker's alien residence certificate; NT$1,000 for their broker's transportation expenses (from the office to the foreign police); NT$1,600 for the worker's medical tests; NT$1,000 transportation allowance (from the office to the hospital); NT$2,000 for income tax processing ; NT$2,000 transportation service (when the worker takes vacation leave); and a counseling charge of NT$7,000. It often takes from between one year and eighteen months to pay off debts to brokers amassed both in the receiving and sending countries, before a worker is able to save any money at all. Many domestics will continue to work even under intolerable conditions in order to liberate themselves from debts to their Indonesian broker and other borrowings stemming from pre-departure investments. Most of them remain silent, fully aware they have been wronged, in order to avoid offending their employers and brokers.

What explains the emergence of escalating brokerage fees in Taiwan? In defense of his industry, Steven Kuan, chairman of the Taipei Association of Manpower Agencies, emphasized that the fee had to cover both the worker's airfare and a complicated, 50-step bureaucratic process that continued throughout the employee's stay in Taiwan. As an insider, he revealed another clandestine cost factor contributing to the high brokerage fee. He said that part of the reason for the rising costs is the employer's greed. The placement business is becoming so lucrative (the sector's

annual revenues are estimated at US$180 million) that many people are keen to have their share. Stiff competition emerges among brokers to win placement orders from employers. Employers expect cash rebates, gold coins and even free trips abroad in return for their patronage (Underwood 1997). This kickback practice is a result of intense competition stemming from a supply of brokerage services that far exceeds demand. In 1997 there were 600 licensed brokers, while 900 existed in 2006. This figure does not even include unlicensed brokers, that account for about 15 percent of the market (Lan 2000). The sums demanded by kickback agencies are passed to migrants. The kickback practice holds true among large-scale employers, for instance, corporate employers, but not among the employers of domestic workers. It certainly could be the case that employers of domestic workers also pay fees to these brokers, although a typical breakdown of the fees from the Taiwan side of the transaction has never been disclosed in detail to workers. The Thai example looks like this: the dominant element is the charge levied by Taiwanese agencies, reflecting the acute competition between labor supplying countries, so that there is in effect a "sale" of job openings in Taiwan. A significant part of the Taiwanese agency fee is paid as commission to the employer for using that particular agency (Lee and Wang 1996), clearly illustrating the power-relationship gradient from the employer, through the Taiwanese and then Thai recruitment agencies, and down to the workers in rural Thailand (Jones and Findlay 1998). Such information is more reliably obtained from local community leaders and sub-agents than from main agents, who are reluctant to admit charging, given that they often do so substantially in excess of government-set maximum levels. The fee differentials by country largely reflect wage differentials, so that the fee is less a measure of actual recruitment costs than one of surplus value shared between foreign employer, worker, agent and other intermediaries.

The intense competition among recruitment businesses is exacerbated further by

the quota system in Taiwan. In order to avoid too many foreign workers entering the Taiwanese labor market at one time, the government monitors and places restrictions on the nature and scope of incoming migration. Firstly, the nationalities of migrant workers are limited: only workers from the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, and meanwhile also Mongolia are eligible for entry (the last two countries combined do not number more than fifty migrants per year). Secondly, restrictions on occupation activities are in place: migrant workers are only permitted to work in the manufacturing and construction sectors, or as crewmen or domestic helpers and caregivers. Thirdly, restrictions exist on the eligibility of the employer: companies must maintain imported labor at levels below 30% of their total work force and can hire foreigners only if the posts have been advertised and no qualified locals have applied. Quotas and admissions are released by the CLA (Council of Labor Affairs). Alone the procedures of releasing quotas and granting admissions are a breeding ground for bribery and corruption. Some employers mobilize political networks to strive for quotas, or brokers pay off CLA officials in order to speed up the bureaucratic procedures of granting admission. Occasionally some mighty employers, who possess the privileges of distributing or monopolizing the limited numbers of quotas, make extra profit by selling the quotas to other employers (Wu 1997). In most cases, the broker acts as a go-between. With regard to domestic workers, there is a quota limitation for recruiting domestic helpers, but no limitation for caregivers. This does not however mean that it is easier to get one. According to the restrictions, the employer of a domestic caregiver must have patients or disabled persons suffering from one of the 32 diseases listed by the state in the household, and the employer of the domestic helper must have two or more children under the age of six or a dependent person over the age of 75 in the household. Besides purchasing and selling quotas among large-scale employers, falsifying some documents for the client also

belongs to the order of a broker's day. If clients are not eligible to employ a domestic worker, brokers help with medical certificates or find someone seemingly eligible as an official employer, and arrange for the domestic to work for the real client. As a result, many migrant domestics work do not for the employer whose name appears on the contract. The strict restrictions on paper, but not in practice, provide an ideal niche for the manipulation of brokers and so their business.

The fleecing of migrant workers in Taiwan is not only the work of individuals, but is actually conducted systematically. In 1997, Bernadette Chen, Director of the non-governmental Migrant Workers' Concern Desk, pointed out that not only the avarice of brokers, but also the rotten brokering system was responsible for the extortionate brokerage fee. She claimed that the real bosses of the brokers are high government officials and legislators. The Council of Labor Affairs officials also implied that, owing to powerful patrons, they were remained unable to change the system (Underwood 1997). Eight years after these statements, in 2005, the incident of Thai workers in Kaohsiung, Southern Taiwan, demonstrated the same phenomenon. The incident began with a protest by the Thai workers of the Kaohsiung subway system, a government project, against their horrendous living conditions. 1,700 Thai workers were crammed into 8 dormitory rooms, accommodating about 220 workers in each room. In the heat of the humid summer their rooms were like an oven. They had asked for assistance from the local government but had received none. Out of frustration they burnt down the dormitory office. The day after the protest, the Hope Workers' Center, a church-based organization, visited the migrant workers to check the state of affairs. One evil deed after another was regaled: physical abuse by the dormitory supervisor with an electric rod; prohibition of the use of cell phones both inside and outside the dormitory; unhealthy food; poor sanitation in the toilets and bathroom; cramped living quarters; unpaid overtime; and endless hours of work. On

top of this was the corrupt brokering system, which left all these workers in debt for their first one and a half years of work in Taiwan, despite the alleged direct hiring program - from government to government. Each Thai worker paid on average 150,000 Baht (US$ 3,636) for their broker's fee, while the legal amount set by the Thai government is 56,000 Baht (US$ 1,357). With 1,700 workers this meant that 159,8 million Baht (about US$ 4 million) of corrupt money changed hands. During the investigation, several high-ranking government officials resigned, including the Minister of the CLA (Council of Labor Affairs), the Kaohsiung City Mayor, as well as the Kaohsiung City Mayor's father, who was also an adviser to the President. Whoever had received kickbacks in helping to bring in the 1,700 workers into Taiwan was to be investigated (Catholic Hope Workers Centre, Taiwan 2005). Studies on the brokering systems show that although bureaucratic structures would like to regulate the migration of foreign labor, those systems, in practice, rarely work exactly as stipulated. Until 2006, the government investigated broker agencies once a year, when agencies were due to renew their licenses. All that is required to obtain a license is the payment of a nominal annual fee. After the incident with the Kaohsiung subway project in 2005, the government proclaimed that the by way of trial judgment system would be officially incorporated into the "Regulations on the Permission and Administration of the Private Employment Agencies" and would be more strictly carried out than hitherto. If agencies refuse to be investigated or get the lowest grade in the past two years and no betterment is seen within several months, the agencies do not have their license renewed and cannot continue running their business. Whether the new measure functions is still to be examined. Up until the present, inconsistencies within and between institutions and practices and minimal regulatory mechanisms characterize the Taiwanese brokering system and create opportunities for fraud and corruption, and above all the unconscionable financial exploitation of

migrant workers in the system.

4.3 Tricks

Misrepresentation in migrant domestics' passports, such as fraudulent ages (where those who are too young appear older and those who are too old appear younger), false names (if migrants have ever been involved in illegal activity in the receiving country), and bogus marital status (in most cases the status of being married is changed to that of being single), mostly result from advice from brokers, urging the applicant to meet employers' expectations and avoid possible bureaucratic hurdles. Such practices initially appear as "harmless" collaboration, but can mean a long-term fiasco for migrant workers, should their agency at any point decide they no longer wish to keep the migrant worker on their books. Usually the agency will suddenly report that misrepresentation has been discovered and the migrant will have to be deported. This generally occurs one and half years after employment has commenced, at the time workers will normally have reimbursed their brokerage fees. From this time on, the workers themselves cease to be of value to the agencies, although the job itself remains profitable. If the migrant leaves their work and the job becomes free, agencies can fill the position with another waiting migrant. New recruits mean renewed income for the agencies. I put the possibility of such a scenario to my interviewee, an official of the Foreign Workers' Counseling Center in Taipei. He was of the opinion that if a false identity was discovered by the authorities, the authorities would first of all inform the employer, not the agency. He said that the sudden detention of the domestic worker in the agency bureau after the discovery of misrepresentation and the immediate deportation the next day suggested something fishy about the occurrence.

Due to its relatively high salaries, Taiwan has become one of the most popular

destinations for migrant workers. The minimum wage regulation is one of the rights which the "Employment Service Act" bestows upon migrant workers when they take up employment in Taiwan. Brokers emphasize this advantage, attract a large number of potential migrant workers, and thereby make a great profit. As a result, the oversupply of migrant workers reduces the fee for the employer and increases the fee for the employee. The minimum wage, intended to benefit migrant workers, turns out to be a tool of manipulation for brokers. Another example shows us how brokers seek to make money by any means. Since May 1997, in order to ease the financial burden on overseas workers, Taiwan's government has ruled in favor of allowing them to work a total of three years, rather than the previous two-year limit. However, the brokers have quickly turned this ruling into another money-making scheme, setting an industry-wide fee ranging from US$700 to US$900 for the processing of applications for a third-year extension. The process is actually only a simple matter of filling in some forms and collecting government charges. The fee for a third year in the industry prompted CLA officials to notify brokers that they were not permitted to charge this fee and had to refund the fees paid (Underwood1997). In spite of this notice, to my knowledge, many brokers have continued to collect the third-year placement fee, at rates ranging from NT$15,000 to 20,000 (US$455 to US$606), and to charge the employer about NT$ 5,000 (US$151).

Besides matching domestic worker to employer, theoretically speaking, agencies also play the role of mediator between them. Agencies serve as a key source of information for employers on issues relating to and the demands of their domestic workers. Agencies are also the first address for domestic workers to come to with their problems. Some agencies do listen to both sides and try to resolve problems keeping the welfare of both sides in mind. Yet many migrant domestics related that they had negative experiences while seeking assistance from their agent because of abuse from

employers. Considering employers as clientele, agencies strongly encourage or coerce domestic workers with the ultimatum “stay in your job or go home”, or even with a beating (reported to me by Indonesian workers) containing the message to submit to their employers. An Indonesian domestic related that she had just one off day in the first year and longed for a second off day after fourteen months. When she conveyed her wish to her employer, the latter became angry and refused. She then approached the broker with her request. The broker won over the employer with an endorsement that the domestic would forfeit further days off in the future. The support of the broker for the employer in this way is not uncommon, even from the beginning. Most domestic workers are asked to sign their sponsor contracts at the recruitment agency in the country of origin, almost none retain their own copies, and many are unclear about the terms and conditions of employment. Some even said they were asked by agencies to sign a blank contract. In order to win patronage from the employer, many agencies in Taiwan bargain away workers’ rights, for example, taking no rest days, and carrying out all task demanded, even before the workers have left their home countries. High brokerage fees and “loans” induce migrant workers to accept all kinds of unreasonable working conditions. An early termination of their contract would mean unsettled credit for the migrant worker, which often escalates into a financial disaster for the whole family.

Another serious consequence of the brokering system is that of "runaway" workers. Workers escape from their contract job for various reasons. Some do so for more personal reasons, such as disputes with co-workers; some to escape maltreatment; and some as a strategy to deal with the debt shackle (Lan 2000: 77). According to the official statistic of "runaway" workers in 2003, runaways account for 2.11% of total foreign workers. Two thirds of runaways are domestic workers and half of all of these are Indonesian. Domestics are best known as suffering from poor

working conditions, including excessive work demands, a lack of regular working hours, no days off, and isolation in the workplace. This is especially true among Indonesian domestics. Moreover, Indonesians pay the highest brokerage fees among migrant workers. Interestingly, when Vietnamese domestics took the place of their Indonesian counterparts because of the ban on Indonesian workers in 2003, the Vietnamese subsequently comprised the largest runaway group in 2005. Can it be said that the harsher the work conditions, or the higher the brokerage fees, the greater the number of runaway workers? Most runaways occur at one of three key stages in the employment cycle. Either they leave their registered jobs at the beginning of their employment because they refuse to pay the huge placement fees, or, if they get wind of the threat of repatriation, they leave their work near the end of their stay of employment and overstay elsewhere in order to earn more money without paying an extra brokerage fee to renew their application. They attempt to make as much money as possible before returning home. Most runaway workers find their new jobs through the referral of compatriots - through placement by unlicensed brokers. The charge for such a placement varies, but in most cases it ranges between NT$5,000 and NT$7,000 (US$151-212). Some unlicensed brokers find jobs for runaways and charge fees for the new placement. It is, however, very often the case that the runaway is lured into a trap. The unlicensed brokers charge the fee, but find no jobs for them. I have heard even worse stories from the arrested runaway workers in the Shan-shia detention center. Some of them related that they had paid the brokers who promised them to place them, but in the end, the brokers merely reported the runaways and were rewarded by the police, and all of them wound up in the detention center. In some cases they even pocketed the salary intended for the runaway. There were also numerous cases of recruitment agents sexually abusing runaway domestic workers.

In order to avoid financial loss, agencies devise schemes to prevent runaways,

for example through compulsory savings. Mostly on the advice of the broker, the employer opens a saving account for the worker in the name of the employer, and withhold 30% of their wages for the account. If the domestic does the job well up until the termination of the contract, the domestic can reclaim the deducted salary in his/her country of origin. If the domestic runs away or is repatriated prematurely, she will lose all rights to the savings. In 1998 the government passed a law requiring such accounts to be opened not in the name of the employer, but instead in the name of the worker. The main purpose of doing so is to prevent the worker from running away. Due to the violation of the international labor convention, this law was rescinded in 2000 by the Taiwanese authorities. Nonetheless, the practice is still very common among agencies. It is an easy ploy for agencies to retain a part of the salaries as forced savings, because many employers do not transfer domestics' salaries directly, but through the agencies themselves. If domestic workers are repatriated for whatever reason, they have no chance to reclaim their money. I heard of another initiative from the agencies. One Indonesian domestic related that her agency asked each worker to pay NT$1,200 (US$36) as insurance against running away, so that the employer could be compensated for the loss of a domestic worker.

4.4 The Role of Ethnicity in Shaping Domestic Employment

Since we regard current labor migration as an industry, the marketing strategies used in this industry are key in understanding the dynamics of labor migration in Taiwan. Agencies project particular advertising slogans to promote the migrant women of a given country. The positioning of domestic workers relative to one another becomes organized under gendered, essentialized and racialized codes. By making matches for their Taiwanese clients and foreign domestic workers, they attempt to attach particular racist stereotypes to particular nationalities, and project different nationalities as being

suitable for different kinds of work. According to Anne Loveband (2003), one special strategy is that of brokers' attempts to promote essentialist stereotypes linked to nationality as a means of channelling workers of a particular nationality into specific sectors of the labor market. She points out that Taiwanese brokers have developed a pattern with which to convince employers that workers from particular countries hold certain distinct and inalienable traits, therby persuading them to choose the domestics they offer according to this pattern. The formulation and promotion by brokers of nationality-based stereotypes touches all sectors of the labor market. For example, it is claimed that Thai men make the best factory and construction workers because they are hard-working and honest. Filipino men are also good in the factory but for different reasons - they are not as hard-working as their Thai counterparts but can read English and are therefore useful for interpreting English language instruction manuals. On the other hand, however, Filipino men can be more "troublesome" and belligerent. If one were looking for a carer for one's children, a Filipino woman would be the best choice, since Filipinos are intelligent and possess English language skills. They are deemed to be better educated and “more civilized”, in terms of hygiene habits, than Indonesians. They are, however, cunning, at times troublesome and tend to steal. Indonesians have also their positive and negative attributes that affect their suitability for particular jobs. "Despite their 'questionable toiletry habits' and lack of educational level equivalent to Filipinos, Indonesians were praised for their loyalty and willingness to work hard but damned for their stupidity" (Loveband 2003: 6). Thus, they are considered good at simple, repetitive tasks that are not too challenging. Another assumption is that Indonesian women are best suited as caregivers of the chronically ill, the paralyzed and elderly patients. This promotion of Indonesian domestic workers is actually the brokers’ solution to Filipinos’ increasing unwillingness to be mishandled. Initially, Filipinos dominated the sector, but as they

became more and more demanding of their rights and their support structures, such as the Catholic Church, various NGOs and the Manila Economic and Cultural Office, become more vocal on their behalf, Indonesia was promoted as the prime country of origin for migrant domestic workers. When the taking on of Indonesian workers was suspended in 2002, labor brokers looked to the Vietnamese to fill this gap in the labor market. For instance, a few websites of Taiwanese brokerage agencies presented the attributes of Vietnamese in the following words: ”the contact history between Chinese and Vietnamese is very long and culture as well as religion is alike”. Sometimes the reason for Taiwanese Employers' preference for Vietnamese maids is beyond cultural affinities. They indicate that Vietnamese maids give a comfortable appearance because of their lighter skin color in comparison with Indonesian maids.[22]

The reinforcement of stereotypes as a marketing strategy prevails in recruitment agencies around the world. It is interesting to see how people of the same ethnicity are represented differently according to interests of agencies. For example, Filipino women in Canada, compared to their Jamaican colleagues, are portrayed as "naturally" docile, subservient, hard-working, and willing to endure long hours of housework and childcare with little complaint (England and Stiell 1997). In Taiwan, they are characterized as cunning, troublesome and demanding of too many days off compared to their Indonesian colleagues. Serving as partners to the Taiwanese agencies, agencies in the sending countries also make efforts to position their compatriots. After examining six private employment agencies in Manila, Guevarra (2003) points out that the success of the Filipinos' desirability as work ers is not really rooted in "inherent" cultural traits that make them cost-effective workers, but emerges

[22] As in many Asian countries, Taiwanese women go to great lengths to keep their skin pale. In addition to cosmetics and food products with purported whitening properties and skin resurfacing treatments such as laser therapy, Taiwanese women even call on intravenous drips to become as pale as possible (Oung 2007). To what extent this white aesthetics is shaped by the impact of colonialism (the Japanese colonization) and of neocolonialism (the penetration of American culture) should still be complemented by a rigorous examination.

from a series of negotiations and carefully orchestrated and calculated strategies that labor brokers manufacture in the interest of accumulating capital. Constable demonstrates it much more explicitly:

> Recruitment agencies in the Philippines present themselves as advocates for prospective domestic workers. Despite the kindness of certain agency personnel and the stated patriotic or humanitarian motives of specific agencies, however, recruitment agencies are money-making operations. Their success depends on their ability to generate and “package” products that will satisfy would-be employers” (1997: 64-65).

In addition to the profit-oriented intention of brokerage agencies, I offer another interpretation of this practice. I believe it implies uncertainty about the domestic employment relationship in Taiwanese society. The criteria for a worker are leveled at her personality but not at her labor power. The personality of a worker is important for an employer, because domestic work (especially care work) encroaches upon the sphere of intimacy and familiarity and thus can be equated with vulnerability. The concept of an "outsider" entering into the “inner” sanctum of the family is a very sensitive issue and implies the transgression of social boundary. It is a delicate matter for both parties. Brokerage agencies acknowledge this tension between demand and anxiety and their emphasis on the good “natural” qualities of women of different nationalities is aimed at comforting employers. On the other hand, the construction of “otherness” – such as Taiwanese “modernity“, “civilization“ versus Southeast Asian “backwardness“, “non-civilization“ – I argue, suggests an indeterminate power relationship between employer and domestic worker in Taiwan. Although "slavery" is often used to describe the working conditions of a migrant domestic worker (Anderson 2000), there does exist some nuances of difference between these two systems. Unlike the slavery system of the past, the power relationship between

employer and domestic worker is no longer incontestable. The propaganda of racial difference or the construction of otherness between employers and their domestic workers aims at asserting an unstable domination. The extensive system of control practiced from broker to employer narrates the same tale.

4.5 Conclusion

Transnational migrant domestic is now highly organized by government and private agencies. Nine out of every ten foreign placements in most of the major labor-sending countries of Asia are conducted by private recruitment agencies. These agencies intervene between employers and employee by matching, manipulating as well as constructing representations of both. Extravagant profits in this sector have led to the proliferation of recruitment agencies. The sector's annual revenues in Taiwan alone are estimated at US$ 180 million. Unscrupulous practices include: the confiscation of passports, personal belongings, and religious items; threats and physical abuse; illegal arrangements; and refusal to remove women from abusive employment situations. As was noted in the preceding sections, agents may also saddle workers with large initial debts and overcharge them for transfer and training fees, in some cases placing them in situations similar to those a coolie would face. If migrant domestics complain to their agents about poor working conditions, they become, in most cases, the recipients of either intimidation or physical punishment, such as a slap. In the eyes of agents, domestic workers are not clients deserving of respectful and dignified treatment, but merely goods to be sold.

The positioning of domestic workers relative to one another becomes organized under gendered, essentialized and racialized codes. Migrant women are characterized according to their country of origin. I argue that this practice, carried out by brokers, sustains confusion in the domestic employment relationship in Taiwanese society.

This measure should, on the one hand, alleviate an employer's anxiety over potential transgressions of social boundaries through employment. On the other hand, it should remedy the unstable power relationship between employer and domestic worker.

The opaque and complicated recruitment process renders not only the migrant, but also the employer, totally dependent on the agent, who may be the only party with access to the inside story and the power to manipulate the whole process. Goss and Lindquist (1995) reveal that the more institutionalized migration becomes, the more fraudulent and corrupt the system becomes:

> Of course this is an indication of relative deprivation in the country but it is also the result of the selective flow of information through the migrant institution. Institutional agents control knowledge about the risks and disappointments of international migration, but it is obviously in their interest to hide these and to promote the advantages of overseas labour" (344).

5 Neither Victims nor Sluts:

Gender Discourse and Migrant Women in Taiwan

In travel literature, romance is an essential part of the conquest experience, in that it "signals the authenticity and depth of the traveller's insight and allows the traveller to learn from local men 'as a man'" (Tsing 1993:214). Women in such stories are often characterized as weak betrayers of their communities, seduced by the outsider into giving up their own men's knowledge. Is romance only a highlight of the travel narratives of men, although women in the contemporary world now travel at least as much as their male counterparts? What role do romance and other sexual encounters play in the experiences of traveling women? What significance does gender have for the integration of women into the global economy?

My interest in this more intimate and underrepresented aspect of migrant women's experiences began with their narratives of sexual harassment in the workplace, which I learnt of during my fieldwork, and with my observation of their romantic relationships. This chapter attempts not only to retell such stories but also to explore the gender conventions behind them and the changing connotations of gender within larger hegemonic contexts.

While gender has tended to be studied as an "internal" cultural issue, recent studies of gender as a performative and negotiated activity suggest that the contestation of meanings is at its most intense where communities, classes, cultures, and nationalities overlap (Ong and Peletz 1995). The dislocation of large numbers of people and the ethnic heterogeneity which has been its consequence, have blurred, confused and challenged cultural understandings about what it means to be male and female. Uncertainty over gender constructs is encountered not only by newcomers but also by locals. The gender discourse exemplified here demonstrates one such example.

In addition, the stories told illuminate the gendered opportunities and constraints on the lives of migrant women.

5.1 Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

The first part of this chapter focuses on sexual abuse and harassment in the workplace of migrant domestic workers. Although both male and female migrant workers in the host country can, and often do, face abuse such as overwork and, on occasion, the non-payment of wages, only migrant women, especially domestic workers, are at risk from sexual vulnerability. In response to overwork and the non-payment of wages there is growing awareness of the need for migrant workers to have access to better legal protection and support both at home and abroad. In contrast to this realization, sexual harassment remains a taboo in the employment relationship. Over the course of my fieldwork, I was very often told of the sexual harassment of foreign domestic workers in their everyday working life. For example, a domestic worker described her experience so: her boss would lay on the sofa naked or watch pornographic films, whilst she cleaned up the living room. One young girl reported that the grandpa, her elderly charge, asked her for a massage and more just after the grandma had died and her corpse still lay in the house. One Indonesian domestic worker revealed to my Indonesian translator in *Bahasa Indonesia*, as I was talking to her Taiwanese boss, that he touched her breast while bathing or on other occasions. Another recounted harassment from her boss harassed in terms of constant sexual innuendos. One said that she was prohibited from locking her door during the night. Someone else related how the male employer of her friend offered her money for sex. One Vietnam interviewee said they had already heard about such occurrences in Vietnam and therefore would refuse to take the job, if they knew they might have to take care of a male ward. All of the information appeared to be founded on the one-sided assertion

that if they revealed the offences within the employer's family or to the broker, they would be threatened with summary dismissal and immediate deportation. Hence they complained about their suffering only to friends and exchanged tips on how to guard against this kind of assault. The cases of which I was told are only the tip of the iceberg. Most of them remain in the dark, except for some extremely severe cases that have been brought before the public.[23] A Philippine domestic worker threw herself out of window to escape being raped by her boss. An Indonesian domestic worker ran out of the house of her employer and was found delirious on the street by police. Shortly before she had been badly beaten by her male and female employers and sexually abused.

5.1.1 The Stigmatization of "Maids"

One of the crucial implications of the sexual vulnerability of migrant domestics has to be sought within the context of the division of labor and its historically gendered structure. In reviewing the work stories of domestics in Taiwan, from *chabo-kan* and *sim-pua* to paid domestic workers, whether commodified or not, domestic work and care work is constructed as low-status, dead-end, marginal and female. Women of mean status have not traditionally been permitted to conform to the sexual norm and have subsequently rarely been empowered to defend themselves. The social construction of domestic workers nowadays is not exempt from this stigmatization.

The sexual generosity and availability of "maids" is a prevalent concept. As addressed in chapter three, the prevailing notion of the migrant domestic worker in Taiwan is one which is "enslaving" and "concubinizing". I argue that this powerful

[23] It has meanwhile been reported that the harassment by employers of foreign domestics is very widespread. Sexual harassment is now a significant reason for cases of run-away domestic workers, cited as being responsible for nearly half of all cases. There is even a so-called current price for bargaining. For the afflicted domestic worker who has not yet completed one year of work, the employer pays her three-months' salary; for the afflicted domestic worker who has worked more than two years, the employer pays her just one-month's salary (*TVBS Weekly* 25 March 2005).

discourse is crucial to the occurrence of sexual harassment. It is remarkable that such assumptions about domestic workers are not only common among Taiwanese men, but also among Taiwanese women. This point is best illustrated by a story.

5.1.2 May's Story

May, a young Thai woman, began to work as general maid in a barbershop in Hong Kong in the 1990s. One of customers of the barbershop, a Taiwanese businessman in Hong Kong, found her kind and diligent, and ask her to work for him. He offered her a much higher salary and she agreed to accept the position. She worked together with another Thai woman. Because of her higher proficiency in Cantonese (the current main language in Hong Kong), May served as the housekeeper and also a receptionist for the boss's business partners. The other woman worked as cook. May said that she had to be on twenty-four hour standby, because she did not know when the guests of the boss would come and go. If they played *mah-jong* (a traditional Chinese four-player game) overnight, she and her colleague would have to prepare a night snack for them. The boss was very satisfied with her service. At the turn of the century, being seized with apoplexy, the Taiwanese boss could no longer conduct his business in Hong Kong and wished to return to Taiwan. He offered May a higher salary to come and take care of him there. At first, May refused the offer as she preferred to continue working in Hong Kong. Finally, she yielded to the conditions and accompanied her boss to back Taiwan.

May described her first three months in Taiwan as horrific. Her sick boss clung to her and would not let her out of his sight. If she occasionally went out to run errands, she would receive a great deal of trouble from him as a result. He would make a scene and give her no rest. I once experienced such a situation, when May and I went on an outing of several hours from her home in Thailand (she took the boss

with her even on her home visit). Although he was not left alone but taken care of by May's sister and mother, he made a fuss about May's absence, assaulting her verbally and threatening her with a knife when we arrived home again. The constant stress of her job caused her to suffer from sleeplessness and successive complaints. I asked her why she didn't quit. She said if she quit her job, the boss would die. She didn't have the heart to do it. In her narrative, May emphasized her status as worker and her respect for her elders. Despite her repulsion at her boss's unreasonable requests, she very often began her story with "as worker, I should…", "as worker, I should not…", or "I cannot inflict such a thing on an old man". On the contrary, if I heard the story from her boss's daughter-in-law, who lived in the same house, she told me that the relationship was like that between a man and his concubine. The wage relation and the possibility of resignation were not paid attention to in the daughter-in-law's narrative.

Observing the different points of view of May and the daughter-in-law to in describing the same relationship, I learnt the discrepant evaluation of domestic work by migrant employees and employers. For the employee, domestic work is a kind of service work; for the employer, either male or female, their maids are not only workers but carry with them an element of sexual innuendo. I asked May how she thought about sexual harassment in the workplace. She said they earned their money through very hard work, including preparing meals, giving medicine, dealing with excrement etc. It was too much if the boss asked her for sex on top of this. She said that the boss had tried to take her hands like he did with his girlfriend in Hong Kong, but she refused it. She said, "I'm his maid, not his mistress".

5.1.3 The Commodified Sexual Images of Southeast Asian Women

I argue that another factor caught up in the tension of this interethnic gender discourse is the commodified sexual images of Southeast Asian women that have persisted for

decades. One of them is the burgeoning new bride-order business in Taiwan that connects middle-aged Taiwanese men with young women from Southeast Asia. For approximately a decade, marriage agencies have been very active in placing Southeast Asian brides. Thousands upon thousands of Taiwanese males have taken advantage of such services. The practice of matchmaking suggests a deal rather than a pairing and occurs asymmetrically between the genders. Dozens of bride candidates, for example, might stand in a room awaiting selection by a male; some agencies ask the bride candidates to present medical certificates of virginity. I do not wish to presume that these bride candidates are mere victims in the matchmaking process, on the contrary, they are often self-aware women on the search for self-realization. Yet the propagandizing of foreign women in matchmaking business in Taiwan objectifies Southeast Asian women and constructs an image of purchasability. I once asked a group of Vietnamese domestic workers I knew what they thought about Vietnamese brides, who form the majority of "foreign" brides in Taiwan. They told me that those who married Taiwanese people came from South Vietnam and those who worked in Taiwan, like they did, came from North Vietnam.

The mobility of Southeast Asian women across ethnic lines is not only apparent in the model of the commercialized foreign bride business. It is also present in the form of sex tourism. The exoticization of Southeast Asian women is rooted in the history of colonialism. It has been further exacerbated by the specific geo-political situation of Southeast Asia in the 1960s. In the Philippines, a thriving sex industry sprang up around U.S. military bases during more than 40 years of American occupation. The Marcos government subsequently propagandized "the reputed beauty and generosity of Filipino woman as 'natural resources' to compete in the international tourism market" (Enloe 1989: 38). Although Aquino's government, the successor to the

Marcos regime, proclaimed to have cleaned up this "service economy", the sex trade has remained a major source of foreign currency. Even through three governments, the sex trade in the Philippines has established a firm footing in the tourism industry. In the case of Thailand, the tourism and leisure services initially aimed at capturing the "Rest and Recreation" market of United States military personnel during the Indochina conflict. After the withdrawal of US troops, the model of "Rest and Recreation" was adopted by some corporations to ensure the maintenance and renewal of the working capacity of their employees. Southeast Asia has become the sexual paradise for men from the West as well as from Asia. The number of Taiwanese men who are buyers of sex package tours in Southeast Asia is not inconsiderable. In February 2004, for example, the government distribution of toiletry bags containing condoms to Taiwanese male tourists bound for Southeast Asia at the airport, spoke for itself. These different types of international trade and trafficking of women blurs the boundaries between domestic employment and sexual service.

5.1.4 An Episode in the Park

Although the gender relationship in Taiwan claims to be one of the most progressive in East Asia, the instability of discourse on gender continues. I will recount a brief incident to illustrate it. One day I sat together with Yeni, an Indonesian domestic, in a pavilion to take shelter from an unexpected shower. A Taiwanese old man, aged seventy and more, a neighbor of Yeni's, came and sat down right next to her and proceeded to regale stories about his experience with prostitutes: which price for how many girls, and so on. Feeling embarrassed, Yeni asked him not to continue; otherwise, she would call for the police. He paid no attention to what Yeni said and simply kept on talking. Finally, Yeni told him that I was Taiwanese and her agent (actually I was not). The old man was very surprised, stared at me, and stopped chatting. Perhaps on

that afternoon, the man prattled unbridledly as usual, because he took me to be an Indonesian or another foreign domestic, too. This genre of sexual boasting, meanwhile regarded as politically incorrect in public, seems to remain a beloved domain of the traditional fantasy of male desire and authority and has now found other listeners – migrant domestic workers. As new participants in Taiwanese society, migrant domestics are intertwined in the gender discourse either willingly or not.

5.1.5 Of My Own Experience

As a researcher and a woman in the field, I have made several uncomfortable experiences of this kind. One day I got to know an old man in park, whose legs were amputated because of his diabetes, along with his Thai domestic worker. He was at first very polite and invited me to dinner at his house. While the Thai domestic worker was cooking dinner in the kitchen, he and I chitchatted, and then he turned on the TV and chose a private channel, on which a pornographic film was being shown. At that point, I found it very embarrassing and asked him to change the program. After hesitating briefly, he changed channels, soon switching back however to the pornographic film. So it went on, back and forth several times, until I decided to go into the kitchen and talk to the domestic worker.[24] I was not his employee and could decide how to respond without hesitation (that is, almost with no hesitation - in fact, I had some consideration for my status as a guest in his house. I found later that I am still influenced by the gender conventions of Taiwanese women). Unlike me, most afflicted migrant women will choose to tolerate sexual advances in order to keep their jobs. In this uncomfortable position I was able to learn the perception of the sexually

[24] Considering his attitude toward me, I suspected at that time that he would not spare his domestic worker from sexual assault. I have recently heard from another Thai domestic that the domestic of this man was compelled by him to engage in sexual acts. She had to imitate the pornography with a vibrator. This unhappy story was not heard from the afflicted domestic herself, but from a male accomplice of the boss. The accomplice told the other Thai domestic this story to persuade her into having intercourse with him.

afflicted migrant domestic and the constraints on negotiations.

5.2 Sexual Harassment of Migrant Domestics as Interethnic Gender Conflict

Sexual harassment in the workplace of migrant domestics symbolizes one of the sites of gender conflict at the borders of communities, classes, cultures and nationalities. Gender domination is never a thing in and of itself, but intersects with other hierarchical domains (Ong and Peletz 1995). These gender conflicts take place not only at personal levels of daily life, at the local level, but also at the national and international levels. The migrant woman's body becomes the confrontational battlefield of these various gender discourses. Below, I attempt to frame my discussion in terms of the intersections of power and difference, both within and across the interests of religions, nations, and local communities. What are the various ways in which ideologies of religion, nationhood, and ethnicity, respectively, are involved in the experiences and understandings of gender among Southeast Asian migrant women? What possibilities are open to Southeast Asian migrant women with which to respond to or deflect the varied norms and forms of domination?

5.2.1 The Influence of Religion

Migrant domestic workers generally tend to be labeled in terms of their nationalities, although, religion nevertheless plays an important role in their overseas lives, influencing their gender ideology as well as supporting them in their uneasy lives abroad. In the case of the Filipinos, the Roman Catholic Church is engaged in the lives of labor migrants from the very beginning. Fe Nicodemus[25], a popular Philippine

[25] Fe Nicodemus is was the anchorwoman of "*Babaeng Migrante, May Kakampi Ka*" (Women migrants, You have an ally) and chair of the group *Kakammpi*, which works with migrant workers and their families (Sison 2003).

radio anchorwoman for migrant workers, points out that many of her program's listeners begin their questions with "Is it a sin?". For example, "Is it a sin if my girl friend gets an abortion? She will be deported if her employer finds out she's pregnant…" In addition, a commitment to remaining chaste ranks highly within the Filipino community. According to Chang and Groves' (2000) study of the Filipino domestic worker community in Hong Kong, many church groups make rules to protect their members' reputations. One of the most important group rules is regular attendance at weekly Sunday gatherings. Hanging out in the central district of Hong Kong is recognized as disreputable. Wearing fancy clothing, jewelry or matching lipstick and shoes arouse extra suspicion. Mutual censorship is not unusual. Women expect the clergy to infuse the group with a clean and wholesome identity. Overseas Filipino publications, such as *Tinig Filipino*, are rife with warnings about "the vulnerability of migrant women to fall prey, if not to prostitution, then at least to being construed as prostitutes" and suggestions for "appropriate behaviors and appearances" which provide guidelines for the new situation (Chang and Groves 2000: 78).

While the Philippines has been significantly influenced by the Roman Catholic Church, Theravada Buddhism has exercised a great influence on Thai society. Approximately 95 per cent of Thais are Buddhists, as are the majority of Thai workers in Taiwan. Buddhism, with its emphasis on monkhood and monastic activities, discriminates against women both ideologically and in practical activity (Karim 1995). In Thai history, Theravada Buddhism has played a central role in shaping the legal and cultural framework as well as the social life of its people. Since the feudal period, Buddhism and polity have had a symbiotic relationship. Buddhism functions as an ideological force that supports the gender-biased political system, placing males in the

position of household representatives as well as the representatives of other social fields. In terms of spirituality and ritual, women are subordinate to men; they cannot ordain as monks because it is believed that their biological sex morally binds them more closely to worldly attachments and desires than men (Kirsch 1982). The activation of sexual desire is considered to be caused by women. Even today, attributing potentially harmful powers to female sexuality and glorifying male sexual power is very common in Thailand (Mills 1995). A Thai domestic told me that as woman, she had to do good deeds to accumulate merits and better karma. She always read Buddhistic parables in pamphlets and prayed to Buddha and the King Chulalongkorn, Rama V (the fifth King of the Chakri Dynasty) in her free time.

As the country with the most Muslims in the world, the Indonesian (also the Javanese) gender relationship is influenced very strongly by Islam. The Javanese declaration that men are better able than women to control themselves also accords well with Islamic gender ideologies. Islamic gender ideologies portray men as innately more capable than women of controlling their passions and instincts, *nafsu*. It is believed that men have greater rationality and reason, *akal*, which enables them to suppress those desires and to hold fast to the guidance of the *Qur'an* (Rosen 1984; Abu-Lughod 1986; Ong 1987). This ideological system has been generated and reinforced not only by the values of the Javanese elite, but also by the patriarchal tendencies of the Dutch colonial rule of Islamic doctrine, and of the postcolonial Indonesian state (Brenner 1995). This combination of local ideas and religious conviction as well as colonial legacy have resulted in a gender-biased ideology in Indonesia. Men are more valued than women because they are gifted in self-control and thus superior in spirituality. On the one hand, self-control over desire is advisable; on the other hand, men's sexual prowess and potency are glorified and permitted.

Under Indonesian and Islamic law, Muslim men may have up to four wives at the same time. By contrast, women with more autonomy in public, whether widows, divorcées or successful women traders, are frequently the objects of gossip and suspicion regarding their sexual activities (Brenner 1995). Most of the Indonesian domestic workers I knew did profess Islam, but they generally made decisions pertaining to male-female relationships without reference to religious concerns.

Approximately one fourth of the Vietnamese are Buddhist. For most of the Vietnamese domestic workers I knew, religion did not play an important role in their everyday overseas life.

Religion is often an important source of support for migrant workers, as an ideological prop as well as a practical help. Among the migrant workers, Filipinos are most strongly influenced by a religious institution – the Roman Catholic Church. The Christian sexual moral and familial ideal is very present in their everyday life. For Thai migrant women, Buddhism serves rather more as a spiritual background, even as far as the gender aspect is concerned. Despite the religiously conditioned gender-biased ideology in Indonesia, Javanese domestic workers certainly seem not to be influenced by it in everyday life. Among the Vietnamese migrant women, I did not notice the influence of religion upon gender.

5.2.2 The Force of Fatherlands

The emergence of female labor migration in Southeast Asia has occasioned public discussions about the mobility of women. The sexual abuse of domestic workers abroad seems to demand intervention from their fatherlands. Although migrant women are as much celebrated as remittance-winners in their home countries as their male counterparts are, gender specific problems during their overseas stay, such as

sexual abuse, are likely kept secret or overlooked. The response of some governments to the cases of sexual advances further illustrate the extent to which "the transnational spaces where desire, fears, and power become entangled with the moral economies of religious 'brotherhood', nationalism, and global capitalism" (Ong and Peletz 1995: 8-9). The response of the Indonesian government to the abuse of their women overseas demonstrates a typical attitude.

Since the 1980s, Indonesian women have only gradually participated in international labor migration. Like the majority of their Southeast Asian counterparts, their destination has been East Asia and the Middle East. In addition to cash value, the shared Islamic faith and the wish to partake in the Muslim pilgrimage attracts many Indonesian workers to this region. The Indonesian authorities also assume that the women will be in good hands in the devoutly Muslim atmosphere of Saudi Arabia. In 1984, alongside irregularities in the process of recruitment, the mistreatment and sexual abuse of Indonesian women workers in the Middle East was laid bare for the first time. The problems, which many Philippine workers had previously experienced, affected the Indonesian workers to no lesser extent. They suffered ill-treatment, including sexual assault. The Islamic faith provided no protection for the Indonesian women; they were treated in the same manner as domestic workers from other Asian countries. The miserable life of the domestics came to light when a journalist inquired into the problems of Indonesian women workers in Saudi Arabia in a 1984 press conference. The Indonesian ambassador denied the existence of any problems, asserting that there had been only been a few cases of abuse out of the thousands of Indonesian women working there. This judgment was made according to the conviction that the care of women is a "natural" consequence of strict adherence to Islamic law in Saudi Arabia (Robinson 2000). The government was caught between its economic agendas and the public demands for moral accountability. Moreover, the

government did not want to displease Saudi Arabia. Many suggestions for compromise were made. The minister for Manpower, Sudomo asserted that it was just a small proportion of migrant women, who experienced these problems, and the majority of migrant house servants were *janda* (widows/divorcees), as if this made allegations of mistreatment of less concern (should it be true). He proposed that it might be preferable to consider sending Indonesian housemaids to Malaysia, rather than Saudi Arabia, because Indonesia and Malaysia shared a common Malay heritage. Many were convinced that some of the problems stemmed from the low skill-levels of the workers recruited. If more effort were made to send skilled workers, such as nurses and shop assistants, exploitation would not happen as often.[26] The problems were passed back to the women, drawing on the rhetoric of their lack of skills as the cause of the problems. Over decades, the Indonesian government even now imputes poor treatment overseas to the lack of language and work related skills of their women workers (Robinson 2000; Elias 2003[27]) and demands labor recruiters to provide language and other classes to prospective migrants before they leave. In such an atmosphere, the women and their families are often unwilling to expose cases of abuse: if their daughters are pregnant as a consequence of rape, the families might claim "they liked each other". They often feel that the publicizing of these cases places a burden on them if it means their female relatives' sexual violation or death are exposed to public scrutiny (Robinson 2000). As a result, the reaction of Indonesian domestics to sexual abuse and its consequences takes the form of a reluctance to protest and confusion about what to do in case they get sacked and sent home and divorced by their husbands. The force of the fatherland serves as a source of

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[26] The number of Indonesian workers overseas has continued to rise, and women working as domestic helps still comprise the majority (Hugo 1996).
[27] The government suspended unskilled female worker emigration in March 2003 for two to three months, arguing that unskilled workers lack the language and work related skills to deal with foreign employers, contributing to their poor treatment abroad (Elias 2003).

suppression instead of support.

The Vietnamese authorities are another example of a system which represses the right of women to safeguard the alleged national interest. Recently (May 2005), a number of Vietnamese domestic workers (possibly up to fifty afflicted parties) accused their Taiwanese broker and his father of rape. It is reported that an official of the Vietnam Economic and Cultural Office in Taipei threatened their afflicted fellow Vietnamese into retracting their testimonies as accusations spread in Vietnam. Not only did the Indonesian and Vietnamese governments fail to back up its citizens, but the Philippines and Thailand authorities also took the same approach. Sara Balabagan, a Filipino maid working in the United Arab Emirates, was accused of murdering her elderly employer, who had raped her, and was sentenced to death (*Chicago Tribune* 9 June 1996). A Thai domestic outlined the similar situation of helplessness in her home country. She and others had complained about the sexual advances of their male employers to the government and had received the answer: "We cannot help you. Best you don't work as domestics, but as workers in a factory". It seems there to exist no alternatives besides running away. This choice often leads to further tragedy, a topic I addressed in more detail below. These cases, which only form the tip of the iceberg, highlight some of the difficulties and risks foreign domestic workers are confronted with. If the situation of abuse does not improve, we will again and again read the sorry headlines: "Indentured Servants: 1,5 Million Women Brave Unknown Risks to Support Their Families" (*Chicago Tribune* 23 June 1996).

According to Taiwanese regulations, the contract for foreign domestics is at first two years. If the employer is satisfied with the service of the employee, the contract can be extended for three years. The contract can be renewed once more for the same worker. It is the employer who holds and renews the work permit. Should there be a problem in the fraught domestic worker-employer relationship, the employer can

simply repatriate their worker by supplying any excuse (in most cases with help of the brokers) or by refusing to renew the permit. In contrast, the regulations for changing employers are very strict. Foreign domestic workers were not permitted to be transferred to a new employer or take up new work until 1998. Since 1998, foreign domestic workers can only be transferred to a new employer if their charge has deceased, their employer has emigrated, their wages have not been paid or if they face similar circumstances which are not attributable their own conduct.[28] In almost all cases of sexual abuse, even if it can be proven, employers and brokers are not prepared to re-employ the foreign worker or provide them with a new placement. The disclosure of sexual abuse means an end to overseas employment. For these women this translates into a financial disaster, since foreign workers pay a substantial broker's fee to work in Taiwan. Most of them go back in debt if the contract is terminated midway. Most of the salary of the first two years is just able to cover the high broker fee. Most foreign domestics do not have much in their pockets until the sixteenth month or even much later in their employment. Thus the third year is, relatively speaking, a year of profit. As a rule, domestics endeavor to work beyond the extended year, unless the working conditions are too hard, and resign themselves to one more year's employment. A number of employers regard this right to extension as a tool with which to control the employee. The fact that foreign workers outnumber employers reinforces the dependence of domestic workers on their employers. This dependence greatly influences the decision to refrain from filing a complaint against the sexual offender during employment. Therefore, it is not unusual for an afflicted domestic to yield to the will of her male employer; in fact, some domestics finally enter into clandestine sexual liaisons with them. Moreover, the vulnerability of women to pregnancy is another influential aspect. Foreign female workers who are

[28] Employment Service Act: Article 53, 59.

categorized as unskilled workers are subjected to regular pregnancy checks and are deported if found pregnant. Until November 2002, the foreign domestic workers in Taiwan were also subjected to regular pregnancy checks and to medical check-ups every six months. Any worker whose test results are positive is repatriated.

In the light of Douglas' suggestion that all social systems are vulnerable at their margins, and that all margins are accordingly considered dangerous, Butler argues that "if the body is synecdochal for the social system per se or a site in which open systems converge, then any kind of unregulated permeability constitutes a site of pollution and endangerment" (Butler 1990: 168). Migrant women's bodies seem to assume an interstitial position, a no man's land, in the interethnic context under investigation here. No authorities will seriously consider them or their transnational problems, since they both symbolize a poorly articulated social system.

5.2.3 The Feminine Ideal

Many studies of the region in question have long pointed to the "relatively high status" of women in Southeast Asia as an important feature which both underlies the region's tremendous diversity and simultaneously distinguishes it from India, China, Japan, other parts of South and East Asia (Ward 1963; Van Esterik 1982). The more recently published volume *Power and Difference: Gender in Island Southeast Asia* emphasizes, on the one hand, how many insular Southeast Asian cultures stress gender equality and complementarity, but also illustrates, albeit less emphatically, that the prerogatives of spiritual power or "potency" and the overall prestige enjoyed by men typically exceed those of women (Atkinson and Errington 1990). Aihwa Ong and Michael Peletz's collection (1995) *Bewitching Women, Pious Men*: *Gender and Body politics in Southeast Asia* links the gender construction to a wide range of given socio-economic, political and cultural contexts – "uneven capitalist development

combined with enormous local diversity; the rise of newly affluent middle classes; the relative strength and legitimacy of the state in the region; and the prevalence of overt state policies of ideological control" (8). Below, I will concentrate on how feminine ideals configure gender performances of migrant women in different ways.

The family is a central concern for migrant women. Their roles as mothers, wives and daughters in the family are premier. Articles in *Tinig Filipino*, a popular magazine among the Philippine domestic workers, repeatedly warn of numerous temptations and the potentially devastating consequences for one's marriage and family. It often encourages them to suppress their own interests and desires. Some try to discipline themselves in the name of national pride. As one woman wrote in an editorial in *Tinig Filipino*: "it is up to us to prove to the world that even if we come from a poor nation, we do not easily fall prey to men's advances for money or for relationships!" (Chang and Groves 2000: 81). In contrast to involvement in extramarital or other illicit affairs with men and violation of the conventional and religious image of a "good" woman, lesbianism seems to find more tolerance, which is often regarded as a "safe" alternative (Constable 1997; Chang and Groves 2000).

While sexual prowess is a positive feature of masculine identity, any deed that jeopardizes the virginity of young, unmarried women or the chastity of married women, such as long-distance mobility, is regarded suspiciously. A present-day example: the sexual propriety of women working in Bangkok or overseas becomes a matter for uncertainty and speculation (Hantrakul 1988; Mills 1995). The story of a Thai informant reveals the same ideology. When she and her sisters had just begun working as domestics in Hong Kong, a rumor about their "selling themselves" overseas did the rounds in the village. To relieve their parents of worry and free themselves from community gossip, they invited their parents to Hong Kong and showed the means by which they made money. In contrast to the strict tabs kept on

female chastity, a male worker from the same village, married and paterfamilias, could continue to live a quiet life in his family and in the village, event though he had impregnated his Taiwanese girlfriend during his two-year stay in Taiwan. As dutiful daughters, the two abovementioned women had to uphold their obligation to support their parents and young siblings, observe the sexual propriety, and not dishonor the family through sexual activity.

The overwhelming majority of Indonesians who work as domestics in Taiwan come from Java. Therefore, it is appropriate to draw on the literature on Javanese culture in this discussion. Many scholars of Javanese society have remarked on the prominent economic roles of women and their central position in the household (H. Geertz 1961; Jay 1969; Stoler 1977; Keeler 1987; Hatley 1990). In her book *The Javanese Family*, Hildred Geertz notes that within the domestic domain, "The wife makes most of the decisions; she controls all family finances, and although she gives her husband formal deference and consults with him on major matters, it is usually she who is dominant" (1961: 46). Moreover, Javanese custom has entitled women to be active in marketplaces and in many businesses for a long time (Raffles 1965 [1817]). In addition, both descent and inheritance are also reckoned bilaterally. Javanese custom prescribes that daughters and sons should inherit equal shares of property from their parents (H. Geertz 1961). Women not only manage their husbands' incomes and control their own inherited property; they are important economic contributors to their households in their own right. They are often the main or even sole breadwinners for their families. This is certainly the case in households where men are absent (many households are headed by women alone, in part because of the high divorce rate in Java), but it is also true in some households where both husband and wife are present (Brenner 1995).

The dominance of women in the household and their economic strength would

seem to suggest a degree of social and economic status for women in Java which is comparable to that of men. Yet scholars of Javanese society also point out that while women have economic power and considerable control over household affairs, in the realm of prestige they fall far short of men (Jay 1969; Hatley 1990; Keeler 1987). The ethnographic literature on Java constantly refers to the concept of spiritual potency (Keeler 1987; C. Geertz 1960; Anderson 1972; Hatley 1990; Errington 1990). Gender construction in the region is based on this notion. Women are considered to be unable to control bodily desire or protect the boundaries of the body (Tsing 1993). As a result, women must be both protected and constrained by men, and by contrast, male sexual desire signals masculinity and is commended.

The different attributes of the male and female physical and spiritual potency impress different sexual morals upon Indonesian men and women. Wati's story serves as one example. Wati, an Indonesian domestic in Taiwan, told me that her husband had not called her for weeks because he was angry with her. It began with a joke she told him, that she would ask her employer for leave in order to make acquaintances with men. Her husband took this very seriously and demanded that she gave up the idea. Actually, she had only made the joke to attract his attention. Later, she said that they had a daughter together. I asked her if the daughter lived with her father (Wati's husband). Wati said "No, she lives with my mother". I asked further, "Why not with her father?" and Wati replied "it is not convenient. Her father now lives with his girlfriend". I asked her "Don't you mind? And what would happen, if you go home?" Wati said "I'm not with him and nobody takes care of him. He has found a girlfriend to do this. It's O.K. If I go home, she will leave". This is a common anxiety among female migrant workers. They feel guilty that they cannot stay with their husbands and tolerate infidelity because the needs of their husbands require fulfillment.

Although Vietnam has been under a socialist regime for several decades, the

influence of earlier Confucian ideology has seemingly maintained its predominance in Vietnamese society. The family and its welfare remains the central concern for women. The interplay between Confucianism, socialism and gender in Vietnam has still to be explored.

Although some religious and national ideologies regard the female body as tempting and vulnerable, their according responses to the interethnic gender conflict – sexual harassment in the receiving countries – appear hesitant. Gender asymmetry in Southeast Asia impresses the construction of body and desires upon migrant women to varying degrees. It produces a feeling of shame about themselves if their gendered body was touched "indecently" or "immorally", regardless of reasons and conditions. As a result, many of women who are afflicted with sexual harassment or rape choose to keep silent.

5.2.4 The Creativity of the Migrant Domestic Worker's Response

Due to the deliberate indifference of recruitment agencies and employer families towards the cases of sexual advances, some foreign domestics take the initiative of protecting themselves. Sari, an Indonesian domestic in her late twenties, took care of a male who was ill with ALS and reported that she was again and again harassed by her charge if they were at home on their own. She complained to her best friend, Ani, also an Indonesian domestic with whom she was acquainted in the park, when she accompanied her charge on his daily walk. They decided on a tactic to address the sexual offences suffered by Sari. Sari would call Ani if sexual advances were initiated and Ani would then call Sari repeatedly to interrupt any further advances by the employer.

Some Philippine recruitment agencies recognize this problem and pass on some tips for self-protection, for example, if the domestic is asked to sleep with an unlocked

door she should put a metal pot behind the door and if somebody enters the room, he will hit the pot and she will wake up. Yet some offenders would not be put off by the sound. Eka, an Indonesian domestic in her late twenties, was supposed to take care of a grandma, who could only breathe with an oxygen inflator, and the five children of the family. The daily routine for consisted of getting up at 6 a.m. and going to bed at 1 a.m. She was not given her own bedroom. She slept in a room with the grandma. Eka reported that one day she was sound asleep and did not expect to be awakened when she caught the 75-year-old grandpa about to unbutton her clothes. She begged, refused and struggled against him. But it was futile. The Grandpa said, "I can give you money". Eka said, "I'm not married. I don't want to do this". Every night the grandpa came and harassed her. I asked her why she didn't lock the door to the room. She said that the grandpa used the excuse of checking on the grandma's well-being to command that she sleep with the door unlocked. If she locked the door, the grandpa would kick at it and shout "let me see my wife" and so on. She tried not taking a shower in the hope that her body odor would keep the grandpa at bay. Eka put it sadly, "I need this job very badly. I've already worked one and a half years here. I hope I can stay here and work longer, but for another employer. I don't mind working long hours, but I don't want to be involved in such a dissolute relation".

I often heard about such experiences of sexual harassment from those afflicted personally or from their colleagues. I think that their storytelling served more as a kind of delicate counterattack to the sexual assault than as an emergency call for my direct intervention. I think these migrant women could assess their disadvantageous position and situation vis-à-vis their employers very well and attempted to make the best of things.

While the improvised responses of the afflicted parties, aimed at deflecting sexual advances and forms of domination, may not necessarily result in structural

transformation, the changes they effect in everyday attitudes and norms are part of the dynamics of this interethnic gender discourse.

In the context of international labor migration, the migrant woman's body becomes a contested space of gender construction. The daily practices of migrant domestic workers are aimed at defining themselves in the face of various modes of bodily control and are also struggles over gender meanings, norms and values. By challenging the dominant gender discourses in Taiwan and in their fatherlands, they expand the space of political struggle in their everyday lives. They achieve the voices to question gender problems in the global economy.

5.3 The Romantic Relationships of Foreign Domestic Workers in Taiwan

In this section I would like to describe migrant women's mostly short-lived courtships during their stay in Taiwan. The key questions: Which elements are characteristic of these courtships? What role do such intermezzos play in the lives of foreign domestic workers and what problems do they entail? Do the various modes of the bodily control of migrant women domestics in Taiwan also play an important role in their romances? How does geographical dislocation color their sense of the form the relations between men and women ought to take?

The nature of live-in domestic work, created by the Taiwanese for their foreign domestics and involving being on call at all times, leaves hardly any space for the privacy of the latter. Occasional phone calls to their nearest and dearest provide the most significant and often sole chance to channel their emotions and strengthen their will to continue their work abroad. According to my survey in Taipei in 2002, most foreign workers are single and in their prime reproductive years. Both Filipino and

Indonesian workers are mainly in their twenties and the next largest group in their thirties. Foreign labor policy stipulates that contract workers cannot bring their families into Taiwan and are not allowed to marry there. Many migrant workers find themselves under stress due to a lack of contact with the opposite sex, along with the monotony of their jobs and the generally dull routine of their lives. What's more, they have no normal outlet for their sexual urges. While visiting prostitutes is often a solution for migrant males, the harsh working conditions, isolation and loneliness predispose migrant females to enter into adventurous intimate relationships (Lin 1999).

Most foreign workers have their day off on Sundays. Sunday is the only day on which all their personal needs, whether religious devoutness, pleasures of the table (appetite for hometown food), and social contact, etc., can be satisfied. Many workers gather to amuse themselves, meet their compatriots and acquire information as well as necessities. In addition, they seek friendship and courtship. Due to the approximately equal number of male and female migrant workers and the communication problem,[29] the courtship of Filipinos is very often between their compatriots. Churches as well as fast-food restaurants serve as their main meeting places. By contrast, most of the Indonesian workers in Taiwan are female. On average they are younger than Philippine domestics. They are highly sought-after, especially the Thai group, which is mostly composed of men. Groceries and shops, which are run especially for foreign workers and have mushroomed within and around Taipei Main Station, are their preferred places for dates. On Sundays, they pay great attention to their appearance, dressing up and keeping an eye on their target groups. In courting, material and

[29] Most Filipino workers are not very motivated to learn Mandarin, because they think they can speak English and it is enough for them to communicate with employers and other people.

monetary gifts from men to women are common. Among other gifts, cell phones and jewels are most popular.

Another locality where male workers look for prospective girlfriends is parks, since many domestics accompany their charges to get some fresh air. The Spring Park in Taipei is a regular haunt. The subject of who was going out with whom was very often a topic for discussion among the Indonesian domestic workers frequenting Spring Park. A group of Thai workers would now and then visit the park looking for girlfriends. Sometimes the park resembled the scene of a courtship ritual. Thai workers usually surrounded the domestics' meeting-place at a distance of several meters. The men and women kept an eye on each other. If a woman showed interest in a man, he would approach her. If a birthday or thanksgiving party[30] was being held among the domestics, the Thai workers would not join in but just watch from a distance. The presence of the Thai men in the park seemed to strike the right note. As a result, a number of them would approach the women. Telephone numbers were exchanged and dates followed. If one girl went out with one man from a group, she would attempt to couple a member of her own company with another man from the group. At times a collective outing would be organized. Such occasions were very often a great success. If the domestic did not have a day off, the man would visit her in the park and accompany the woman with her charge on a walk or help the woman support the weighty charge during exercise. Familiarities seldom came off in the park. Yet it did not take long for courtship to develop into love play. Sometimes the domestics had to sneak off to hide their love affairs from their employers and other acquaintances. Passion was often confined to the "stolen" moments on their day off. On this day, they would go on a date downtown or at train stations. They would have

[30] Some Indonesian domestics prepared some food and organized a thanksgiving party after having worked in Taiwan for two years. It meant they had paid off their brokerage fees and could keep most of their salary from that time on. Concerning the complicated issue of brokerage, see Chapter 3.

a meal or go shopping together, walking hand in hand or with the man holding the woman's waist in the manner of many Taiwanese couples. At this moment, the routine of daily life seemed to disappear and it was possible to receive some personal attention from one another.

For many domestic workers, a weekly day off is not yet a matter of course, and this can have a great impact on their intimate relationships. Among Indonesian domestics, a day off is especially rare. One Indonesian domestic told me that she had had just two days off during her two years of employment. The last day off she had taken was only granted because she had agreed to sign away further day offs. Many of the domestics have to bargain each and every time they wish for a day off. This particularity also shapes their love lives. Thai males, most of them working in the construction industry or in factories, have regular days off every week. Indonesian women, most of them working as domestics, seldom get a regular day off. Thus it is usually not difficult for Indonesian domestics to initiate a relationship, but it is not easy to maintain it for a long period of time because of the irregular incidence of their days off. Very often I heard Thai workers talking about the calls from their Indonesian girlfriends, who did not have regular days off, calling to check up on them. Once I was involved in one of their telephone conversations. The Thai worker, who I had just talked with, thrust his cell phone in my hand, and asked me to talk to his girlfriend. My proficiency in Mandarin paid witness to his claim that he was not flirting with any other foreign domestic girl, but was speaking to a Taiwanese woman who was asking him questions about his employment. The irregularity of the domestic's day off burdens the relationship, which is endowed with uncertainty and jealousy from the very start. As a result, many if not most foreign workers, men as well as women, are constantly on the lookout for a new sweetheart. Having a relationship with two partners at the same time can result in quarrels, even in blows. I experienced such a

confrontation in the park I frequented. A Thai man was conducting a love affair with two Indonesian domestics, who were acquainted with each other, at the same time. When one of the women saw the man calling to the other in the park and was about to attack her, the man stepped in, thereby wounding her on the head. Before the police could arrive, the man had left, leaving the wounded woman to be accompanied by her friends to the doctor. This occurrence was just one episode. Most romances do not come to such a dramatic end. The parties to a relationship normally give it up and commence a new one relatively swiftly and peacefully.

One particular episode made me rethink my attitude towards migrant workers in the field. By joining in the parties held by migrant workers, I would be once in a while regarded as a possible object of someone's affections. One day, at a party, I carried on a conversation with a Thai worker and sat next to him unintentionally all evening. Both he and the other people at the party understood me to be giving him a signal to woo me. They made fun of us when they saw us talking together again on another occasion. Of course, the joke drew to a close, when nothing happened. Another example involved a Thai-Indonesian courting couple I was acquainted with. I would sometimes spend the weekend with them. When I heard that the Thai worker was sick, I took him two durians in the company of a male friend of mine and wished him a speedy recovery. The next day, when I saw his Indonesian girlfriend in Spring Park, where I usually met them, the Indonesian domestics were sharing one of the durians I had given to the sick Thai worker. Later on one of the group told me that it was being whispered that I liked the Thai worker and that his girlfriend was angry with me. I was very astonished to hear that. From these two occurrences, I was at first surprised by becoming fair game to male migrants and a rival to female migrants, but later I was much more surprised by my self-righteous conviction of holding the detached status of a researcher.

Courtship among foreign workers seldom ends in marriage. Strictly speaking, marriage is out of the question in most courtships. During my fieldwork, I heard of just two cases which were heading for marriage. Both of these couples were Indonesian women and Thai men. The younger couple were in their twenties and had not been married before. The Indonesian woman introduced her Thai boyfriend to her parents over her cell phone. Due to their different mother tongues, they were only able greet one another. The Indonesian woman told me that her boyfriend would finish his employment contract earlier than her, and he had asked her to go with him prior to the end of her contract. She was not very enthusiastic about the idea. She said she would rather earn more money before they got married than have to be separated again in order to go abroad to earn money after the wedding. The other couple were in their late thirties, divorced, and both had children from their previous relationships. The Indonesian woman told me she appreciated her boyfriend's love for her children. She said if he bought clothes and playthings for his own children, he bought also some for hers and gave them to her to send to Indonesia. Both of the women asked me about the possibility of traveling from Taiwan directly to Thailand. They wanted to visit Thailand when they finished their employment contract in Taiwan.

Besides these two couples, for the overwhelming majority of foreign workers, marriage is out of the question in their courtships in Taiwan. Extramarital affairs are not uncommon. These are regarded from the beginning as FTO (For Taiwan Only) or TLA (Taiwan Love Affair), meaning that those involved cease to be a couple on their return to their home countries (Lin 1999). Airports (in Taiwan or in their home country) are usually the terminals of their courtship. Several women are also married and have children, who are mostly taken care by the female relative of their native families. It is hardly ever the case that married women with children leave their husbands for a new lover in Taiwan. On occasion, it is heard that a woman bargained

over alimony after filing for divorce. The cause of divorce is usually not because of a new lover in Taiwan, but due to a husband's affairs with other women at home while a woman is overseas. For married as well as unmarried couples, the one left behind will frequently insist on maintaining the relationship, because a partner who works abroad usually means a secure household economy.

In addition to the responsibility for their partner in their hometown, the female as well as the male workers concerned are, in many respects, often uncertain of their bond in Taiwan. Some worry whether their kinship will accept the mixed marriage. Some are troubled by the short-term relationship and do not know what will happen if they go home separately. Some still get entangled in a separation or in a wedlock crisis and are not sure if they can ride out the storm. Hence, most of them experience a relationship in Taiwan as a short-lived liaison. It is not unusual for those involved to be conscience-stricken. Even those women who go to work overseas in order to escape unhappy marriages cannot easily opt for a new one. Nonetheless, a courtship without plans for marriage does not mean less passion is felt. Careless of the consequences, some Indonesian domestics who are seldom granted free time and irregular days off and are unable to meet their lovers, run away from the employer's dwelling in order to be with them. They thereby become “illegals”. A number of them work underground until they are caught by the police. Episodes of courtship like this end up at the detention center and result in deportation.

Fascination with the charm of migrant women is not confined to male foreign workers. They also attract many Taiwanese men. The appearance of young foreign domestics cannot be missed in parks. Normally, very few young Taiwanese women frequent parks alone. Most of the Taiwanese women in parks are pensioners and show up just in the morning for exercise. During the day, very few women make a halt in parks,

except the old and the sick with their attendants. By contrast, these young and vigorous foreign women seem especially conspicuous. More often than not the older Taiwanese men who frequent the park maintain a certain relationship with foreign domestics. The most typical one is a patron-clientele relationship. They are acquainted with each other, sometimes because the Taiwanese employers are friends, sometimes because the domestics are compatriots, and sometimes just because they meet each other every day in the park and have thereby established contact with one another. They chat and take light refreshments together. A lot of older men regard the foreign women as their protégés and bestow favors upon them, such as giving them snacks, advice, or even loaning them money. In return for that, the domestics spend time with the older men, give them a massage or run errands for them. Joking with one another by making sexual innuendos are not taboo.

While migrant domestics are often held to be erotic objects and the constant target of Taiwanese men's sexual adventures, an actual love affair seldom comes off. During my research in Spring Park, I only ever heard of one case. The man was handicapped but not old. I was told that the man had been married and had little money, but had settled on an Indonesian domestic and wanted to please her. He bought her a cell phone and pre-pay cards on credit. What did he eventually get? When the Indonesian domestic finished her contract, she went without saying goodbye to him. Perhaps he wept for her. This love story stirred up less commiseration than ridicule among other domestics. Some Indonesian domestics even mocked the man by imitating his whimper.

Those who really chase after the foreign domestics in the park are not typical frequenters of parks. At the beginning, these men perhaps go there adventitiously. They are salesmen, estate brokers or taxi drivers. They go there to find customers, clients or just to take a break. They are attracted by the group of women and try to

approach them. Most of the time the men succeed in their flirtations with these women since they are considered more open and amusing by the foreign women and pay them more attention than other Taiwanese. Very often Taiwanese men flirt with them just for fun. They regard the relationship with foreign domestics as an adventure. Yet some women expect the relationship to possibly yield positive results. They dream of a marriage with a Taiwanese man which would allow them to stay forever. Almost all of them are disappointed. Some domestics try to secure a relationship by any means, even by pregnancy. This usually fails. In most instances, the woman has to clear up the problem alone. In sum, courtship plays an important role in the life of many foreign domestic workers. It can serve as a source of pleasure, but also as a beginning of sorrow and pain.

Pregnancy during overseas employment is inconceivable and has serious consequences. Until November 2002, pregnancy meant summary dismissal for the domestic. To avoid jeopardizing their jobs, most of them will take contraceptives which can be bought in many groceries for foreign workers or acquired from their compatriots. If a women still becomes pregnant, she will take pills to induce a miscarriage or seek out a clinic that carries out secret abortions at the migrant women's own risk. In spite of the fact that since November 2002, employers are not allowed to dismiss their foreign employees because of pregnancy, in practice difficulties persist.[31] Desperate not to jeopardize their jobs, the women who induce a miscarriage put themselves at even greater risk than before. Most Filipinos are Catholics. Abortion is banned for Catholics. Many Philippine women thereby suffer

[31] A single regulation without a complete set of measures cannot resolve the problems of pregnancy. For example, a pregnant woman cannot carry out as much housework as before. Would an employer accept less work? How will it continue when she is in advanced pregnancy? Who will take care of her and pay for her and her baby after the delivery? Can she and her child stay in Taiwan? Will she be able to find a job again? Another issue concerns the cultural norm in such a situation.

greatly from their miscarriages. For Indonesian women, an extramarital pregnancy is in any case a mortal sin and it is as good as impossible for it to be socially accepted. In the end, abortion is the only way out. Sometimes complications set in and these women emerge from the situation with lifelong scars. The pain these women bear is not only physical but also psychological.

Not every foreign domestic is engaged in courtship in Taiwan. Some are committed to being a faithful wife, and say: “As for my husband, here I don’t look at men”. One woman told me: “I’m too old. I’m forty and married. Many people think the husband is far away and he cannot know. I pray to Allah and so does he. Our hearts are interlinked. I cannot do anything to deceive him”. According to my observations, a shared belief seems to play a more important role in self-restraint, whereas marital status and age are not decisive. The visit of Thai males to the Indonesian domestics in the park, thus, was not perceived with great enthusiasm by all Indonesian domestics. One of them, Ruth, who was the pray-speaker at birthday or thanksgiving parties, often complained about the visits by Thai males to the park. Ruth said: “I don’t like this situation. We come here to work, to make money, not for fun. The conduct of the Thai males is embarrassing. What will the Taiwanese think of Indonesian women? The Taiwanese will misunderstand and think Indonesians are licentious”. Counter to this position, one Taiwanese charge showed understanding for the courtship between male and female workers, and said: “It’s private life. It doesn’t matter, if they keep doing a good job”. Most other employers, however, do not share this opinion. They either try to persuade their domestics out of courtship or snoop around and control the employee’s daily schedules, so that they do not have time for courtship. By contrast, there is a certain gender solidarity in this respect. Although not all migrant women share the same opinion about alien romances, nobody would be rejected or excluded

from the group because of their personal romantic affairs.

By observing and analyzing the courtship of foreign domestics in Taiwan, it is possible to recognize that globalization not only affects the economy, but also the nature of intimate relationships. The new conditions of migrant's life introduce new ideas about gender relationships and new terms for male-female encounters into their lives. Geographical dislocation has led to more opportunities for migrants that are not governed by customary norms. On the one hand, migrant women might empower themselves with more autonomy to act abroad, while on the other hand, the image and responsibility of a "good woman" still awaits them at home. Migrant women are involved in a multiple discourse of gender contestation.

5.4 Conclusion

According to my study, mobile women are not as privileged in an interethnic gender discourse as their male counterparts. Sexual harassment in the workplace of migrant domestics offers an example of gender conflict at the borders of communities, cultures and nationalities. As a domestic worker abroad, migrant women are involved in a multiple discourse of gender contestation, of which their bodies become the battlefield. The alien romance, which has often been a highlight of the male traveling experience, signals rather a bizarre episode for migrant women. The diverse interests of religions, nations, and local communities complicate this gender discourse.

Drawing on Butler's concept of gender performativity, I argue that the sexual harassment suffered by migrant domestics is also a gender performance staged by the advancers. The advancer performs an act in order to force the afflicted party into assuming a certain gender. These advancers have their regulatory ideal of gender hierarchy and attempt "to materialize the body's sex, to materialize sexual difference in the service of the consolidation of the heterosexual imperative" (Butler 1993:2).

The dominant discourse of the advancer is not the sole power in the field. Migrant women strike back in their own mode to rearticulate “what qualifies as bodies that matter, ways of living that count as ‘life’, lives worth protecting, lives worth saving, lives worth grieving” (Butler 1993:16).

The refusal to grant a domestic’s regular day off and the exercise of offensive control over the private domains of migrant women’s lives, outfits, and time schedules with a view to handicapping their romances with men, represent another imperative of the gender ideal and imply an assumption of migrant women’s incapacity for self-control. In their role as domestics, migrant women struggle for their freedom of body and mobility often in relatively delicate gestures.

The dislocation of large numbers of people and the ethnic heterogeneity which has been its consequence, have blurred, confused and challenged cultural understandings about what it means to be male and female. Uncertainty over gender constructs is encountered not only by newcomers but also by locals. This chapter throws light not only on those who are marginalized by sex, status, race, age, and all the other conditions of difference, but on the fully normative body itself. Further, it asserts that female labor migration in a globalized world is related not only to economic activities, but also to cultural involvement.

6 Can the Subaltern Speak?

The term “subaltern” originally functioned as a title for a military officer below the rank of captain. Its usage of the term in the social sciences is inconsistent with its origin and each researcher understands the term somewhat differently. The nuance among them reflects the different problematic and standpoints. The Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci originally used “subaltern” to signify a proletarian, whose voice could not be heard because it was structurally written out of the capitalist bourgeois narrative. In the early 1980s the “Subaltern Studies” group, a kind of postcolonial writing, led by Ranajit Guha, a Bengali historian, introduced the term “subaltern“ to signify the silenced colonized masses of India. The objective of Guha and the other Subalternists was to recover the “voice”, or “agency”, of the colonized people or “subaltern” subjects, through their writing about the activities of those marginalized. In her much-quoted essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?“, Gayatri Spivak, best known as a postcolonial feminist, objects to the sloppy use of the term and its appropriation by other marginalized, but not specifically “subaltern“ groups. For her, “everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern“ (de Kock 1992). Her essay discusses the discrepancy between subaltern research and the way its practitioners have theorized that research. In particular, she doubts the notion that Subaltern Studies allow the previously ignored voice of the subaltern to be finally heard and that its objective can establish true knowledge of the subaltern and its consciousness (Montag 1998). In the end, Spivak presents us with a despairing answer to the question: the subaltern cannot speak. Her point is not that the subaltern does not cry out in various way, but that speaking is “a transaction between speaker and

listener" (Landry and Maclean 1995). The subaltern talks, but the voice of the subaltern never really achieves a dialogic level of utterance where there is any aspect of good faith hearing. What seems to achieve the recovery of the voice of subaltern is actually a reproduction of imperialism:

> Reporting on, or better still, participating in, antisexist work among women of color or women in class oppression in the First World or the Third World is undeniably on the agenda. We should also welcome all the information retrieval in these silenced areas that is taking place in anthropology, political science, history and sociology. Yet the assumption and construction of a consciousness or subject sustains such work and will, in the long run, cohere with the work of imperialist-subject construction, mingling epistemic violence with the advancement of learning and civilization. And the subaltern woman will be as mute as ever. (Spivak 1988: 295)

In fact, her aim is not to deny the subaltern's capacity for articulation, but to query the legitimacy of the representation of the intellectual for the subaltern. She suggests that any attempt from the outside to ameliorate their condition by granting them collective speech invariably will encounter two problems: 1) a logocentric assumption of cultural solidarity among a heterogeneous people, and 2) a dependence upon western intellectuals to "speak for" the subaltern condition rather than allow them to speak for themselves (Graves 1998). The Subaltern Studies movement did so, however, only by suppressing the heterogeneity and non-contemporaneity of the subaltern itself (Montag 1998). The academic assumption of a subaltern collectivity will in fact reinscribe the subordinate position of the subaltern in society.

The legendary difficulty of Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak* is "less a consequence of the profundity of its subject matter than its tactical objectives" (Montag 1998). Her radical argument should help to accentuate the deprivation of the power of articulation of subalterns in the established structures of political

representation, even in the field of Subaltern Studies. The provocation of her argument that the subaltern can speak neither in the historiography of the past, nor in the present provided by "Subaltern Studies" appears to be successful. Although Spivak's essay does not supply a panacea for postcolonial research in this approach, it creates awareness of this problematique – that of epistemic violence. The vast majority of responses to her essay refine the discussion of postcolonial studies, and then confer an eternal status upon the question: can the subaltern speak?. In contrast to the original concern of the subaltern question, which rests on the power relation between intellectuals and subaltern people, my study here regards speech as a social act and focuses on whether the subaltern can speak and how the subaltern might speak within larger hegemonic contexts. The subaltern in my case is not the colonized in India, but a migrant worker in Taiwan. For Spivak, subaltern is not "just a classy word for oppressed, for Other", but "everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism" (de Kock 1992). As a foreigner and unskilled migrant worker in Taiwan, one can well imagine that the inferior position of a migrant worker allows him or her limited or even no access to the dominant cultural discourse.

6.1 Incident

The incident which is central to my discussion, occurred in February 2003 in Taiwan, between an Indonesian domestic, Vinarsih, and her wheelchair-bound charge, Liu Hsia, a well-known writer and advocate of the rights of the underprivileged. Liu had suffered from rheumatoid arthritis for nearly 50 years, which had destroyed the function of nearly 90 percent of her joints. She was forced to lie down most of the time and use a wheelchair to get around. Since 1996 she has employed four foreign domestics in succession. Vinarsih was Liu's fourth domestic and had worked for seven months prior to the incident. On an early morning in February 2003, Liu's

mother heard Liu scream from her bedroom, rushed to her and saw Liu lying on the ground and Vinarsih seizing Liu's legs. Liu's mother called an ambulance and Liu was rushed to hospital. The next day Liu died of an atrial flutter. After that Vinarsih was detained and requested to attend a medical inspection in the Mackay Memorial Hospital. According to the report from the hospital, she was suspected of suffering from conversion disorder, a type of hysteria. The psychologically afflicted person is unable to distinguish between reality and imagination. The Indonesian domestic was ordered to be repatriated owing to the incapacity of the courts to dispose of justice.

During and after the occurrence of this incident, variant forms of "speech" emerge. In hospital, Liu *told* her mother that she had awoken to find herself being dragged from her bed by the domestic. Liu's mother *told* the police that she had been awoken two times by the Indonesian domestic Vinarsih in the middle of the night. The first time was at approximately one o'clock and the second time at three o'clock and Vinarsih *told* her that there would be an earthquake. After she had ascertained that there was no earthquake, she no longer paid any attention to Vinarsih. What drove Vinarsih to draw her employer out of the bed? Vinarsih *told* the police that she had dreamed of Liu's dead father three times, who *told* her to help his daughter because there would be an earthquake coming. The domestic felt bound to place her handicapped employer in safety and decided to take action alone, after she had vainly asked Liu's mother for help. While Liu's 85-year-old mother *claimed* she witnessed Vinarsih beat her daughter, Vinarsih firmly *denied* she had attacked Liu. The neighbors of the family Liu *said* that Vinarsih looked as though she were possessed by devils on the night of occurrence. Subsequently the judicial authority handled the case and *commanded* the domestic to undergo an examination. The Mackay Memorial Hospital, requested by the police, diagnosed Vinarsih's case as conversion disorder, a type of hysteria. Vinarsih *said* she had never been diagnosed with the syndrome

before and reasserted: “I never beat anyone”. Because of this diagnosis and the incapacity of the courts to dispose of justice, Vinarsih was *adjudicated* to be repatriated.

For several days, the incident drew major headlines in the local dailies and relations between migrant domestic workers and their Taiwanese employers became the subject of intense debate. First of all, the media was interested in the opinion of Liu’s family members towards the migrant domestic worker. One of Liu’s family members censured the quality of migrant caregivers and allowed for the possibility of migrant workers to bring disaster to their charges. Some activists of non-governmental organizations fighting for foreign workers rights said a lack of clear regulations and lax social welfare policies were the reasons for the frequently tense relations between foreign caregivers and their employers. Many domestics from Indonesia tried to provide and explanation for this tragedy. One said: “We are so far away from our hometowns. Working in an alien land can be very stressful. Sometimes we really don’t know how to relieve our pressure” (*Taipei Times* 10 February 2003).

Many voices clamored beneath the incident and each stuck to his or her own opinion. The case of Vinarsih is like a performance, a social drama. The Indonesian domestic seemed to have had a script thrust in her hand and been placed on stage. According to her, she wanted to rescue her handicapped employer from the danger of an earthquake. What drove her to do that? She said that the employer’s father, who had died a long time before she came to the family, had issued an order three times in a dream. A familiar and authoritative figure in the Taiwanese family – the father – could comprise no better plot in the drama with which to convince other people of her good will. Is the command of father from the other world her reality or her attempt to iterate the patriarchal convention? Is Vinarsih a victim of her psychic illness or her position as a marginalized speaker? Her narrative sounds very reasonable. A father

loves his daughter and a servant submits to her master. Liu's mother listened to Vinarsih, but hesitated to believe her. She decided to reassess the message with the help of her own reason. Finally, she found no reason to be influenced by Vinarsih's word.

6.2 Theories

6.2.1 Austin's View of Speech Act

According to J. L. Austin (1962), speech is not merely statement, which philosophers assume only to describe some state of affairs, or to state some fact, which must be true or false. Speech is also beyond different types of sentences, questions, exclamations, or sentences expressing commands or wishes or concessions, as many grammarians classify. Austin argues that speech has quite often something which lies beyond the superficial contextless meaning of words. Thus, he distinguishes the performative, which refers to an action which has been performed by saying something, from the constative, which is declarative, i.e. a statement or assertion. While truth or falsity is important for the constative, success or unsuccess is significant for the performative. The title of Austin's book "How to do things with words" (1962) suggests that words are instrumentalized in getting things done. In his speech act theory, every utterance can be categorized as a locutionary act, an illocutionary act, and a perlocutionary act. A locutionary act is the act of arranging words into sentences that make sense in a language with correct grammar and pronunciation. An illocutionary act refers to intended action by the speaker, whereby a speech act incorporates a command which takes effect at the moment of speaking. The perlocutionary act merely leads to certain consequences that are not the same as the speech act itself. Although Austin's speech act theory often revolves around the individual, he reveals that the performative utterance derives its forcefulness or efficacy through recourse to established

conventions. The performative utterance is more than an individual intention, but rather a social phenomenon. In the light of Austin's argument, scholars have developed their conception of a performative utterance.

6.2.2 Bourdieu's Account of Speech Act

Bourdieu considers Austin's primary explanation of the force of the utterance to be striking but not conclusive. Bourdieu tries to delineate more clearly the force of the performative utterance, of what gives a linguistic utterance the force to do what it says, or to facilitate a set of effects. Bourdieu thus criticizes the thinness of the social context in Austin's theory:

> He thinks that he has found in discourse itself – in the specially linguistic substance of speech, as it were – the key to the efficacy of speech. By trying to understand the power of linguistic manifestations linguistically, by looking at language for the principle underlying the logic and effectiveness of the language of institutions, one forgets that authority comes to language from outside… Language at most represents this authority, manifests and symbolizes it. (cited from Butler 1997: 146)

For Bourdieu, the distinction between performatives that work and those that fail has everything to do with the social power of the one who speaks: the one who is invested with legitimate power makes language act; the one who is not invested may recite the same formula, but produces no effects. The former is legitimate, and the latter, an impostor. Like Austin, Bourdieu regards speech as a means of social action; unlike Austin, Bourdieu attributes the performative magic not to conventions but to the legitimacy of the speaker. The power of words lies in the social authority of speakers.

6.2.3 Derrida's Interpretation of Speech Act

In contrast to Bourdieu's search for outward power, Derrida, from the point of view of deconstruction, argues that every iteration of a convention is an innovation and the breaking of the utterance from prior, established contexts constitutes the force of the utterance (Butler 1997: 141). Derrida recognizes that the iteration of convention is necessary in the performative utterance, but assumes that "the force of the performative is derived from its decontextalization, from its break with a prior context" (Butler 1997: 147). "A formula can break with its original context, assuming meanings and functions for which it was never intended" (Butler 1997: 147). Derrida's argument tends to accentuate the relative autonomy of the structural operation of the sign (Butler 1997: 148). While Bourdieu claims "that performative utterances are only effective when they are spoken by those who are in a position of social power" (Butler 1997: 156), Derrida adjudges everybody the power to renew the performance, or, strictly speaking, every utterance derives from itself, rather it is "authorless".

6.2.4 Butler's Speech Act Theory

In this discussion, Butler first queries the assumption of stable social constellations in Austin's and Bourdieu's theories. For Austin, conventions appear to be stable, and that stability is mirrored in a stable social context in which those conventions have become sedimented over time (Butler 1997: 146). Bourdieu's account of the speech act presumes that the conventions that will authorize the performative are already in place (Butler 1997: 142). Under this assumption, it is impossible to think of a subject capable of acting and challenging the *status quo*. Then opportunities for linguistic agency that exist "at the margins of power" would be foreclosed (Butler 1997: 156). Going one step further, Butler conflates Austin's citational logic of language with

Foucault's theory of power relations to interpret the performance. According to Foucault, power is not a matter of individual resources or strength, but is rather a name that designates the conjoined effect of different force relations. Foucault states that:

> Power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly as the strategies in which they take effect whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies (1978: 93-94).

For Foucault, power manifests itself not in a downward flow from the top of the social hierarchy but flows through society in a sort of capillary action: "Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (1978: 93). Foucault argues that "every power relationship implies, at least in potentia, a strategy of struggle…Each constitutes for the other a kind of permanent limit, a point of possible reversal" (Foucault 1982: 225). Domination and resistance are inextricably linked. In Foucault's words, "Where there is power, there is resistance" (1978: 95). Foucault's conception of power has implied possible modes of resistance from the margins. Drawing on Michel Foucault's conception of power, Butler argues both that power is productive, constituting the subject rather than simply constraining it, and that resistance is never external to power but reinstates its norm in the very process of subversion (Mills 2003). Butler (1997) argues further that resistance is made possible by the inevitably polysemic nature of language and the inability of the speaker to fix the meaning and efficacy of their speech acts. Like Derrida, Butler recognizes that the iteration of convention is necessary in the performative utterance, but disagrees with

Derrida's radical decontextualization.

Following Austin's and Bourdieu's theories, subalterns are assumed to have limited or no possibility to articulate themselves. By contrast, Foucault, Derrida and Butler allow subjects that exist "at the margins of power" to have quite good chances to speak, although these subjects have a different significance in their theories. Foucault is not really engaged in defining the subjects of resistance; Derrida invests "sign" rather than "subject" with power; and Butler argues that resistance is made possible by the inevitably polysemic nature of language and the inability of the speaker to irrevocably fix the meaning and efficacy of their speech acts (Butler 1997). In sum, according to Foucault, Derrida and Butler, everyone in the system, whether subaltern or not, has the possibility to articulate themselves. Derrida and Butler reveal further that the iteration of convention can be a crucial step to articulation, but it promises no success. I am of the opinion that the iteration of convention is open a door for everybody, even the marginal, to articulate themselves, but only the legible deviation can achieve the intention of the actor. A social act connects with historical, cultural and social conditions as well as idiosyncrasies. The co-operation of these determinants engenders the complexities of the social act with unintentional side effects.

6.3 Discussion

The performative utterance, which was initiated by Vinarsih, the domestic, was perceived of as a constative statement by the listener, the employer's mother. For the mother, the speech would be heard as an utterance to considered, but not as a forceful command. Unfortunately only the migrant domestic could hear the commitment and she was not powerful enough to convince the listener. What for the domestic was an authoritative conveyance turned into an untrue statement. Both parties were at

cross-purposes. Not all utterances that have the form of the performative, either illocutionary or perlocutionary, actually work.

The disastrous end of the incident and the prominence of the employer make Vinarsih's voice weaker. Most of the audiences preferred to gather around the physician and jurists. Unlike the indefinite efficiency of civil utterance, the speech of the justice often takes a sovereign form. In order to maintain the jurisdiction, human beings must be objectivized as subjects, who can be responsible for injurious effects of the deed. Foucault suggests that the subject is formed through the operation of power. The subject emerges through a primary submission to the categories, terms and names established by the concatenations of power relations:

> Subjects have been constituted, for example, as mad, sick or delinquent through forms of knowledge, identified as psychiatry, clinical medicine, and criminal science, which in turn are articulated with the institutions of the asylum, the clinic and the prison respectively" (Foucault 1982: 225).

Thus our ideas about madness, criminality or sexuality are regulated through institutions such as the madhouse or the prison, and also through certain ideological "regimes". What Austin formally ascribed as the forcefulness or efficacy of speech to the iteration of established conventions, is, in Foucault's terms, the result of dynamic power relations, very often propped up by a colossal system of knowledge. The disturbing consequence of this primary submission to power in order to exist is that the subject comes to desire the conditions of its own subordination in order to persist as a social being, since one would rather exist in subordination than not exist at all (Butler 1997: 9). In connection with legal system, Foucault predicted in the 1980s that there would be practically no convict and no criminal procedure in the near future, which would take place without specialists in medicine, psychiatry or psychology. In

our modern societies, "immediate justice", "transgression-punishment" automatically possesses sovereign authority.

Subversion or resistance is never a thing in and of itself, but intersects with hierarchy and power. Discipline plays a crucial role in the establishment and practice of this apparatus. In *Discipline and Punish* (1979), Foucault portrayed the rise of new forms of discipline that began to develop in Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which was more subtle, abstract, and indirect than the harsher and more directly brutal forms of discipline found in slavery or service. Slavery, according to Foucault, is based on "a relation of appropriation of bodies" which was inefficient, "costly", and "violent". In this system, service involved "a constant, total, massive, non-analytical, unlimited relation of domination, established in the form of the individual will of the master" (1979: 137). The modern form of discipline—different from service or slavery—involved a larger "scale of control", a "subtle coercion" of the various parts of the "mechanism itself" including such minutiae as "movements, gestures, attitudes, rapidity" (136-37). This modern, covert discipline also involved a different "object of control", no longer the end product but the "mechanism". The "modality" is also different, in the sense that this form of discipline involved uninterrupted, constant coercion (137). Discipline is aimed at creating not only the growth of skills, but also "the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful" (137-38). In contrast to the prior form of control, which was full of exclusion, repression, and constraint, the modern form provides technologies of self, or the ways in which individuals can "affect by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, their own souls, their own conduct, and this in a manner so as to transform themselves, modify themselves" (Foucault 1982: 210). The subordinate must behave as if under surveillance at all times, thus becoming his/her own guardian.

In sum, the modern form of domination is to take control of the subordinates through his or her own self-control. This development of a disciplinary regime of power is crucial to the emergence and successful installation of capitalistic economic relations (1978: 141). The other characteristic of this modern form of domination maintains not only economic profit but also political correctness. The operation of power is not established by the arbitrary will of masters, but is based on a succession of disciplinary technologies, for example, the objectification of work efficiency, the laborer ethic, etc. An outstanding example is that the management of many Asian enterprises often correlates with the principle of family. This rhetoric bestows an obligatory flavor in the employment relationship. Not oppression, but rather pastoral care is the issue at hand. The employers regard keeping young women under their surveillance not as a form of victimization or deprivation but as a means of protecting the maid "for her own good/ security/ safety" in a manner akin to what Foucault calls the exercise of "pastoral power", with the emphasis on salvation in terms of the reform of a people's health or habits (Foucault 1982).

What form does the discipline of migrant domestics in Taiwan take? The financial stress and monitoring by their agencies cause many newly-arrived workers a great deal trouble (one Indonesian recruiting agent told me that at the beginning of their period of employment he would oversee his protégés very strictly, because he had to lend money every one in advance and every premature departure of a migrant meant great losses for him). If migrant domestics are down on their luck, they have to work under harsh conditions, such as abysmally long working hours with no weekly rest days. In some cases, they are asked to sign a blank form as contract, before they depart for Taiwan, so they cannot know in advance what actually awaits them at their destination. Some Indonesian domestics told me that they were warned by their agencies to do their duty as carefully as possible, because employers were very

watchful, using, for example, cameras to capture each and every misdeed committed by their maids. The relationship between employers and domestic workers on the basis of such prejudice is often very tense. Moreover, some employers snoop around the private domains of their domestics and exercise pastoral power over them. In her seven-month employment, according to the employer's mother, Vinarsih did a good job, exhibited no odd behavior, and got along well with the family. From the beginning, Vinarsih accepted no holidays because of the serious illness of her employer. Another Indonesian domestic said that Vinarsih's employer even once publicly acclaimed Vinarsih's service (*Taipei Times* 10 February 2003). The relation between the employer and the employee seemed not to display any tension. What led Vinarsih to this "abnormal", unexpected act? Was it an unconscious outcry at her lack of accommodation with the system or a conscious act of self-help with which to better her condition?

Associating with the case of Vinarsih in Taiwan, I contend that the refined, subtle forms of discipline also shape the forms of resistance. According to Gramsci, the ruling classes achieve domination not by force or coercion alone, but also by creating subjects who "willingly" submit to being ruled. Hegemony is achieved through a combination of coercion and consent. Ideology is thus crucial in creating consensus, it is the medium through which certain ideas are transmitted and, more importantly, held to be true. Ideologies create the terrain upon which men move (Gramsci 1971: 324, 377). Gramscian notions of hegemony characterize the incorporation and transformation of ideas and practices belonging to those who are dominated, rather than simple imposition from above. Many ideological apparatuses, for example, schools, churches, families and political systems, facilitate the reproduction of the dominant system by creating subjects who are ideologically conditioned to accept the

values of the system. The hegemony is so omnipresent that it is difficult for individuals to think outside it. In my case, migrant domestic workers internalize the systems of repression and reproduce them by conforming to certain ideas with which they are judged. It can be imagined that Vinarsih was deeply influenced by the discipline of migrant domestic workers, expressed through the different mechanisms of labor migration. According to Vinarsih's testimony, she complied with the request of the employer's father and simply wanted to do her employer a good deed. It might perhaps be helpful to interpret this point in light of de Certeau's observation. De Certeau asserts that discipline is constantly deflected and resisted by those who are caught in its "nets", and that their "dispersed, tactical, and makeshift creativity" constitutes an "antidiscipline". De Certeau calls this *la perruque* (the wig), an act in which the employee does things for him or herself ostensibly on behalf of the boss. On a larger scale, de Certeau cites the example of resistance on the part of the indigenous peoples of the New World in their subversion of the dominant Spanish colonial system by eluding norms of exchange and behavior. On a lesser scale, he praises students and intellectuals living under government repression who subvert required texts by poaching, resisting by posing different interpretations from the official ones (de Certeau 1984: 29ff).

Further, I argue that migrant workers could be poured into the mechanisms of discipline and intimidated into docility and taciturnity even without the overt coercion of their meticulous employers. It is not simply the direct inspection by a superior which keeps the subordinate on permanent tenterhooks, but the subject, unsettled by discipline, which promises trouble. If subordinates hold that there is no elbow-room for negotiation when a clash of interests occurs between them and their employers, they come into conflict with the self and possibly go to extremes. They have learned that they are to behave submissively towards their employers and refrain from

contradicting what their employers say and desire. As a migrant domestic, Vinarsih might have been inculcated with the assumption that she should accept her working conditions in their entirety, as stipulated by the contracting parties. Today we cannot really know what Vinarsih suffered and resisted within this system of knowledge which is established by the mechanisms of transnational labor migration. But we have learned that if subordinates find themselves in a similar situation, the immediate surroundings fall victim to the excitable acts of subordinates who have remained silent for too long.

6.4 Conclusion

Can the subaltern speak? The subaltern does have a possibility to create a space to speak within hegemonic contexts. But the articulation of the subaltern can by no means always have the desired effect. There are too many factors involved in the field: historical, cultural and social conditions as well as other idiosyncrasies. Iterations of convention are an effective means of articulation, but no panacea for a social act. The interpretation of a social act is itself constitutes another struggle for power. In addition, the fine and delicate power mechanisms in the modern epoch characterize not only forms of hegemony but also forms of resistance. Can the subaltern speak? If "subordinate people do not have the privilege of explicitness, the luxury of transparency, the presumptive norm of clear and direct communication, free and open debate on a level playing field that the privileged classes take for granted" (Conquergood 2002: 146), very probably, they speak back in an ambivalent manner with incalculable effect.

7 Conclusion

Culture in the Borderlands

Anthropology has classically constituted cultures as essentially immobile or possessing a mobility that is cyclical and repetitive (Tsing 1993). Within this framwork, culture emerges from stabily localized communities. Thus, those possessing a given culture are expected to occupy a regular territory. The central issue in my study is as follows: if cultures are regarded as discrete phenomena occupying discrete spaces, how are those who live a life of border crossing, such as migrant workers, affected? Does the zone of immigration simultaneously mean "zones of 'zero degree' culture", "a site of cultural stripping away", a zone accordingly "assimilated" or "acculturated" by the receving communities (Rosaldo 1988: 81)?

The classic norm of culture is no longer tenable in our globalized world. Rosaldo's concept of "border crossings" seems to be a constructive way of answering these questions. Inspired by Gloria Anzaldua's (1987) discussion of the imaginative and empathetic use of a dual perspective as a "consciousness of the Borderlands", Renato Rosaldo developed the concept of "border crossing" to describe border crossers as "complex sites of cultural production" and then addressed a renewed concept of culture, which "refers less to a unified entity ('a culture') than to the mundane practices of everyday life" (Rosaldo 1989:217). Ethnographers should "look less for homongeneous communities than for the border zones within and between them. Such cultural border zones are always in motion, not frozen for inspection" (1989: 217). His concept turns our attention to the creative projects of individuals without neglecting power and difference both within and across the interests of nations, classes, and local communities. The borderlands have no typical citizens;

experiences there undermine the safe ground of cultural certainty and essential identity (Tsing 1993: 225). Culture is freed from assumptions of the stable community, and we can begin to attend to other forms of mobility (Tsing 1993: 124).

Within this framework of culture in borderlands, in this study I have attempted to recount the diverse experiences of Southeast Asian female domestic workers in Taiwan. These women are people of border crossing and have never stopped to create their own cultures during their travels across "porous national and cultural boundaries that are saturated with inequality, power, and domination" (Rosaldo 1989: 217). The shortage of labor both in the sectors of production and reproduction in Taiwan, coupled with the large labor surplus and imperative demand for foreign exchange in sending countries, bring Taiwanese and Southeast Asian females workers together and establish an interdependent relationship. However, the historically conditioned stigmatization of female household labor burdens the employment relationship between Taiwanese employers and their foreign domestic workers. Domestic work is so burdened that it has never been regarded as "normal" wage work and domestic workers are regarded more as servants than workers. In addition to the shadow cast by this asymmetrical power relationship from the past, many practices in the employment process imply the unstable power relationship between employers and their domestic workers, such as the broker's greater emphasis on a maids' good "nature" – docile, simple-minded etc. – than their capacity for labor. The usual refusal to grant a domestic's regular day off and the exercise of offensive control over the private domains of migrant women's lives, with a view to handicapping their romances with men, represent not only the suspicion of domestic workers but also the distrust of their employers' power. It is not only the migrant domestic workers who embark on their journey to Taiwan who experience life in the borderlands, but also the Taiwanese, who are sedentary, are confronted with an everyday life crisscrossed by border zones such

as class, gender, ethnicity, nationality in their encounters with migrant domestic workers. One of the examples, as I demonstrated in chapter five, the dislocation of large numbers of people and ethnic heterogeneity, have blurred, confused and challenged cultural understandings about what it means to be male and female. Uncertainty over gender constructs is encountered not only by newcomers but also by locals.

The migrant women's community, as described in chapter three, informs us of another feature of culture in the borderlands. It is less a question of where you are from than where you are. Entry into the community is not strictly guided by ethnicity, or nationality but some basis of sameness, for example, background, work, residential quarter, or acquaintance between employers, permits access to the community. Nuances in the intensity of solidarity and commitment existed not only between migrant domestic workers from different countries but also among their own nationals. Difference of opinion was allowed and nobody would be rejected or excluded from the community on such a basis.

Accommodation and Resistance

Rosaldo has argued that those who are at the crossroads are not located in "empty transitional zones", which "by classic norms and projects [were] previously excluded or rendered marginal", but located in "sites of creative cultural production" (1989: 208) and "in a position to become leaders in developing new forms of polyglot cultural creativity" (1989:208). The presence of the "weekend enclave" of migrant workers at Taipei Main Station makes a statement about their marginalized social position in Taiwanese society. These marginalized people recognize their constraints, but at the same time, also their possibilities. The presence of the "weekend enclave" of migrant workers at Taipei Main Station celebrates the potential of border crossings

in opening new forms of the different appropriation of this public space. Migrant workers at Taipei Main Station play a double game. One the one hand, they behave, according to the spatial arrangements, like local people, but at the same time they create a place, transforming it into their own space according to their wishes and needs. The movement of migrant workers in the station reinscribes the urban topography, as de Certeau describes: "the opacity of the body in movement, gesticulating, walking, taking its pleasure, is what indefinitely organizes a *here* in relation to an *abroad*, a 'familiarity' in relation to a 'foreignness'" (1984: 130). They exit the system by binding themselves to it.

Sexual harassment at the workplace of migrant domestics offers an example of gender conflict at the borders of communities, cultures and nationalities. As a domestic worker abroad, migrant women are involved in a multiple discourse of gender contestation, of which their bodies become the battlefield. The diverse interests of religions, nations, and local communities complicate this gender discourse. In their everyday lives as domestics, migrant women struggle for their freedom of body often in a relatively low-key manner. Under some circumstances, migrant domestic workers do not simply resign themselves to sexual advances but organize resistance with which to defend themselves. On the other hand, the narratives of experiences of sexual harassment from those afflicted personally or from their colleagues served more as a kind of delicate counterattack to the sexual assault than as an emergency call for my direct intervention. The compromise between revelation and acquiescence results from the careful assessment of their disadvantageous position and situation vis-à-vis their employers and an attempt to make the best of things.

Associating with the case of Vinarsih in Taiwan, explored in chapter six, I contend

that a refined, subtle form of discipline also shapes the form of resistance. The more power is equipped with miniscule mechanisms, the subtler the resistance becomes. What one should be wary of is that resistance sometimes works in its own way, and not according to the actor's intention, sometimes with incalculable results.

The Detached Observer

It still seems ideal than real that both anthropologists and the people they study are symmetrically engaged in "the interpretation of cultures". The recognition that the knowledge of "other" people is partial, situated, and perspectivistic is easier than that of the anthropologist's "self". As Rosaldo (1989) described:

> The study of differences, formerly defined in opposition to an invisible "self", now becomes the play of similarities and differences relative to socially explicit identities. How do "they" see "us"? Who are "we" looking at "them"? …Rather than being perspectival, inscribed from within a single point of view, such forms of human understanding involve the irreducible perceptions of both analysts and their subjects. (206-7)

The episodes of my intervention in the romances of migrant workers – becoming fair game to males or a rival to a female – during my fieldwork, which I mentioned in chapter five, alerted me to my self-righteous status as a detached observer and an innocent onlooker. I ignored the fact that I was an "ordinary" woman in their perception and did not consider myself to be an object of desire or of envy to them. That my "self" faded out of my study only through this interaction made me aware of my own imagined invisibility.

Global interconnections signify confrontation with varied power and difference rather

than a spreading domination and homogeneity. In my study I attempt to demonstrate the heterogeneity and dialogue in the cross-cultural experiences of migrant women within and across the interests of nations, classes, and local communities. The borderlands are becoming the critical spaces created as contrasting discourses of dominance which touch and compete in a contested hierarchy (Tsing 1993: 225). Listening to female cross-cultural commentators offers one alternative form of narrative. As Said notes, “Exile, immigration, and the crossing of boundaries are experiences that can therefore provide us with new narrative forms or, in John Berger’s phrase, with *other* ways of telling” (1989:225).

Appendix

An English Example of the Questionnaire

Research on Leisure and Consumption of the Migrant Workers in Taipei

(Questionnaire No. _____ Staff: _____________ Date: ____/____/____ Place: _________)

Dear Friend:

Hello! We are a group of college students who concern about the migrant workers. For a better knowledge of the leisure and consumption features of the migrant workers in Taiwan, and thus for making Taiwan a friendlier and more humane environment for all of our fellow OCWs, we initiate this research. Please take a few minutes for filling this questionnaire. Your answers would be anonymous and may help the Taipei City Government on making better policies on behalf of the migrant workers.

A. General Features

Gender: ☐Male ☐Female/ Age: Born on _______/ Marriage Status: ☐Married ☐Single ☐ Widow/er ☐Divorced ☐Separated/ Education Background: ☐Elementary School ☐High School ☐College or above.

Nationality: ☐Indonesia ☐the Philippines ☐Thailand ☐Vietnam ☐Malaysia ☐ Other_________.

You are actually working as a: ☐Domestic Helper ☐Caretaker ☐Construction Worker ☐ Factory Worker ☐Other_______.

It is the ____ time you work I Taiwan; you worked from ______(month), ______(year) for this present contract.

B. Working Environment

1) On each day, during which hours can you manage to do your own things, except for working and sleeping? Usually from ______ to ______.

2) During such hours, what do you usually do? (Multiple)

☐Do some walking ☐Watching TV ☐Talking on the phone ☐Writing Letters ☐Resting ☐Missing the families ☐Joining religious activities ☐ Other_____________________________.

3) Is your day-off regular? How do you have your day-off? (e.g. every Sunday, every other Sunday, or one Saturday every month, etc.)?

____.

C. Leisure and consumption

1) On the day-off, where do you go usually?

____.

2) How do you get there usually?

____.

3) What do you like to do during the day-off?

____.

4) If you need to go shopping on the day-off, where do you go? And what do you buy usually?

____

D. Social Relationships

1) How did you know the above places? ☐I found it out myself/ Or, introduced by ☐friends ☐employers ☐brokers ☐church ☐other (e.g., OCW service center, media, etc.)________________.

2) Who do you go with to these places? ☐By myself ☐With Relatives or friends ☐With the Employer/s ☐With the broker/s ☐Others________________________.

3) If you have some problems on your work, who would you ask help for? ☐Families, relatives or friends in my country ☐Colleagues ☐Kababayan ☐Taiwanese friends ☐Foreign Workers' Counseling Center, Taipei City Government ☐OWWA/MECO ☐Media (e.g. Tito Gray on ICRT, Roger Pinoy, etc.) ☐ Other____.

E. Perspectives for the Future

1) In Taiwan, other than your work, what do you want to do the best? ☐To travel around ☐To make friends with Taiwanese ☐To know more kabayan in Taiwan ☐To marry ☐To be a resident ☐Other________________________.

2) Where have you been in Taiwan except for Taipei, and who is/are the companion/s?

____

3) If you have the chance, where would you like to visit in Taiwan, and what do you like to do there?

____

4) After finishing the contract in Taiwan, what do you plan to do?

____.

Any further suggestions or feedbacks?

____.

Thank you very much for your generous cooperation! *If you don't mind, would you please leave us some of your information so that we can reach you later? (Nothing personal would be passed forward.)*

Have a nice day!

Name: ____

Tel: (Mobile)_______________________ (Office)_______________________

(House)______________________

Address In Taiwan:

____.

Phone Number and Address in your own country:

____

_______.

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