

The Victimisation of Filipino Domestic Workers in the United Kingdom and Singapore

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Introduction

Research Focus

In 2012 a change was made to the visa for migrant domestic workers entering the United Kingdom which tied them to a single employer. Although this has recently been altered somewhat to allow a change of employer within six months, migrant domestic workers must still live in their employers home in order to fulfill the requirements of the visa. These conditions are not particular to the UK - policy in Singapore, where there is a strong tradition of families employing a 'foreign maid', also ties migrant domestic workers to a single employer, and decrees that they must reside in that employers household. It has been shown that policy of this kind, alongside a lack of employment protections, can facilitate abuse of migrant domestic workers by their employers. It has also been suggested that in addition to the stigma of their migratory status, the abuse that many migrant domestic workers face is specific to how their gender roles are interpreted, in comparison to those of non-migrant women. Taking a transnational perspective, this thesis explores the victimisation of Filipino migrant domestic workers in the United Kingdom and Singapore. My contention is that the crux of the victimisation of migrant domestic workers is the idea that migrant women are inherently vulnerable - an idea that can be seen in governmental and public discourse on migrant women, and that is embodied into policy, class structures, racial prejudices and proscriptive gender roles in Singapore and the UK. This thesis is concerned with how the vulnerability of migrant domestic workers is constructed through these factors and how, for many migrant domestic workers, this can combine with policy to make their constructed vulnerability a reality. Empirically, it will draw on interviews with members of a charity run by and for Filipino domestic workers in the UK to build on the body of examples of migrant domestic workers' experiences in Singapore already collected by scholars, with the idea of contributing to our understandings of the situations of migrant women from less economically developed countries in general.

Historiography

The body of literature on migrant workers in Singapore is large and often encompasses both domestic workers and other migrant workers. Scholars are fairly unanimous in arguing that migrant workers (referred to as foreign workers in Singapore) are treated as the 'others' in Singaporean society. To 'other' an individual or a group of people is to distinguish them from what is normal, by consistently focusing on their characteristics as being different from yours. In this way the 'others' are the outsiders - they are often those who have been deliberately excluded from mainstream society and labelled, in a negative way, as different. In Alison Mountz' words, "Othering' is the work of persons who discriminate, and it has also been the work of social scientists and philosophers."¹ Rani Rubdy and Sandra McKay, for example, found that the use of English in Singapore is rooted in elitist colonial practices and continues as a basis for class discrimination against foreign workers.² Recent work has also

¹ Alison Mountz, 'The Other', in Carolyn Gallaher, Carl T Dahlman, Mary Gilmartin, Alison Mountz, Peter Shirlow, *Key Concepts in Political Geography* (London etc.: Sage, 2009) 328.

² Rani Rubdy and Sandra Lee McKay, "'Foreign Workers in Singapore: Conflicting Discourses, Language, Politics and the Negotiation of Immigrant Identities', *IJSL* 222 (2013) 157-185.

focused on how the presence of foreign workers has affected the process of defining Singapore's national identity, with an attention to how this definition invariably involves 'othering' foreign workers.³ Other research has focused on 'othering' through multiculturalism, racism, integration (or the lack thereof) and gendered national discourses.⁴ Research has mostly followed the tenets of social history in taking a "bottom-up" approach that aims to reveal the stories of those who are oppressed and under-researched.⁵ Brenda Yeoh and Shirlena Huang are perhaps the most prominent scholars on Filipino and other domestic workers in Singapore; as well as otherisation, their work has explored gendered public spaces and the social, political and economic impacts of transnational labour migration.⁶

Victimisation is inextricably linked with otherisation - indeed the basic definition of victimisation is that it is the singling out of a person, or a group of people, for unjust treatment. But, as will be explored in the Material and Methodology section, this thesis argues that victimisation of migrant domestic workers is based on prejudices about their gender. Victimisation is implicit in the various factors that have been explored as part of the 'othering' process, but has not often been directly addressed. When victimisation is directly considered it seems to be mainly within the literature on the agency of migrant women. Research in this area is often split between focusing on migrant domestic workers and on migrant women working as entertainers. But there are overlaps. For example, Yeoh and Huang's evidence that domestic workers' carry out small habitual acts in their everyday lives to resist the subservient label of 'foreign maid', is on a similar theoretical level to Laura Maria Agustin's analysis of the label of 'migrant' and its association with victimhood. In both cases Yeoh and Agustin found that these labels embody prejudices which deny the agency of migrant women and define them as being inferior to the non-migrant women who are citizens of economically developed countries. Agustin focuses on victimisation whereas Yeoh is more concerned with identity, but both scholars highlight how a society's belief that migrant women do not have agency alters gender expectations for these migrant women, in comparison to non-migrant women. In convergence with this is Erinn Cunniff Gilson's conclusion that vulnerability is assumed to be a fixed and immovable quality of victimised women. Gilson's work focuses particularly on women who have been subjected to sexual abuse, but her theory can also be applied to migrant domestic workers. Similarly, Marlou Schrover argues that migrant women are seen as 'having' problems (as opposed to migrant men, who cause problems) and are therefore considered to be vulnerable to trafficking and

³ Terence Chong, 'Manufacturing Authenticity: The Cultural Production of National Identities in Singapore', *Modern Asian Studies* 45:4 (2011) 877-897; Brian J. Shaw and Rahil Ismail, 'Good Fences Make Good Neighbours'? Geographies of Marginalisation: Housing Singapore's Foreign Workers', Paper presented for SEAGA (2010) 1-14.

⁴ Subramaniam Aiyer, 'From Colonial Segregation to Postcolonial 'Integration'- Constructing Ethnic Difference Through Singapore's Little India and the Singaporean 'Indian', Thesis, *University of Canterbury* (2006); Brenda Yeoh and Kati Willis, "'Heart' and 'Wing', Nation and Diaspora: Gendered discourses in Singapore's regionalisation process', *Gender, Place & Culture*, 6:4 (1999) 355-372.

⁵ Suzanne M. Sinke, 'Gender and Migration: Historical Perspectives' *International Migration Review* 40:1 (2006) 85.

⁶ Brenda Yeoh and Shirlena Huang, 'Maids and Ma'ams in Singapore: Constructing Gender and Nationality in the Trans-nationalization of Paid Domestic Work', *Geography Research Forum*, 18 (1998) 21-48; Brenda Yeoh, Shirlena Huang and Joaquin Gonzales, "Migrant Female Domestic Helpers: Debating the Economic, Social and Political Impacts in Singapore", *International Migration Review* 33:1 (1999) 114-136.

situations of violence, which can lead to their being oppressed.⁷ This thesis argues that migrant women are sometimes constructed by the media as being problematic or criminal *because* they are vulnerable but Schrover's reasoning is fundamental in showing that because migrant women are inherently vulnerable, they can be victimised. With this and Agustin's and Gilson's feminist theories as a framework, this thesis argues that examples in the research on foreign domestic workers in Singapore are also examples of the victimisation of these women. Yeoh's examples, for instance, of the ways that employers react to domestic workers' 'off-days', provided empirical evidence of the victimisation of foreign domestic workers in Singapore, while Agustin's research contributed on a theoretical level to this thesis through her focus on the nexus between the 'victim' and 'criminal' discourses about migrant women.⁸ Sallie Yea has researched the complex reasons behind the migration of many migrant female workers, showing that the background that migrant women come from can make them more vulnerable to abuse. Yea's focus was on revealing the stories of the women who were the subject of her fieldwork. While drawing on Yea's findings, this thesis argues that policy also makes migrant women vulnerable, and that this is a form of victimisation. Robyn M. Rodriguez's research has some parallels with Yea's in that she considers the policy and politics behind the migration of Filipino domestic workers. She concludes that the procedures that the Philippine government makes women go through before migration reflect that the government consider them to be vulnerable workers.⁹ Conversely to Yea, she does not focus much on the agency of migrant Filipino women, but, importantly, her research does align with Agustin's and Schrover's in arguing that there can be a discrepancy between the way NGOs talk about migrants as 'victims' and the way that migrants talk about themselves.

While there has been considerable historical research into domestic work in the United Kingdom since the 1970s¹⁰, studies on Filipino domestic workers in the UK are not common. However the situation of domestic workers is becoming more known there; since the change to the Overseas Domestic Worker Visa more domestic workers have been interviewed by the media, NGOs such as Human Rights Watch¹¹ and research teams such as the Institute for Human Rights at University College London.¹² Virginia Mantouvalou, co-director of the Institute, carried out a series of semi-structured interviews with undocumented domestic workers in the UK in 2015, from which she used examples to frame her argument that the changes to the visa for migrant domestic workers in the UK which tied them to their employers was 'contrary to the prohibition of slavery' that was the aim of

⁷ Marlou Schrover, 'Feminization and Problematization of Migration: Europe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', in: Dirk Hoerder and Kaur Amarjit (eds.), *Proletarian and Gendered Mass Migrations A Global Perspective on Continuities and Discontinuities from the 19th to the 21st Centuries* (Leiden 2013).

⁸ Brenda Yeoh and Shirlena Huang, 'Negotiating Public Space: Strategies and Styles of Migrant Female Domestic Workers in Singapore', *Urban Studies* 35:3 (1998) 583-602; Laura Maria Agustin, 'Forget Victimization: Granting Agency to Migrants', *Development* 46:3 (2003) 30-36.

⁹ Robyn M. Rodriguez, 'Domestic Insecurities: Female Migration from the Philippines, Development and National Subject-Status', *Centre for Comparative Immigration Studies*, 114 (2005) 1-26.

¹⁰ Bridget Anderson, "'Just Like One of the Family?'" Migrant Domestic Workers in the European Union', PhD Thesis, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Leicester (1998) 36.

¹¹ Human Rights Watch, 'Hidden Away: Abuses against Migrant Domestic Workers in the UK (2014).

¹² 'UK tied visa system 'turning domestic workers into modern-day slaves'', *The Guardian* online, Alastair Sloan, 17 May 2015 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/17/uk-tied-visa-system-turning-domestic-workers-into-modern-day-slaves> [Accessed 13 December 2017].

Britain's recent Modern Slavery Act.¹³ The methodological approach of this thesis is not dissimilar, but with a focus on comparable policy in Singapore and how the changes to the visa is part of the victimisation of migrant domestic workers. In line with Mantouvalou, Siobhan Mullally and Cliodhna Murphy show that the recent changes to this visa are indicative of the disparity between increasingly strict immigration policy and the lack of applicable employment protection for migrant domestic workers in the UK.¹⁴ This has some parallels with Yeoh and Huang who have pointed out the lack of protection in Singaporean private households for domestic workers, and with Bridget Anderson's investigation into the employment of migrant domestic workers in the European Union which found that the home functions as a 'protected arena for the family - but not for the worker'.¹⁵ Anderson does not mention victimisation, although again this is implicit in her argument about the treatment of some migrant domestic workers by female employers.

Overall then the common themes in the literature on migrant domestic workers in Singapore are the methods of 'othering' domestic workers based on their migratory status, employment, class, ethnicity and gender. This research converges with investigations into the ways in which the agency of migrant women is denied. There has been less fieldwork carried out in the UK and less research, but literature on domestic workers there has likewise focused on gender, and also on the recent controversial visa changes. While drawing on this important literature, this thesis will differ by focusing on the UK and Singapore. Providing empirical evidence of the experiences of Filipino domestic workers in the UK, it will draw out what is implicit in the literature on domestic workers in Singapore and the UK: the victimisation of migrant domestic workers.

Material and Methodology

This paper focuses on Filipino migrant domestic workers. While it is acknowledged that Philippine women have 'come to constitute' a 'contemporary female labor diaspora',¹⁶ they are understudied in an European context and, in particular, there is not much known about their experiences in the UK. In line with Mantouvalou's research, the interviews with members of the Filipino Domestic Workers' Association provide some evidence of Filipino women's experiences in the UK. They can be supplemented by evidence of domestic workers' experiences in Singapore and by theory on migrant women and victimisation. Agustin, Schrover and Gilson's feminist theories on migrants and victimisation and vulnerability and victimisation respectively, provide the theoretical framework for this research. Victimisation of migrant domestic workers separates them from the non-migrant population, declaring their position as the 'others' in society and justifying their subordination. Victimisation of migrant women embodies the belief that they are vulnerable, and this is carried into policy, discourse and the actions of employers. Women's

¹³ Virginia Mantouvalou, 'Am I Free Now?' Overseas Domestic Workers in Slavery', *Journal of Law and Society* 42:3 (2015) 329-357.

¹⁴ Siobhan Mullally and Cliodhna Murphy, 'Migrant Domestic Workers in the UK: Enacting Exclusions, Exemptions, and Rights', *Human Rights Quarterly* 36:2 (2014) 397-427.

¹⁵ Brenda Yeoh and Shirlena Huang, 'Negotiating Public Space'; Bridget Anderson, 'Why Madam has so many bathrobes: Demand for Migrant Domestic Workers in the EU', *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 92:1 (2001) 24.

¹⁶ Rhacel Salazar Parrenas, 'Transgressing the Nation-State: The Partial Citizenship and "Imagined (Global) Community" of Migrant Filipina Domestic Workers', *Signs* 26:4 (2001) 1129.

agency is often ignored by these parties, who in molding the vulnerability of migrant women and rendering them as differing forms of victims, are 'reproducing masculine ideologies of gender and nation.'¹⁷ Hence it is important to compare Singapore and the UK in order to gain a transnational perspective on the victimisation of Filipino migrant domestic workers, which can contribute to our understandings of the experiences of migrant domestic workers, and perhaps also migrant women coming from less economically developed countries in general.

The Filipino Domestic Workers' Association-UK (FDWA-UK) is a charity based in London in the United Kingdom. Founded in late 2013, it now has around eighty members. The charity aims to provide help and advice to Filipino women working as domestic workers, and also to campaign for changes to visa policy and to wages. Its main objective is 'to raise awareness about the abuse and exploitation of domestic workers in the UK'.¹⁸ I interviewed eight women; Phoebe, Analisa, Bella, Faith, Eleanor, Girlie, Hassan and Paulina. Eleanor was interviewed over the phone, the others in person and individually, in the rooms they used as a meeting place in a church in Kensington. I have changed their names where requested. Phoebe Dimacali was one of the founders of the FDWA-UK and it was thanks to her that I was able to do the other interviews. Four of the women had been brought to the UK by their employers in the Middle-East, two from Hong Kong and one from Malaysia. Bella had family in the UK and had come there directly. All but Bella, who was younger than the others, were single mothers at the time of their migration and were working to support their children and sometimes their parents in the Philippines. All but three of them were undocumented workers at the time the interviews took place. Because the women were members of a charity that aimed to help Filipino women in cases of abuse, the interviews that I carried out were likely to include instances of this and, therefore, also instances of victimisation. However, the interviewees were chosen by Phoebe - I had no knowledge of them as individuals and did not meet them until the time of the actual interviews. I prepared through reading the literature, as discussed previously, about migrant domestic workers and through reading specifically about the context of economic issues in the Philippines. I also communicated with Phoebe, who explained about the meetings that the charity held, so that I was aware of what the surroundings would be like.

The interviews were intended to be semi-structured. I prepared twelve open-ended questions¹⁹ concerning details of their work and their migration experience. When the actual interviews took place I followed this structure either loosely or more rigidly, depending on how much the interviewee contributed on their own. With those that spoke more, the interview become more like an informal chat, within which I could ask for clarification and make sure that they did not steer too far away from the topic of the original questions.²⁰ This had advantages in meaning that what they volunteered was largely unbiased by my questions and that I was able to build a rapport with them, but also disadvantages because not every question was answered. As the abuses* that migrant

¹⁷ Na Young Lee, 'Gendered nationalism and otherization: transnational prostitutes in South Korea', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 7:3 (2006) 463.

¹⁸ Filipino Domestic Workers' Association, <http://fdwa.co.uk/about-us/> [Accessed 12 February 2017].

¹⁹ Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*. Third edition. (New York etc.: Oxford University Press, 2015) 73-4.

²⁰ Patricia Pui Huen Lim, Chong Guan Kwa, James H. Morrison (Eds.), *Oral History in Southeast Asia: Theory and Method* (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies: Singapore, 2000) 49.

domestic workers have suffered at the hands of their employers have been recorded extensively by NGOs and scholars, a small number of interviews only were needed to show that the experiences of migrant domestic workers in the UK is often alike in that respect to those of migrant domestic workers in other countries. What was more important was to learn about their individual perspectives and feelings as women on the margins of society.²¹

*It would have been inappropriate to ask any of the women from the FDWA-UK if they had experienced sexual abuse, and so this issue is not much discussed in this thesis, but it should be noted here that sadly this is also something that migrant domestic workers can be subjected to.

My background reading included articles published on the online platforms of Singaporean and British newspapers. The final selection of articles chosen were not used as authoritative sources but as examples of media discourses on migrant, and were used as supplementary to the interviews with the FDWA-UK members. I have used four articles from *The Straits Times* online, a platform which is both a vehicle for promoting government policy and a long-established paper with a wide circulation amongst Singaporeans. My main sources from the British media were eleven articles from the online version of the moderate left-wing paper *The Guardian*. *The Guardian* has a reputation for investigative journalism in the UK and has interviewed both Phoebe Dimacali and researchers from UCL's Institute for Human Rights. I also found and used three articles from British tabloid newspapers - one from *The Sun* and two from *The Daily Mail* - because they are typical examples of discourses on migrants that Phoebe and Girlie, members of the FDWA-UK, referenced. For actual details on policy I used the Singaporean Ministry of Manpower's website and *Singapore Statutes Online*, and Gov.uk for details of the visa for migrant domestic workers in the UK.

Research Aim and Objectives

The research aim is to critically explore the victimisation of migrant domestic workers in the UK and Singapore. To fulfill this aim I have four objectives:

1. To critically analyse the Singaporean and British government's discourse on migrant domestic workers and the public discourse as it is presented in the press and discussed in the literature.
2. To investigate how Filipino migrant domestic workers are victimised by their employers in the UK and by the British government by identifying examples in the interviews of eight members of the Filipino Domestic Workers' Association. This will be supplemented by highlighting examples of the victimisation of migrant domestic workers in Singapore found in the literature.
3. To assess the results of the first two objectives together and understand what this reveals about why migrant domestic workers are and can be victimised.
4. To evaluate these reasons using feminist theories on victimisation put forward by Agustin, Gilson and Schrover.

²¹ Valerie J. Janesick, 'Oral History Interviewing: Issues and Possibilities' in Patricia Leavy (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Oxford University Press, 2014) 301.

Historical Context

The economy and migration from the Philippines

In the 1970s, due to growing unemployment and a loan fiasco with the IMF, the Philippine government began to actively promote labour migration.²² The 'smooth flow of foreign currency' generated by the remittances which Philippine nationals working overseas sent back to their families soon developed to be one of the biggest supports to the country's foundering economy.²³ The Philippine government institutionalized its 'export-based development' strategy in 1974²⁴ and, twenty years later, the number of Filipino women migrating for the first time had risen to sixty percent.²⁵ Ligaya Lindio-MacGovern describes how 'the Philippine labor export policy demonstrated two patterns. One is the feminization of export labor. Another is the commodification of migrant labor.'²⁶ Since then, as Robyn Rodriguez explains, migration has been 'marked by the active role of the Philippine state in brokering Filipino labor'.²⁷ Indeed, the Philippines has been considered as the epitome of labour-sending nations and a key example in the theory of the feminisation of migration. Filipino men usually find work in construction or labour, and women as domestic workers or in the sex trade as 'entertainers'. Domestic workers are 'live-in help'; they cook, clean and care for children and sometimes the elderly.²⁸ Pauline Gardiner Barber describes how 'to speak of Filipina now, particularly when speaking from outside of the Philippines, is to conjure up the idea of domestic service.'²⁹

The Filipino diaspora takes in many of what Saskia Sassen has termed "countergeographies of globalisation". As developing countries try to grow or even just stay afloat under the impact of economic globalisation these 'alternative circuits for survival and profit making' have increased hugely in scope and number. Sassen describes these circuits as emerging

'From the desperate survival strategies of a growing number of poor, from the illegal and merciless ways of profit-making using the poor by those seeking to make money no matter what, and from the often heavy reliance by governments on the remittances of their hard work in low-wage emigrants and trafficked workers to obtain foreign exchange reserves'.³⁰

²² Ligaya Lindio-MacGovern, *Globalization, Labor Export and Resistance: A Study of Filipino Migrant Domestic Workers in Global Cities*, 'Rethinking Globalizations; 32 270972544', (London etc.: Routledge, 2012) 21.

²³ c, 342.

²⁴ Rhacel Salazar Parrenas, 'Transgressing the Nation-State: The Partial Citizenship and "Imagined (Global) Community" of Migrant Filipina Domestic Workers', *Signs* 26:4 (2001) 1136.

²⁵ Pauline Gardiner Barber, 'Agency in Philippine Women's Labour Migration', 399.

²⁶ Ligaya Lindio-MacGovern, *Globalization, Labor Export and Resistance* 21.

²⁷ Robyn M. Rodriguez, 'Migrant Heroes: Nationalism, Citizenship and the Politics of Filipino Migrant Labor', *Citizenship Studies* 6:3 (2002), 345.

²⁸ Robyn M. Rodriguez, 'Migrant Heroes', 345.

²⁹ Pauline Gardiner Barber, 'Agency in Philippine Women's Labour Migration and Provisional Diaspora', *Women's Studies International Forum* 23:4 (2000) 400.

³⁰ Saskia Sassen, 'The Excesses of Globalisation and the Feminisation of Survival', *Parallax* 7:1 (2001) 100.

These countergeographies have become increasingly dominated by women. The majority of labor migrants, around 71%, are women working in domestic service - mostly in recently industrialised countries in Asia, the Middle East, Europe and North America.³¹

Although it can be necessary to refer to Filipino migrant workers as being part of the 'Filipino diaspora', there is of course a lot of diversity within this diaspora. Parrenas describes the differences that 'exist in the global community of migrant Filipina domestic workers', who represent 'different classes, age groups, and regions in the Philippines.'³² All Filipino women planning to migrate to be domestic workers must go through agencies licensed by the Philippine government, as well as taking part in a 'pre-departure orientation' organised by the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency. But many women also migrate independently of the government through networks of friends already working abroad or through illegal recruitment agencies, in order to avoid government agents' fees and substantial official red tape.³³ The reception of these migrants in popular destinations such as Singapore and the UK is partly determined by that country's economy. States create policy to attempt to control immigration flows, and this policy is part of a country's economic goals. As an increased number of immigrants coupled with an economic downturn, for example, can alter racial prejudices, so the victimisation of immigrants is influenced by the desire to maintain economic status. Within these prejudices, whenever women are the subject the age-old dichotomous (sexist) views still resurface, described in the language of the new global and economic environment.

Immigration into Singapore

Migration was foundational to the formation of Singapore. It was established under British colonial rule in the early nineteenth century, becoming an independent city-state in 1965. Martin Perry describes how the original population of around '150 Malay fishermen' quickly grew as new economic and building plans attracted traders and labourers from China, India and Malaysia. The People's Action Party, the party which has been in power since independence, believed that these three ethnicities should receive equal treatment as 'the founding races of Singapore'.³⁴ This 'abiding belief in the multiracial ideal' that developed under colonialism 'played a major part in shaping public policy in many spheres of life in the post-independence years'.³⁵ Singapore is one of the dominant destinations for labour migrants from poorer countries in South and South-East Asia. Due to Singapore's small resident population and its ambitious 'macro-discourses' on engaging further with globalisation, the government has always been open to what it calls 'foreign workers', although the policy on these workers has changed over time, and also differs according to the type of worker.³⁶ Consequently, Singapore now has 'one of the largest percentages of

³¹ Ligaya Lindio-MacGovern, *Globalization, Labor Export and Resistance*, 21.

³² Rhacel Salazar Parrenas, 'Transgressing the Nation-State', 1145.

³³ Annelies Moors and Marina de Regt, 'Migrant Domestic Workers in the Middle East', in Marlou Schrover, Joanne van der Leun, Leo Lucassen and Chris Quispel (eds.), *Illegal Migration and Gender in a Global and Historical Perspective* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008), 155-58.

³⁴ Martin Perry, Lily Kong and Brenda Yeoh, *Singapore: A Developmental City State*, 'World Cities Series 065306848' (Chichester etc.: Wiley, 1999) 22-26.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 53.

³⁶ Rani Rubdy and Sandra Lee McKay, "'Foreign Workers" in Singapore: Conflicting Discourses, Language, Politics and the Negotiation of Immigrant Identities', *IJSL* 222 (2013), 158.

foreign-born workers in the world, constituting 36 percent of its population of 5.2 million'. The majority of workers are concentrated into two sectors- men mostly in construction and hard labour, and women working as live-in 'foreign maids'. Most workers fit into the pattern that scholars have called 'transnational migration'.³⁷ They go to Singapore with economic gain as their goal, with the intention to send remittances home and to eventually return to their country of origin. As Singapore began a move to industrialize in the 1970s, the government encouraged skilled Singaporean women to enter the labour market.³⁸ This led to a higher demand for 'foreign maids'. At the end of 1990 Singapore's new prime minister Goh Chok Tong began to implement a new economic strategy. This was partly a 'restatement of established goals. It spoke of positioning Singapore as a global city, by making it a 'total business hub' for the Asia-Pacific'.³⁹ As a result the country's reliance on labour migrants to keep population numbers stable, and to take the jobs no longer wanted by Singaporeans, was cemented.⁴⁰

Migrant domestic workers in the United Kingdom

In Europe as a whole (as in Singapore) domestic work is typically an area of employment for women.⁴¹ Historically those carrying out domestic work in the United Kingdom have been mainly poor natives or slaves, but migrant women have also been employed to do domestic work. For instance, Jewish women escaping from Nazi persecution during the Second World War were able to enter the UK on a 'domestic service visa'.⁴² According to Lucy Delap, from the 1970s there were a small number of Filipino, Sri Lankan and Malaysian women working as maids in London, but the majority of migrant women came from Spain, Portugal and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s.⁴³ The number of migrant women working as domestic help, childminders, cleaners and in care homes in the UK has since increased.⁴⁴ It is now no longer the custom to have domestic workers who live with their employers, rather most of these women will work for several different families on an hourly basis. Kensington, where the Filipino Domestic Workers' Association (FDWA-UK) meet and most of its' members work, has traditionally been one of the richest boroughs in London. The church where they meet holds a mass in Tagalog, suggesting that there is a substantial Filipino community there. Migrant women, working both legally and illegally, do enter the UK independently but the majority of those doing domestic work will have first entered the UK with their

³⁷ For example: Charles Tilly, 'Trust Networks in Transnational Migration', *Sociological Forum* 22:1 (2007) 3-24; Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Blanc-Szanton, *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Nationalism Reconsidered* (New York: Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, vol. 645, 1992).

³⁸ Perry, Kong and Yeoh, *Singapore: A Developmental City State*, 85.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 113.

⁴⁰ Rani Rubdy and Sandra Lee McKay, "'Foreign Workers in Singapore: Conflicting Discourses, Language, Politics and the Negotiation of Immigrant Identities', *IJSL* 222 (2013) 157-8.

⁴¹ Bridget Anderson, 'Who Needs Them? Care Work, Migration and Public Policy', *Cuadernos de Relaciones Laborales* 30:1 (2012) 46.

⁴² Rafaella Sarti, 'Domestic Service: Past and Present in Southern and Northern Europe', *Gender and History* 18:2 (2006) 226.

⁴³ Lucy Delap, 'Knowing Their Place: Domestic Service in Twentieth-Century Britain' (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 79- 80.

⁴⁴ Bridget Anderson, 'Who Needs Them? Care Work, Migration and Public Policy', *Cuadernos de Relaciones Laborales* 30:1 (2012) 49.

employers from countries in the Middle East, particularly the Gulf States.⁴⁵ These countries have been heavily criticised for seriously abusing migrant workers. The system of *kafala* (sponsorship) in particular has been denounced for the way it ties a migrant worker to a single employer.⁴⁶

Migrant domestic workers enter the UK on the 'Domestic Workers in a Private Household' visa, of which between 15,000 and 16,000 are issued each year.⁴⁷ This visa is only for workers outside of the European Economic Area.⁴⁸ In 2012 the visa was altered to prevent migrant domestic workers from changing employers or from renewing their visa after six months. Since 2016, thanks to campaigns on the part of charities such as Kalayaan and the FDWA-UK, domestic workers have been able to change employers, as long as they do so within the six months. They cannot extend the visa beyond this period. Kalayaan compared records of workers under the tied visa with those of workers still on the visa as it was before 2012 and found that the abuse of migrant domestic workers has 'increased profoundly.' Moreover, the numbers of those going to Kalayaan or the FDWA-UK for help has 'reduced dramatically,' as the fear of deportation is now much higher.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Virginia Mantouvalou, 'Am I Free Now?' Overseas Domestic Workers in Slavery', *Journal of Law and Society* 42:3 (2015) 337.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 340.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 337.

⁴⁸ Virginia Mantouvalou, 'Am I Free Now?', 334.

⁴⁹ Kalayaan, 'Slavery by Another Name: The Tied Migrant Domestic Worker Visa', <http://kalayaan.org.uk/documents/Slavery%20by%20a%20new%20name-%20Briefing%207.5.13.pdf>.

1. Vulnerable Criminals? Policy on Migrant Domestic Workers

Migration is influenced by trends in the global economy and by the economy of the origin and receiving countries of migrants. For migrant workers economic advancement is a prime motivator for migration; all of the Filipino migrant domestic workers interviewed for this thesis cited situations of poverty and lack of secure employment as the main reason that they sought work overseas. On the side of nation states, the desire to continue being wealthy, or to increase wealth, has an impact on the way that immigration and migration is managed; with relation to their aims for the national economy, for example, or in their engagement in and responses to the global economic climate.⁵⁰ Maintaining economic status is also related to maintaining the importance and superiority of the nation-state in comparison to the 'others'.⁵¹ Victimisation happens through discursively constructing migrant domestic workers as the invisible and/or undesirable 'others'. This means that the state, the media and public discourse can construct migrants as suits their priorities in any given situation, which can compound abusive treatment from employers. It also often leads to migrants being associated with criminality. Migrant domestic workers are subject to this notion but because of their gender they are also simultaneously considered to be victims.⁵² Where migrant women are concerned the definition of victim is specific - it focuses on the notion of the 'helpless female', who is passive, ignorant, and, above all, vulnerable. Victimisation reproduces and keeps alive these reductive notions about women, in order to assert the usefulness of men as their protectors.⁵³ Policy (mirrored by public discourse) on migrant domestic workers is dichotomous: it creates an environment which makes it easy for them to actually become victims and criminals as defined by the patriarchal state and by society and this allows for the maintenance of strict immigration policies while the state can position itself as a protector of women and the saviour of the nation. Hence victimisation of migrant domestic workers involves considering them as both victims and criminals, while the thread connecting these ideas is the notion that women are inherently vulnerable.

Singapore has a desire to encourage continued growth as a richer economy and considers globalisation as a key factor in its 'macro-discourses'. It has had a reputation for being a dynamic and vibrant country, as Terence Chong has written:

'With economic growth so central to the idea of national survival, the Singapore nation has been defined as necessarily dynamic, open to change and adaptable to the demands of the world economy'.⁵⁴

Coupled with its small population, this means that immigration policy remains a central issue for the Singaporean government; it has always, to different degrees, encouraged the immigration of foreign workers into the country - and there has been a continuous need for immigrants to make up the labour force. The state aims to control immigration using a 'dual

⁵⁰ Saskia Sassen, 'The Excesses of Globalisation and the Feminisation of Survival', *Parallax* 7:1 (2001) 100.

⁵¹ Terence Chong, 'Manufacturing Authenticity: The Cultural Production of National Identities in Singapore', *Modern Asian Studies* 45:4 (2011) 879.

⁵² Laura Maria Agustin, 'Forget Victimization: Granting Agency to Migrants', *Development* 46:3 (2003) 30.

⁵³ Sharon Lamb in Erinn Cunniff Gilson, 'Vulnerability and Victimization: Rethinking Key Concepts in Feminist Discourses on Sexual Violence', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 42:1 (2016), 80.

⁵⁴ Chong, 'Manufacturing Authenticity', 879.

policy' which categorises migrants applying for working visas as either 'foreign talents (FTs)' or 'foreign workers (FWs)'. The former category is made up of a smaller number of 'professionals' who work in jobs that are higher-skilled in the technology, finance and business sectors, while the latter forms the bulk of Singapore's workforce and mostly consists of men in the construction industry and women as domestic workers. These jobs are known in Singapore as the '3Ds' (dirty, dangerous and difficult jobs), and Singaporeans mostly try to avoid them if they can. The employment of foreign domestic workers in particular means that Singaporean women can continue to participate in the economy (the employment rate of Singaporean women in 2017 was at 72%, the highest it has been).⁵⁵ Despite the country's economic dependence on these workers, their treatment by the state is 'starkly different from that enjoyed by the Foreign Talent sector'⁵⁶; FTs can occupy an 'exalted' position in society, with the possibility of being able to settle permanently, whereas the residence of foreign workers is strictly controlled through temporary work permits.⁵⁷ As Lai Ah Eng has described, within the 'contextual specificities' of migration in Asia there is a 'prevalence of migratory regimes that enforce transience on contemporary populations of labour migrants, particularly those considered unskilled and undesirable'.⁵⁸ These temporary permits are normally valid for up to two years but can be cut short if the economy declines. In order for migrant domestic workers to remain in the country legally, the permits must be renewed by their employer and, crucially, domestic workers must live in the residence of their employer for their work permit to be valid. The power of employers over their domestic workers then is reinforced. If their permit is not renewed or they wish to leave their employers they risk becoming undocumented, and therefore illegal, immigrants.

In a forum with university students in 2013 the Deputy Prime Minister at the time, Teo Chee Hean, outlined his views on migration into Singapore. Using language found in the dual policy, he directly equated migration with the national economy - the kind of migrants that Singapore needs to maintain its vibrancy and energy (read: its economic status), he suggested, are the 'foreign professionals' who are attracted to Singapore because of its dynamism and wealth. Foreign workers, by contrast, are merely allowed to come:

'Amongst Singaporeans, it's a rarity to find somebody who goes back three generations and has no one who was not born outside of Singapore. In Singapore we have an ability to adjust to migration, to people, we have the tools. Why do we have migration to Singapore? Why do we attract foreign professionals, or why do we allow foreign workers to come to Singapore? It's because we want to create a stronger, better Singapore, and largely for Singapore citizens. Because we see the competitive world out there and if we don't do some of these things we'll be a weaker Singapore, less vibrant, less energy, fewer companies doing business here,

⁵⁵ Ministry of Manpower, 'Speech by Minister Lim Swee Say in Response to Motion on Aspirations of Singaporean Women in Parliament' (16 April 2017) <https://www.mom.gov.sg/newsroom/speeches/2017/0405-speech-by-minister-mr-lim-swee-say-in-response-to-motion-on-aspirations-of-singaporean-women-in-parliament> [Accessed 10 November 2018].

⁵⁶ Rani Rubdy and Sandra Lee McKay, "'Foreign Workers' in Singapore: Conflicting Discourses, Language, Politics and the Negotiation of Immigrant Identities', *IJSL* 222 (2013) 159.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 161.

⁵⁸ Lai Ah Eng, Francis Leo Collins, Brenda S.A. Yeoh (Eds.) *Migration and Diversity in Asian Contexts* (Singapore, ISEAS Yusof- Ishak Institute, 2012) 16.

opening fewer opportunities elsewhere and therefore fewer jobs, fewer opportunities in Singapore'.⁵⁹

Clearly there is a difference here between what the government chooses to say about migration and the reality for foreign workers. Foreign workers make up 85% of the workforce (as opposed to the 15% of foreign talents) - obviously they are needed to maintain Singapore's economic status, but the deputy prime minister mentions them only in passing. This is reflective of the Singaporean government's attitude towards foreign workers in general, which shows a tendency to treat them as an invisible workforce. In comparison to the situation for foreign talents, the temporality of the work permit and the requirements which come with it (meaning that foreign domestic workers spend the majority of their time in their employers' residence and that their stay in Singapore is relatively short) allow the government to ignore them - in other words to make them into an invisible workers. As Brenda Yeoh and Shirlena Huang describe, this contributes to the poor treatment of foreign domestic workers: 'The state's abdication of responsibility over the foreign domestic worker's work conditions and relegation of the tasking of 'policing the maid' to the employer tends to drive employers towards excessive control over their maids' activities.'⁶⁰ By treating foreign domestic workers as invisible, the government passes the responsibility for their working conditions to their employers, who are in a position of total power over their domestic worker thanks to the conditions of immigration policy that facilitate making them invisible in the first place. This is a victimisation of foreign workers by the Singaporean state because it contributes to and enhances the possibility that they will be abused by their employers. (Especially since, given the high numbers of foreign domestic workers it is not possible for them to literally not be visible - an example of this is an ongoing issue that some Singaporeans have over foreign domestic workers' 'off-days', when they meet up in big groups in public spaces).⁶¹

The fact that in a speech aligning Singapore's economy with its national identity, the major contributors to this economy are mentioned only in passing is also indicative of a matter that is important to national governments everywhere - that of redefining the nation state and asserting its superiority over the foreign 'others'.⁶² In July 2017 the Straits Times reported on the current Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's attendance at a citizenship ceremony, where he commented on Singapore's 'inflow' of 'new immigrants'. The paper expounded on this;

'Maintaining a stable population is needed to stave off labour shortages as the population ages and there are fewer working-age people. National University of Singapore sociologist Paulin Straughan said there is a limit to how much the Total Fertility Rate can be pushed up, so other strategies are needed to sustain population

⁵⁹ SPH Razor, "Our forefathers were migrants too (Dialogue with DPM Teo Part 14)". 2013. Online Video Clip. (YouTube, 2013).

⁶⁰ Brenda Yeoh and Shirlena Huang, 'Negotiating Public Space: Strategies and Styles of Migrant Female Domestic Workers in Singapore', *Urban Studies* 35:3 (1998), 590.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 594.

⁶² Marlou Schrover, 'Pillarization, Multiculturalism and Cultural Freezing: Dutch Migration History and the Enforcement of Essentialist Ideas', *BMGN- Low Countries Historical Review*, 125:2-3 (2010) 354 and Rani Rubdy and Sandra Lee McKay, "'Foreign Workers" in Singapore', 166.

growth. For instance, making Singapore an attractive destination for talented residents, so the country can “pick and attract people who can bring the best to Singapore.”⁶³

The article focuses on the need to boost the numbers of ‘talented residents’ in order to decrease labour shortages. It does not mention the reality that, although foreign talents may be needed to work in the higher-paying sectors, it is the large numbers of foreign workers in the ‘3Ds’ who make up the majority of the workforce.⁶⁴ The majority of national papers, of which *The Straits Times* is one of the oldest and most widely circulated, are part of Singapore’s primary media company Singapore Press Holdings, which has close ties with the Singaporean government. Singapore does not have a free press - foreign reports about the city-state were seen as interference by a former president, and as a result many foreign newspapers are banned.⁶⁵ The chief editor of *The Straits Times* in 1993 once stated that the ‘contemporary role of the press is to promote consensus among the citizenry and to prevent erosion of the values on which Singapore’s economic success is based.’⁶⁶ The article on new immigrants is definitely aiming to promote ‘consensus among the citizenry’. It declares that it is ‘the country’ that will choose who can and cannot enter - a somewhat ambiguous statement implying that the Singaporean public have a say in this decision. Even the use of the word ‘pick’ implies that there are others who will not be picked. In stating that these judgements are beneficial for the city-state - it ‘can bring the best to Singapore’- the article asserts the power of Singaporeans and aligns them with the foreign talent, who will bring financial benefits and contribute to the dynamism of the country, along with Singaporeans themselves. Clearly, Singapore’s economy is part of its definition of national identity. Again when migration is under discussion the Singaporean government are rendering foreign workers invisible, this time joined by the media. The aim to make the country ‘an attractive destination for talented residents’, compared to the ‘enforced transience’ of foreign workers strongly implies that foreign workers are also the ‘others’ in Singaporean society. In effect, the system is built on a classification of foreign workers as the ‘others’ who are needed for economic reasons but, as the government turns them into the invisible ‘others’ through policy and discourse, their vulnerability is increased. This leaves those who have relative power in comparison - politicians, the media and employers of foreign workers – with free reign to treat and construct foreign domestic workers as they wish.

Laura Maria Agustin has theorised that, in public discourse, migrants’ motives and desires are relegated to the background, bringing the dangers of migration into sharper focus and suggesting that migrants themselves are somehow inherently dangerous.⁶⁷ Agustin points out that this discourse encompasses disadvantaged people in general, not just women. This discourse is advantageous to governments because if migrants are seen as criminals, and the government can be seen to be dealing with these criminals (through immigration policy,

⁶³ ‘Singapore must manage inflow of new immigrants carefully: PM Lee Hsien Loong’, *The Straits Times* online, 28 May 2017, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/spore-must-manage-inflow-of-new-immigrants-carefully-pm> [Accessed 10 November 2018].

⁶⁴ Rubdy and McKay, “‘Foreign workers’ in Singapore”, 158.

⁶⁵ Anne-Marie Hilsdon, ‘What the Papers Say: Representing Violence Against Overseas Contract Workers’, *Violence Against Women* 9:6 (2003), 703.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Agustin, ‘Forget Victimization’, 31.

for example), then the government can position itself as the protector of the nation state. Although not a sensationalist paper, *the Straits Times* has achieved this by presenting foreign workers as an invisible workforce, by the using the subtle means of ignoring their contributions to the economy while implying that the governmental apparatus and laws of Singapore are the saviours of the country. Given Teo Chee Hean's statement and the way the article builds on the comments of the Prime Minister, this is presumably the kind of reporting on immigration that the government wants to be published, as well as subconsciously appealing to most Singaporeans. But there are also examples in the *Straits Times* when migrant domestic workers are constructed as potential criminals. An example of this can be found in an article from early 2017 about the apparent 'radicalisation of maids' in Singapore. One was titled 'How to spot extremism in foreign maids'. This explained that

'The Home Affairs and Manpower ministries recently produced an advisory for employers of foreign domestic workers (FDWs) [...] It provides information on what extremism entails, how to recognise it, and how to report suspected cases to the authorities'.⁶⁸

The article noted that the two ministries had 'included the dangers of extremism in the curriculum of the Settling-In Programme which is compulsory for all FDWs'. As stated on the Ministry of Manpower's website the 'topics covered' in this programme include;

- Introduction to Singapore
- Employment conditions
- Safety at home
- Safety in other areas
- Relationship and stress management'⁶⁹

The Settling-In Programme is aimed at achieving integration but, crucially, it puts the onus of integration on to the workers' shoulders - they must learn to manage relationships with their employers but there is no suggestion that Singaporeans should do the same for their employees. By placing this onus onto the workers, it is therefore insinuated that Singapore holds no responsibility for the domestic workers who became 'radicalised'. Rather it is the culture that they come from (the Philippines, for example, has a history of extremist Islamic practice) that is at fault, not the culturally, morally and economically superior Singapore. If the 'others', foreign domestic workers, are criminal and threatening to Singaporeans, then that is a justification for otherisation. It seems that when there is a perceived threat from something foreign (in this case fundamental Islam) then the foreign 'others', foreign domestic workers, are constructed as potential criminals in order that the government can be seen to be protecting the nation state, by tackling the problem through policy such as the Settling-In Programme. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's views on othering (although here referring to colonisers rather than a specific national government) can also be applied to Singapore:

⁶⁸ 'How to spot extremism in foreign maids', *The Straits Times* online, 14 July 2017, <https://www.straitstimes.com/forum/letters-in-print/how-to-spot-extremism-in-foreign-maids> [Accessed 10 November 2018].

⁶⁹ Ministry of Manpower, 'Settling-In Program (SIP)' <http://www.mom.gov.sg/passes-and-permits/work-permit-for-foreign-domestic-worker/eligibility-and-requirements/settling-in-programme-sip> [Accessed 12th November 2017].

'Europe had consolidated itself as sovereign subject by defining its colonies as "Others," even as it constituted them, for purposes of administration and the expansion of markets, into programmed near-images of that very sovereign self.'⁷⁰

The Singaporean state has defined foreign domestic workers as its others, as it has constituted policy on those workers. Indeed it seems that victimisation is systematised in Singapore's immigration policy. The condition of the temporary work permit which requires that domestic workers live in their employer's home removes responsibility from the government as to how foreign domestic workers are treated once in their place of employment. This is compounded by the 'enforced transience' of foreign domestic workers which makes it easier for government discourse to make them invisible, instead focusing on those which it defines as 'foreign talents', who are alike to Singaporeans. The media in Singapore sometimes constructs foreign domestic workers as the criminal 'others', making them into scapegoats when there is a perceived threat to Singapore, and this is again compounded by government discourse which tries to deal with the threat by constructing foreign domestic workers as criminals. Essentially foreign domestic workers are victimised because they are either signalled out for unfair treatment as the criminal 'others', or they are treated unfairly as the invisible 'others' who (conveniently, if they are criminals) have no protection under labour laws.

In the UK labour migrants coming from situations of poverty are in general considered to be undesirable immigrants, and are framed as the 'others' by both the government and the media. The creation of the British government's "'hostile environment on illegal immigration'"⁷¹ in 2017 reflects a general rise in anti-immigrant discourse; sensationalist newspapers (and often politicians also) choose to focus negatively on migrants, mostly depicting them as criminals, or if not overtly as criminal then as something threatening to British people. In 2015 the Prime Minister described the numbers of refugees entering the UK as a 'swarm' - a word that arguably has strongly negative Biblical connotations and implies that refugees are a threatening, inhuman force. This attitude was later incorporated into actual reports - a year later the tabloid newspaper *The Sun* reported that 'Hundreds of rioting migrants swarmed Brit cars and lorries at the flashpoint port of Calais in scenes described as 'like The Walking Dead''.⁷² A media diatribe that has particular relevance to migrant domestic workers is the focus on the 'cost' of migrants to the welfare state. *The Daily Mail*, another widely-read tabloid, indignantly declared that migrants are 'abusing British hospitality' through claiming unemployment benefit.⁷³ In another article it was hysterical in proclaiming that '£886 million' was the cost for British subjects; 'That is the

⁷⁰ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives', *History and Theory* 24:3 (1985) 247.

⁷¹ "Hostile environment": the hardline Home Office policy tearing families apart', *The Guardian* online 28 November 2017
<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/nov/28/hostile-environment-the-hardline-home-office-policy-tearing-families-apart>. Accessed 13 December 2017].

⁷² 'LET US IN: Huge mob of 300 migrants storm port in Calais in violent bid to smuggle their way into UK', *The Sun* online, 21 June 2016, <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/1315538/huge-mob-of-300-migrants-storm-port-in-calais-in-violent-bid-to-smuggle-their-way-into-uk/> [Accessed 13 December 2017].

⁷³ 'Stop this abuse of British hospitality', *The Mail Online*, 21 January 2012
<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2089696/Immigrants-claiming-UK-benefits-report-Stop-abuse-British-hospitality.html> [Accessed 31 October 2018].

eye-watering sum YOU pay in benefits to out-of-work EU migrants in just one year'.⁷⁴ In both articles immigration was related to the wider economic state of the UK and Brexit; 'At last we are laying bare the huge cost of being a member of the EU. The changes the Prime Minister has negotiated are trifling – the only way to restrict benefits to EU migrants is to leave the EU.'⁷⁵ This tirade about 'benefit tourists' does not just apply to EU migrants. In a transcribed speech about living in London as an undocumented domestic worker, an anonymous member of the Filipino Domestic Workers Association-UK (FDWA-UK) stated that

'Like regular citizens in this country, we are not exempted in paying bills. We pay our rent, which helps landlords pay their mortgages. In my area, many landlords were saved from foreclosure during the financial crisis because of our contributions. In short, some of the money we earn is returned to the economy that helps the UK industry [...] Contrary to what politicians and the media says, we don't depend and never claim benefits from the state. We have no access to even the most basic protection of our rights and wellbeing.'⁷⁶

As with the 'enforced transience' of foreign workers in Singapore the British government aims to regulate domestic workers through the 'Domestic Workers in a Private Household' visa which is now valid for six months. In 2012 this visa (then called the Overseas Domestic Workers visa) was changed - the visa became a 'tied' visa, whereby domestic workers could not legally remain in the UK if they wished to find new employers. The FDWA-UK has been involved in a crucial amendment to the tied visa which gives domestic workers a six month window, meaning that if they leave their employer within the duration of their six month visa then they will not be illegal immigrants, but they must find another post *before* the end of that time. Phoebe Dimacali, the chairperson and one of the founders of the charity, spoke angrily about this, also referencing the benefits diatribe:

'The campaign still goes on, give them [domestic workers] the freedom to come here, give them the visa to work legally so that you know they're not here - what do you call this - they're not here to claim benefits, we came here to work for the families.'⁷⁷

Through her work helping Filipino domestic workers to run away from their employers, Phoebe had found that it was the norm for Filipino domestic workers to have been brought to the UK, usually without being given a choice, by their employers in the Middle-East. Agustin describes how 'many situations arise during a migration in which migrants have to choose between doing things the 'right', or legal, way, or doing them so that they might turn

⁷⁴ '£886 million... That is the eye-watering sum YOU pay in benefits to out-of-work EU migrants in just one year', *The Mail Online*, 28 February 2016, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3467563/886million-eye-watering-sum-pay-benefits-work-EU-migrants-just-one-year.html> [Accessed 31 October 2018].

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Filipino Domestic Workers' Association-UK, 'My Life As An Undocumented Domestic Migrant Worker in London' (2015) <http://fdwa.co.uk/2015/05/08/my-life-as-an-undocumented-domestic-migrant-worker-in-london/> [Accessed 13 July 2018].

⁷⁷ Phoebe Dimacali, 11 April 2018, personal interview.

out the way they want'.⁷⁸ Although it could be argued there is little about situations in which migrant domestic workers are being abused by their employers that involves choice, the point is that reality for migrant domestic workers is much more fluid than being either legal or illegal immigrants. Girlie, Eleanor and Hassan, also members of the FDWA-UK, spoke emotionally about how being undocumented made them feel and were defensive against implications that they were in the wrong (suggesting that they had internalised the British negativity about migrants):

Girlie: 'You feel stressed and think about how maybe if you've been caught in the immigrations you [will] have nothing, but for me I said I think I have nothing to worry about, I didn't steal anything, didn't do anything, I don't even buy the things here because taxes are so high.'⁷⁹

Eleanor: 'I think it's unfair because you want to go further here but you need to pay to live here, you cannot go home to your family [...] because even if I am working overseas for a long time you can not save money because things became very expensive and salary is just enough for the needs, for the basic needs.'⁸⁰

Hassan: 'I'm scared that I'm not allowed to stay with my friend, I'm scared to go out, when I see police I don't know why but I get scared.'⁸¹

In Phoebe's experience of helping domestic workers to leave their employers, most domestic workers do not know what laws apply to them. Although the migration of Filipino women to work overseas is arguably not autonomous, the knowledge that the Philippine government is involved in the migration of its citizens will have contributed to their confusion. According to Nestor Rodriguez:

'It is important to understand that autonomous migration means more than unauthorized ('illegal') border crossings: it means a community strategy implemented, developed, and sustained with the support of institutions, including formal ones, at the migrants' points of origin and [...] points of destination. Precisely because core institutions (legal, religious, local governmental, etc.) support this migratory strategy, undocumented migrants do not perceive its moral significance as deviant. Migrants may see their autonomous migration as extralegal, but not necessarily as criminal.'⁸²

Migrant domestic workers (rightly) also do not see themselves as criminals, as suggested by Girlie's reiteration that they 'didn't do anything wrong'. Perhaps the anger that both she and the anonymous FDWA-UK member (and to some extent Helen and Girlie as well) felt in referencing the anti-immigrant diatribe is because, apart from its obvious stupidity, they

⁷⁸ Agustin, 'Forget Victimization', 34.

⁷⁹ Girlie, 21 April 2018, personal interview.

⁸⁰ Eleanor, 14 April 2018, personal interview.

⁸¹ Hassan, 21 April 2018, personal interview.

⁸² Nestor Rodriguez, 'The Battle for the Border: Notes on Autonomous Migration, Transnational Communities, and the State', *Social Justice* 23 (1996) 23.

have realised that there is policy that increases the vulnerability of migrant domestic workers, placing them into situations in which they might become criminals or victims (as defined by the government and the press), with no in-between. Phoebe has taken an active role in trying to change policy on domestic workers:

‘All these employers who are bringing their maids into this country, once they arrive they have to report to the Home Office, so our organisation and other organisations are setting a program that if they [the employers] arrive here for twenty days and they do not report their domestic worker to the Home Office then we knock on their door, so...if they’re being abused and the employer did not report that their domestic worker is staying here then we know where they are and it’s easier for us to rescue them, so we’re trying to be involved in knocking, because it should be us going to knock on the doors of Filipinos, it should be Filipinos who are talking so that we could explain in our own language.’

The Home Office has instigated that employers of migrant domestic workers should report their arrival in the country, but this does not seem to act as a check to their being abused because there are no safeguards in place to protect them. Government policy and discourse, together with media discourse, renders migrant domestic workers invisible, which makes it easy to ignore the need for more changes to the six month visa which would protect them. Newspaper articles about migrant domestic workers have increased since the Modern Slavery Act was passed in 2015 but their situations are still largely unknown in comparison to the frequency of articles like those in the tabloid papers referenced above. Rendering migrant domestic workers invisible in the UK is also easy to do because they are, in terms of numbers, literally less visible than migrant domestic workers in Singapore. This makes projects like the FDWA-UK’s all the more necessary. Seemingly, the desire to control immigration vies with keeping checks on migrants in abusive situations, and the desire to control immigration usually wins. Moreover as there has been a rise in open anti-Islamic sentiments in the UK, requiring employers to report to the Home Office on their arrival may perhaps be as much, if not more, of a way to keep track of the employers than migrant domestic workers. The government may also consider migrant domestic workers to be victims in this situation, in which case they can lay the blame on their undesirable employers. As Robyn M. Rodriguez describes: ‘Postcolonial states draw on gendered representations to legitimize their developmental projects amongst their citizens.’⁸³ Phoebe seems to be following the same logic as the government here - that is, seeing the vulnerability of migrant domestic workers in the situations she described and considering them to be victims. Perhaps she differed from the Home Office in not considering migrant domestic workers’ vulnerability to automatically makes them victims; the only time she used the word ‘victim’ was later on in the interview, when she was talking about women who had been trafficked. Whatever the case, it seems that it can be beneficial to migrant domestic workers to recognise situations in which they are vulnerable, as it would be if the result is that Phoebe and her co-workers can ‘be involved in knocking’.

In juxtaposition to the sensationalist media diatribe about benefits and swarms of refugees, the moderately left-wing British paper *The Guardian* published angry articles over what was

⁸³ Robyn M. Rodriguez, ‘Domestic Insecurities: Female Migration from the Philippines, Development and National Subject-Status’, *Center for Comparative Immigration Studies Working Paper 114* (March 2005) 5.

generally described as the ‘controversial’ visa change that tied migrant domestic workers to their employers⁸⁴ and an independent review of the visa by barrister James Ewins also condemned the changes.⁸⁵ Human rights groups have led campaigns for individual migrant women with some success, by portraying them as victims rather than by focusing on their position as illegal migrants. But although of course crucial for these women, scholars such as Marlou Schrover have pointed out that a fall out of this has been an impression that migrant women (who, in general are seen as a group, and not as individuals) are victims.⁸⁶ For example, migrant domestic workers are often described by the Guardian as being Britain’s “modern-day slaves”.⁸⁷ The government also uses this tag; a governmental process called the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is in place in the UK to help migrants who have been trafficked and ‘modern slavery victims’.⁸⁸ Phoebe, who has been interviewed for a couple of articles by *The Guardian*, explained that ‘many women are too scared to enter the NRM because of the immigration repercussions’: “Recently, a woman was recognised as a victim of trafficking but was told to leave the UK within a few weeks,” she said. “Word gets round to the other women and it makes them afraid to approach the Home Office.”⁸⁹ Applicants who have been identified as victims by the NRM are given two weeks of funded accommodation and support from the government, while those who have received a negative decision, a mere forty eight hours.⁹⁰ Eleanor has had direct dealings with the Home Office which indicate how reluctant the government is to allow migrant domestic workers to stay beyond six months:

‘We applied for an extension and I was refused, so I made an appeal with my employer and then the judge said I won the case, but then the Home Office appealed, so they refuse again, and then I appeal again, and then January they gave me [a visa] for two and a half years, even though I fought for four years.
Interviewer: Do you know why it was refused in the first place?’

⁸⁴ See, for example; ‘The UK’s new immigration bill creates perfect conditions for slavery to thrive’, *The Guardian* online, Caroline Robinson, 28 August 2015 <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/aug/28/slavery-uk-immigration-act-2014-hostile-environment-undocumented-migrants-focus-on-labour-exploitation-flex>.

‘Domestic workers abused in the UK: ‘She took the iron and pressed it on my hand’’, *The Guardian* online, Humanity United, Harriet Grant, 11 January 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/jan/11/domestic-workers-abused-uk-london-gulf-state-employers-iron-pressed-my-hand>.

⁸⁵ James Ewins, ‘Independent Review of the Overseas Domestic Worker Visa’, 16 December 2015 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/overseas-domestic-workers-visa-independent-review>.

⁸⁶ Marlou Schrover, ‘Feminization and Problematization of Migration: Europe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries’, in: Dirk Hoerder and Kaur Amarjit (eds.), *Proletarian and Gendered Mass Migrations A Global Perspective on Continuities and Discontinuities from the 19th to the 21st Centuries* (Leiden 2013), 126.

⁸⁷ UK tied visa system ‘turning domestic workers into modern-day slaves’, *The Guardian* online, Alastair Sloan, 17 May 2015 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/17/uk-tied-visa-system-turning-domestic-workers-into-modern-day-slaves>. [Accessed 5 November 2018].

⁸⁸ National Crime Agency, ‘National Referral Mechanism’, <http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/about-us/what-we-do/specialist-capabilities/uk-human-trafficking-centre/national-referral-mechanism> [Accessed 5 November 2018].

⁸⁹ ‘UK visa policy ‘increasing abuse’ of foreign maids, says damning review’, *The Guardian* online, Humanity United, Harriet Grant and Annie Kelly, 11 January 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/jan/11/uk-increasing-abuse-foreign-maids-tied-visas> [Accessed 5 November 2018].

⁹⁰ Virginia Mantouvalou, ‘The UK Modern Slavery Act 2015 Three Years On’, *The Modern Law Review* 81:6 (2018) 1027.

Eleanor: Because they say - because the domestic worker is not open here [sic], and then they say that my employer can get a childminder.'

Despite the reality of dealing with anything governmental for migrant domestic workers, the fact that the NRM is in place allowed the government to refuse to amend the tied visa beyond the alteration of allowing domestic workers a six month window. According to the immigration minister, the rationale for this was as follows

“The government’s concern is that if ODWs [Overseas Domestic Workers] were able to change employers and significantly prolong their stay, irrespective of whether they have reported this abuse and whether there is evidence that such abuse has taken place, they may be less likely to report abuse. This may perpetuate a revolving door of abuse in which perpetrators remain unidentified and free to bring other domestic workers to the United Kingdom with impunity.”⁹¹

As with Eleanor’s experience, this is clearly about maintaining the ‘enforced transience’ of migrant domestic workers and trying to regulate their numbers, while (in this case) positioning the government as simply concerned for the welfare of migrant domestic workers. While it is true that ‘perpetrators’ are responsible for bringing domestic workers to the UK it is significant that, in other articles, it is made clear that these ‘perpetrators’ are foreigners. Significantly, the Home Office only provides the statistics on the numbers of visas for migrant domestic workers issued each year, but does release data on the nationality of the employers - the majority of whom are from the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait and Oman.⁹² One article in particular calls out the government for placing the blame onto Saudi Arabia. A Labour minister is quoted as saying that

“It seems clear that the government doesn’t want to confront the Saudi authorities or Saudi practices where they are an affront to human rights. They are obsessed with bringing down immigration numbers, and that obsession trumps concerns for human rights.”⁹³

As with the *Straits Times* articles about ‘radicalised maids’, and given the rise of negative feelings towards the Middle East in the UK and the association of Islam with terrorism, focusing on Saudi Arabia and migrant domestic workers in the same article implies that there is something dangerous about these workers. There is a suggestion that migrant domestic workers may be criminal, the undesirable ‘others’, while they are simultaneously portrayed as victims.

⁹¹ ‘Government rejects calls to end UK tied visas for domestic workers’, *The Guardian* online, Alan Travis, 7 March 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/mar/07/government-rejects-call-scrap-uk-tied-visas-domestic-workers> [Accessed 5 November 2018].

⁹² Virginia Mantouvalou, ‘Am I Free Now?’ Overseas Domestic Workers in Slavery’, *Journal of Law and Society* 42:3 (2015) 337.

⁹³ ‘UK visa policy ‘increasing abuse’ of foreign maids, says damning review’, *The Guardian* online, Humanity United, Harriet Grant and Annie Kelly, 11 January 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/jan/11/uk-increasing-abuse-foreign-maids-tied-visas> [Accessed 5 November 2018].

A product of Singapore's dual policy, the six month visa in the UK and the conditions for the employment of domestic workers, is to place migrant domestic workers into situations where they are wholly dependent on their employer for food, shelter and money. They are placed into situations which would be befitting of someone who did not speak any language in common with their employers, had previously never travelled away from home (and so could not be trusted with their passport) and are incapable of navigating their way through a foreign country (to find their way to their place of work for example). To be victims then, women must be completely vulnerable, which means that they are powerless, passive, ignorant, and in need of protection from men. Sharon Lamb described this as the concept of the "true" or "culturally approved victim".⁹⁴ As Erinn Cunniff Gilson outlines:

'In their emphasis on victims' vulnerability, the norms of victimhood reproduce "a notion of girlhood and womanhood that we [as a culture] would like to preserve: the helpless female— slight, airy, voiceless— who needs reviving or rescuing".⁹⁵

If the British government had to consider all migrant domestic workers as victims then it would have to help all of them, and this might mean allowing them to stay in the UK. In wanting migrant domestic workers to go through the NRM, the government aims to be seen as the protector of the 'helpless female' while still being able to maintain the strict immigration policy that regulates them as the criminal 'others', so 'reproducing masculine ideologies of gender and nation'.⁹⁶ In fact, the synonymous portrayal of women as criminals and the policy which makes it all too easy for them to become such is also based on the idea of vulnerability. As Marlou Schrover describes

'Migrant men are seen to *cause* problems while migrant women are seen as *having* problems - they are considered as being more likely to end up in situations of trafficking, prostitution, 'forced marriages, situations of domestic violence or becoming the victims of honour killings'.⁹⁷

So, if migrant women are criminals then it is because they are vulnerable - they 'have' problems. The basis of policy that victimises migrant domestic workers is more than just the economic and 'othering' reasons that signal them out for unfair treatment, it is an assumption about women's vulnerability. And herein is the dichotomy of victimisation - because while migrant women are vulnerable they are also still the undesirable 'others'. As Agustin describes, because 'migrants are usually seen as people from the Third World, the positioning of so many of them as victims... harks back unsettlingly to the old category of the 'native'. And since migrants nowadays are so often women, these natives are constituted as backward, developmentally *less* than First-World women.'⁹⁸ Where migrant women are concerned, this idea of the culturally-approved victim is a double-edged sword; the discourse that describes migrant women as victims in need of a saviour suits the state because, in being able to help the 'other' women, it upholds the idea that that country is culturally and morally more advanced than the country from which the women came. In the same way it suits the state to treat migrant domestic workers as criminals, or potential criminals, because it shows that the nation state is capable of dealing with the threat of the

⁹⁴ Sharon Lamb in Gilson, 'Vulnerability and Victimization', 80.

⁹⁵ Gilson, 'Vulnerability and Victimization', 81.

⁹⁶ Na Young Lee, 'Gendered nationalism and otherization: transnational prostitutes in South Korea', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 7:3 (2006) 463.

⁹⁷ Marlou Schrover, 'Feminization and Problematization of Migration', 126.

⁹⁸ Agustin, 'Forget Victimization', 31.

others. Although it seems like a paradox, in this way migrant women can be seen as causing problems *because* they are vulnerable. Referencing Marlou Schrover again, where migrant women are concerned ideas about illegality tend to go hand in hand with a “victimhood approach”.⁹⁹ Phoebe and other migrant domestic workers are perhaps aware of the victimhood approach, particularly Phoebe given her involvement with *The Guardian*, but as suggested by their anger over the benefits diatribe, they also cannot fail to be aware of the view sensationalist newspapers take of migrants in the UK. Unfortunately, this latter discourse is much more widely propagated; in 2018 *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail* have been the most widely circulated newspapers, with *The Guardian* coming in at the bottom of the ranking.¹⁰⁰ Perhaps then, in treating migrant domestic workers both as criminals and as victims, migrant domestic workers are victimised because they are set up to be scapegoats for the state, who can be blamed for issues surrounding the national economy and for the perceived increase of outside threats, such as fear of the rise of fundamental Islam in Singapore.

To conclude, in the UK and Singapore the victimisation of migrant domestic workers is the result of the same desires to maintain economic status and the importance of the nation state as opposed to the ‘others’. In Singapore this means that the government prefers to act as though foreign domestic workers are an invisible workforce, while public discourse has a tendency to criminalise them and to blame them for a perceived increase of outside threats to Singaporeans. The British government also chooses to treat migrant domestic workers as invisible which (as in Singapore too) actually increases the likelihood that they will be mistreated. When migrant women apply to the National Referral Mechanism the government can then act as the saviours of migrant women, and place the blame entirely on their employers. There is a similarly criminalising but more openly racist tirade against migrants in general in sensationalist media, which makes migrant domestic workers into undesirable migrants because their employers are perceived to be a threat. Discourse on migrants propagates the principal players; if migrants are victims who need to be saved, then their supporters can take on the role of saviours, and if migrants are criminals that must be dealt with in order to protect citizens, then their saviours (the government) become the saviours and protectors of the nation. Possibly it is necessary to view migrant women as criminals in order to claim that they are victims - if women are working illegally as prostitutes then they have been coerced into that work, if they have chosen to work as domestic workers, then they are not victims. However, as we have seen, the idea of women having inherent vulnerability is embodied in policy even when it seems that women are just being considered as migrants, from a purely economic point of view. This policy then, in putting domestic workers into situations where their supposed vulnerability is made into a reality (where they are likely to end up in situations in which they can then be defined either as victims of abuse or criminals) is almost a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is because victimisation embodies sexism that it becomes even more dangerous and difficult for migrant women coming from positions of poverty - as the policies so concerned with

⁹⁹ Marlou Schrover in Schrover et al (eds.), *Illegal Migration and Gender in a Global and Historical Perspective*, 27.

¹⁰⁰ The Statistics Portal, ‘Circulation of newspapers in the United Kingdom (UK) as of June 2018 (in 1,000 copies)’, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/529060/uk-newspaper-market-by-circulation/> [Accessed 6 November 2018].

securing the nation-state not only place limitations on women based on *where* they come from and *what* they do, as with all migrants, but also because of their gender.

2. Victims of a 'Colonisers' Consciousness'

As a leftover of colonialism, prejudices against certain ethnicities and notions about class have long been fully formed in Singapore and the United Kingdom. Market conditions have allowed this already existing racist mentality to take root in economic and financial management so that this state of mind becomes the framework for the country's economic processes, law and policy. Where migrants come from and what they do is held and used against them, and where migrant women are concerned, there are a plethora of gender-specific prejudices that have a significance and a root both nationally and internationally.¹⁰¹ Because of their perceived vulnerability, migrant women can be constructed as both innocently girlish and fully-fledged temptresses; combined with the racist and classist distinctions that are applied to some migrants, these notions result in strict control and often abuse of migrant domestic workers.¹⁰² Moreover, through victimising migrant domestic workers the position of the patriarchal state - 'us' - is maintained as superior to 'them', so that migrant women can contribute to the economy while not trespassing on the rights of Singaporean and UK nationals.

Singapore was established as a trading outpost of the British empire in 1819 and grew quickly with the arrival of labourers and traders from Malaysia, India and China.¹⁰³ The People's Action Party, which has been the sole party in power since independence in 1965, introduced the 'CMIO (Chinese, Malay, Indian and Others) model of multiculturalism' with the aim to ensure equal treatment for Chinese, Malay and Indian ethnicities, as the 'founding races of Singapore'.¹⁰⁴ This policy continued the "separate but equal" model espoused by British colonial administrators.¹⁰⁵ The victimisation of foreign domestic workers through immigration policy in Singapore is consolidated by this multicultural policy. In 1989 the government introduced the Ethnic Integration Policy to try and create a mix of ethnicities in public housing blocks - one that was roughly equivalent to the average percentage of each of the 'founding races' in the population. The policy has continued 'to be under scrutiny and contestation for its underlying assumptions about the fixedness of ethnic culture and its perpetuation of differentiation and separation by ethnicity'¹⁰⁶, which again follows the colonial model. As the nationality of Singaporean has always been equated to the 'founding races', multiculturalism in Singapore is strictly defined as applying to Chinese, Malaysian and Indonesian citizens - Singaporeans - and therefore, not to migrants. Indeed the varying origins of domestic workers' are ignored, in favor of a unifying stereotype which sees Filipinos, Indians, Malaysians and, more recently, women from Myanmar as one mass group of 'others'. As Marlou Schrover writes that governments tend to focus on an immigrant 'community' - such as the 'Islamic community'- even though the immigrants in question are from different countries. The government can then identify an 'umbrella

¹⁰¹ Helma Lutz, 'At Your Service Madam! The Globalization of Domestic Service, *Feminist Review* 70 (2002) 94.

¹⁰² Brenda Yeoh and Shirlena Huang, 'Negotiating Public Space: Strategies and Styles of Migrant Female Domestic Workers in Singapore', *Urban Studies* 35:3 (1998), 590.

¹⁰³ Martin Perry, Lily Kong, Brenda S.A. Yeoh, *Singapore: A Developmental City State*, 'World Cities Series 065306848' (Chichester etc.: Wiley, 1999) 22.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 22.

¹⁰⁵ Lai Ah Eng, Francis Leo Collins, Brenda S.A. Yeoh (Eds.) *Migration and Diversity in Asian Contexts* (Singapore, ISEAS Yusof- Ishak Institute, 2012) 15-16.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 12.

organisation', which they consider to represent the 'community', and can hold this organisation responsible for the 'community'.¹⁰⁷

The Singaporean government's multicultural policies aimed to stop the formation of ethnic enclaves and promote unity between the city-state's 'founding races'. This is despite the fact that some Singaporeans will share an ethnic heritage with foreign workers. Recalling Teo Chee Hean's talk entitled 'Our forefathers were migrants too', he began by stating that "Amongst Singaporeans, it's a rarity to find somebody who goes back three generations and has no one who was not born outside of Singapore [in their family]".¹⁰⁸ An underlying implication of the CMIO and Ethnic Integration Policy is that the government are actively contributing to the continuation of Singapore's celebrated multi-racial history, which necessitates an 'othering' of foreign workers in order to legitimize itself. Immigration policy has achieved this 'othering' (and so also glossed over the fact of a shared ethnicity) by victimising foreign workers - through ensuring that they cannot stay long-term, thus enforcing that they are not and cannot be Singaporean, and through rendering them as invisible (which discourse on immigration does too), making it easy for them to be abused.

The 'social infrastructure' for foreign domestic workers in Singapore is illustrated by the issue of their off-days, or the lack of them. Paulina, a member of the Filipino Domestic Workers' Association in the UK, who had worked in Singapore, described how she had had only one day off a month and that there was 'a certain time you are have to come back, so once a month is not enough.' This is common practice in Singapore.¹⁰⁹ When they do have time off, domestic workers in Singapore tend to gather in certain public spaces. Brenda Yeoh and Shirlena Huang explain how 'starting off as accessible public meeting-points, these places gradually grew to cater to the cultural and economic needs of specific groups'. Filipino domestic workers meet in the shopping centre Lucky Plaza, which has come to be known as 'Little Manila'. *The Straits Times* reported that in the Lucky Plaza

'A new subculture has grown up around workers- remittance companies where the Filipinos can send money home, snack bars serving Filipino food, and IDD card phones from which they can make regular calls home'.

The newspaper also reported that shopkeepers and shoppers complained that "the Filipinas have taken over the shopping centre on Sundays".¹¹⁰ As discussed previously, in treating foreign domestic workers as invisible, the Singaporean government allows employers to have almost total control of the employment conditions of their foreign domestic workers - victimising domestic workers by increasing the ease with they can be abused. Indeed, legislation stating that domestic workers should receive a mandatory off-day was only introduced in 2013, and there is a stipulation that, if the employee wishes, their off-day can be swapped for a day of paid work. Of course this also suggests that domestic workers can easily be 'persuaded' to give up their off-day. The extreme control and restriction of foreign

¹⁰⁷ Marlou Schrover, 'Pillarization, Multiculturalism and Cultural Freezing: Dutch History and the Enforcement of Essentialist Ideas', *Low Countries Historical Review* 125:2-3 (2010) 349.

¹⁰⁸ SPH Razor, "Our forefathers were migrants too (Dialogue with DPM Teo Part 14)". 2013. Online Video Clip. YouTube.

¹⁰⁹ Rahman, 'Shaping the Migrant Institution' in Lyn Parker (Ed.), *The Agency of Women in Asia* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2005), 189.

¹¹⁰ Yeoh and Huang, 'Negotiating Public Space', 593.

domestic workers' social lives leads to the large, public meetings that seem threatening because they are fulfilling the very suspicions and prejudices which led to those restrictions in the first place. This is a cause and effect of the media portrayal of migrants as a unified mob. As described by Rubdy and McKay:

'Not only are migrant workers consistently referred to through collective nominal groups such as "influx of foreign labor", "relentless flood of foreigners", "uncontrolled numbers" and so on, in a way that "transforms aggregate individuals into an undifferentiated mass quantity" that effaces their humanity; the discourse also taps into populism and scare tactics in a negative presentation of immigrants while using a positive self-presentation by describing the in-group as a "beleaguered majority".'¹¹¹

The anti-immigrant tirades of British tabloid newspapers such as *The Daily Mail* and *The Sun* focus on migrants as one, threatening group- as with the association of all migrants as 'benefit thieves' and the proverbial 'swarms' of migrants. Articles such as 'Stop this abuse of British hospitality' reflect this idea of UK nationals as the "beleaguered majority" by propagating the idea of the 'nation as a house', in which 'immigrants are "filth" to be cleaned away'.¹¹² Clearly in the UK (as in Singapore) 'the assumption and even celebration of Britain as a multicultural country by the British government and the public acts as a veneer or tolerance that masks deeper racist attitudes'.¹¹³ This discourse has been morally acceptable to those who propagate it because it has its basis in a longer history of the most extreme kind of government interference; colonialism.¹¹⁴ The language used in the Straits Times coverage of Lucky Plaza - 'subculture' and 'taken over'- point to what Skutnabb-Kangas calls a "colonised consciousness" on the part of the media, Singaporean public and the government.¹¹⁵ The 'enforced transience' of migrant domestic workers and the transformation of "aggregate individuals into an undifferentiated mass quantity" through the perception of them as being defined by their status as migrants and workers, independent of their varying origins, reflects this "colonised consciousness". This consciousness is based on racial prejudices that construct migrant workers as the modern-day versions of the 'natives' from colonial times who are 'capable of antisocial acts' ('benefit thieves' again) so, in other words, the construction of migrant workers as criminals. Crucially, these are criminals who are of a lower-class than Singaporean and UK nationals - a typical colonial fear of the mob which is used to justify strict control of the everyday lives of migrant domestic workers. As Yeoh and Huang describe, 'In part, the apprehensions about public space stem from suspicion that the deference and docility of the 'other'... is but a façade; unmasked, the 'other' fulfills all of society's worst fears.'¹¹⁶ Seemingly, the only part of the "separate but equal" model of multiculturalism applicable to foreign workers is "separate". Hence behind the reassertion of 'us' versus 'them' in immigration and

¹¹¹ Rani Rubdy and Sandra Lee McKay, "'Foreign Workers in Singapore: Conflicting Discourses, Language, Politics and the Negotiation of Immigrant Identities', *IJSL* 222 (2013) 165.

¹¹² *Ibid*, 165.

¹¹³ Elizabeth Buettner, "'Going for an Indian": South Asian Restaurants and the Limits of Multiculturalism in Britain', *The Journal of Modern History* 80:4 (2008) 869.

¹¹⁴ Schrover, 'Pillarization, Multiculturalism and Cultural Freezing', 354.

¹¹⁵ Rubdy and McKay, "'Foreign workers" in Singapore', 163.

¹¹⁶ Yeoh and Huang, 'Negotiating Public Space', 594.

multicultural policies are racial and class discriminations that victimise migrant domestic workers by treating them as undesirable immigrants when they cannot be ignored (as with the off-days). In order to justify this, they are victimised by being constructed as potential criminals and as scapegoats who are the source of all societal problems.

Another indicator of this “colonised consciousness” in Singapore are the ‘underlying beliefs of a ‘monoglot’ ideology’ which are ‘prevalent in a number of English-dominant societies’. These beliefs include:

- that linguistic diversity is a problem;
- that English is linked with education and progress;
- that standard English, which is presented as universally available, is the only resource for attaining economic success;
- that high levels of English language proficiency help one to assimilate better to mainstream society and lead to acceptance whereas low levels of proficiency in English are an obstruction to such acceptance.’¹¹⁷

As well as being scapegoats, it seems that the victimisation of foreign workers’ as undesirable immigrants is also due to their supposed lack of English. As with colonial notions about ‘natives’, this stigmatization of migrant domestic workers has a racial element: tellingly, the foreign talents who are aligned as on a level with Singaporeans mostly come from wealthy countries in the West, as well as Australia and New Zealand, and are probably native speakers of English, whereas foreign workers mostly come from poorer countries in South-East Asia. It seems that, as Ho Soon Hoe observes

‘The “Othering” processes are really those of race and class, except that, rather than the binary opposition of Self and Other that is typically mirrored between the East and the West, in the case of Singapore the mirroring of the Self and the Other is between the East and the East.’¹¹⁸

The maintenance of economic status and the reaffirming of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ then is based on the idea of Singaporean culture (and therefore Singaporeans too) being higher-class and superior to foreign workers. In Singapore this is compounded by large financial outlays such as the ‘maid levy’ and ‘security bond’ - a monthly payment of 265 Singaporean Dollars and a one-off payment of 5,000 respectively - that employers must pay before in order to legally hire a foreign domestic worker. According to MOM the levy is a ‘pricing mechanism to regulate the number of foreign workers in Singapore’. However, the practice of having a domestic worker is so well-entrenched in Singaporean society that those who cannot afford to pay the full levy but wish to hire a domestic worker can apply to pay the ‘concessionary rate’ of only sixty Singaporean Dollars per month. Moreover, if the employer fails to pay the levy their workers’ permit may be revoked, so initiating the repatriation process. The outcome for the worker is harsh considering they have no control over the fulfilment of these payments. Again it is underlined that foreign domestic workers are not Singaporean, nor should they hope to become permanent residents. Their foreignness is perceived to be something negative in comparison to the foreign talents who can contribute to Singapore’s

¹¹⁷ Rubdy and McKay, “‘Foreign workers” in Singapore’, 161.

¹¹⁸ Ho Soon Hoe in Rubdy and McKay, “‘Foreign workers” in Singapore’, 166.

dynamism. Similarly in the UK a domestic workers' visa costs £516, and the cost of renewal (only possible up to the random six month marker) is almost double this.¹¹⁹ As Yeoh and Huang explain; 'These measures do not simply serve to cap numbers, but also contribute to the excluded status of the maid as both foreigner and domestic worker and militate against her fuller incorporation into the receiving society.'¹²⁰

The influence of colonialism means that in modern-day Singapore, English-language ability is used to emphasise the negative differences between foreign domestic workers and their employers. This, alongside prejudices against the ethnicity of foreign domestic workers (as will be discussed later), contributes towards the ongoing use of colonial preconceptions against them, clothed in modern language.

As in Singapore, in the UK fluency in English is 'linked with education and progress'¹²¹ and an assumption about migrants in general is that they will not speak good English. Talking to members of the FDWA-UK, the reality is of course different. Bella, who was working as a nanny and childminder, described how she tried to help newly arrived domestic workers and nannies of different nationalities:

'I always try to communicate even though sometimes that person is struggling to speak English. I'm still struggling in British English 'cause I normally use American, in the Philippines we use English American, so when I first came here that's my big trouble, from a simple vase [pronounced the American way] to a vase, so I struggle with that because I'm working with people who are really good in English and they say can you find the vase - I'm just thinking what is this vase. So at that time I was working in a care home, I searched the whole building and I ask everyone, no response, so I've been running around three hours just to get a vase, and when I found out that vase and vase is the same thing I just said, it's right next to me, it's just there, like no one told me and everybody was just laughing... that's my experience, so I don't want anybody else to have that experience, so I always try to communicate with people even though I struggle to understand.'¹²²

Bella had been in the UK for nearly eleven years, and was able to simplify her English to communicate with newly arrived migrants. Similarly, Rubdy and McKay found that some domestic workers in Singapore can take pride in the fact that, having gone there with little to no English, they had learnt through their own initiatives of listening to people around them and seeking help from their colleagues. By focusing on their learning of English as a personal achievement that will help them better their futures, they resisted the discourses that 'freeze' them as lower class due to their English-language skills and work in disagreeable, poorly paid jobs. Filipino domestic worker Sylvia was able to do this :

'Sylvia: What I don't like is the discrimination. The Chinese look at you as some kind of dirt sometimes . . . Yeah, . . . even though you speak English better than them they look at you like dirt.

¹¹⁹ Gov.uk, 'Domestic Workers in a Private Household Visa', <https://www.gov.uk/domestic-workers-in-a-private-household-visa> [Accessed 1 August 2018].

¹²⁰ Yeoh and Huang, 'Negotiating Public Space', 587..

¹²¹ Rubdy and McKay, "'Foreign workers" in Singapore', 161.

¹²² Bella, 1 April 2018, personal interview.

Int: So that's the only thing you dislike, that they look at you as if you're different?

Sylvia: Yes . . . why like that? We are just the same.

Int: Yes, I agree.

Sylvia: They may be born here but they are not exactly from here. Some of them are from China, some of them are from Malaysia. Singaporeans are not . . .

Int: Very good point.

Sylvia: We are just sharing one country.¹²³

The interviewer here is not neutral but the excerpt above still shows that Sylvia, who as well as being highly competent in English, was even able to recognize Singapore's migrant foundations and use this to resist the discourses that 'freeze' migrant domestic workers.

By contrast, Faith, who was fairly new to the UK and had recently run away from her employers, asked for Phoebe to be there during her interview for this research because she was worried she couldn't express herself properly in English. She responded to questions mostly with one or two worded answers. It is perhaps obvious to point out that the reality of migrant domestic workers' fluency in English is much more varied than allowed for by the assumptions about them (as with the strictly defined categories of legality and illegality in immigration policy). As with Phoebe and the others' anger over the tirade against 'benefit thieves' some domestic workers such as Sylvia, and in a way Bella too, refute the discourses aimed at them. Perhaps Faith also had some idea of how her workable English would not be considered enough for economic advancement in the UK - she was taking English lessons with another charity, Kalayaan.¹²⁴ But focusing too much on some migrant domestic workers' higher level of education risks 'making them over-responsible for situations largely not of their own making'.¹²⁵ To all intents and purposes, this is blanketing them in the same way as the NGO campaigns that focus on migrant women as victims. It is beneficial to point out that many migrant domestic workers are well educated, but it is perhaps more important in effecting a 'mind-set change of policy-makers',¹²⁶ to understand where the assumption that migrants are uneducated stems from, and what this means for migrant domestic workers. Migrant men have also been marginalised due to their lack of English skills¹²⁷ but for migrant women a lack of education, or their perceived ignorance, is an indicator of vulnerability.

The idea that migrant domestic workers' lack of English language skills and education make them vulnerable also encompasses negative perceptions about where they come from. According to Nicole Constable's interviews of Filipino domestic workers and their employers in Hong Kong, many employers consider their domestic workers to be "just poor maids". One domestic worker described how 'one employer bluntly stated, "Of course Filipinas are poor. Why else would they become maids?"'.¹²⁸ This indicates an assumption made by some employers that their Filipino domestic workers are of lower-status than them because they

¹²³ Rubdy and McKay, "Foreign workers" in Singapore', 174-175.

¹²⁴ Faith, 21 April 2018, personal interview.

¹²⁵ Agustino, 'Forget Victimisation', 34.

¹²⁶ Lyn Parker, *The Agency of Women in Asia*, 212.

¹²⁷ Rubdy and McKay, "Foreign workers" in Singapore', 171.

¹²⁸ Rahman, 'Shaping the Migrant Institution' in Lyn Parker (Ed.), *The Agency of Women in Asia*, 139.

are uneducated and poor, and this is clearly inextricably linked with their ethnicity.¹²⁹ This assumption is used to justify the kind of strict control that is practiced regarding their off-days. Victimization can be disguised by a language of kindness: in Nicole Constable's work interviewing Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong, many workers gave examples of how their employers expressed the intention to treat them like 'one of the family'. While this analogy seems kind-hearted and inclusive, it actually has a 'coercive side', distorting working conditions and disguising the 'exploitative side of the relationship'. In reality, family habits are used to establish the workers' inferior position compared to her employers. For example if a worker eats with the family, she will be served last, often from a separate dish to the family's communal one, or even with leftovers.¹³⁰ As Constable describes

'Unlike other members of the household, a domestic worker must ask permission to use the phone, the television, or the air conditioner, or to attend to "personal matters" when she has completed her work. Like immature members of the household, she is told when to go to bed and what time to come home.'¹³¹

A member of the FDWA-UK, Hassan, described similar experiences with Saudi Arabian employers in the UK:

'I could not go out, only go out with kids or with your employer... it's horrible, your mind can become crazy because you don't know how to talk - they treat you like a dog, and the food [is] horrible for us because you eat what they don't finish, you cannot eat first or together... then the salary is not given, my contract is planned also for holiday and overtime but they don't give me... we get nothing, always employer just say yes yes, just waiting to go home.'¹³²

The separateness of foreign domestic workers is enforced despite their living amongst their employers' family. There are also two issues which Hassan's experiences and Constable's work reiterate: the idea that domestic workers are inferior to their employers - 'they treat you like a dog' - and that they are 'immature' (which is also a kind of inferiority, and a kind of vulnerability). A domestic workers' day, often lasting over ten hours, is very tightly scheduled. There is an idea that workers must be taught the "value of time"¹³³, much as if they were children. The Settling-In Program embodies a similar outlook because it aims to *teach* domestic workers; it assumes that domestic workers will *learn* from this. Noorashikin Abdul Rahman cites a similar example; on a set of rules for Indonesian domestic workers drawn up by an agency responsible for placing them in Singapore is the rule 'You must always be eager to learn'.¹³⁴ As foreign domestic workers are the vulnerable 'natives'

¹²⁹ Joaquin L. Gonzalez, *Philippine Labour Migration: Critical Dimensions of Public Policy*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1998) 103.

¹³⁰ Nicole Constable, 'Filipina Workers in Hong Kong Homes: Household Rules and Relations' in Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild (eds.), *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy* (London: Granta Books, 2003) 134-135.

¹³¹ Constable, 'Filipina Workers in Hong Kong Homes', 117.

¹³² Hassan, 21 April 2018, personal interview.

¹³³ Constable, 'Filipina Workers in Hong Kong Homes', 121.

¹³⁴ Noorashikin Abdul Rahman, 'Shaping the Migrant Institution: The Agency of Indonesian Domestic Workers in Singapore' in Lyn Parker (Ed.), *The Agency of Women in Asia* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2005) 189.

(‘others’), family habits are used to cement the domestic workers’ inferiority in terms of race, education and class. The crux of immigration policy on migrant domestic workers - vulnerability - is aptly described by Erinn Cunniff Gilson thus; ‘vulnerability is construed as a condition that necessarily leads to the harm for which it is really just a precondition’.¹³⁵ As immigration policy sets up the potential for migrant women to be both victims and criminals, so the idea of the native woman is twofold. Recalling Agustin’s theory, because migrant domestic workers are usually women from less economically developed countries, the defining of them as victims ‘harks back unsettlingly to the old category of the ‘native’’, and these natives are considered to be inferior to women who are citizens of more prosperous countries.¹³⁶ Using again the examples of foreign domestic workers’ off-days, the ‘social infrastructure’ consisting of racial and class prejudices that constructs foreign domestic workers as potential criminals, also consists of victimising notions that they are both socially inferior, childlike, and likely to be led into sexually immoral ways. As Yeoh explains

‘Not only do employers fear that the maid’s personal safety may be threatened, venturing forth in nocturnal space is- for women in general and housemaids in particular- associated with permissive and surreptitious activities’.

Seemingly, this means that employers feel justified in keeping tabs on their workers’ phones and enforcing a strict curfew time. Suspicions can result in some workers being denied an off-day, or even lead to them being repatriated.¹³⁷ Indeed, as Rahman writes, these controls are ‘pervasive and accepted in Singapore’.¹³⁸ A common title for foreign domestic workers in Singapore, commonly used in the media, is ‘foreign maids’. The role of the maid has long had implications of the sub-ordinate and sexualised woman. When paired with the word ‘foreign’ this generates stereotypical ‘images of Third World immigrant women as promiscuous if not predatory’.¹³⁹ But as the domestic setting is considered to be the domain of maids, the use of the term ‘foreign maids’ in Singapore also emphasizes that, according to their employers, foreign domestic workers are in their rightful place. It is here that the dichotomy of views on migrant women again becomes obvious. A “stock conversation piece” amongst Singaporeans is that of the child-like domestic worker who may learn to be more “streetwise” and thus fall into “undesirable” sexual liaisons. The reaction to their gatherings in ‘Little Manilla’ then is not just based on a fear of the ‘others’ becoming a criminal mob but is aligned with the fear that foreign domestic workers will become “streetwise”. In order for this to happen to domestic workers they must be starting from a point of innocence, or vulnerability. As their poverty is inextricably linked with their ethnicity, so this idea of domestic workers’ vulnerability is connected to where they come from. Domestic workers are considered to hold ‘rather “different’ (and often, by inference, inferior) moral and cultural ‘standards’’¹⁴⁰ and because of their gender and status as migrants this is based on the idea that they ‘have’ problems- that they are inherently

¹³⁵ Erinn Cunniff Gilson, ‘Vulnerability and Victimization: Rethinking Key Concepts in Feminist Discourses on Sexual Violence’ *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 42:1 (2016) 75.

¹³⁶ Agustin, ‘Forget Victimization’, 31.

¹³⁷ Yeoh and Huang, ‘Negotiating Public Space’, 590-592.

¹³⁸ Rahman, ‘Shaping the Migrant Institution’ in *The Agency of Women in Asia*, 189.

¹³⁹ Yeoh and Huang, ‘Negotiating Public Space’, 594.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 590.

vulnerable. The use of that one employers' phrase "just poor maids" typifies these notions. This means that employers feel justified in restricting the time domestic workers spend outside of the home in order to 'protect' them from (foreign) vice and to keep them in their (inferior) place in the social hierarchy. Thus the 'social infrastructure' in Singapore is one that victimises domestic workers by exploiting the power dynamics between employer and domestic worker based on an amalgamation of class, racial and gender prejudices.

The fear that domestic workers will become "streetwise" also seems to be held by the employers of migrant domestic workers in the UK. Of the eight FDWA-UK members interviewed for this research, four had been brought from the Middle-East. Within the region there is a system called *kafala* which:

'ties migrant workers to individual employers who act as their visa sponsors, and restricts migrant workers' abilities to change employers. The system gives employers great power over employees because it entitles employers to revoke sponsorship at will.'¹⁴¹

In Saudi Arabia, Hassan found that her employers only let her leave the house with them or with their children. In the UK, Girlie described being a 'live-in' as 'like being in jail - you've been in the apartment all day and then they want to go out, you have to go out too.'¹⁴² Again there is the fear of domestic workers frequenting "inappropriate" places....comparing notes with other compatriots with invidious results'.¹⁴³ Other members of the FDWA-UK recalled similar experiences:

Analisa: 'When I'm here in London, they didn't allow me to go anywhere they didn't allow me to talk with Filipinos, if they see Filipino and then they see me talking then [they hit her].'¹⁴⁴

Phoebe: 'We're not allowed to smile to people, we're not allowed to talk even to our fellow Filipinas.... In the park, when there is a Filipina, there was no eye contact because the children will question me 'oh Phoebe are you talking to the Filipinas' [...] The children were going to summer school here [in the UK], so I have to prepare them every morning and when they're ready I have to bring them down from the hotel down to the school bus, but my madam would be looking out the window watching [to see] if I go up again'.

Like 'foreign workers' in Singapore, the use of the word 'migrant' in the UK carries implications about class and ethnicity. As Agustin describes:

'The word migrant is nearly always used about the working class, not about middle class professionals and not about people from the First World, even if they also have

¹⁴¹ Human Rights Watch, "'I Already Bought You": Abuse and Exploitation of Female Migrant Domestic Workers in the United Arab Emirates' (2014) <https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/10/22/i-already-bought-you/abuse-and-exploitation-female-migrant-domestic-workers-united#page> [Accessed 12 June 2018].

¹⁴² Girlie, 21 April 2018, personal interview.

¹⁴³ Yeoh and Huang, 'Negotiating Public Space', 594.

¹⁴⁴ Analisa, 21 April 2018, personal interview.

left home and moved to another country. Instead, the word rings of a subaltern status.¹⁴⁵

The “subaltern status” of migrants indicates their undesirability. As women migrant domestic workers are both undesirable and vulnerable. But since they are *migrants* their vulnerability is connected to their ethnicity. As Gilson describes:

[Vulnerability] is imagined in a way that entrenches inequity and hierarchy rather than acknowledging commonality and seeking equity. When vulnerability is conceived negatively as oppositional and fixed, those who are vulnerable must appeal to or comply with those who occupy the role of invulnerable savior.¹⁴⁶

It seems that the treatment by the British government of some migrant domestic workers as potential criminals who have ‘fallen’ into illegality is because their vulnerability is undesirable, it is ‘negative’, and ‘fixed’ because of their ethnicity. What could be called the ‘colonisers’ consciousness’ in the UK inserts itself here to make assumptions about what the ethnicity of migrant domestic workers means. And these assumptions play a role in whether domestic workers are treated as criminals (in which case the government is acting as the ‘invulnerable saviour’ of the nation) or victims (the ‘invulnerable saviour’ of migrant women, which means that the perpetrators of abuses of migrant women are the ‘others’ and not the state). In either case, the state positions itself and its’ citizens as invulnerable. Gilson has described how

‘When invulnerability is overvalored, it is taken to be unequivocally desirable, a context-free value, a prized character trait, and a marker of achievement and status.... As both a theoretical and a practical goal, it produces the desire for control (of both self and others) and security so as to mitigate unpredictable and threatening changes. Accordingly, the pursuit of invulnerability relies on a reductively negative view of vulnerability.’¹⁴⁷

In the ‘pursuit of invulnerability’, migrant women are considered as the vulnerable group so that Singaporean and British women can be projected as invulnerable. As Conny Roggeband and Mieke Verloo describe in their work about policy frames on gender and migration in the Netherlands:

‘As the problem of the ‘migrant women’ grows, the problem of the emancipation of ‘Dutch’ women dissolves. Negative representations of migrant women invite a comparison with the ‘advanced position’ of Dutch women. This change in focus even makes the government conclude that emancipation of Dutch women is accomplished.’¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Agustin, ‘Forgetting Victimization’, 32.

¹⁴⁶ Gilson, ‘Vulnerability and Victimization’, 75.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 76.

¹⁴⁸ Conny Roggeband and Mieke Verloo, ‘Dutch Women are Liberated, Migrant Women are a Problem: The Evolution of Policy Frames on Gender and Migration in the Netherlands, 1995-2005’, *Social Policy & Administration* 41:3 (2007) 282.

Considering the parallels of *kafala* to the Singaporean law that foreign domestic workers must live in their employer's residence and to the six month visa in the UK it seems that the power these kind of arrangements attributes to employers results in the same victimisation of domestic workers. A Filipino domestic worker interviewed by *The Guardian* stated that she had worked in Saudi Arabia for five years without a day off, before her employer brought her to the UK: "I had to come, but I thought it would be better here as it is not my employer's own country. In fact, it was worse."¹⁴⁹ The 'colonisers' consciousness' is at work in the UK, resulting in a victimisation of migrant domestic workers on the part of the British government, the media and the public. This creates a political and social environment in which migrant domestic workers *are* vulnerable (through the six month visa, for example, and the focus in sensationalist media on the criminality and therefore the undesirability of migrants) which makes it easy for the strict control and abuse that the *kafala* system legalises to be carried on in the UK.

To conclude, it appears that policy is informed by colonial prejudices that are reinforced through the media. The threads of class, gender and racial prejudices are running parallel behind Singapore's need for migrant domestic workers to maintain economic status and the UK's and Singapore's need to reassert who is 'us' and who are the 'others'. The victimisation of domestic workers brings up these prejudices according to how each situation is perceived, and in spite of the reality for migrants. Because of the gender of migrant domestic workers the dichotomy of sexist ideas about migrant women is always present. For example, victimisation of migrant domestic workers can include the supposition that their vulnerability is partly because of a lack English-language skills, a lack which is seen as being due to their gender and to their ethnicity and comparative poverty. At the same time, it is perceived that their ethnicity and gender mean that they are likely to have loose sexual morals which could lead them into undesirable situations from which they need protection. Hence prejudices about migrant domestic workers' ethnicity and poverty are linked to sexist notions regarding their gender, and so it is considered that their ethnicity and poverty are indirectly indicators of their vulnerability. This works to confirm the desired invulnerability and therefore superiority of Singaporean and UK nationals.

¹⁴⁹ UK tied visa system 'turning domestic workers into modern-day slaves', *The Guardian* online, Alastair Sloan, 17 May 2015
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/17/uk-tied-visa-system-turning-domestic-workers-into-modern-day-slaves>.

3. “Bayan, lipunan, pamilya” [Nation, society, family]: Victimisation and Gender

In the globalised economy, there is a demand for migrant domestic workers to take the place of women who now work outside the home. Constructions of gender and notions regarding gender roles impact migrant domestic workers both in their home countries and in the countries where they go to work. As the victimising discourse about migrant women rages on without (almost by definition) learning from the experiences of the women themselves, it is important to note how policy and laws victimise them by making them more vulnerable in their employment than they already would be as strangers in a new country. Immigration policy deems as necessary a strict regulation of migrant female domestic workers at state borders (and regarding the length and conditions of their stay) but there are little to no safeguards to act against harm in the actual conditions of their employment. These policies are partly a product of the desire of governments to define the nation-state against outsiders. The result is that migrant female workers are propelled into the discourses about migrants, providing for the government and for some employers a victimising comparison between ‘our’ invulnerable women¹⁵⁰ and ‘their’ vulnerable women. This is possible because class and ethnic prejudices can alter traditional gender roles¹⁵¹, justifying that women who are seen as lower-class and inferior - migrant domestic workers - are the women who should be doing work that is also seen as low status.

As the number of Filipino women working overseas increased in the 1990s, there was a simultaneous rise in the number of complaints about the mistreatment of migrant Filipino women to the Philippine Embassy and other bodies that concerned migrant workers in Singapore.¹⁵² This prompted public concern in the Philippines about the treatment of these women. The migrant advocate groups Migrante-Philippines and Gabriela expressed concerns that female migration led to ‘social costs’ for the families they left behind, and that their work bought a sense of shame to the Philippine nation.¹⁵³ Similarly, the Social Weather Station - a private research institution whose findings were widely reported by the media - conducted various national surveys (such as “Public Attitudes Towards Female Overseas Workers: Implications for Philippine Migration Policy”) which found that alongside worries about the risks of their work, the employment of Filipino women as domestic workers and entertainers was strongly felt to bring ‘some degree of shame to the Philippine nation’.¹⁵⁴ As Rodriguez describes, it was felt that ‘the Philippines cannot be seen as a “world-class” exporter of labor if it exports low-status domestic helpers’.¹⁵⁵ As a direct response to this,

¹⁵⁰ Erinn Cunniff Gilson, ‘Vulnerability and Victimization: Rethinking Key Concepts in Feminist Discourses on Sexual Violence’ *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 42:1 (2016) 82-3.

¹⁵¹ Annelies Moors and Marina de Regt, ‘Migrant Domestic Workers in the Middle East’, in Marlou Schrover, Joanne van der Leun, Leo Lucassen and Chris Quispel (eds.), *Illegal Migration and Gender in a Global and Historical Perspective* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008) 156

¹⁵² Joaquin L. Gonzalez, *Philippine Labour Migration: Critical Dimensions of Public Policy*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1998) 3.

¹⁵³ Anne-Marie Hilsdon, ‘What the Papers Say: Representing Violence Against Overseas Contract Workers’, *Violence Against Women* 9:6 (2003) 700.

¹⁵⁴ Robyn M. Rodriguez, ‘Domestic Insecurities: Female Migration from the Philippines, Development and National Subject-Status’, *Centre for Comparative Immigration Studies*, 114 (2005) 8.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 10.

the Philippine government began to refer to Filipino domestic workers as the “new national heroes” for undertaking to work abroad in order to send money home. This discourse tried to appease migrant advocates and to establish the sending home of remittances as a routine and normal procedure, by focusing on migrant women in particular as ‘self-sacrificing, nationalist martyrs’.¹⁵⁶

In 1995 Flor Contemplacion, a Filipino domestic worker in Singapore, was executed for the murder of another domestic worker, Della Marga, and a Singaporean child who was in the latter’s care. Relations between Singapore and the Philippines had been at an all-time high in the early 1990s,¹⁵⁷ but the build-up, execution and aftermath of Contemplacion’s death caused a dramatic ‘diplomatic rift’ between the Singaporean and Philippine governments, which was covered extensively by the media in both countries.¹⁵⁸ Contemplacion was executed during the run up to the Philippine national elections, and the concerns which Migrante-Philippines and Gabriela had been expressing were quickly taken up by ‘opposition parties, associations, women’s groups, labor unions, and other non-governmental organizations.’ Assisted by a free press they capitalised on the susceptibility of the government at this time and began to openly critique the state’s policy of labour export.¹⁵⁹ The public reaction both in the Philippines and internationally to the execution of Flor Contemplacion finally prompted the Philippine government to make some reforms regarding their migration policy through the ‘Republic Act 8042’. The act stated that the ‘ultimate protection’ for migrants was the possession of skills. This meant that domestic workers had to earn a certificate from a mandatory training and workers education program before departure. In contradiction to their being held as heroes, Republic Act 8042 labeled domestic workers as “vulnerable workers”. Rodriguez quotes a lecture from one of these pre-departure programs on ‘value formation’;

“Bayan, lipunan, pamilya [Nation, society, family]. These aspects are within us but who is it that brings all sorts of problems to other countries? We do. It is embarrassing. Look at our country. Our heroes are dead and rotting. Take care of the dignity of your country.”

This followed a brief lecture about ‘money-values’, which emphasized that women must not be tempted into prostitution because of the chance to earn more.¹⁶⁰ Here, women’s sexual ‘misconduct’ is seen as directly reflecting on their country of origin, on the ‘dignity’ of the Philippines. Given the low status of domestic workers, they must at least be morally correct in order to reduce national shame and present a positive image of the Philippines to the rest of the world. As Bonjour and Hart write

¹⁵⁶ Rodriguez, ‘Domestic Insecurities’, 6.

¹⁵⁷ Joaquin L. Gonzalez, *Philippine Labour Migration: Critical Dimensions of Public Policy*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1998) 1.

¹⁵⁸ Joseph Chinyong Liow, *Dictionary of the Modern Politics of Southeast Asia*. Fourth ed. (London, New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014) 134.

¹⁵⁹ Brenda Yeoh, Shirlena Huang and Joaquin Gonzales, “Migrant Female Domestic Helpers: Debating the Economic, Social and Political Impacts in Singapore”, *International Migration Review* 33:1 (1999) 128.

¹⁶⁰ Rodriguez, ‘Domestic Insecurities’, 16.

'The 'intimate domains - sex, sentiment, domestic arrangement, and child rearing...play a crucial role in the construction of ethnic and national identities, of categories of 'us' and 'them', and women are ascribed a special responsibility for guarding the boundaries'.¹⁶¹

Given the label of "vulnerable workers", the focus on discouraging Filipino women from becoming prostitutes suggests that the Philippine government considered Filipino domestic workers to be sexually vulnerable. But it also shows that, as in Singapore, the Philippines' migration policy is closely linked to the formation of national identity. The importance of migrant women in this formation is indicated by the Philippine government's change in the way they constructed Filipino domestic workers first as "national heroes" and then, after Flor Contemplacion's execution, as "vulnerable workers". The feelings of a female state official, interviewed by Rodriguez, capture this belief in the vulnerability of migrant Filipino women;

"We really need to take care of them. When I see the DH [domestic helpers] and the OPAs [overseas performing artists], I just cry. They're so innocent...I really hope things change for them. We really have to reach out to them, to give them self-respect and confidence...you know, when we are on the airplane or in the airport traveling, when we have them next to us, deep inside we're ashamed."¹⁶²

The state official victimised migrant women by describing them as innocent (read: vulnerable) and even projected the feeling of the 'national shame' onto them when she stated that they needed to be given 'self-respect and confidence'. This indicates how the discourse on migrant women as the 'national heroes' was a result of the 'national shame' over the kind of work Filipino women were doing abroad and how this work made them vulnerable. Given the lectures on sexual conduct that women received, the label of "vulnerable workers" can be seen as a victimisation of migrant Filipino domestic workers and entertainers because it implies that all migrant Filipino women are vulnerable, not just because of their work, but because of their gender. This victimisation was key to trying to improve the Philippine national identity because it allowed the government to take on the role of protector of these women, in order try and assuage the Philippine public as well as the international audience. It seems that, as Lee Na-Young writes, 'with the nation held up as the primary concern' women's 'need for and rights to work' are silenced.¹⁶³

Scholars have argued that a 'dominant model of migration' is one wherein men who migrate take their wives and children with them, reinforcing 'the notion of women as passive followers and dependants, whose employment, where it occurs, is of secondary consideration'.¹⁶⁴ While female migrants are now 'increasingly part of worker flows, moving on their own to become the principal wage earners for their families'¹⁶⁵ and the academic

¹⁶¹ Saskia Bonjour and Betty de Hart, 'A proper wife, a proper marriage: Constructions of 'us' and 'them' in Dutch family migration policy', *European Journal of Women's Studies* 20:1 (2013) 63.

¹⁶² Rodriguez, 'Domestic Insecurities', 18.

¹⁶³ Na Young Lee, 'Gendered nationalism and otherization', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 7:3 (2006) 460.

¹⁶⁴ Eleonore Kofman, 'Female 'Birds of Passage' a Decade Later: Gender and Immigration in the European Union', *The International Migration Review* 33: 2 (1999) 273-4.

¹⁶⁵ United Nations, 'Women and International Migration', 3.

debate has moved forward¹⁶⁶, in some ways laws that make ‘living-in’ a legal requirement still embody these traditional ideas about women, by making migrant domestic workers dependant on their employers for accomodation, food and money. As previously discussed, the Singaporean governments’ discourse on migration often ignores foreign domestic workers which in turn makes it easy for the government to make employers responsible for most of their working conditions. For the government, the details of these working conditions become a ‘secondary consideration’ as long as foreign domestic workers are working in their employer’s home, allowing Singaporean women to work outside the home. For example, in Singapore’s ‘Employment of Foreign Manpower Act’, the rules for employing a foreign domestic worker state that workers should only “perform household and domestic duties at the residential address as stated in the work permit”¹⁶⁷, but what constitutes these ‘household and domestic duties’ is ambiguous. The governmental website which has the details for the Domestic Workers in a Private Household’ visa in the UK is slightly more specific, but still vague. According to this, ‘domestic workers include:

- Cleaners
- Chauffeurs
- Cooks
- Those providing personal care for the employer and their family
- Nannies’¹⁶⁸

In March 2017, The *Straits Times* took issue with the fact that, as it put it, ‘domestic helpers these days have become Jills of all trades’. Overworking domestic workers, it continued, could have a negative impact for employers by ‘actually hurt[ing] loved ones’.¹⁶⁹ The article stated that maids were doing everything from walking their employers’ dogs, caring for the elderly and providing medical care, to working in their employers’ businesses. Published on their website and in the *Straits Times*, the Ministry of Manpower’s response to issues raised in the article was simply titled ‘Tasks maids can or cannot do are quite clear’. The responses are presented as being clear and explicit (they are listed as numbered points, for example) while actually avoiding definitively stating what domestic workers should and should not be expected to do. For example; ‘6. As the report shows, it is not unreasonable for FDWs to perform caregiving roles if family members are expected to do the same’.¹⁷⁰ A comparable example to this amongst the FDWA-UK members that I spoke to was Eleanor. Unusually, Eleanor’s employers gave her a choice in whether she came with them to London. She described how she initially turned them down because she was afraid she would lose her

¹⁶⁶ For example; Marlou Schrover, “Feminization and Problematization of Migration: Europe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries”, in Dirk Hoerder and Amarjit Kaur (Eds), *Proletarian and Gendered Mass Migrations: A Global Perspective on Continuities and Discontinuities from the 19th to the 21st Centuries* (Leiden, 2013) 103–131.

¹⁶⁷ Singapore Statutes Online, ‘Employment of Foreign Manpower Act 2012, Chapter 91A’, <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/SL/EFMA1990-S569-2012#Sc4-> [Accessed 17 December 2018].

¹⁶⁸ Gov.uk, ‘Domestic Workers in a Private Household visa’, <https://www.gov.uk/domestic-workers-in-a-private-household-visa> [Accessed 11 June 2018].

¹⁶⁹ ‘Draw up a list of chores that maids shouldn’t have to do’, *The Straits Times* online, March 30 2017, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/manpower/draw-up-a-list-of-chores-that-maids-shouldnt-have-to-do> [Accessed 10 November 2018].

¹⁷⁰ Ministry of Manpower, ‘Tasks maids can and cannot do are quite clear’ (6 April 2017) <https://www.mom.gov.sg/newsroom/press-replies/2017/0406-tasks-maids-can-or-cannot-do-are-quite-clear> [Accessed 10 November 2018].

job after the six month visa ran out. But her employers assured her that they would ‘do anything just to employ’ her, including requesting an extension to her visa and going through a lengthy appeal process when this request was initially refused. In contrast to the legal and systematic way her entry into the UK and length of stay was handled, the lack of specificity about what migrant domestic workers can and cannot do meant that Helen ended up having to be a kind of ‘Jill of all trades’ anyway:

‘Because they’re always working I am the only one with the kids, I am working long hours but my salary is just one thousand per month. It’s not enough because it’s supposed to be eight hours only but I am working twelve hours [...] And you know with all of the activities that the children have, I am the one in charge, and then I’m ironing the clothes, washing, cleaning the whole house, sometimes we have plenty of things to go to get and running errands.’¹⁷¹

This highlights how, where they exist, rules on domestic workers (beyond the terms for their entry and length of stay) are often open to the employer’s interpretation. This victimisation is systematised in immigration policy which in tying a domestic worker to her employer stops, as it were, on the employers’ doorstep. As Siobhan Mullally and Cliodhna Murphy describe, the migration of women to work as domestic workers is a key factor in the construction of their vulnerability: immigration law plays a ‘dual role’ in this victimisation by protecting the ‘public’ borders of a country, while simultaneously “reifying the private borders of the home”.¹⁷² Because the position of a domestic worker is inseparable from the home, by “reifying the private borders of the home” the contract between domestic workers and their employers is reified as private also, making it easy for employers to define ‘domestic and household duties’ more or less as they please. This is a victimisation of foreign domestic workers because (as a recurring theme) it can make them more vulnerable, as the majority of domestic workers are not in a position to be able to refuse any orders from their employers.

As workers who live in the home of their employer, the vulnerability of migrant domestic workers is also heightened by their gender. According to Marlou Schrover, gender ‘is a normative concept, related to the behaviour that is expected of men or women. Gender roles are internalised and institutionalised in laws and regulations’.¹⁷³ Singaporean women are encouraged by the government to work but a recent report by Singaporean NGOs about Singapore’s implementation of the ‘Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women’ (CEDAW) shows that, while gender roles for Singaporean women are not limited to caregiving and domesticity, this idea still lingers beneath the surface:

‘State policies presume a gendered division of labour within heterosexual nuclear families with women as primary caregivers and men as breadwinners. Gender

¹⁷¹ Eleanor, 14 April 2018, personal interview.

¹⁷² Siobhan Mullally and Cliodhna Murphy, ‘Migrant Domestic Workers in the UK: Enacting Exclusions, Exemptions, and Rights’, *Human Rights Quarterly* 36:2 (2014) 400-401.

¹⁷³ Marlou Schrover, ‘Integration and Gender’ in Marco Martiniello, *An Introduction to Immigrant Incorporation Studies: European Perspectives*, ‘IMISCOE textbooks; v.3 326478248’, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014) 118.

stereotypes lead to inadequate support for combining unpaid care work and paid employment. Marginalised groups (e.g. single parents, poorer women, migrants, LBT women and sex workers) face stereotyping which stems from marital status, class, ethnicity etc. and is also gender-based.¹⁷⁴

As Prasenjit Duara explains 'The systematic construction of woman as a symbol of national cultural essence and embodiment of continuity and tradition [is] in juxtaposition with modernity and capitalism'.¹⁷⁵ In line with the report on CEDAW, the charity We Can Singapore reports that one in ten women in Singapore has 'experienced physical violence or abuse by a male' and that six in ten suffer this repeatedly.¹⁷⁶ Although migrant domestic workers can be victimised by female employers as well as male ones, in a society where women can be abused – if their gender can be prescriptive for Singaporean women and this can manifest itself in domestic violence - then how much more likely is this to be the case for foreign domestic workers, because of their gender, what they do, where they come from and because of their ever present migratory status and the miasma that surrounds this status.

There are attendant prejudices against migrant domestic workers regarding their race and supposed class, as we have seen before, that come with being a foreign women in the countries in which they work, and with being the invisible and/or undesirable migrants. The use of the title 'foreign maid' by some Singaporeans and the Singaporean press, is indicative of these prejudices. It implies that migrant domestic workers are poor, 'promiscuous' and 'predatory' foreign women.¹⁷⁷ Clearly, domesticity often becomes related to issues of sex when discussed in the context of female migrants. The idea is maintained that 'sin' and 'our women' are separate, in comparison to 'their (sinful) women'. This indicates that the behavioural expectations that Singaporean society has for migrant women are also different compared to those for Singaporean women. To elucidate; if migrant domestic workers are sinful then Singaporean women can be upheld as being 'right', 'pure', 'moral' and 'us'.¹⁷⁸ Although the impact that the perception of their gender roles has on migrant domestic workers has been remarked on previously in this thesis, here we can see that gender can be used explicitly to contribute to the definition of national identity and the 'us' versus 'them' discourse. As feminist scholars remind us, and as the lectures aimed at Filipino women intending to migrate indicated, sexual conduct is an "indicator of the moral integrity and, to some extent, the legitimacy of the state".¹⁷⁹ Annelies Moors and Marina de Regt describe how large numbers of local women are also often employed as domestic workers, and that this only becomes an issue for the public when women migrate to do domestic work:

¹⁷⁴ Coalition Report of National NGOs for the 68th Session of the United Nations Committee on CEDAW, 'Report on CEDAW and the Republic of Singapore: "Many Voices, One Movement"(2017) <http://www.aware.org.sg/2017/10/local-ngos-come-together-to-submit-joint-report-to-the-un-about-gender-inequalities-in-singapore/> [Accessed through AWARE, 10 March 2017].

¹⁷⁵ Prasenjit Duara in Terence Chong, 'Manufacturing Authenticity: The Cultural Production of National Identities in Singapore', *Modern Asian Studies* 45:4 (2011) 878.

¹⁷⁶ 'Definitions and Statistics', We Can! Singapore, <http://www.wecansingapore.com/statistics-and-definitions/> [Accessed 18 January 2019].

¹⁷⁷ Brenda Yeoh and Shirlena Huang, 'Negotiating Public Space: Strategies and Styles of Migrant Female Domestic Workers in Singapore', *Urban Studies* 35:3 (1998), 594.

¹⁷⁸ Na Young Lee, 'Gendered nationalism and otherization', 461.

¹⁷⁹ Julia I. Suryakusuma in Rodriguez, 'Domestic Insecurities', 19.

‘This relates to the notion that women embody the nation, while men are the real citizens of the state. A particular notion of femininity, which centres on morality, motherhood and sexuality is at stake here, as is a particular construction of masculinity, with men as the protectors of women.’¹⁸⁰

It seems that victimisation is based on and encompasses comparisons: migrant women versus ‘emancipated’ women, victim versus criminal, vulnerable versus invulnerable. The differences in gender roles for migrant domestic workers as opposed to their female employers is an indicator of this. As Marlou Schrover describes

‘The victimized immigrant woman provides a strong counter-identity – ‘she’ is everything that ‘we’ are not – enshrining the idea of a cohesive society while providing a basis for protectionist claims to muster societal support, enforcing the idea of a caring society.’¹⁸¹

We have seen indicators in the idea of a ‘caring society’ before, in the way that some employers describe an intention to treat their domestic workers as ‘one of the family’, which effectively disguises the fact that domestic workers’ work can often be closer to forced labour than to being just the ‘domestic help’. To use Eleanor as an example again; her employers did, in her words, ‘stand by what they said’ and go through a lengthy appeal to get an extension on her visa. But despite obviously valuing her as an employee they still did not pay her enough (she was working twelve hour days and only earning just under £3 an hour) and required her to undertake a wide variety of tasks. She was also heavily in debt and working extra hours to try and earn more:

‘I have Saturday and Sunday off but I am using it to work part-time, so right now I’m very tired because I went home at one o’clock... I go eight o’clock in the morning to eight o’clock in the evening, and then I am up [later] sometimes if there’s an available job in the evening.’

It’s tempting to say that Eleanor’s employers may have been aware that she would find it difficult to find another job when her visa ran out, meaning that the chances were that she would accept their offer. But whether Eleanor’s employers intentionally deceived her or not, they approached her using a language of kindness. They may have felt they were giving her a choice, but for Eleanor the idea of not going with them to the UK and potentially then having to go back to the Philippines was untenable. It is interesting to note that this language of kindness can be used specifically by female employers to assert their power over their domestic workers - the ‘notion of femininity, which centres on morality [and] motherhood’ that Moors and de Regt described. Bridget Anderson puts forward a similar argument, describing how some female employers try to build a friendly relationship between themselves and their domestic worker, thus confirming the employer’s ‘feminine qualities of morality’ and the inferior and childlike qualities of the worker. In effect, this

¹⁸⁰ Annelies Moors and Marina de Regt in Schrover et al., *Illegal Migration and Gender in a Global and Historical Perspective*, 156.

¹⁸¹ Schrover, ‘Integration and Gender’ in Marco Martiniello, *An Introduction to Immigrant Incorporation Studies*, 118.

'enables middle-class women to take on the role of woman as moral/spiritual support to the family and frees her from the role of woman as servicer, doer of dirty work.'¹⁸² Here we can see that the trope of the 'caring society' is connected to age-old dichotomous views on women. Traditional notions of gender position women as responsible for the 'well-being of the nation' because they are responsible for birthing, raising (and cooking and cleaning for) the next and current generations - recalling Moors and de Regt: '...women embody the nation, while men are the real citizens of the state.'¹⁸³ But because of class structures and racial prejudices, migrant women are seen as incapable of doing this without instruction. They 'have problems' - they are vulnerable - and they are the ignorant, passive women who provide a comparison to 'our' invulnerable women. To quote Moors and de Regt again:

'Gender always articulates with multiple axes of differentiation, such as class, age, religion, nationality and so; while gender does transform the meaning of class, for instance, the opposite is also true.'¹⁸⁴

Eleanor's employers asking her if she wanted to come to the UK was an exception rather than the rule: most of the other FDWA-UK members that I spoke to had not been asked. Seemingly the belief in their vulnerability runs behind both blatant and disguised poor treatment of migrant domestic workers. As we have seen, this belief facilitates the Singaporean and British government in making migrant domestic workers invisible, and, when this is not possible, also contributes to and justifies the idea that migrant domestic workers are in need of protection. Public discourse holds that migrant women are forced into prostitution or into being domestic workers because they are the victims of human trafficking, and do not ever choose these employments themselves. Comparisons with non-migrant women contribute to this notion that migrant women do not use or have agency. Gilson suggests that what she terms as the 'together woman' (who in this argument could be replaced by, for example, the non-migrant woman in Singapore who employs a foreign domestic worker - the invulnerable 'our' woman) cannot be victimised, while the 'true victim cannot be sexually sophisticated. In this way, autonomy and agency are framed as all-or-nothing projects' and so victimisation 'necessarily entails failure.'¹⁸⁵ In this way, victimisation is generalising: it ignores what individual reasons a woman may have had in choosing to become a migrant domestic worker. (It also, in propagating the idea of the 'true victim', denies that there are things that migrant domestic workers can do to make their lives easier while working - this will be discussed further later). In fact, the reasons for migration can be complex. Sallie Yea's contention is that women who plan to migrate often struggle with self-esteem, which can be caused by 'societal norms' and experiences in their life prior to migration. This means that migration can become 'intimately connected to desires for personal transformation' as well as the more conventional desires for economic prosperity and security.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸² Anderson, 'Why Madam has so many bathrobes', 23.

¹⁸³ Moors and de Regt in Schrover et al., *Illegal Migration and Gender in a Global and Historical Perspective*, 156.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 154.

¹⁸⁵ Gilson, 'Vulnerability and Victimization', 82-3.

¹⁸⁶ Sallie Yea, 'When push comes to shove: sites of vulnerability, personal transformation, and trafficked women's migration decisions', *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in South-East Asia* 20:1 (2005) 1.

Mirroring this, a couple of the FDWA-UK members spoke tearfully about their children's reactions to their migration. Paulina spoke about her daughter, saying that 'she doesn't understand, she always tells me I don't impress her with money'.¹⁸⁷ Similarly, Eleanor described how 'you know you cannot say [about being in debt] to your children because they will not understand'. In terms of a desire for economic gain, five out of the eight women interviewed for this thesis said they wanted to return home to the Philippines and set up a small business to sustain themselves:

Eleanor: 'I'm planning if my children are already settled then, maybe if I have a bit of plan for myself, I'm already 60 so...If I have the chance I will save money to go home, I just want to buy a bit of land to have [as] my own when I grow old and cannot afford to work, even if there's enough for me to eat three times a day... I just want a simple living'.

Paulina: 'Maybe I will prepare a little business for myself, because I'm 52 already so you know I'm not getting any younger, so I bought some insurances for myself [...] If I have money maybe I can slowly renovate my place to get it rented out so I can have some [money for] my daily needs, say for the water, electric, things like this.'

This might be connected to Yea's idea that the migration of female domestic workers is partly about 'desires for personal transformation': once they had supported their children through education, the members of the FDWA-UK could start to think about their own futures. However, I think that by this time there was also a sense of hopelessness - Eleanor had not been able to start saving for going back to the Philippines, even though as she said 'I'm already 60', and her main goal was only to have enough money to be able to eat three times a day. Paulina and Phoebe also expressed what could have been a sense of hopelessness:

Paulina: 'Because I think some of them [domestic workers] here, like me, they become old in London and then back home it's very hard, if you see them it's so hard... I always pray to god to give me good health so I can help my family and my family can have everything.'

Phoebe: 'I don't want to work until my sixties here, I'm thinking maybe I'm too old, maybe I won't enjoy life anymore you know [...] We work all our lives, we're not like other people, the well-off families can go abroad every three months but we don't, you know it's once in a year that we go to our family, not actually abroad to enjoy life but to spend our time with our family.'¹⁸⁸

Wanting only enough to sustain themselves, seeing this as something to aim for, is indicative of the daily hardships that migrant domestic workers face. Hence while it is necessary to make clear the agency that migrant domestic workers use, it is also necessary to focus on what they feel. Sallie Yea puts this clearly:

¹⁸⁷ Paulina, 21 April 2018, personal interview.

¹⁸⁸ Phoebe Dimacali, 11 April 2018, personal interview.

‘While it is important to recognize the role of personal desires in women's migration decisions, it is also important not to overly romanticize women's experiences and overstate the degree of agency they are able to assert in their migration experiences, including their degree of autonomy at the destination’.¹⁸⁹

The aim of highlighting the agency of Filipino migrant domestic workers such as Phoebe is not to focus on the degree of choice involved in each decision, but to show that victimisation affects women who are of different ages, backgrounds and personalities. Rhacel Salazar Parrenas suggests that globalization ‘initiates the constitution of parallel realities’ among migrant Filipino domestic workers ‘across different settings’ and that ‘this includes nations with both liberal and illiberal policies’. In this way globalization ‘impels the confrontation of similar issues of migration among workers in similar economic locations.’¹⁹⁰ In ignoring individuality victimisation makes the unifying aspects about these women (such as their work and their comparative poverty) the defining factors about them. Moreover these factors are often ones that are not controllable by individuals. The perceived differences between gender roles for migrant domestic workers and non-migrant women is the final nail in the coffin for migrant domestic workers, cementing as it does their position in society due to their migrant status, and that society’s perceived class hierarchies and racial prejudices.

Robyn M. Rodriguez argues that it was the ‘self-organized migrants’ who, through their ‘ability to bring migrant women’s issues onto a global stage’ finally pushed the Philippine government into addressing concerns over the migration of Filipino women.¹⁹¹ Active complaints to the government and the role of NGOs are also important in resisting abuse; domestic workers in Singapore who ‘run away’ can go to charities such as H.O.M.E (Humanitarian Organization for Migration Economics) which provides shelter, food and assistance in getting their case taken up in court.¹⁹² In successful cases, women are given some money and are then able to return to their country of origin, although this hardly compensates for their experiences.¹⁹³

When migrant domestic workers do not live in their employers’ residence they are sometimes able to openly resist the way they are treated - as, for example, Phoebe and her co-founders of the FDWA-UK. Women such as Phoebe have used agency in campaigning for a change to the visa policy on migrant domestic workers in the UK, and the members of the FDWA-UK have also been involved in this. When I said goodbye to Phoebe she was going to a workshop for the members which aimed to educate them about how the economic situation in the Philippines meant migration was necessary to earn enough money. Unfortunately ‘migration laws continue to function as limits to the transformative promise of such initiatives’¹⁹⁴ as the FDWA-UK’s campaigns. Phoebe described the Philippine government, referring to their inducements to Filipino migrant domestic workers to send

¹⁸⁹ Yea, ‘When push comes to shove’, 4.

¹⁹⁰ Rhacel Salazar Parrenas, ‘Transgressing the Nation-State: The Partial Citizenship and “Imagined (Global) Community” of Migrant Filipina Domestic Workers’, *Signs* 26:4 (2001) 1136.

¹⁹¹ Rodriguez, ‘Domestic Insecurities’, 15.

¹⁹² ‘H.O.M.E- Humanitarian Organization for Migrant Economics’, <http://home.org.sg/> [Accessed 22nd November 2017].

¹⁹³ Al Jazeera English, ‘Maid in Singapore- 101 East’. Online Video Clip. (YouTube, 2016).

¹⁹⁴ Mullally and Murphy, ‘Migrant Domestic Workers in the UK’, 398.

their remittances home as a way of ‘milking’ Filipino women. She talked about how, from school age, they are taught that going abroad to work is a good opportunity and something they should aim for, for the good of the Philippines - it is the focus on ‘bayan, lipunan, pamilya [nation, society, family]’ again. As argued earlier, the Philippine government victimised Filipino women who become migrant domestic workers, which allowed them to position themselves as protectors of these women (and so in this case, indirectly, as protectors of the nation). This is mirrored in the UK and Singapore by immigration policy, and a lack of policy on the details of employing migrant domestic workers, which makes migrant domestic workers vulnerable and means that they usually end up as either victims or criminals (as defined by the government). This allows the government to position itself as the protectors of migrant women or the protectors of the nation (by dealing with potential criminals and so protecting ‘our’ women), respectively. As Mullally and Murphy make clear, states are reluctant to address the fact that the norms of border control can encroach on human rights.¹⁹⁵ Indeed, because border controls are about protecting the state and not about protecting the individual, as far as the Singaporean and British government are concerned their policies are consistent.

But even if outward defiance is not possible, migrant domestic workers can and do employ what Brenda Yeoh calls ‘small tactics of habit’ (strategies which are ‘inscribed in habitual practice’) in their everyday lives to resist ill treatment.¹⁹⁶ Meeting up on their off-day in a public space is one of these strategies. Yeoh explains that ‘starting off as accessible public meeting-points’, areas such as ‘Little Manilla’, ‘gradually grew to cater to the cultural and economic needs of specific groups’.¹⁹⁷ Domestic workers resist victimisation ‘through the unbridled tone and unbounded topic of their conversation, their boisterous but non-violent outward behaviour and casual disregard for the gaze of others’, which reflects ‘a style of resistance in contradistinction to the more compliant and subservient attitude integral to their daily working routines’.¹⁹⁸ The members of the FDWA-UK who meet up in a church in Kensington which holds a weekly mass in Tagalog, and bring food and enjoy themselves together, is somewhat similar to this. Phoebe described the way she managed to convince her employer that she would not run away and, in gaining her trust through the habitual behavior that was expected of her, was able to take the children to the park on her own, where she was contacted by another Filipino domestic worker:

‘There was a Filipina who ask me and I was talking to her, she was like five meters from me. There was no eye contact because the children will question me, so I was talking loudly but then the child was like ‘Oh Phoebe are you talking to the Filipina?’ I said ‘No I’m singing’, while the Filipina was telling me ‘Ok friend if you want my number, let’s see in the toilet. She [the child] believed me because I wasn’t keeping in eye contact with the Filipino, so I went to the toilet and she gave me her phone number and she said ‘If you want to run away contact me’. They [her employers] were always at my back, watching me, but they didn't know that I already have the number of the Filipino, so I don’t talk to people and I don’t argue with them,

¹⁹⁵ Mullally and Murphy, ‘Migrant Domestic Workers in the UK’, 398.

¹⁹⁶ Yeoh and Huang, ‘Negotiating Public Space’, 599.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 593.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, 598.

whatever she says I don't argue [...] So when it's been like two weeks of the routine, and she hasn't seen me smiling to other people, I got her trust, she trusted me.'

From their visits to the park Phoebe managed to save some money and then, having gained her employers trust enough to be able to go out alone to the postbox, she managed to run away:

'I was given one pound to buy ice cream or to buy chips so I don't buy my share I only have the leftovers of the children so that I could have some food, my share I kept, so during those two weeks of staying with them I saved like fourteen pounds, and then I decided to leave them. What I did was I wore like five bras, I put on like five underwears, I put on like three trousers and shirts. I left all my stuff because the receptionist in the building knows that I wasn't allowed to go out, so if I go out with things they will know that I am running away. I don't have a bag, just my jacket, and when I walked through the reception I had in my hand a postcard, so it's like telling them that I'm going just to drop the postcard in the mailbox, so they didn't question me. But I was really, really scared because I didn't know where to go.'

Phoebe went to a payphone and was able to contact the Filipino who had given her her number:

'Two ladies came to pick me up, they were actually new, these Filipinas had given them the number at the same time that they had spoken to me, so they run away one week ahead of me, so they helped me.'

I think that for the FDWA-UK members, and perhaps for migrant domestic workers in Singapore too, agency also functions as an 'ability to influence one's life'.¹⁹⁹ Depending on the situation, this manifests in different ways. Phoebe clearly made decisions and carried out actions that changed her life during a desperate time. The Filipinas who picked her up used agency in helping her get a mobile-phone and to find a temporary job. Girlie found out about the FDWA-UK through Facebook, and Annalisa was able to find an internet cafe when she ran away where she searched online for Filipino communities. Migrant domestic workers also use agency to bring enjoyment to their lives outside of work, as with the FDWA-UK meetings in the church, when members would eat, chat and socialise together. Also, Paulina was helping with the charity Cancer Research in her free time and Bella took pleasure in being able to help families who were struggling to speak English. Similarly, according to Rani Rubdy and Sandra McKay, some domestic workers in Singapore can take pride in the fact that, having come to Singapore with little to no English, they have learnt through their own initiatives of listening to people around them and seeking help from their colleagues. By focusing on their learning of English as a personal achievement that will help them better their futures, they resist the discourses that 'freeze' them as lower class due to their poor English-language skills and work in undesirable, poorly paid jobs. Clearly, vulnerability and agency are not opposites, or incompatible - as is often unconsciously thought by those who victimise domestic workers.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ Marcu H. Kristiansen, 'Agency as an Empirical Concept. An Assessment of Theory and Operationalization', *Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute*, Working Paper no.: 2014/9, 3.

²⁰⁰ Gilson, 'Vulnerability and Victimization', 74.

Examples have shown that Filipino migrant domestic workers are victimised both in the Philippines and in the UK and Singapore. While these three countries are the main examples in this research, other countries in the Middle East have also been mentioned. To put forward an idea related to this: perhaps the victimisation of migrant domestic workers means that patriarchal attitudes towards women as the inferior sex are suspended when talking about non-migrant women (they can be celebrated for being 'invulnerable' women), while migrant domestic workers become the inferior women. As discussed in the second chapter, the results are not always beneficial for non-migrant women (for example in providing a reason for the government to claim that its female citizens are completely emancipated, even though NGOs such as We Can Singapore report that women still suffer from domestic abuse, and the gender gap remains very much in evidence). But unlike many Singaporean and British women, migrant domestic workers are on the lowest rungs of the 'stratified global labour market'. Therefore being seen as the inferior 'other' woman combines with the stigma around migrants and class and ethnic prejudices (which also delineate that migrant domestic workers are the right kind of women to be doing low status work) to prevent the economic progression that many migrant women hope to make, instead making them more vulnerable. Moreover, the underlying belief in the vulnerability of female migrant workers means that their agency is denied and the idea persists that they are forced into migration. Their vulnerability is then increased by ambiguous policy on the working conditions for domestic workers. This suggests that (as both a cause of and a surfeit to) institutionalised victimisation, there are also global structures of victimisation which make a Filipino woman vulnerable from the beginning of her migration to her employment and residence in another country. These global structures could be seen as a 'web' of victimisation. For Filipino migrant domestic workers this 'web' begins with government rhetoric in the Philippines which tries to impress upon them the importance of family to the Philippine nation, while still labelling them as vulnerable workers. The 'web' spreads to countries such as the UK and Singapore, the governments of which construct migrant women as suits the priorities of the state - so as invisible workers, criminals or victims - which makes it easier for some employers to abuse their domestic worker. Placement agencies clearly also occupy a position in this interplay, one that could be an important topic for further research. The role of the media could also be explored in more detail.

Conclusion

Singapore and the UK have been the main focus of this research, as have Filipino domestic workers, but examples from the Middle East and the Philippines indicate that the abuse of migrant domestic workers does not seem to be highly specific to particular locations or cultures, or to the ethnicity of workers. Where women are still denied numerous rights, such as in many Gulf States, it is telling that the abuses of migrant domestic workers seem to intensify. It is also telling that in countries such as the UK, which prides itself on the emancipation of its female citizens and on its anti-slavery laws, the abuse of migrant domestic workers is allowed to continue and is even tacitly condoned by policy. The nexus between these countries' treatment of migrant domestic workers is the equation of the gender of migrant domestic workers with vulnerability. Class structures and ethnic prejudices are deeply sexist, depicting migrant domestic workers as low-class, ignorant and childlike, as well as likely to be sexually immoral. By inference, the job of domestic worker then is also low-status, and domestic work is both vulnerable work and undesirable work. There are strong parallels between these notions and the idea of the culturally-approved victim; to be victims women must be girlish, ignorant, passive and innocent, which are all traits that can denote vulnerability. When migrant women are under discussion, the idea of the culturally-approved victim translates into the idea that they *have* problems, that they are more likely to 'fall into' situations of trafficking or forced labour. This can be seen in the way some employers strictly control the life of their migrant domestic worker in order to try to 'protect' them from falling into vice. Furthermore, although in reality agency and vulnerability are not incompatible, victimisation denies that migrant women have agency. Clearly, gender is interpreted differently for migrant domestic workers than it is for non-migrant women living in more economically developed countries. If migrant women are vulnerable then non-migrant can be held-up as invulnerable and morally correct. Migrant domestic workers then are seen as the right kind of women to do work that is low status, as domestic work is so perceived. So while othering processes are about 'us versus 'them', victimisation is specifically about 'our' (invulnerable) versus 'their' (vulnerable) women.

Vulnerability means that migrant domestic workers are not in a position to object to media discourse or to government discourse and policy. Policy enforces transience on migrant domestic workers and ties them to a single employer, while a lack of adequate legislation on their working conditions means that the decisions regarding this are mostly left to the employer. The abuse this facilitates can encompass refusing to let domestic workers leave the house, constant supervision and a lack of privacy, a lack of food, use of derogatory language and even physical and sexual violence. In the UK and Singapore if migrant domestic workers manage to leave their employers and work legally then they do have more opportunity to act for themselves, for example in taking on different part-time jobs, but state policy is constructed in such a way as to make actual open resistance impossible for most. Moreover, in these jobs migrant domestic workers can still be exploited (as are other low status workers) through inadequate wages, long hours and lack of job security. The majority of workers who run away from their employers are criminalised by the state; they become undocumented migrants and work illegally, or are deported. Charities can help domestic workers to argue their case in court, but the outcome for the worker is often the same. In the UK migrant domestic workers can apply to the National Referral Mechanism, but for this they must be victims of human trafficking, and, if their claim is declared genuine

they are given only the minimum assistance before they have to leave the country. Newspaper articles that construct migrant domestic workers as potential criminals or as threats to the nation-state are not in themselves victimising, but they are underlied by this idea that migrant women have problems, that they are inherently vulnerable. Clearly vulnerability means that those in positions of power can construct migrant workers as they choose - for example in taking on the role of protector of migrant women or of protector of the nation-state. In this way victimisation is institutionalised through structures such as the National Referral Mechanism.

Interviews with members of the Filipino Domestic Workers' Association show that the majority of employers treated them as the vulnerable, inferior women that they believed them to be, and that policy had forced them into becoming undocumented workers because they were not able to leave abusive employers without forfeiting their legal right to remain in the UK. Moreover, according to Phoebe the Philippine government still encourages Filipino women to work abroad, even though they are designated as 'vulnerable workers' in policy. This suggests that there are also global structures of victimisation which impact migrant women before and during their migration, and during their employment in a foreign country. Perhaps most clearly described as a 'web' of victimisation, these structures function as a method of effectively keeping migrant domestic workers impoverished, so reflecting and enforcing attitudes (held to varying degrees by states and by employers) that migrant domestic workers are poor; with poor social rank, poor economically and with poor English-language skills. The employment of migrant domestic workers in private households with little to no protections, and the way they are prevented from legally changing employers, is in a sense the real vulnerability of migrant domestic workers. This is both subsumed by and caused by the prejudices about their gender, class and ethnicity and by the stigma of their migratory status. This suggests that victimisation is a self-fulfilling prophecy because policy on migrant domestic workers puts them into positions where they seem to become vulnerable almost in the ways that their constructed vulnerability posits that they are. This 'web' of victimisation could be examined more clearly by further research into the victimisation of Filipino migrant domestic workers by the Philippine government and the role of placement agencies and the media.

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