

From Competition to Cooperation: Reworking Care Relations in Eldercare

by

Lynn Yu Ling Ng

BA (Honours), Geography, Durham University, 2017
MPhil, Development Studies, University of Cambridge, 2018

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of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Supervisory Committee

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Supervisory Committee

Feng Xu, Department of Political Science

Supervisor

Arthur Kroker, Department of Political Science

Departmental Member

Sujin Lee, Pacific and Asian Studies

Outside Member

Victor V. Ramraj, Faculty of Law

Outside Member

Abstract

In this dissertation, I argue for a transnational relational approach to eldercare that prioritizes its affective and emotional dimensions as resources for social transformation. I suggest that the changing and dynamic nature of what it means to age and grow ‘old’ in industrialized societies, as people encounter and make sense of the aging body in modern life, is a fruitful arena from which to reframe economic constructs of eldercare’s value. The Introduction chapter starts with the research context of eldercare policy in Singapore and Taiwan, both ‘Asian Tiger’ states that achieved rapid post-war industrial success. Here, I provide a relational account of eldercare planning in a transnational political economy of care where gendered and racialized ideologies prevail, manifest most acutely in the regional presence of foreign domestic workers (FDWs) – known as migrant care workers (MCWs) at a global scale. I then outline the central research questions, which are informed by the frameworks of feminist political economy (FPE) in care work and global racial capitalism:

1. How is eldercare treated differently from childcare? By what means do Singapore and Taiwan contrast in their eldercare regime management?
2. In what ways do FDWs in Singapore and Taiwan experience and make sense of eldercare? How do their narratives complicate popular economic justifications of care work, and what are some conundrums of ‘care’ that emerge?
3. What do my interviews indicate about the potential of resisting exploitative care relations through cooperative agendas that centre the emotional aspects of care and vulnerability?

I construct an overarching transnational relational approach to eldercare from the answers I received during the research interviews. Between May 2021 and July 2022, I conducted a total of 67 Zoom/WhatsApp interviews with the various actors implicated in eldercare provision: FDWs (live-in caregivers), domestic employers, family caregivers, nursing home managers, and NGO workers. Taken together, these conversations reveal the importance of accounting for unequal power relations in the broader imperial legacies of gendered and racialized care work. On that note, Chapters One and Two point to race and gender as structuring principles of care labour migration, but also contrasts the different experiences of colonial and state formation that result in significant variations of eldercare policy. Thereafter, Chapters Three to Five delve into some instances of lived experience in eldercare regimes, which people approach from different vantage points and positions of power (e.g. domestic employers and citizen activists vis-à-vis FDWs). From their words and my observations, I construct accounts of normalized ageism in households struggling to care adequately for their young and old, which I narrate through Chapter Three’s framework of “reproductive ageism”. Thereafter, Chapters Four and Five delve into stories of FDWs and ordinary citizens who resist the pressures of marketized care, namely the migrant-in-the-family (‘foreign maid’) model. Last but not least, the Conclusion chapter revisits some interview encounters and reflects on how cooperative understandings about care, as a necessary (rather than negative per se) state of dependence in each and every human being’s life course, can be achieved.

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Glossary of Acronyms and Key Terms

Activities of Daily Living (ADLs)

Agency of Integrated Care (AIC), Singapore

Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE), Singapore

Center for Domestic Employees (CDE), Singapore

Central Provident Fund (CPF)

Domestic Caretakers' Union (DCU), Taiwan

Foreign Domestic Workers (FDWs)

Hope Workers Centre (HWC), Taiwan

Housing Development Board (HDB)

Humanitarian Organization for Migrant Economics (HOME), Singapore

Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP), Canada

Long-Term Care (LTC)

Migrant Care Workers (MCWs)

Ministry of Health (MOH), Singapore

Ministry of Labour (MOL), Taiwan

Ministry of Manpower (MOM), Singapore

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA)

Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs)

Taiwan International Workers Association (TIWA)

Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2), Singapore

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This dissertation is the outcome of painstaking intellectual labour by not only myself but countless other cherished colleagues, family, friends, and interviewees. Its illustrations and stories are a cumulative result of trust and faith in me as an aspiring scholar to do justice to the narratives I am entrusted with. My debts are too many to name. To everyone who has been part of this academic voyage, I am immensely grateful.

Few graduate students are as blessed as I am to have journeyed with such an interdisciplinary, inquisitive, and involved committee: Professors Feng Xu, Victor V. Ramraj, Sujin Lee, and Arthur Kroker. Their combined guidance and mentorship every step of the way has pushed me analytically and opened up my eyes to fresh perspectives. I have benefitted from an extraordinary amount of scholarly input and time spent together at our individual and group conversations.

How far you push someone reflects how highly you think of them. Feng has been the embodiment of tough love and endearing support. I attribute some of my dissertation's adventurous twists and turns to her astute analytical eye. Working through the ideas from our "walk and talk" sessions sometimes felt perplexing but also inspired many "aha!" moments. Feng has been tremendously generous with disbursing professional mentorship and personal support that got me through the vicissitudes of my time in Victoria.

My own formative academic writing background (mostly in poststructural geography) has a narrative winding style that, although meaningful in its own way, is not the most readily comprehensible to many interdisciplinary readers. I thank Victor the most for tips on style and mechanics and for being so remarkably patient and understanding of my penchant for long sentences. Feng and Victor have both been reassuring presences at the Center for Asia-Pacific Initiatives (CAPI) since the earliest days of my doctorate. Significant portions of my dissertation's conceptualization and fieldwork benefitted from CAPI events and scholarships.

Chapters One and Two in particular were aided by Sujin's keen historical insights and recommended resources about Asian Empires, especially readings on Japanese colonialism and race. As I dealt with academia's pressure to stake out an original claim on knowledge in my field, Sujin encouragingly conveyed that a dissertation is for "crafting your own narrative based on your research". If anything, I had these words in mind for the epilogue.

Arthur has been most ardent and steadfast in hearing out my scattered thoughts. He never failed to sound out ideas and always responded with a reassuring emotional stoicism. His generous compliments and constant invocations of "most interesting" were timely confidence boosts while I was in the throes of intense jadedness. My committee as a whole believes in my potential as a novice researcher more than I expected. For that, I am incredibly fortunate. I am also particularly indebted to Dr. Rita Dhamoon's endearing support and infectious passion for deep thinking.

More graduate student colleagues and confidants than I can count have commiserated with me over the woes of dissertating, giving away their precious time in the process. In particular, Can Zhao, Yuesheng, Yunhui, Ma Xue, Yifan, Abel, Namitha, Fazila, Franziska, Smith, Marta,

Mehdi, and Monet relate the most to international student experiences. Chance encounters and random fate in a shared office brought me into contact with Rachel, Phil, Brydon, and Stacie, who always will be formative inspirations in my thinking about indigenous-international (and settler) immigrant solidarities. I also do miss the hallway conversations with Micheal, Ryan, Thea, Zoe, David Lark, David Miller, Claude, Nicole, Matt, Morgan, Jess, and Jasmine. Our conversations have meant a lot when it felt like all this existential investment into graduate school is going nowhere.

The empirical flesh of my dissertation's intellectual work comes from the many courageous and inspiring interviewees in Singapore and Taiwan: foreign domestic workers/live-in caregivers, domestic employers, family caregivers, nursing home managers, and grassroots activists. As I hope my readers will gather, the migrant women had an electrifying presence that provoked my analytical foray into ageism in care relations. A fellowship at the Center for Global Studies (CFGS) contributed greatly to my earliest writing process on this topic. Scholars at *Academia Singapore* provided crucial scholarly input: Anju M. Paul, Teo You Yenn, Cherian George, and Lynette Chua. Andy Chang, Elaine Ho, and Yasmin Ortiga in Singapore and Weiyun Chung in Taiwan kindly offered advice at various junctures.

Our aspirations and passions often have deeper subconscious foundations. For my parents, my decision to pursue academic writing may look like a strongly independent life project. But I believe that my emotional need to work with words stems from my childhood memories with mum, who is my first and most dedicated tutor. Before the school teachers and expensive tuition classes, she helped me develop a liking for reading and writing now forever etched in my psyche. By becoming a writer, in this way, I get to relive those memories indefinitely. In his own fashion, dad has never stopped being an infallible and irreplaceable tower of strength. As my time abroad lengthens, my family constantly reminds me that “our door is always open”. My siblings, Kenneth and Jane, are curious and humorous every time we catch up on one another's pursuits. With them, I can always look forward to rejuvenating laughter and comforting getaways.

My lifelong partner and husband, Lucian, sees the best and worst of my professional and personal choices. We met as young adults and continue to grow alongside each other into better versions of ourselves. I like to think that in this scenario, 一切尽在不言中 (*yi qie jin zai bu yan zhong*): everything is understood without saying anything.

To all my cherished connections in life, our trek continues!

Dedication

For my family, as a testament to their unconditional love and support;
and for my late beloved *yeye*, as a tribute to our joys of intergenerational bonding.

Introduction

A Transnational Relational Approach to Eldercare

“By the way, why is a young lady like yourself with such a bright future ahead interested in old people?”

Heidi¹, Taiwanese family caregiver

“As you can see from walking around here, attending to elderly people is a totally different kind of nursing work. Most of the time it’s accompanying them. Listening to them repeat the same old stories over and over again for the whole day. Not that exciting and pretty boring to most young graduates just out of medical or nursing school, right? Not exciting like in the ER everyday something new happens, there’s high stimulation...”

Serene, head nurse of KWSH Hospital and nursing home

I originally envisioned doing a project about gender and race intersections in migrant care work. But I was egged on by some offhand comments such as those above to wander into issues of subconscious bias in age relations; the social processes that reproduce ageism in market society. Somewhat serendipitously too, the first foreign domestic worker (FDW) I interviewed, Sha, had become inconsolable when talking about *ah ma*'s² worsening health condition. Her anger at what she recognized as elderly abuse by adult children was not restricted to a few comments but poured out extensively across her emotionally charged ramblings (see Appendix D). Following the mood of these fleeting interactions, I argue for a transnational relational approach to eldercare that prioritizes its affective and emotional dimensions as resources for social transformation. This lens challenges a nation-state-centric view of care gaps and prioritizes the shared struggles of differentially privileged people (here FDWs and ordinary citizens) in debilitating conditions of care and social reproduction. In contrast to empirical

¹ In this Introduction, I quote a Taiwanese family caregiver (Heidi, 17 February 2022) and NGO worker at DCU (Grace, 15 December 2021). The Singaporeans quoted are an NGO worker at CDE (Don, 9 November 2021), head nurse (Serene, 28 March 2022), and program director of a philanthropic organization (Gabriel, 10 November 2021).

² FDWs/live-in caregivers often address their elderly patients as *ah ma* (grandmother) or *ah gong* (grandfather) to signal an expression of endearment.

accounts of global patterns of live-in servitude, my approach foregrounds affective, emotional, and sentimental dimensions that point to the age-old problem of care's degradation (see p. 182).

Central to my argument is an understanding that more than gender and race concepts, how we understand the meaning of work lies at the root of social inequities in care provision. This insight is by no means new to the care work and social reproduction literature as well as Marxist thinking in and against the 'value' question more broadly. FPE analysts know that the conceptual omissions of gender and race in Marx's formative account of work and the worker, apparently a social status befitting of only white male factory labourers, presents analytical constraints when arguing for alternative forms of valuation and 'worth' (Federici, 2020; Mezzadri, 2021; Stevano et al., 2021). But perhaps reflecting broader patterns of power imbalances in academic outputs, few studies have unpacked theoretical categories of gender and race oppression from a vantage point of care activity and work that may be more relatable to our research subjects (but see Amrith, 2020; Chan, 2023; Raghuram, 2019). Most accounts of migrant care work emphasize imperial legacies of labour migration. These conversations must occur alongside stories of other socially constructed identities that at the same time are experiencing tremendous change – age as a political position being a key example. For many FDWs and Singaporean and Taiwanese citizens, cultures of filial piety extend beyond parent-child relationships to include wider role expectations among siblings and relatives. An individual's order of birth (not just biological age) may often connote a certain status (e.g. of seniority) and corollary forms of responsibility. After almost three years since we first spoke in June 2021, Sha posted the following on social media:

Being a "*panganay*" (first-born and eldest sibling) is so hard.

We always have the biggest and heaviest role in the family. We are expected to be the "breadwinner". We should be the "perfect" example to our younger siblings. We need to be "cautious" of our words and actions. We should be "polite" all the time. As if it's a sin for us to be seen as a weak person. We should never let our emotions out. We should not disappoint anyone.

But not all the time we have the strength to go through every single day. We do have our own share of struggles. We cry at night in our own room unable to share to anyone our feelings. We reprimanded our own selves when things get out of hand (especially when it comes to our siblings and parents). We always keep in ourselves the things that hurt us and cause pain. We do not speak of our struggle.

Sha, Facebook Communication, 15 January 2024

Learning from and inspired by the long line of Feminist Political Economy (FPE) scholars in East Asia (e.g. Cheng, 2020; Chien, 2018; Huang et al., 2012; Lan, 2022; Ogawa, 2018; Peng, 2018; Teo, 2018; Wee et al., 2018; Yeoh et al., 2021; Yuen and Paul, 2020), my proposed lens does not downplay the analytical and empirical importance of unsettling gendered racialized relationships of servitude in care labour migration (Glenn, 2010). Rather, building on these existing observations of FDWs more broadly, I make use of certain positionalities vis-à-vis interviewees to point out modes of relationalities that our field could use more mulling over: age relations is a case in point. Care work analysts in FPE draw most often (and rightly) on intersectional frameworks that, although not always the case, tend to overlay popular meta-categories of gender, race, and class in structural injustices of care labour migration (e.g. Williams, 2018). Also key to my argument for a transnational relational approach to eldercare is a view of intersectionality as a domain of lived experience geared toward social transformation that has no pre-defined itinerary (e.g. Dhamoon, 2023). As the subsequent chapters illustrate, my interviewees reflexively seek to change the status quo through care ethics and practices that unfold in no predestined sequence just as real life is complex and chaotic. I bring up age relations as a relational device, inspired by the emotional dynamics of my interactions with interviewees, and as not yet another identity card to be quantified in tokenistic operationalizations of intersectional agendas (see Chapter One). I invite readers to pay special attention to the conversations to be had in and beyond Chapter Three's take on socialized ageism; for instance, how settler colonial logics are infracted through the meanings of old age embodied by aging and

old bodies in our modern milieu. Beyond its (inevitable) empirical referents, there is room for FPE analysts to discuss care, conceived as the quality of social bonds, in an industrial context of competitive work culture where creeping ageism is hardly talked about.

Particularly in the last two decades, concerns of elderly dependence in rapidly aging populations have gained explosive traction in public debates of social welfare policy. East Asia, as the regional exemplar of exponential post-war economic success, is well-known for its distinct human capital-oriented and cost minimization approach to healthcare spending (see Chapters One and Two). But as just as important are the affective and emotional processes feeding into the wheels of care work, including its social infrastructures of ethics, practices, and ideologies around who should be responsible. FPE analysts have discussed Singapore's and Taiwan's national 'maid' culture with reference to global patterns of live-in domestic servitude (e.g. Chien, 2018; Huang and Yeoh, 2018; Lan, 2016; Teo and Piper, 2009) whereas fewer studies have unpacked care itself vis-à-vis care work from transnational and relational angles; perspectives that look for horizontal rather than vertical connections (e.g. Amrith, 2018; Raghuram, 2012). Using eldercare as an empirical focal point, I draw on a variety of FPE and racial capital frameworks (outlined in the roadmap) to pose the following central questions:

1. How is eldercare treated differently from childcare? By what means do Singapore and Taiwan contrast in their eldercare regime management?
2. In what ways do FDWs in Singapore and Taiwan experience and make sense of eldercare? How do their narratives complicate popular economic justifications of care work, and what are some conundrums of 'care' that emerge?
3. What do my interviews indicate about the potential of resisting exploitative care relations through cooperative agendas that centre the emotional aspects of care and vulnerability?

The Thing About Eldercare

“I really think people don’t compare these two things (taking care of their children and elderly parents) on the same plane; fundamentally people think that they are two different things... Giving birth is a very conscious and deliberate decision but nobody can stop aging... I feel that taking care of elderly is something with no sense of accomplishment; it’s a process of accompanying them in their journey towards death.”

Grace Huang, Domestic Caretakers’ Union Taoyuan, Taiwan

The doubly devalued status of eldercare vis-à-vis childcare sets the tone of the following chapters. Grace’s comments are representative of what I observed among Singaporean and Taiwanese adult children: ordinary citizens and family caregivers do not comprehend eldercare as a significant part of human reproductive needs. Instead, people make sense of caring for one’s ailing parents as an act of reciprocal love and gratitude for raising them. But a purely sentimental definition of eldercare is insufficient. If people do not shift, at a deeper emotional and practical level, their understanding of eldercare as external to the system of ‘work’ that deserve to occupy our energies, there can be no social resistance against ageist norms. Based on a triangulation of government policies and interview findings (see Chapters Two and Three), I find that eldercare is doubly if not even more marginalized in an already secondary domain of care work in social reproduction. That is, logics of human capital investment and population development, namely through education as care labour (Teo, 2022), applies to the public treatment of children but not the elderly. This economic and social devaluation of eldercare is not unique to Singapore and Taiwan and is no less bad in European or North American contexts (Federici, 2014). But East Asia’s cultural conditions of filial piety make issues of ageism way more implicit and harder to recognize at an emotional level. For most adult children who equate hiring a ‘maid’ with filial piety rather than with a devaluation of eldercare (e.g. Rozario and Hong, 2019), the inconvenient truth of state-endorsed ageism alongside the manufactured vulnerability of migrant workers is hard to rationalize. Take, for instance, a fairly typical mindset of eldercare as a private matter:

Lynn: I also wanted to ask if you think whether childcare and eldercare is treated differently, based on your observations of the government's policies, the employer's behaviour, and such...

Don: Okay so in terms of investment, I would say that it may seem as if the government is focusing a lot more on childcare services compared to eldercare, it may seem so. But my personal perspective is that it is a situation where I think the government is also very well aware that there are certain levels of Asian values that our society holds dear. Filial piety is one of the core Confucian values and I think as an Asian society, the government is very mindful that children should play a role in looking after the elderly in the family because it's all a part of filial piety right? And if you were to openly promote institutionalized care, be it day care centre or nursing home, we might be sending a wrong signal to society (in that) when our parents get older we can just leave them there and completely divorce your caregiving from them...

In contrast to Don's view, his Taiwanese NGO counterparts (e.g. Untha, Grace, and Wei Dong) agreed that elderly institutionalization comes across as unfilial but contextualized the poor state of eldercare provision in profit-seeking mechanisms (see Chapters One and Three). There are still significant divergences between Singapore's and Taiwan's colonial legacies, political democratization (or the lack thereof), and eldercare policy development that translate into what I call "pragmatic institutional" (Singapore) and "diplomatic filial" (Taiwan) characteristics (see Table 1.1), which affect how ordinary citizens experience the effects of marketized care. But for FDWs, these location-specific social quirks (e.g. going out in Taiwan feels "freer" and "more chill") do not alter the harsh realities of live-in exploitation. Hence, regardless of their working destination, the FDWs interviewed threw up ethical dilemmas and moral conundrums of care itself (*vis-à-vis* care work) through their actions and words while on the job. I explore these processes of complicating care relations in Chapters Three to Five on the topics of social ageism, nuanced perspectives of resilience (a neoliberal subjectivity), and the politics of resistance through care. Beyond these issues, the possible conversations that unsettle to reconfigure care relations in need of questioning extend into every nook and cranny of life.

Even without the tools of academic training and intellectualization, FDWs know at a corporeal level that every human being's life starts, proceeds, and ends with vulnerability. Our

needy body calls for caring capacities unto oneself in order to survive and thrive to do the same for and alongside other people (see Chapter Five; Vaittinen, 2015). In this sense, some women I interviewed sent emotionally charged messages about the need to move in cooperative rather than competitive directions of care. One FDW in Chapter Three, Desy, wished for “more understanding” from employers about “why we’re here” (p. 268). The status quo of coerced care labour migration (see Chapter One), in her understanding, is a primary social foundation of hierarchical inequity in an overall degradation of care that those who can afford to pay their way out are blind to. Instead of antagonizing their requests (e.g. “Why do you need more training?”) or approaching FDWs with a deficit mentality (that they are somehow ‘lesser’ beings) that puts employers on a pedestal, the FDWs I interviewed hope for more ordinary citizens to speak to them as equally knowledgeable, deserving, and trustworthy people. I see their decision-making responses in care ethics and practices (see Chapters Four and Five) as an experiment with cooperative agendas that require support from more powerful actors, namely ordinary citizens who are domestic employers. Unanimously, FDWs I interviewed pointed to their “madam” or “ma’am” as their unlikeliest but most needed allies in the collective struggle for equitable care outcomes. As I note in Chapter Six, there are often no easy or straightforward answers to what these collaborative partnerships should look like but rather an endless room for trial and error. Below, I consider some unexpected hiccups in the fieldwork process amidst an unfolding pandemic before turning to issues of positionality.

Methodological Considerations in Pandemic Circumstances

My prior literature review suggested that a flexible or semi-structured interviewing style (see Appendixes B and C) was more conducive than other conversation starters for the complex nature of care work (e.g. Folbre and Nelson in Liang, 2018: 223). Before our virtual meetings, I

shared these potential ‘talking points’ with FDWs and invited them to contribute anything else of interest. Although my primary focus was on eldercare-related topics, it was important that my framing of the issues did not foreclose or even prevent FDWs from sharing about personal struggles related to care ethics more broadly. I envisioned asking about eldercare routines first before wandering into more sensitive topics of gender and race, which only a few but not all of the FDWs interviewed eventually touched on. My decision to start by talking about care activity follows a standpoint view (Harding, 2009: 195) that as frontline caregivers, FDWs withstand the worst of many of society’s problematic mindsets of care work and hence embody an instinctive knowledge of its power imbalances. Unmasking power relationships goes beyond the issue of perspective; for instance, claiming that a precarious migrant worker has internalized oppressive colonial norms from a social justice angle.

I agree with observations about the continued need for expanding political consciousness (e.g. Tungohan, 2019). But I also suggest that the FPE scholarship has a lot more to learn from unpacking care relations and care itself as an ethics and practice (e.g. Raghuram, 2012). In my case, recognizing the broader relational patterns of dominance in marketized care that FDWs try to identify means momentarily looking past (for good reason) gender and race subjections. Some researchers observe that unstructured conversations are often the most conducive for allowing “communicative inversions” to happen (Kuar-Gill and Dutta, 2020: 4). These verbal instances are when FDWs speak unrestrictedly and in the process allude to their most pressing concerns. In fact, one key area that my chapters dwell on is the power of people’s attitudes and dispositions to care as an activity. Rather than probing for theoretical and empirical references to familiar forms of exploitation in migrant care work, then, finding ways for interviewees to approach these abstract categories (of gendered racialized servitude) in their own circumstantial frameworks

(e.g. doing care as a ‘maid’) gives an alternative picture. In certain moments, FDWs use words in ways that explicitly signal their subversive intent of going against ‘the system’ and/or refer to the spectral aspects of domestic work (e.g. eldercare) that often go unnoticed.

Like many other graduate students who are gearing up for long-anticipated fieldwork interviews, I too had prepared the itineraries for in-person meet ups and topic lists. I was enthralled at the prospect of finally getting to ‘prove’ myself as a scholar by experiencing what esteemed researchers in my field (e.g. Yeoh and Huang, 1998) do on a regular basis. I had secured funding for travel to Singapore and Taiwan, where I planned to source for contacts on Sundays (most common day off for FDWs) in crowded city center districts. I was looking forward to meeting FDWs at social gatherings and recreational sites in urban space, then establishing contact points with those who indicated an interest to participate in my research project. But the unprecedented lockdowns from a (still ongoing) pandemic, which were at its peak from 2021-2022, threw those grand fieldwork plans into disarray. It surely did not help to know that virtual rather than physical contact with interviewees may be considered inferior among qualitative researchers, since digital communication does not allow for close-up observations of “context clues” such as “body language” or facial expression (Weller in Tungohan and Catungal, 2022: 4). But as I note below, my unthreatening stature as a novice researcher had a rather serendipitous effect on the conversations. A few FDWs reacted with mild surprise when we both turned on our cameras, as if they expected to see someone who looked more authoritative or perhaps closer in age to themselves. To some extent, I got the sense that this dynamic helped some interviewees feel more comfortable with what they wanted to say as well as how emotionally expressive they could be. As human communication pivoted online, I was anxious and envious of other researchers who were not affected by social distancing rules.

Fortunately, I was heartened by the kind enthusiasm of many FDWs who responded to my recruitment post on social media (see Chapter Five). Because of the power-over relationship in live-in employment, I looked for domestic employers and family caregivers through personal networks and/or other online communities where FDWs were not present (e.g. Pik Wan and Heidi are part of dementia support groups). I sent out interview invitations to migrant worker NGOs in Singapore and Taiwan, but some FDWs who were involved in grassroots activism referred me to their own contacts; for instance, Fajar knew Untha (TIWA) in Taiwan. I did the same for recruitment agencies (i.e. labour brokers) but was ignored most of the time. As my final interviewee breakdown indicates, FDWs (27) and NGO workers (18) together form the bulk of the 67 interviews conducted, which are evenly split across Singapore and Taiwan (see Appendix A). All of the interviewees quoted have either been anonymized, given pseudonyms, or identified with their real names as per their preferences.

Instead of a few months of deep personal immersion into a purposefully chosen site of contact sourcing, I endured a lengthy period of scattered, sporadic bouts of video calls and texts with my interviewees. Surprisingly, more of these online exchanges than I expected turned out to be less abrupt than I was prepared for. Neither did they necessarily lack a human touch in the way many of us plugged into a ‘zoom in, zoom out’ routine would understand. Belatedly, it became evident that these ‘abnormal’ and ‘exceptional’ interview sites, not crowded shopping malls, are actually a lot more representative of many isolated FDWs’ interactions with the outside world. Hence the need to ask: In what fields does fieldwork occur? To what extent can my exclusively online interactions with FDWs be considered a unique circumstance and might this pivot to virtual interviews actually have enabled my focus on the FDW-elderly pairing?

Had I interviewed FDWs during their rest days instead, as I had initially planned to do in places such as Lucky Plaza in Singapore's Orchard district and around the Taipei central station, I may have ended up with analytical frameworks that focused more on social movements and styles of resistance. Most studies that involve participant observation in such public displays of migrant worker collectivities emphasize issues of agency and subversive tactics against political censorship (e.g. Amrith, 2018; Constable, 2009; Law, 2002; Rother, 2017; Yeoh and Huang, 1999). But the FDWs interviewed were usually beside their elderly patients rather than with their friends as we spoke through video calls, which in its own way provided a certain (care-oriented) texture to our interactions. Importantly too, their performances to the researcher (me) were more or less while on the job in isolating circumstances that are actually more reflective of the women's daily lives than what they do on long-anticipated days off. At first, I was concerned that the virtual interviews would not produce much empirical material at all due to the often abrupt and truncated nature of online meetings. This scenario indeed happened with a few of the interviews but in some cases such as Sylvia's (see Chapter Four), relative silence and few repetitive words could not cover her infectious strength of raw emotion. In more cases than I expected, FDWs rambled on extensively without much or any heed of the talking points shared beforehand (see Appendix B). What is for the analyst a research occasion of an 'interview' may in fact be treated as a space for emotional ventilation.

As Krista McQueeney and Kristen Lavelle (2015: 85) observe, qualitative social researchers are prone to leaving their own feelings and emotions in the fieldwork process out of the picture. Doing so tends to reinforce false binaries of objectivity (so-called neutrality) and subjectivity as well as untenable separations between data and analysis. Instead, the authors call for researchers to situate emotional responses in power relations and to link one's feelings to

their life trajectories (McQueeney and Lavelle, 2015: 83). Hence, rather than rehash the many horrific instances of abuse and exploitation that all the ‘maids’ interviewed are familiar with, the main chapters’ frameworks reflect my deliberate analytical forays into just a few women’s inner worlds. I invite readers to interpret this selective presentation of sprawling data as “not about the numbers but about the stories” (Victor V. Ramraj, personal communication, 24 October 2023). The substantive frameworks I derive reflect an attempt to engage in emotional reflexivity by revisiting one’s unconscious biases and assumptions (Hsiung, 2008: 213) when my interviewees seem to contradict my project’s social justice beliefs (most so in Chapter Four).

Keeping in mind that our interlocutors are creative and resourceful agents in their own right who embark on transformative projects, I have favoured an analytical approach that reads between the lines in light of power imbalances over one that claims the lack of agency and/or sacrificial decision-making on their behalf. That said, my ideas have benefitted from particular research dynamics and responses that may not be applicable to another. My junior status and unimposing appearance contributed to the candid honesty of many interviewees who seemed to feel rather at ease with airing opinions that may otherwise feel too ‘controversial’ to say in front of another listener. After ‘feeling me out’ and getting a sense of my social and political orientations, many FDWs began criticizing the ‘system’, most notably by speaking badly of unreasonable employers and unethical recruitment agencies. Part of their reactions to me were also related to our age gaps that at times erased the conventional aura of authority that university researchers carry. For instance, Sha remarked several times that “you are just like my daughter” and “you remind me of her”, which a good number of other FDWs echoed; some asked for my age out of curiosity instead of the other way around. The so-called ‘face sheet information’ (e.g. education level, marital status, and income) that senior researchers seem to obtain fairly easily in

fact felt difficult or even rude to ask about (e.g. “Characteristics of study population” in Paul, 2011: 1076). Several of the FDWs gave away personal information while responding to my request for introductions (“Could you please introduce yourself?”), which they set the boundaries to. In some cases, I knew of their age, marital status, and income not by probing but when the women complained about abusive employers, their own problematic families, and worries about retirement prospects.

Although our particular dynamic produced rich narrative detail in expressive ramblings, it was also the case that my relative lack of authority in front of the women prevented me from directing the conversational trajectory. This lack of enforcement showed up in moments when it felt inappropriate to interrupt my interviewees’ train of thought (see Appendix D), also where the women corrected some perceived misplaced assumptions about adult children’s (lack of) filial piety (Maylene in Chapter Four). My junior stature then inadvertently contributed to less structure in an already flexible conversation, such that many women talked in a “truly intersectional” way; one where researchers “would simply ask the respondent to tell about her experience without separating each identity” (Bowleg in May, 2012: 163). The topic list I prepared had not specified ‘gender’, ‘race’, or any such identity, but I could not have requested that FDWs address these identity cards systematically when they spoke to me “just like my daughter”. Had I been in the same age group or looked like a senior researcher, I may have been met with more pauses or prompts to follow up with directed inquiries. If anything, these exceptional interview encounters are noteworthy for what they allude to about the spectral aspects of feelings in care work (e.g. Tungohan, 2019). As the forthcoming chapters indicate, care is essentially emotional, idiosyncratic, and uncontainable. But first, a few words on situating myself to the research context and how I identify with its subject topic.

A note on location and positionality in a transnational relational approach to eldercare

My overarching idea of a transnational relational approach to eldercare is best illustrated using a conjunctural view of intersecting social identities in which age-related dimensions of everyday life are underrated in relational thinking. I am an ethnic Chinese Singaporean with ancestral ties to Xiamen city, Fujian province, China. I live and work as an immigrant settler in what is now Victoria, British Columbia, on the traditional unceded territory of the Lekwungen speaking peoples, which includes the Songhees, WSÁNEĆ, and Esquimalt Nations. When we think of self-locating and positioning ourselves in the settler colonial state, gender and markers of race tinged by nationality tend to be the major starting points. While that is certainly the case for me too, I suggest that analysts pay more attention to the social relevance of age relations in care as well. I do not mean by this to downplay the everyday salience of patriarchy (in its various forms), gendered expectations in the family and society, and processes of racialization that profoundly affect the life opportunities of so-labelled individuals. Further complexities arise, for instance, in the racialization that non-whites experience given that People of Colour (POC) is a broad umbrella that encompasses diverse immigrant groupings and (international) indigenous peoples, among others. Elsewhere, my colleagues and I have commented on the limitations of Canada's race-identified data collection in COVID-19 surveillance; 'race' does not touch those so named in uniform ways and hence needs further qualifications by and for the specific individuals involved (Oduro-Marfo et al., 2022).

In Canada, similar to the Southeast Asian states in the Asia-Pacific where I travel to and from, migrant care workers are a distinct immigration stream in states' economic and welfare policy. Canada's Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP) comprises almost all Filipino nationals whereas FDWs from Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar, and other Global South sending

countries are more commonly seen in Southeast Asia's care labour migration (Peng, 2018).

Growing up, I was accustomed to seeing FDWs of multiple nationalities hanging out with their friends and running errands (e.g. grocery shopping and fetching schoolchildren) for their employers around the city. But in Victoria and even more so in especially Vancouver and Toronto, it was almost always Filipinos who I bumped into when strolling outside who are caring for the elderly. These trends reflect American global hegemony in the imperial nurse trade economy, which largely accounts for the Philippine's international prominence as the largest source country of caregivers (Choy, 2003). Many non-Filipinos, however, could not relate to their counterparts' destination hierarchies, and prefer to move circularly in bouts of serial migration in the Asian region instead of settling in Europe or North America (Killias, 2018; Paul, 2017). Such manifold patterns of care labour migration and social mixing with citizen employers throw up a range of potential inquiries into cross-cultural manifestations of gendered racialized servitude (Glenn, 2010). Patriarchal customs of feminine domesticity vary widely across cultures and national contexts as do race and racisms (see Chapter Two).

With the above said, why do we not contemplate about age-mediated experiences of our lives in modernity more often? Because these are often not as obvious as gender, race, and class inequalities? As I hope will become apparent in the subsequent chapters, organized struggle through age-related concerns about social injustice is urgent yet underrated. Bodies and persons who are associated with 'age' are often talked about in derogatory terms that create unwelcome effects of social marginalization. The reproduction of processes of ageism that lead to elderly concerns being left out of public agendas are distinct from but related to more well-recognized ones of gender and racial segregation in care labour migration. In 'Asian Tiger' states where FDWs (called 'maids' in the local parlance) are a common sight, the explicit sexism and racism

against these women often hides the ways in which the elderly in their care are implicitly treated as an unwanted nuisance. In Singapore and Taiwan, states that share a Confucian cultural worldview with ideological ties to filial piety, aging-in-place (at home) is still a strong social norm and by far the most popular caregiving arrangement (Basu, 2016; Liang, 2021; Rozario, 2012). Institutionalizing one's elderly, as numerous interviewees attested to, is socially stigmatized and widely regarded as a sign of abandonment or unfilial character.

The majority of citizens interviewed referred to institutionalization as “just not an option” (Tina and Pik Wan) and some saw it as akin to cultural blasphemy against seniors: “You know what people say if you send your old ones to a nursing home (*yang lao yuan*): (shouting) unfilial (*bu xiao*)!” (Chien Wei). It is important to note that institutionalization for the elderly comes in a great variety of forms and styles, such as day care centers, assisted living communities, and senior apartment or condominium developments for retirement living, among others (Chen and Fu, 2020; Teo et al., 2006). These facilities are increasingly gaining popularity in China's urban coastal cities where construction proposals for eldercare facilities are tied into real estate investments and urban regeneration policies (Strauss and Xu, 2020). But the people living in Singapore and Taiwan typically equate elderly institutionalization with a pessimistic outlook of nursing homes in particular (Basu, 2016; Hsu and Chen, 2019), which are seen as places where the “most down and out” go to “wait for death” (Pik Wan, 30 November 2021). Some media anecdotes³ suggest that younger generations are no less averse to institutionalization but increasingly see this outcome as an inevitable, even if undesirable, reality (e.g. Gabriel).

At a personal intercultural level, the above perspectives contrast starkly with many of my European and Canadian acquaintances who were able to causally say “just send them (parents) to

³ See Our Grandfather Story (2023): “Are we all bound to live in nursing homes one day?” at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PM5EnQoIJUE>.

a (long-term care/nursing) home when the time comes”. The barely concealed shock of my same-aged international peers who share a similar cultural understanding of filial piety is all too familiar to me as a participant observer in such interactions. People’s instinctive aversion to institutionalization of the elderly in Singapore and Taiwan differs markedly from the normalized resignation, if not grudging acceptance (‘so be it’ or ‘it cannot be helped’), of many European and North American adult children and elderly themselves. Ageism in the United States and Canada, for instance, is more easily called out where liberal market norms clearly draw on economic reasoning to justify institutions of social death⁴ (Gordon, 2011: 10). But in places such as China, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea, and Japan, people may find it disturbing to connect poorly managed eldercare with ageism, especially because cultural norms of filial piety suggest otherwise (c.f. Herron et al., 2021 on Canada’s long-term care). The vocabulary of elderly discrimination or neglect sits uncomfortably at an emotional level for many individuals and families who hold high regard for the values of respect and veneration of an elderly’s wisdom, life experiences, and senior social status; distinct from but parallel to many indigenous understandings of ‘elders’ in the community (e.g. Grande, 2018; Wasiq Silan et al., 2022).

Nonetheless, a framework of transnational ageism is useful for drawing out relational experiences of feeling and being unwanted due to the negative constructs (e.g. of needs and dependency) surrounding age and old people that are no less serious in the familial-oriented ‘East’ than in the liberal-oriented ‘West’. In modernity as a general social problematic, my idea of relational comparison for age relations is not so much interested in debating what is filial piety or not, much less discussing the ethical or moral character of adult children the world over who

⁴ Such institutions allow the physical and social isolation of populations deemed undesirable enough to be left to die. In these places, “a person is socially negated or made a human non-person as the terms of their incorporation into a society: living, they nonetheless appear as if and are treated as if they were dead.” (Gordon, 2011: 10).

fret over multiple care responsibilities while struggling with renewed precarity in a contract gig economy with its all-too-costly social reproduction. Rather, I see these irreducible conflicts and indecisiveness about where and how to care for the elderly as part of an ongoing mutation of profit-seeking strategies by corporations and governments of states. Concrete variations in their institutional patterns of care organization aside, capital's adaptive hide-and-seek game plays on people's affective and emotional capacities to manipulate primal instincts to love and protect their loved ones. In Chapter Three, for instance, I discuss child-centric motivations in modern parenting and the neglect of elderly needs as two sides of the same coin; unfolding alongside rather than separate from each other in the social reproduction of care relations. One Singaporean interviewee who is a seasoned veteran in the palliative care sector remarked on the need to rethink age-based constructs of dependency: "I think we need a new language or new lexicons that can convey that elderly folks...the fact that we got to help them and they need help does not mean that they need to be treated as with a passive nature itself" (Gabriel).

Gabriel's comments are not only illuminating for the Southeast Asian societies that have undergone dramatic changes in social norms of familial care, but also point to transnational phenomena of ageism. Old bodies and people as well as their family members (consumer subjects and purchasers) are a novel frontier for ongoing expropriation (accumulation by non-economic, not-so-well-recognized means) for capital accumulation. In social policy and urban construction, high-end long-term care residential facilities (e.g. condominium apartments and gated compounds for retirement living) are increasingly weaved into broader state narratives of economic growth supported by ordinary citizens' spending power. Eldercare policy blueprints are now implemented through real estate property investment partnerships between said conglomerates; new or repurposed buildings "appear determined to create a for-profit"

atmosphere even in sociocultural contexts where eldercare is not usually associated with profitable supply (Lawson and Xu, 2024: 3). Adopting a relational mindset of horizontal not vertical connections of eldercare then entails viewing localized configurations of care as co-constitutive rather than in distinct ‘core’ and ‘periphery’ zones. Between FDWs and ordinary citizens/domestic employers, horizontal relations refer to common experiences of human struggles to secure adequate or satisfactory care resources for the young and old in the family, which people face irrespective of class and socioeconomic standards of life. Vertical thinking about care relations, in contrast, tends to celebrate a citizen consumer’s financial ability to pay for outsourced care; hiring a ‘maid’ who provides 24/7 paid service is a solution to marital conflicts over who does the care work. In my conceptualization, relational comparisons of age relations in care also means thinking dialectically about regions (‘East Asia’ and ‘North America’) connected by the forced uptake of commodified solutions in care management here and ‘over there’ (e.g. Hart, 2018; Shih, 2016). In more ways than meets the eye, settler colonial logics are infracted through aging bodies and their processes and meanings of growing old. My transnational relational approach is an interconnected reading of the social relations that reproduce ageism in ongoing colonial dispossessions irrespective of where elderly neglect occurs. Next, I outline this dissertation’s roadmap to contextualize each chapter’s scholarly contributions to care work in and beyond FPE.

A roadmap of what lies ahead

Chapter One draws on intersectional frameworks of care labour migration (see Williams, 2018) to provide a comparative overview of Singapore’s and Taiwan’s eldercare policy. Conversing with FPE analysts in Southeast Asia (e.g. Lan, 2016; Ogawa, 2018; Ortiga et al., 2020; Peng, 2018), I illustrate some case-specific contextual factors that significantly affect how

ordinary citizens receive and cope with marketized eldercare policies. Namely, Singapore's authoritarian ruling party has managed to socially engineer liberal market norms into family planning policies in a manner that Taiwan's competing parties have not. The Singapore government has also steered the nation-state away from diplomatic struggles amidst China's meteoric rise that Taiwan is burdened with. In fact, contrary to most external perceptions of 'Chinese' as a racial identity that increasingly confers privilege, Taiwanese felt that Beijing's political hegemony of a one-China demand excluded them from claiming any such benefits.

Chapter Two engages with the long and complicated histories of racial capitalism with a focus on postcolonial Southeast and East Asia. I start with an overview of the emerging literature on 'new racisms' among non-white populations vis-à-vis most accounts of race and relations that privilege Euro-American settler colonialism and transatlantic slavery. I agree that social constructs of 'race' identity in my research context is always already more "porous and protean" than meets the eye (Stoler, 1992: 536). Yet I argue that the post-war global context of development and modernization (see Chakrabarty, 2005; Shih, 2016) following the League of Nations and its attending civilizational hierarchies in the international system of nation-states (Getachew, 2019) deserves more analytical weight. I learned by talking to my interviewees that instead of what they know about 'race', an antagonistic politics of competitive personhood couched in the economic *raison d'être* of developmental states forms the background conditions for processes of racialization. This chapter suggests that drastic power imbalances of who gets to mobilize 'race' and for what purposes warrant caution when researchers speak on behalf of precarious migrant workers. For instance, it is common to hear Chinese rural migrants speak disparagingly about their village background and lack of credentials vis-à-vis their urban dweller counterparts (Xiang, 2021; Yan and Luo, 2023). Such narratives parallel what I heard from some

Filipina FDWs who leveraged on their knowledge of Filipino-centric ‘racial capital’ to differentiate themselves from other (inferior) ‘maids’ (e.g. Amrith, 2010; Paul, 2011).

Transitioning from racism to ageism, Chapter Three weaves together the concepts of social reproduction in FPE and social gerontology perspectives to illustrate scenarios of elderly neglect and marginalization in intergenerational dynamics. I draw on observations and interviews with adult children and family caregivers. This chapter calls for greater attention paid to age relations and elderly needs in public policy debates of reproducing the population. To my knowledge, no research studies in Southeast Asia has drawn contrasts between childcare and eldercare at the household level. Yet I suggest that doing so is important to arrive at more expansive definitions of reproduction that take a whole-of-life rather than child-centric perspective. As I hope readers will realize, Chapter Three is also my dissertation’s strongest link and where its main contributions to the care work scholarship in FPE lie. Thereafter, moving to the topic of migrant agency and resistance, Chapter Four discusses how FDWs pushback against market pressures to ditch their emotions and cut corners with caregiving.

As Sha reminded me recently, “In caring for others, we find our true purpose and make a lasting impact” (Facebook post, 22 February 2024). I argue that although the women I saw were successful hyper-resilient workers (Chee, 2020), they embody complicated subjectivities that emerge in their interactions with elderly patients. This chapter draws on feminist theories of resisting resilience (Bracke, 2016a, 2016b) to caution against the popular uptick of ‘bounce back’ resilience projects in all spheres of life. This critique of the way resilience is politically used to exploit workers does not mean denying the importance of resilience itself to handling the pains and tribulations of human life. Allowing oneself the space to rest and recover to soldier on with renewed strength is not itself a negative quality, and indeed is an important life skill. But in

many Global South locations where people leave their families in exchange for a livable wage, romanticized views of resilience implies that even more can be done to these communities.

Above all, the women hope to become political equals with rights of expression and dignity.

Chapter Five revisits the contextual differences between Singapore's authoritarian state and Taiwan's democratizing government that are mentioned in Chapter One but from the perspective of civil society protests. My interviewees unanimously agreed that FDWs in Singapore express subversive intentions through covert ("not so obvious") means that do not visibly rock the boat (e.g. Jaya, 1 November 2021). In contrast, people in Taiwan took for granted a certain ease of social mobility and the right to occupy public space in confrontational fashions. Drawing on power-attentive frameworks for contextualizing resistance, I move away from the dominant understanding of agency and transformative action as only happening when structural change ensues. For all their critically rebellious and subversive intentions, FDWs do not wield enough power to pressure state authorities into policy reform. This chapter invites readers to visualize digital communication and online texting in Facebook support groups as an example of uprising against the disparaging treatment of 'maids'. The connecting theme of bodies in struggle is an attempt to be understood as full, complicated human beings.

Last but not least, the final substantive chapter recaps the dissertation's main ideas in light of my interviewees' narratives to contemplate how cooperative care relations between FDWs and ordinary citizens/domestic employers can be forged. Rather than superficial displays of affirmative action, FDWs hope for deeper shifts at a spiritual level of how care is understood and valued for current and future generations. I conclude Chapter Six with care relations as an inherently malleable and unsettled domain. And on this note, we now look at Singapore's and Taiwan's landscape of eldercare policies.

Chapter One Coerced Carers: “So we live to love”

Introduction

“I’m just a helper. Even though people look down on us, we are a maid, but they don’t know how we are putting ourselves out there just to make sure that we are taking care of them properly. We come to Singapore, we have a foremost determination in life because we need to send money to our family, you know? So we live to love, to put care in everything.”

Sha, Filipino FDW in Singapore, 2 June 2021

In this chapter, I draw on intersectional approaches in the FPE literature on migrant care work and institutional political economy of welfare regimes to situate the FDWs interviewed as coerced carers (Glenn, 2010: 35; Williams, 2018). In *Forced to Care*, Evelyn Nakano Glenn notes that although the majority of FPE discussions about care work assume that childcare is the locus of struggle, it is actually eldercare responsibilities that present the most social conflict (Glenn, 2010: 2). Glenn’s (2010: 36) context of writing about “coerced labour regimes” in the United States focuses on the intersections between ideologies of domesticated womanhood and marketized care that connect women of all classes – processes of compulsion and coercion⁵ to provide caring labour are inseparable. East Asia is no exception to the eldercare predicament: here too, public debates of work-life balance tend to neglect eldercare despite rising concerns about aged dependency⁶. My current purpose is to provide the necessary context of care labour migration and family planning policy in Singapore and Taiwan that shape the perspectives and behaviour of ordinary citizens⁷ and migrant actors. In Southeast Asia as it is in North America, a relational arc of “status categories such as race and gender” give rise to “racialized gendered

⁵ For FDWs and most low-income and/or single mothers in Singapore and Taiwan, the reproduction of one’s own children and family is often the strongest source of compulsion and coercion to endure devalued work. (Glenn, 2010: 35-36).

⁶ In both locations, the aged population (65 years and above) now hovers at almost 20%. By global standards, a population is “super-aged” when at least 21% are aged 65 and above (Visaria and Malhotra, 2023). Taiwan is on track to become a super-aged society by 2025, while Singapore is expected to hit this mark in 2026 (Hsueh, 2023).

⁷ Due to the large number of interviewees quoted in this chapter relative to the others, I include the dates of interviews with their names/pseudonyms when quoting them for the first time.

servitude” in migrant care work (Glenn, 2010: 7). Following the Introduction’s lead, I give an account of Singapore’s and Taiwan’s eldercare regimes and localized configurations of power. The central role of global capitalist patriarchy in regional examples of eldercare regimes, and the range of reactions and responses these evoke, are my primary considerations. For my purposes, I follow Yasmin Ortega and colleagues’ definition of an eldercare regime as “a loose configuration of policies, programmes and institutions that govern what constitutes appropriate skills...and who can be suitably equipped” (Ortega et al., 2020: 437). This usage of eldercare regime underscores the institutional characteristics of welfare and government policies affecting family care but also the supporting ideologies in public sentiment more broadly.

I follow Sumi Cho, Kimberle Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall’s take on intersectionality as a “nodal point”, not “closed system”, around which people can construct alliances “tied together” by “similar experiences of oppression” that seem to come from unrelated sources (Cho et al., 2013: 803). This approach suggests that all individuals are “connected knowers” (Collins, 1990: 258) who experience different degrees of privilege and oppression in eldercare regimes, bound by the “connective tissue of matrices of power” (Lewis, 2013: 873). For instance, for many Taiwanese interviewees in particular, the inequitable imperial foundations of a state-centric world order merit further consideration in transnational political economy of care. Drawing out significant differences in nation-state development, political culture, and eldercare institutions, the local policy contexts elaborated here follow up on observations that “global versions of Asian migration research are in need of further nuancing” (Asis et al., 2019: 14). Furthermore, even regionally specific frameworks of the care diamond – the particular interplay between different actors, such as state, market, community, and households – manifest in case-specific ways that can hardly be generalized across East Asia (Ochiai, 2011; Ogawa, 2018; Peng, 2018).

We need to consider the different political culture and government regime⁸ type of Singapore (authoritarian) and Taiwan (democratic) when we explore the agency of ordinary citizens to make and break the status quo: “families themselves who were propelling the practice” of migrant-in-the-family (Michel and Peng, 2012: 407). In this chapter, I illustrate processes of coerced care by weaving together top-down (government) policy and bottom-up (families and individuals) narratives with the range of social incentives that make ‘foreign maids’ a universally preferred option. My illustration of coerced carers reconciles the diverse areas of focus from the macrostructural to embodied micro-personal (see Williams, 2018: 550). Singapore’s and Taiwan’s national context of eldercare regimes foreshadow stories of reproductive ageism (Chapter Three), punctured resilience (Chapter Four), and care uprising (Chapter Five) – aspects of people’s emotional lives that are usually glossed over. In that regard, this chapter precludes my attempt to comprehend intersectional lived experience as “a bundle of journeys geared toward social transformation” (Dhamoon, 2023: 162). In other words, beyond this chapter’s policy overview, care work analysts can probe deeper into the complex emotional worlds of interlocutors who rarely articulate their lives in familiar intellectual terms (e.g. race, class, gender) but rather convey a sense of justice through raw demonstrations of care as resistance (see Chapters Four and Five). I retain intersectionality for structural critiques of migrant care work, but hold open the possibility of its muted relevance⁹ in micro-contexts of everyday life.

⁸ For the topic at hand, labour regimes include work visa regulations and FDWs’ live-in condition while eldercare regimes refer to the organization of care delivery and resource allocation, plus the range of emotions and human reactions provoked (see Ortega et al., 2020: 437). A ‘regime’ is often equated with government establishment(s) but encompass not only official rules of the game; “major social relations of power and inequality inherent in care” (Williams, 2018: 552) point to social actors’ agency in shaping the trajectory of welfare policy (Peng, 2018).

⁹ Chapter Two’s methodology of Porous Races, for instance, suggests that any analysis of race and racialization bumps up against the intellectual preferences of post-war Euro-American theory (Shih, 2008, 2016), including the reality that “the white/colored racial binary based on visible difference was forever front and center” (Takezawa and Tanabe, 2023: 4). Prior disagreements with “forced nation-state identifications” that bred racial nationalisms, such as

Below, I lay out the crucial differences behind each government's eldercare policy that shape people's perceptions and choices of care allocation. I then discuss how despite dramatic differences in political culture and government regime, FDWs' experiences of precarity and isolation do not vary by much (see Table 1.2). I conclude by circling back to the agency and influence of those who stand in relative power vis-à-vis FDWs to reconfigure exploitative care relations.

A snapshot of eldercare in Singapore and Taiwan (East Asian) variations

The four 'Asian Tigers' share a common preference of prioritizing human capital and economic investments for industrial "developmentalism" (Ogawa, 2020: 170), but finer differences exist between the "highly regulated institutional" regimes of Japan and South Korea and the "very liberal market oriented" ones of Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan (Peng, 2018: 1117). For instance, Japan and South Korea maintain higher standards for professional medical training and skills criteria for prospective foreign caregivers, who are mostly hired in institutional settings (nursing homes) rather than in people's houses (Lan, 2016; Ogawa, 2018). In contrast, Singapore and Taiwan have opted out¹⁰ of administrative responsibilities for the placement and matching of foreign caregivers. In both my research locations, FDWs have transitioned from an industrial policy to a key pillar of welfare provision, and fulfil informal care obligations that do not strain public expenditures. However, as Ito Peng has noted, "Taiwan is

"Chinese", "Japanese", "Korean", and "Hindu (Asian Indian)" (Ibid), were not addressed in transpacific encounters. Southeast Asia's preoccupation with national economic development also fits awkwardly with the analytical burden of 'colour first' where subtle judgments of a person's civilizational qualities (e.g. consumption habits and compartment) are more significant in processes of racialization.

¹⁰ Foreign work permit holders who are nursing aides or healthcare attendants in Singapore's nursing homes cannot obtain formal certification with the Singapore Nursing Board (SNB). These restrictions apply even to workers with extensive institutional healthcare backgrounds and outstanding performance, which results in significant outflows: "We lost so many good nurses." (Serene, Kwong Wai Shiu community nursing home, 28 March, 2022). Some healthcare attendants become cleaning supervisors instead under the higher-tier S-Pass because they cannot sit for the nursing conversion exam (Basu, 2016: 54). Likewise, in Taiwan, live-in caregivers are formally excluded from the government-run LTC (Chen, 2016).

clearly ambivalent in its liberal market approach” (Peng, 2018: 1120). It is worth noting that eldercare emerges as an intriguing exception: Taiwan’s welfare philosophy is mostly influenced by the inclusive social democratic insurance regimes of Japan (following German and Nordic examples) and South Korea. But for eldercare, Taiwan has “copied” Hong Kong’s and Singapore’s “individualist and market-based” method of hiring FDWs, even if in a markedly staggered fashion (Chien, 2018: 1148; Wang and Chan, 2017).

According to the latest available data, there are slightly more FDWs in Singapore than live-in caregivers/domestic helpers in Taiwan: almost 276 600 as of June 2023 (MOM, 2024) and nearly 233 000 as of October 2023 (MOL, 2023) respectively. Considering that Taiwan’s population of almost 24 million is more than four times of Singapore’s 5.5 million, Taiwanese households in general are not as entitled to ‘maids’. One in five Singaporean households hire an FDW while one in 20 (if not fewer) Taiwanese households do so, and less so in urban compared to rural areas. I propose the below categorizations (not airtight descriptors) to illustrate some finer differences in eldercare regimes.

Table 1: Characteristics of eldercare regime

State	Economic nationalism ¹¹	Social welfare	Family care
Singapore	Pragmatic	Liberal market	‘Pragmatic institutional’
Taiwan	Diplomatic	Semi-liberal market	‘Diplomatic filial’

Source: Author

I consider both eldercare regimes as marketized healthcare systems that are subject to deregulation, liberalization¹², and privatization (Aspalter, 2006; Teo, 2015; Mies, 2014). But the

¹¹ This term refers to the synergy between growth maximizing policies, labor force composition, and the social imaginary of post-war Asian national economies (see Chu, 1989; Lee, 2019).

¹² The late Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew argued that American imperialism gave the rest of the world no choice but to accept the reality of market competition (Lee, 1985: 94). His plans for Singapore’s economic future was not about debating the benevolence¹² of American-led leadership, but about how newly formed Asian states could strategize best within the confines of post-war American hegemony (e.g. compare his statements in Lee (1985) with

existence of a government-run Long-Term Care (LTC) system since the 1950s, in theory a citizen entitlement, is specific to Taiwan due to its social democratic foundations (Yeh, 2022: 1). Singapore, on the other hand, inherited Westphalian state institutions from the British and runs a healthcare system fully steeped in liberal market origins (Chua, 2015; Teo, 2018). These respective institutional legacies influence the everyday subjectivities of ordinary citizens, especially in familial care. I found that people's expectations and understanding of their government's role in welfare provision were opposite. Compared to Singaporeans' matter-of-fact acceptance, if not resignation, toward the state's aversion to socializing care (see Table 1.1 below), Taiwanese felt that "no matter what, LTC should be the government's responsibility" (Wei Dong, 18 January 2022). That is, Taiwanese always referred to an "irresponsible" government but Singaporeans (with the exception of a few NGO workers) seemed to have internalized state-endorsed values of competitive individualism, taking pride in self-reliance.

With the above categories in mind, I turn to the interplay between political democratization and the institutional characteristics of eldercare. Singapore and Taiwan share a Confucian cultural worldview of family responsibility in eldercare. But the Singapore state's historically serendipitous marriage between an authoritarian leadership and British trade institutions has created a path-dependent economic pragmatism in its national institutions. Democratizing Taiwan, on the other hand, is diplomatically burdened by Beijing's one-China demand and petty politicking among competing electoral parties. These result in significant differences for domestic employers, for instance, in the hiring constraints (less restrictive in Singapore) and gendered culture of eldercare duties (more prevalent in Taiwanese households) at

that in Zakaria (1994)). Taiwan's former president Lee Teng-Hui was likewise conscious of American imperial dominance, but was more concerned about Taiwan's diplomatic possibilities facing Beijing's one-China demand, citing the lack of "mutual trust between Taipei and Beijing", that made it impossible for Taiwan to achieve equal political recognition and fair economic participation in the United Nations (Lee, 1999: 12).

the family level. It is important to note that Table 1's descriptors convey the most pressing aspects of my interviewees' experiences with eldercare in their own national context rather than offer directly comparable 'variables' for political scientists. All my interviewees are familiar with marketized care organization and filial piety norms. But the Singapore state's economic pragmatism shines through strong institutions whereas Taiwan's diplomatic burdens shake the core of filial piety at an emotional level. Below, I illustrate these pragmatic and diplomatic patterns of eldercare regimes, which are enmeshed in causality dilemmas (see p. 39).

Political democratization, eldercare regimes, and everyday practices

“Taiwan is comparatively...its development as a Chinese community abroad should be the most special one. It is actually very free (politically). You have a different department coming up and everything changes suddenly...So your source of finances and budget is not certain, which is a big problem for your LTC system...In Taiwan, the government may last for four years, eight years, and as an institutional manager, I don't know what tomorrow will bring.”

Kuan Long¹³, Taiwanese LTC institution manager, 5 January 2022

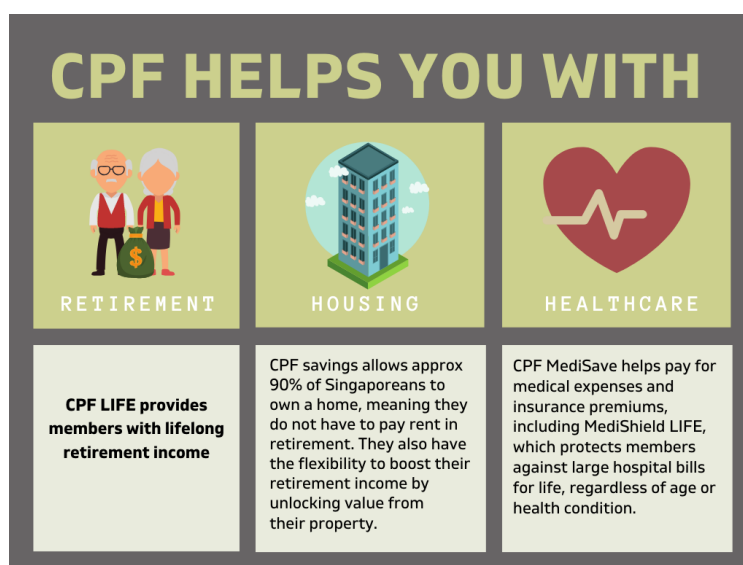
“As a Taiwanese, I really admire Singapore policy. You set up a policy plan and you follow the rules, you don't change it...Taiwan has laws but we don't follow them. Another problem is our government changes every four years. Our policy regime is not like yours in Singapore, where you set a plan and then follow it.”

Heidi, Taiwanese domestic employer and family caregiver, 17 February 2022

All my interviewees agreed that eldercare regimes nowadays are built to serve the national goals of economic development (Sciubba and Chen, 2017). Despite some consequential differences in government regime, the connecting theme is “global pressures to marketize care services” for Southeast Asian states (Peng, 2018: 1129). But Taiwanese domestic employers and family caregivers spoke of an “incapable” and “weak” government unable to chart a consistent direction for care liberalization, whereas Singaporeans were well-informed, even if resigned, about their future of intensified care commodification. Put another way, the ruling People Action

¹³ Kuan Long has almost 20 years of experience as an LTC nursing home manager, and has been involved in recurrent LTC policy meetings with the Legislative Yuan as an institutional manager. He has also been on various research study trips including Norway, Denmark, Japan, and Singapore.

Party's (PAP) Singapore wields a stronger administrative capacity¹⁴ while Taiwan's democratization worsens "a lack of consensus" (Fu, 2011: 314). Several Taiwanese were envious of the Singapore government for historically possessing the centralized cohesion that Taiwan's government lacks; "you know, that system your country has for families to own houses and save up" (Heidi). Welfare analysts and political scientists note that the Singapore case of social welfare is exceptional for having achieved a 'home-owning democracy'¹⁵ through its Central Provident Fund (CPF), which the government integrates seamlessly with its Housing Development Board (HDB) policies (Chua, 2000; Teo and Piper, 2009). The CPF system (1955) has its institutional roots in British colonial economy. The incumbent PAP initially maintained CPF as a social security system for old age, but in 1968, introduced the Public Housing Scheme that would (irreversibly) diversify its funds' purposes (Chua, 2015: 28).



Source: Ministry of Manpower (MOM) Singapore (2020).

¹⁴ As centralized and cohesive as the Singapore government is, it has to contend with periodic discontent with the rising costs of living, especially in housing, immigration policy, and public resource allocation (Teo, 2018). Some elections (e.g. in 2011) saw the PAP obtain an unprecedentedly low proportion of the electorate's vote, albeit still having the clear majority. Still, relative to Taiwan's political rivalry between the KMT and DPP (Sciubba and Chen, 2017), the Singapore government faces no equivalent opposition.

¹⁵ Urban geographers such as Natalie Oswin call for a queer politics that goes beyond rhetorical invocations of LGBTQ rights and sexual identity debates. The Singapore case of home ownership criteria tied to the 'proper' (heteronormative) family points to "teleological narratives about progress and social reproduction" that belie broader developmental rather than simply identarian implications (Oswin, 2014: 414).

The CPF today combines “financing healthcare costs”, “targeted assistance for the needy”, and “monetizing the home”; the last component stands over and above other priorities, and is the mainstay of intergenerational cooperation (Khoo et al., 2021: 23-25). CPF comprises the Ordinary Account (housing, insurance, and investments), Medisave Account (medical and hospital expenses), and Special Account (retirement-related financial investments). Its Medisave account is the standard frame of reference for Singaporeans when referring to healthcare expenditure (Khoo et al., 2021: 23). It is for designated social security expenses (not in-kind medical treatment) through ElderShield, MediShield, and MediCare, which are schemes for approved healthcare spending that the government continues to build on (Aspalter, 2006: 291). According to MOM (2020), this “3-in-1 system” is a “social security scheme” sustained by both employee and employer contributions to ensure that all Singaporeans have sufficient savings to not only retire comfortably, but also fulfill home ownership, education, and healthcare needs during one’s working years.

At age 55, an additional Retirement Account is added to one’s CPF portfolio for monthly payouts. In this sense, CPF is essentially a whole-of-nation savings policy for every working citizen and PR (from the third year onwards) to contribute 20% of their salary each month. These personal savings are topped up by compulsory employers’ contributions as well, which currently stand at 17% of monthly wages (CPF, 2023). In comparison, Taiwan’s post-2000 political democratization has not provided a suitable environment for fledging policy drafts to consolidate and materialize under a consistent leadership. Consequently, Taiwanese face fewer restrictions¹⁶

¹⁶ The Singapore government has a zero-tolerance stance on political dissent and an official Out-of-Bounds (OB) markers clause; an arbitrary list of topics deemed too controversial for discussion are prohibited in public debate. Political scientists Jennifer Sciubba and Chien Kai Chen note that the Singapore state seems to suffer “no electoral penalty” for going ahead with unpopular policies (Sciubba and Chen, 2017: 644), whereas Taiwanese politicians are not insulated from the electorate’s emotions to the same degree. In LTC policy, as Taiwanese lamented, party competition creates a stalemate for ordinary citizens: “European-style conflict between elderly power and fiscal leakage for two decades” (Sciubba and Chen, 2017: 644).

on social activism (see Chapter Five), but are more frustrated with uncertain LTC policy. A condensed timeline of LTC policy drafts (and disruptions) over the years demonstrates that eldercare provision for Taiwanese was an electoral campaign pawn (Chen and Fu, 2020: 188).

Table 1.1: Direction of government policies for eldercare provision

Taiwan (KMT and DPP turnovers)	Singapore (PAP)
1995: National Health Insurance (NHI)	1984: Set up of Medisave account in Central Provident Fund (CPF)
1998: Three-year project for LTC	1995: Maintenance of Parents Act ¹⁷
2000: Welfare reform with DPP's victory	1999: Many Helping Hands
2002: LTC Services Plan	2001: Eldercare Master Plan
2005: LTC Task Force	2006: Introduction of the Successful Aging (SA) framework
2007: 10-year LTC Plan	2007: Formation of the Ministerial Committee on Aging (Ministry of Health)
2008: Alternative new LTCI proposal with KMT's victory	2009: Set up of Agency of Integrated Care (AIC) to promote home, community, and institutional linkages
2011: LTC Service Act, LTCI Planning	2015: Action Plan for Successful Aging
2015: Landmark LTC Draft Law	2019: Careshield Life
2016: Plans for LTC insurance abandoned with KMT's loss to DPP	
2017: LTC 2.0 reform and opening up to contract service providers (pay-per-use)	

Compiled by author from sources: Chiu (2002), Fu (2011), Hsu and Chen (2019), Maags (2020), Phua (2001), Rozario and Rosetti (2012), Teo (2018), Thang and Johan (2018)

Taiwan's opposition DPP began to establish a political presence during the 1980s before its first victory in 2000. KMT's planning for NHI had started since the mid-1980s, but its implementation only in September 1995 was "mostly a product of political compromise", which was "carefully chosen to minimize its adverse political impact" (Lu and Chiang, 2011: 103, 96). In Table 1.1, Singapore's unhesitant pragmatic liberal approach contrasts with Taiwan's staggered policy execution. In fact, the absence of political flip-flop in Singapore and an ongoing Long-Term Care Insurance (LTCI) debate in Taiwan (Chien, 2018; Hsu and Chen, 2019; Maags,

¹⁷ Filial piety legislation in Singapore is notable for its strong rule-of-law *modus operandi*, whereby formalistic procedures of pragmatic cost-minimization take priority over ideological concerns (Rozario and Hong, 2019). Several studies have found this to be the case, for instance, when the financial duties of adult children are imposed even in circumstances of abusive childhood and negligent parents (Rozario, 2012: 662). Tellingly, in the eldercare policy literature, filial piety is not typically considered as coming under the state's apparatus, save for in Singapore (see Khoo et al., 2021: 17).

2020), for instance, are localized factors with longer genealogies. For those familiar with the said policies, a cursory search into their developmental trajectories and trends in the *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* (Asato, 2004; Chan and Lan, 2023; Cheng, 2022; Liang, 2014), *Ageing and Society* (Yeh, 2020), *Critical Sociology* (Chien, 2018; Teo, 2018), and *Journal of Asian Public Policy* (Fu, 2011) reveal that Taiwan's care services are disorganized, fragmented, and poorly integrated compared to Singapore's straightforward marketization.

Taiwan's elders-related act includes a Senior Citizens Welfare Act and Act on Long-Term Care, which are directed at in-kind assistance, while Singapore's equivalent is a Retirement and Re-employment Act that aims to extend the number of productive years in the workforce (Sciubba and Chen, 2017: 648). In that regard, Taiwan's elderly welfare has communal foundations unlike Singapore's finance-based roots. Historically, the KMT is associated with communist socialist models of care provision while the DPP is known as a liberal market champion (Hsu and Chen, 2019: 913; Yeh, 2020: 1342). The KMT government planned to universalize LTCI (insurance) provision through live-in caregiver policy, but the DPP's focus on human rights ran counter to this (Asato, 2017: 220). Today, Taiwan's LTC reform is inspired by the Nordic Scandinavian social democratic model, a radically different philosophy from Singapore's anti-welfare stance (Yeh, 2019: 1339).

“In 2015, we were preparing to push for LTC insurance nationwide but DPP regime happened: within one month the system changed to tax funding. The Singapore government has been ruling, so when they decide on one policy direction they can keep building on it, but Taiwan's government is not. Tomorrow you get a different party...it's a pain point for institutional managers like us.”

Kuan Long, Taiwanese LTC institution manager, 5 January 2022

Where Taiwan's LTC development has sporadic implementation, the Singapore case is a gradual intensification of a cost-minimizing “Many Helping Hands” (1999) approach, which had been in planning since the late 1980s and continues to the present day with CPF modifications

(Thang and Johan, 2018). Taiwan's LTCI draft bill, initially drafted by the KMT in 2008, was "discussed in parliament for seven years" before the landmark 2015 LTC draft law emerged (Maags, 2020: 90). However, disagreements ensued about how best to fund this scheme, and the DPP made use of its 2017 electoral victory to propose a whole new reform yet again. Such policy uncertainty has not emerged in PAP's Singapore (Phua, 2002; Teo, 2018; Yeoh and Huang, 2010b), where economic justifications of the "salience of family in the life of frail elders" (Rozario and Rosetti, 2012: 648) are strongly enforced. As policy experts note, the World Bank's highly coveted "pillars" of "taxation, savings, and insurance" are implemented in a uniquely "different form in Singapore than in most other countries" (Phua, 2002: 182). Singapore's eldercare provision is embedded in a minimal expenditure model that socially engineers¹⁸ the patterns of reproductive life, ultimately containerizing the costs of care and elderly upkeep into the family unit. Intergenerational financial transfers (to enable home ownership) are almost always a given, plus the government has a range of tax incentives and rebates for nuclear households who opt to stay together or in close proximity to their parents. Some examples are the Married Child Priority Scheme and Higher-Tier CPF Housing Grant, which give allocation priority for HDB flats to married couples looking to purchase homes within a two-kilometer radius from their parents. The government offsets up to SGD \$40000 for first-time buyer couples, and up to \$20 000 for single adults (Thang and Johan, 2018: 140). The Singapore government heavily promotes intergenerational cohabitation (e.g. Three-Generation 'jumbo' flats scheme), given the most cost-effective nature of such an arrangement. But younger generations

¹⁸ The default way to own an HDB flat (public housing) is through marriage and then intergenerational pooling of CPF funds; family members use one another's accounts for major expenses like housing, higher education, insurance premiums, healthcare expenses, and so on (Teo, 2015: 82). It is typical for a couple's home ownership to involve their parents' CPF contributions, given that the majority of married couples cannot afford down payments on their own. See Chua (2015: 29) and Phua (2001) for an illustration of this "closed loop of financial transactions".

increasingly take to the privacy of nuclear households, and additional HDB policies have been devised to incentivize intergenerational cooperation (Yeoh and Huang, 2014). For instance, the Multi-Generation Priority Scheme gives preferential buyer treatment to married couples and parents who purchase homes in the same building. Similar policies exist for elderly persons who purchase studio apartments near their married children (Thang and Johan, 2018: 140), often because this arrangement allows grandparents to supervise FDWs.

In this above regard, CPF funds are tied to living arrangements, medical expenses, tertiary education, and even insurance investment in an intergenerational pooling system (Teo, 2018; Thang and Johan, 2018). In fact, the CPF may hardly be associated with old age security at all because many citizens use the accumulated savings on housing purchase in particular¹⁹ (Teo, 2015: 78). On many counts, Kuan Long's above comment does not just refer to a government's implementation capacity but crucially, also to its ability to instill anti-welfare values that people uphold as a virtue of good citizenship. In Singapore, economic pragmatism rules because of its precarious history as an 'unlikely nation', which is always safeguarded by the hard work and thriftiness of citizens (Hill and Lian, 1995: 12). One Singaporean caregiver, for instance, suggested following the "self-sustaining HDB model" for eldercare.

“HDB is operating with subsidies that is not upright cash but grants in terms of land and tax that makes it economically viable for an operator. It's self-funding, so I think they can expand that concept to eldercare then to mental and physical care for patients. It's quite unique for a public healthcare system so for eldercare that approach makes it self-sustaining.”

Siok Pin, Singaporean family caregiver, 14 December 2021

¹⁹ The 1968 Public Housing Scheme created a 'home-owning democracy' by tying employment-based contributions to CPF accounts, which were then used for housing instalments (Aspalter, 2006: 296). This structural and social embeddedness of home ownership (as a rite of passage) is a unique policy situation that has no equivalent elsewhere (Chua, 2015: 29; Phua, 2002: 171), and has the effect of normalizing a financial worldview of social welfare, including eldercare (e.g. Teo, 2015: 79). In everyday conversation, the durability of CPF (crucially, its association with the PAP) is commonly seen as a primary reason for the ruling party's electoral stronghold (Chua, 2000).

As this above logic goes, the government's top priority is Singapore's economic viability in the region and internationally; top-down decisions are made with a pragmatic rigour that citizens are expected to trust (Wijeysingha, 2005). In the absence of institutionalized state intrusion into private life, I found that only Taiwanese interviewees were explicitly critical about the liberalization of healthcare, including their government's over-reliance on 'foreign maids' (e.g. Wei Dong and Untha). Taiwanese, in other words, lack an equivalent macro-framework for long-term financial planning amidst intensifying care commodification. Importantly, several Taiwanese spoke of their frustration with being invisible in international diplomacy (see Chapter Two), which further complicates the existing uncertainty of LTC policy. For instance, Heidi, Wei Dong, and Untha spoke of Beijing's one-China demand as a political hegemony that prevents the Taiwan government from implementing health policies independently. Compared to these Taiwanese who observed that their government lacked international recognition, no Singaporeans mentioned uncertain sovereign status as a problem.

As of the time of writing in October 2023, the "ultimate nightmare scenario" of Taiwan being thrown about as a political pawn in US-China rivalry is at its peak (Dittmer, 2004: 482). Taiwan's unending diplomatic stalemate has roots in its 1971 withdrawal from the United Nations, during which many allies were coerced by Beijing authorities to ditch formal acknowledgments of the Taiwanese state in favor of one-China principles. Beijing wishes to reclaim "Taiwan as a renegade province" while no equivalent diplomatic awkwardness constrains the Singapore state (Lee, 1999: 9-10; Zakaria, 1994). In the flames of the global pandemic, *Business Insider* reported that Taiwan was unrepresented at an emergency COVID-19 meeting in January 2020 because WHO considers the island a province of China, not an independent nation-state. Taiwanese public health experts say that although the island's infection

and death rates are low, it is implicated as a “high-risk” destination category in global travel advisories because its data is included in China’s counting system (Lee et al., 2020).

Taiwan’s diplomatic struggle indicates that changes in political regime and Asian governance are situated in broader imperial relations of Euro-American hegemony (Shih, 2016) that entrap Taiwan to a larger degree than Singapore, with its well-established external sovereignty²⁰. Historically, Taiwan’s social welfare “embodies a mix of Chinese and Japanese institutional legacies” (Peng, 2018: 1127), whereas the “free market system had become entrenched” in Singapore’s political economy during British administration (Wijeysingha, 2005: 197). Under the PAP’s iron-fisted leadership, Singapore’s anticolonial economic nationalism strove to excel in a “neo-Westphalian global settlement” where “all nations would be incorporated into a capitalist world economy”, which the government bureaucracy coheres around (Wijeysingha, 2005: 189). In fact, since the 1980s, Singapore has enjoyed a reputation of leading a regional ‘Asian Values’ discourse after becoming the “first industrialized state in Asia to adopt a large-scale guest worker policy” (Lee, 2019: 2509). As Lee (2019) points out, this success story triggered roll-on effects in Southeast Asia as Taiwan and then South Korea strived to emulate Singapore’s model. While Singapore had an early start with its 1978 Foreign Maid Scheme, Taiwan’s Foreign Live-in Caregiver program began in 1992¹ after a 1989 research trip to Singapore. Specifically, Taiwan adopted Singapore’s system of differentiated work permit entitlements to regulate the duration of guest worker residence. In the domestic sector, dual-income families looking to relive themselves of social reproduction chores were encouraged to do so through hiring a ‘live-in caregiver’ or ‘foreign domestic helper’ (Chien, 2018: 1150).

²⁰ Unlike Hong Kong and Taiwan, Singapore has avoided the diplomatic hassle of becoming a ‘third China’, which is part of Beijing’s political efforts to reclaim overseas Chinese communities, framed as long-lost provincial motherlands (Lowrie, 2018; Wu, 2014).

While both Singapore and Taiwan are subject to international pressures of market liberalization, Singapore's PAP stands out for its degree of "state involvement and emphasis on national control" of this process, supervised by a tight bureaucracy of "government elites" (Chu, 1989: 648). Meanwhile, Taiwan is constantly caught between appeasing Eastern (China) and Western (America) superpowers (Yeh, 2022: 5). My Taiwanese interviewees felt helpless (*wu zhu*) about having no political autonomy to speak of, which only worsened "Taiwan's already weak economy" (Heidi). In that regard, all things considered, Singapore's economic nationalism is channelled in qualitatively pragmatic terms while Taiwan's institutional capacity is hindered by diplomatic burdens (see Table 1 on p. 26). I now consider how these notable differences in policy implementation capacity (see Table 1.1 on p. 31) roll over into immigration policies for FDWs/live-in caregivers at the household level.

Pragmatic institutional and diplomatic filial patterns of family care

I suggest that a causality dilemma exists between political regime, government policies of eldercare, and its everyday social practices (Michel and Peng, 2012). While Singapore's strong state results in citizens there feeling and being more structurally unable to deviate from marketized care (Yeoh et al., 2021), individual consumption patterns and families themselves have been instrumental in encouraging the merging together of migrant-in-the-market to migrant-in-the-family, used synonymously in Singapore and Taiwan (Peng, 2018). As the words of NGO workers below show, the agency and transformative potential of ordinary citizens in the eldercare regime's trajectory is often underrated. Rather than a top-down approach, an intersectional "care-ethical" one emphasises not just the vertical but also fluid horizontal interactions among "the everyday experiences of care and care work", "the institutional, social,

political and cultural factors”, and “the transnational political economy” with its “geopolitical, gendered, imperialist and post-colonial hierarchies and inequalities” (Williams, 2018: 550).

Eldercare regimes, from this above perspective, encompass open-ended projections of power in care work. They embody not only the institutional blending of migration and care policy (Michel and Peng, 2012; Ogawa, 2018; Ortiga et al., 2020; Teo, 2018), but also the complicated range of human reactions and responses elicited. In other words, structural factors and policy differences matter not independently, but in relation to “the social relations of power” in “cultures, practices, and legacies” of care labour migration, and “forms of mobilization and contestation” by responsive individuals (Williams, 2018: 552). With this conceptual backdrop, I continue elaborating on what I call the ‘pragmatic institutional’ (Singapore) and ‘diplomatic filial’ (Taiwan) characteristics of family care.

Even when rolling out social insurance policies in response to rising dissatisfaction with costs of living, the Singapore government has managed to keep these within its financialized national savings system: the CPF’s conditionally independent spending framework and what Singaporean sociologist Teo Youyenn calls “gendered familial self-sufficiency” (Teo, 2018: 113). In light of projected increases in the population’s care demands, Singapore’s government has added several schemes into the CPF’s Medisave component (Thang and Johan, 2018: 140-141): MediShield Life (basic insurance plan for critical illnesses), ElderShield (higher coverage with longer payout periods), and Medifund (public endowment fund for the needy). At a high level of abstraction, the Singapore case can be used as an example for LTC comparisons. But such modes of comparison are based on single policy changes, namely its 2019 CareShield Life (Yeh, 2022: 5), which guarantees disability cash reimbursements to everyone over 30 as mandated (no opting out) by the Ministry of Health’s needs assessment. While these recent

policies were hailed as a welcome change, the state's eldercare regime has not shifted from an anti-welfare foundation "that takes for granted neoliberal logic...in favor of individual responsibility" (Teo, 2013: 391). In other words, although these schemes do deviate significantly from Singapore's welfare-averse stance, the government still has a socially nominal role in healthcare provision. My Taiwanese interviewees (e.g. Untha and Wei Dong below) feel likewise about their government's care management but are able to organize more confrontational styles of public activism in civil society.

Singapore's main initiatives that affect eldercare remain couched in the CPF's system of allowances, which include housing²¹, financial support, social integration, community care facilities, lifelong learning courses, and healthcare elements. Expenses for FDWs' labor are slotted into the latter two components: the FDW Grant (\$120/month) and Caregivers Training Grant (\$200/year) for families to hire and train FDWs respectively (Thang and Johan, 2018: 140-141). Singapore's eldercare regime also embodies social narratives of active ageing and healthy discipline, as several of its financial assistance schemes aim to delay the onset of unproductivity among older workers by mobilizing intergenerational efforts to keep one's aging family members in good shape (Khoo et al., 2021; Maulod and Lu, 2020). Singaporean caregivers (e.g. Pik Wan in Chapter Three) perceive eldercare in this context ("so of course we got the helper for mum") and rationalized the government's responsibility as market facilitator, not care provider – above all, hiring FDWs is pushed to families as the most convenient and effective solution (Wijeysingha, 2005). So strong is this systemic norm that John Gee, a British expatriate who has

²¹ Placing eldercare responsibilities in the household continues the cultural norm of filial piety while absolving the government from welfare maintenance. Confucian morals of intergenerational living and mutual support are promoted through Singapore's housing purchase schemes: Joint Balloting, Mutual Exchange of Flats, and Reside Near Parents or Married Children (Teo et al., 2006: 110). Parliament ministers repeatedly remind the public that family settings are the best for an elderly's quality of life.

lived in Singapore for almost three decades, said: “I’ve seen that many expats over the years who didn’t expect to hire a nanny at first but eventually did. Everyone else around them does for their kids and there’s a kind of peer influence”. In contrast, some Taiwanese were apprehensive about the prospects of migrant-in-the-family; they instead rely heavily on community and voluntary care providers if not close acquaintances.

“LTC planning is very very lousy (*hen lan*); when Taiwan opened up to foreign workers 30 years ago, they already institutionalized the availability of cheap foreign workers in the market. Whether DPP or KMT, both don’t want to solve the manpower issue, they are coming from an investment decision making perspective...not a social model that puts care needs in front.”

Wei Dong, Hope Workers’ Centre, 18 January 2022

“Taiwan has a *chang zhao zheng ce* (LTC), which started in 2008 and until now, its been over 10 years. The newly elected government recently also implemented a new LTC 2.0, but Taiwan integrated live-in caregivers in 1992 back then. So when Taiwan started using LTC, Taiwanese people were actually already very used to hiring foreign live-in caregivers instead of using the government’s LTC plan. TIWA thanks that eldercare should not be an individual or family responsibility; this should be an entire society’s collective problem.”

Untha, Taiwan International Workers Association, 2 December 2021

Taiwan spends only marginally (0.2% of public expenditure) on its LTC, just above Hong Kong’s 0.15%, while Singapore has had no equivalent system (Peng, 2018: 1126). The Taiwan government maintains a variety of Chinese socialist welfare schemes inherited from the KMT government’s 1950s-60s social insurance planning (Aspalter, 2006; Liang, 2014; Yeh, 2022). Some of these provisions for old age income maintenance include the Soldier’s Insurance, Government Employee and School Staff Insurance, Labor Insurance (LI), Farmer’s Health Insurance (FHI), and the National Pension Insurance (NPI) (Lu and Chiang, 2011: 95). An Old Farmer’s Allowance (OFA) was introduced as a means-tested scheme in 1995, but its eligibility criterion was abolished in 1999, producing a “heavy burden to the state” (Fu, 2011: 312-313). For Taiwan’s government today, such constitutionally inherited socialist structures are an inconvenient burden that must be managed diplomatically. Among citizen activists (using NGO

workers as a key example), despite their frustrations with weak policy implementation, Taiwan's ongoing democratization presents significantly more opportunities for civil society actors to disrupt the status quo (see Chapter Five). Taiwanese interviewees spoke of a “useless and non-functioning LTC system” that exists only on paper but not in practice (see Table 1.1) and were critical of the government's scapegoating of ‘foreign maids’ who “essentially do what our LTC cannot or does not want to do” (Grace, 15 December 2021). Another NGO worker, Yu Rong (9 February 2022) from Awakening Taiwan, agreed: “When the government built LTC system, the assumption was there are so many migrant workers and foreign maids who will be caregivers at home, so LTC should only do those things that they cannot”.

For the Taiwanese quoted, domestic employers and foreign live-in caregivers should jointly confront the government instead of blaming migrant workers for the poor condition of LTC services, which is a common narrative (Chien, 2018). In contrast, Singaporean interviewees emphasized the locally unique fashion of economic pragmatism²² (in which CPF expenditures and savings are a default backdrop) and pointed to other actors as responsible for providing care. They agreed that the government could be “less stingy” about its eldercare budget, but their comments were primarily directed at the resourcefulness of civil society and voluntary providers of family care, such as community training resources for FDWs and active aging campaigns. In an email interview with three division chiefs²³ from Singapore's Agency of Integrated Care (AIC), it was apparent what the recommended solutions are in “a multi-faceted engagement of

²² Singaporeans are aware of the government's hands-off approach, which some took issue with. But more often, they emphasized the extent to which care options “is really about the market” and “whatever exists out there”: ‘maids’, community hospitals, and VWOs (Don, CDE, 9 November 2021).

²³ These respondents were from the Health Ageing, Primary and Community Care Development, and Caregiving and Community Mental Health divisions.

the senior”): individual commitment to active aging coupled with the expansion of community-based care and mutual aid through assisted living and day care (AIC, 28 March 2022).

“There are roles for policy makers and the community at large in how it supports the seniors, and the individual choices and contributions that senior citizens make. The involvement of the community includes mobilizing community assets such as tapping on grassroots, citizen groups, and other partners within the community such as corporate entities and educational institutions. Seniors also need to make choices to take up opportunities to help them stay active and engaged with the community. Those who are well can also further contribute to empower and assist others with greater needs.”

AIC Division Chiefs, 28 March 2022

While I was in Singapore (April 2021-July 2022) and Taiwan (April-May 2023), it became apparent that the Singapore government’s reputation for strong implementation materialized most poignantly in the social infrastructures of urban planning. The aforementioned CPF system is a classic example of the Singapore state’s social engineering, which is complemented with a degree of control over urban construction that Taiwanese are unfamiliar with. That is, it was not only the stark differences in the degree of policy clarity and coherence that care planners were able to furnish (e.g. compare the above AIC statements²⁴ with Kuan Long’s) but more crucially, the PAP’s ability to literally engineer ideologies of self-sufficiency into the city-state’s architectural fabric. The social traction of individual agency in preventive health strategies and government implementation capacity are tightly interlinked. What could help explain, for instance, Singaporeans’ beliefs and practices of active ageing in the city’s spaces vis-à-vis Taiwanese skepticism of the concept? Singaporeans’ unanimous reference to this everyday discipline contrasted starkly with their Taiwanese counterparts’ pointed emphasis on the lack of government response to increasingly severe care needs. FDWs in Singapore did

²⁴ There was no mention of eldercare staffing issues in AIC’s planning account of a “Senior Friendly City” and “Community for all Ages” (AIC, 28 March 2022), nor in this email interview; the natural implication is that these positions will go to yet more cheap foreign workers and mostly senior women returning to the workforce or volunteering (e.g. Ortiga et al., 2020).

not encounter elderly patients in need of medical intervention or intensive bedside care, unlike well over half of those in Taiwan. While this seems to suggest that Singapore's population is less aged, this is hardly the case. Rather, the government's substantive presence (and intervention) in the private lives of its citizens is likely the more significant conditioning factor. More empirical data is needed to tell with certainty, but my interview anecdotes suggest that the Singapore government's active ageing policies lead to: 1) fewer older adults (in a given age range) needing intensive long-term care but also 2) a stronger penalization of elderly in this category, in that such cases are due to lack of individual responsibility over personal upkeep.

Earlier, I noted the formative role of HDB housing (where well above 90% of Singapore's population reside) as a site of intergenerational cooperation in family care. On top of that, where there is a tight horizontal integration of the various government ministries in eldercare masterplans (see Table 1.1), the Ministerial Committee on Ageing (MCA) collaborates closely with the HDB and Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) to build spatial zones of active ageing. Most notably, these take the form of senior care centers (SCCs) and active ageing hubs (AAHs) in HDB housing estates that Singaporean family caregivers (Pik Wan in Chapter Three) refer to. SCCs and AAHs are usually located within walking distance of one of the island's 154 active ageing centres (AACs), which are the urban hallmarks of aging in place in the community: a "drop-in social recreational centre" and "go-to point for seniors" to "build strong social connections...and contribute to the community as they wish" (AIC, 2023). At least twice a week, Pik Wan's 89-year old mother goes for aerobics and yoga sessions at her local AAC. Such purpose-built spaces are well-spread across the city-state's residential districts according to the same logic of social mixing²⁵ that Singapore's government infuses into its urban planning.

²⁵ For instance, strong intergenerational solidarity is widely recognized as a hallmark of active ageing: "the greater the interaction between younger and older generations, the less the age discrimination" (Dykstra and Fleischmann in Hsu,



Photo source: NTUC Health (2023). Participants of a dance workshop at one of Singapore’s largest flagship Active Ageing Hubs in Kampung Admiralty.

In contrast, Taipei’s urban landscape has no equivalent presence of such ‘branded’ compounds. Instead, active ageing campaigns there tend to be led by volunteer efforts and even insurance staff when selling financial products (Hsu, 2021: 527). While one may say that Singapore’s focus on preventive care (e.g. Healthier SG²⁶ initiative) is possible due to its marginally less aged demographic, it is also the case that the intensity of active ageing as a social discipline influences many people to downplay acute care gaps, for example, in community nursing homes where the most ‘down and out’ elderly reside (Basu, 2016). As Pik Wan’s account of her mother’s community participation in Chapter Three alludes, there may also be something playing on people’s emotions when SCCs and AACs are side by side.

2021: 531). The presence of whole-of-nation schemes that tie Singaporeans’ spending habits for major life decisions with urban spaces that endorse individual responsibility (e.g. CPF and Active Ageing Hubs) are some cases in point.

²⁶ Healthier SG is Singapore’s most recent offshoot of its eldercare masterplan for successful aging (Table 1.1). Its core goal is promoting preventive health strategies through “proactive steps” to “lead healthier lifestyles” and “prevent the onset of chronic diseases” (MOH, 2023).

As care centres, SCCs are for “frail seniors who require custodial care and assistance with their ADLs”, with a range of rehabilitative services to “slow down deterioration” (Khoo et al., 2021: 51). On the other hand, as integrated compounds for all ages to combine work and recreational exercise, AAHs have free fitness corners, gyms, swimming pools, gardening plots, and a wide variety of public health talks, skills upgrading courses, and senior networking events – in short, “one-stop hubs” that “aim to enable seniors to stay active, mentally and socially engaged” (Khoo et al., 2021: 51). In this context, the spatial juxtaposition of positive prevention and negative dependence serve as concrete reminders of active and successful aging. Singapore’s centralized cohesion of ideological self-sufficiency and planning capacity is one area where Taiwanese interviewees felt their government fell short of the ability to implement (*luo shi*) ideas discussed in cabinet. Taiwanese caregivers did not talk about prolonging their parents’ independence and social mobility, instead critiqued the LTC’s gaps (e.g. Heidi in Chapter Three). This line of conversation inadvertently led them to argue for including foreign live-in caregivers in the national LTC system by giving them standard labour rights.

“Our labour department is in charge of foreign workers, LTC regime is under the health ministry. You’ll find that in theory, the nursing and healthcare manpower management should be given to the health ministry (*wei sheng fu li bu*) but the government only oversees Taiwanese workers. The moment you bring in foreign workers, the government only cares about labour-salary matches, contract disputes, that kind. But if they are looking after patients they should be considered a social benefit or welfare, and managed under that respective system, no?”

Heidi, Taiwanese domestic employer

Taiwan’s government still maintains basically separate provision channels, at least on paper, but foreign caregivers (institutional and domestic) effectively carry out LTC functions (Chen, 2016). Taiwanese critiqued this “dual care system” (Chen, 2016: 2112) that makes use of live-in caregivers to do “those things they (government) cannot” (Yu Rong, 9 February 2022), which absolves them from “their rightful responsibility of providing for the people” (Wei Dong).

The social presence of migrant worker advocacy in Taiwan but not (significantly) in Singapore's public debate signals the relative strength of civil society groups lobbying against the Legislative Yuan. It is worth noting that in contrast to Singapore's rapid all-in-one²⁷ solution, Taiwan's delayed and staggered implementation of migrant-in-the-family was constrained by a sizeable Taiwanese female²⁸ childcare and nursing home workforce, who lobbied for their employment rights as citizens to be prioritized ahead of foreigners (Chien, 2018; Lee, 2019). That quotas have been placed on the intake of general domestic workers but not the care worker category reflects eldercare's unpopularity among Taiwanese workers (Chen and Fu, 2020), and eldercare's uniquely devalued status: a "secondary labour market" in an already marginalized social reproductive sector (Chen, 2016: 2094). The Taiwan government ended up introducing a "legal distinction between general domestic workers and care workers" (Ochiai, 2009: 67), whereas Singapore uses the label 'domestic' for any and every type of work done in a household setting.

Taiwan's Workforce Development Agency specifies the job scope of 'live-in caregivers' as "take care of daily affairs for people with disabilities or diseases", while 'foreign domestic helpers²⁹' must "engage in house cleaning, food cooking, family members' care needs or other work related to private family services." (MOL, 2022). By popular demand, Taiwan's FDW policy was tailored almost exclusively for eldercare needs, and only accepts workers from

²⁷ Over the past five years, the Singapore government has started introducing FDW programs tailored for eldercare, like the Advance Placement Scheme (APS) and Elderarer FDW Scheme (AIC, 2022). It is too early to tell what the implications of these changes are, what differences they make to households, and their general popularity or take-up rate. Furthermore, as I gathered from NGO workers, these pilot programs do not have the same formal weight as in Taiwan because it remains a 'behind-the-scenes' and voluntarily run effort (Don, CDE, 9 November 2021).

²⁸ Taiwan has separate categories for domestic work but also a larger demographic and regional urban-rural divide, which have allowed it to incorporate greater numbers of women into domestic work (Salaff, 1990). More Taiwanese women are homemakers and a sizable female workforce are paid home managers (*guan jia*), albeit less common today.

²⁹ The number of foreign domestic helpers have become insignificant compared to live-in caregivers, reflecting the household service consumption trends of eldercare-strapped households. Some 202, 616 live-in caregivers and 1441 domestic helpers work in Taiwan as of May 2022 (Yen, 2022). The eligibility criteria for 'helpers' is highly exclusive: Taiwanese households with three or more children and elderly under the same roof (with age criteria), or foreigners with high 'foreign capital' potential, company revenue, personnel turnover, and income tax paid (MOL, 2022).

specified source countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam (Peng, 2018: 1128). Compared to authoritarian Singapore's pragmatic cost-oriented approach to the problem of filial piety in eldercare (e.g. Rozario and Hong, 2019; Teo et al., 2006), the democratic Taiwan government has no comparable record of social engineering. Rather, filial piety obligations among Taiwanese family caregivers (Heidi) seem more organically embedded and came up in an unforced fashion. In contrast, Singaporeans (Pik Wan) leaned on financialized interpretations of filial piety – especially one's economic preparedness to hire a 'maid' – in the context of institutional pressures to keep eldercare costs within the family.

Taiwanese domestic employers also face tougher hiring criteria because they are required to provide Barthel index examination assessment forms³⁰ from state-approved physicians on top of proving that their attempts to find Taiwanese caregivers failed (Hsu, 2021: 8-10). In contrast, Singapore's pragmatic hiring criteria rests on class status, such as credit rating and adequate disposable income instead of the urgency of care needs (Rozario and Hong, 2019). Some anecdotal evidence suggests that as a result, Taiwanese labour brokers are held to higher accreditation and training standards for eldercare, even if still falling short of catering for the chronically disabled and ill elderly. All FDWs in both locations are technically required to take at least 90-120 hours of eldercare-related training, and it is common for recruitment agencies and brokers to cut corners to minimise costs (Liang, 2018: 190). But unlike many FDWs in Singapore who reported getting no training at all, none in Taiwan said so: "When I came to

³⁰ Taiwanese have heavier care needs because of its advanced "hyper-aged" demographic, which partly explains the government's stricter hiring criteria for live-in caregivers (Wang and Chan 2017: 201). However, Singapore's capacity to implement unpopular policies without electoral punishments still stands out (Sciubba and Chen, 2017). FDWs observed that "more and more people in Singapore need a caregiver to take care of their elderly" (Mitch, 8 June 2021), but these are not reflected in FDW hiring policy like for Taiwanese households. Don's offhand comment that eldercare for FDWs "is still very much market-driven...it may not be a skill set that relevant" reflects a normalized downplaying of Singapore's growing care needs. These skills are approached not seriously but as a "modular add-on, like an extra unit" that "can be added on if families want" (Don, 9 November 2021).

Singapore I didn't learn much things but when I was in Taiwan they teach us how to take care of elderly.” (Sylvia, 30 November 2021). In fact, live-in caregivers in Taiwan are formally known as “social welfare workers” – doing care work that benefits Taiwanese society – instead of simply ‘domestics’ (Munkejord et al., 2021: 9). Nonetheless, for both the Singapore and Taiwan governments, what was initially intended as a stop-gap measure³¹ for the domestic economy – hiring FDWs to provide a temporary reprieve for female citizens to renegotiate work-life balance (Lee, 2019: 2520) – eventually morphed into an irreversible pillar of social welfare. That is to say, given the economic and social incentives in Table 1.2 above, most ordinary citizens and average households find it hard to contemplate any other option apart from the live-in ‘maid’.

“I think the scary thing is once you open this door, there's no going back. It's irreversible: people are already so used to using cheap labor for care needs at home, so LTC promotion has very limited effect. In people's minds, care is associated with the foreign worker already. Also, hiring foreign workers is already the cheapest solution, but beyond the many middle-class families also lie a lot of poorer ones who cannot afford a foreign worker, and they can only do the care work themselves. They cannot go to work and it becomes a vicious cycle. The job of taking care of elderly also suffers from a stereotypical negative image.”

Wei Dong, Hope Workers' Centre Taiwan, 18 January 2022

In light of the above, Taiwan does boast superior civil society conditions and grassroots activism compared to Singapore's nationalist brand of civic³² society. FDWs who worked in both locations, without exception, spoke of Taiwan's “easy-going and freer” environment compared to Singapore where “everything is so strict”. While their Taiwanese counterparts were critical of LTC's economistic undertones, Singaporeans noted the limits of confrontational debate: “it must

³¹ Singapore's economic policy board intended to fully nationalize the workforce by 1991 with the help of foreign workers, whose presence would ease acute labor shortages in sunset industries (Lee, 2019: 2520). However, subsequent economic recessions halted these plans as the state was compelled to continue loosening the immigration floodgates to staff 3Ds (dirty, dangerous, and difficult) occupations so the local workforce could focus on higher-value activities.

³² This socio-political context is hugely significant for contextualizing the strategies of resistance by FDWs in Singapore (see Chapter Five), who unlike those in Taiwan, rarely if at all appear at street protests or camp outside government buildings. Singapore's “civic/civil society project” was, at inception, about strengthening the core of “a cohesive and resilient nation” dedicated to “the social and emotional stakes” of economic goals (Yeoh and Huang, 1999: 1152), not about letting dissent from the margins into social space.

be reasonable, like what the government feels okay with, right? You know la, we are in Singapore.” (Jaya, 1 November 2021). In summary, the eldercare policies that shape FDWs’ presence in Singapore and Taiwan evolve from different colonial legacies, political cultures, and governmental capacity to implement the marketization of social welfare. Singaporeans demonstrated a distinct pragmatism in a national context where work ethic, savings, and controlled spending through the CPF has infused the social fabric, while Taiwanese more often than not spoke about the impossibility of reconciling market demands and filial piety obligations – these differences in familialist care reveal ‘pragmatic institutional’ and ‘diplomatic filial’ characteristics (see Table 1). Regardless, in both eldercare regimes, the presence of socio-politically expedient ‘maids’ (Cheng, 2020) who reproduce the elderly is prominent.

Structures of coercion in caregiving, mostly studied in the American context (Glenn, 2010: 6; Pittman, 2023: 15), show that internal (domestic) variations often trump the significance of statist borders for the meso and micro-scale experiences of care regimes. But it is also important to consider how relationships between various “coerced carers” across transnational, regional, and local scales implicate the different social subjects of eldercare regimes. In both cases, what is presented to citizens as a safety net relies on “social infrastructures of care labor from which profits are extracted through devaluation” (Strauss and Xu, 2020: 145). The above variations in local policy context feel significant, perhaps even life-changing, to many citizens but hardly translate into remarkable differences for FDWs. For example, biannual pregnancy checks are mandatory in Singapore but revoked in Taiwan since 2002. Such finer differences may reflect Taiwan’s reputation as Asia’s democratic capital (Sciubba and Chen, 2017), yet does not result in significant changes: labour brokers have found a “revolving door” by demanding that reproductive checks be done before arrival and/or administer contraceptive medication measures (Cheng, 2020: 453, 459).

“Again, it comes back to the practicality aspect. The Singapore government is one that acts on pragmatic sense and what worked best for society overall. The nature of caregiving, the nature of domestic work, is such that sometimes it is very hard to differentiate between some of these boundaries and every family has their own unique care needs and every part of the family has their own unique caregiving problems. So, it is very difficult for you to apply a common yardstick throughout...”

Don, Center for Domestic Employees (CDE), 9 November 2021

The Taiwanese government also attributes the difficulty of regulating domestic labour to ‘impracticality’: “live-in requirements and the private nature of individual households” (Chien, 2018: 1151). Taiwan’s *Labor Standard Act (LSA)* covers public sector but not domestic workers, similar to Singapore’s Employment Act (Lan 2016; Teo, 2018). Fajar (26 November 2021), an Indonesian live-in caregiver, said that Taiwan is perceived as one of the most attractive working destinations in Asia. But as she learnt, “In Taiwan salary is higher, but every month we give the agency so much money: in the end it becomes the same”. Chien Wei, a Taiwanese labour broker (see Chapter Three) conveniently left out such sentiments from her transactional justifications of migrant brokerage and trafficking. She felt that “many younger ones nows just want to play” and dismissed migrant ‘runaways’ as “troublemakers (*zhao ma fan*)”. The cost-minimizing drive in eldercare policy creates antagonistic relations between domestic employers/family caregivers who tend to blame FDWs for ‘acting out’ instead of looking out for chances to jointly confront the state.

“Nothing can compare”: Migrant-in-the-family market is a league of its own

“Actually, there aren’t that many choices. First, our family take care of her by ourselves. Second, find a Taiwanese home care worker. Third, a foreign worker stays at home. If not, grandma (*waipo*) goes to an elderly home... Hire a Taiwanese, very expensive, totally a cost problem³³. Straightaway we knew that a foreign worker is our only option.”

Tina, Taiwanese domestic employer, 16 December 2021

Tina is an early 30s single female working professional who lives with her mother, an aunt, and an elderly grandmother. The senior women take turns to see to *ah ma* in between part-time shifts

³³ Taiwanese domestic employers agreed that hiring a Taiwanese was unfeasible, both financially and from a care needs perspective. Not only are Taiwanese caregivers rarer nowadays, they also charge “unreasonable rates” and are “choosy and fussy about what they can and cannot do” (Heidi, 17 February 2022). The 24/7 arrangement is virtually impossible. One Indonesian live-in caregiver received one-third of her Taiwanese counterpart’s salary (working for the same household) despite having to constantly overextend herself; “the Taiwanese lady only sit and talk with *ah gong* only, never do anything, very lazy. Even her food is prepared by me!” (Rika, 5 December 2021).

at the neighborhood grocery store while their live-in caregiver (Tina pays her salary) takes breaks during the day. In both locations, non-live-in care options present formidable financial barriers for most middle-income households. Institutional care including LTC (Taiwan), daycare, and nursing homes cost at least SGD \$1800 per month, excluding miscellaneous costs for medication, transport, and other daily resources that family members must supplement to compensate for additional care needs. It was striking to hear how often the feeling of “we had no choice” came up when people recalled their decision to hire FDWs, even when financial considerations were not an obstacle. Tina’s words are representative of other domestic employers who contrasted the “most value for money option” of hiring FDWs with “very expensive piecemeal services”.

Table 1.2: Costs of hiring FDWs (Singapore) and Live-in caregivers (Taiwan)

Expenses (SGD ³⁴)	Singapore	Taiwan
Workers’ salary/month	Range: \$450-\$700 Median: \$750	Minimum: \$924 Median: \$875
Monthly ‘maid’ levy (employer’s monthly fee)	\$300 without subsidy \$60 with subsidy (young child below 16 years; elderly person above 67 years; person with disability (PWD) certified by state-registered doctors)	Not applicable for employers
Mandatory one-off costs for domestic employers (but often transferred to FDWs/live-in caregivers)	\$1000-\$3000: Recruitment agency fees \$5000: Security bond \$2000-\$7000: Additional placement fees or performance bonds depending on agency requirements	\$1500-\$4500: Registration and placement fee Maximum \$92/annum: Recruitment agency fees including additional service charges
Total costs/month (excluding one-off costs)	\$1000-\$1500/month including living expenses and levies	\$1380-\$1610/month including living expenses

Source: Author’s interviews, Dickinson (2016), Koh (2022), MOL (2017), Poh (2021), Taipei Times (2022), Wang and Chan (2017)

Family caregivers took turns to narrate a common scenario: every other option for home-based care did not seem to square up economically or practically compared to the 24/7 availability of FDWs. In Singapore, home support workers charge at least SGD \$20 per hour and

³⁴ Singapore and Canadian Dollars have negligible exchange rate differences: SGD \$1 : CAD \$1.01 (as of April 2024).

well over \$1600 per month on a five day per week, four hours per day schedule (Evelyn, 2 December 2021). Furthermore, these services are restricted to only caregiving, but most households need and want general house chores covered too. Professional cleaning services are “actually not cheaper than support care”, and cost anywhere from SGD \$70 to \$100 per day (Siok Pin, 14 December 2021). In other words, not hiring FDWs costs families almost two times more and imposes additional time constraints that “increases the burden for usually female family members” (Grace). Consistent with existing studies during the pandemic, I found that employers were prepared for a range of “hidden costs” (Koh, 2022): airfare tickets, biannual medical examinations, orientation and settling-in program fees, work permit processing costs, monthly healthcare insurance, and COVID-19 related expenses. Despite these, my interviewees concurred that “The math doesn’t add up, you see, it’s a no-brainer there: you get the foreign worker.” (Siok Pin, 14 December 2021). As Wei Dong said, “No matter what, there is nothing that compares to hiring someone at home for such a low cost”.

Even Heidi, a Taiwanese family caregiver who went out of her way to locate a suitable nursing home (in Chapter Three), could not prevent the “eventually inevitable” decision to “settle for” a live-in caregiver after numerous lengthy but futile attempts to locate a suitable nursing home. She was shocked to learn that “even the most expensive ones I visited (costing at least SGD \$3000 per month)” in central Taipei “admitted to using restraints” on dementia patients. Often, institutional staff were only willing to admit her father if she hired an Indonesian live-in caregiver to be by his bedside 24/7, as there is simply “no spare capacity to deal with his needs properly” (Heidi). This double hiring practice, as Kuan Long said, is a “technically illegal practice that the Taiwan government turns a blind eye to”. He was resigned to the reality that although the number of foreign workers cannot exceed half that of citizens (government

legislation), “there are simply no Taiwanese willing to do this job”. Many LTC institutions “have no choice but to heavily rely on Vietnamese, Indonesians, Myanmar, and Thai workers”; many are on live-in caregiver visas rather than institutional work permits (Kuan Long, 5 January 2022).

Silvia Federici notes that “it is also important to stress that most elderly people and families cannot afford hiring care-workers or paying for services matching their real need”. (Federici, 2014: 242). As Mary Romero’s contrast of the United States and Dubai (United Arab Emirates) finds, even the most politically disparate countries “adopt similar entry requirements” for migrant domestics that institutionalize asymmetrical bonds in employer sponsorship systems (Romero, 2018: 1180). In all cases, the social organization of care have “tracked poor, racial minority, and immigrant women into positions entailing caring for others” (Glenn, 2010: 5). That said, I conclude by pointing to the stigmatization and marginalization of elderly reproductive needs as a general problematic in care organization. What troubled the NGO workers handling labour disputes was the inability and/or unwillingness on the part of most employers to coral around common experiences of neglect in marketized eldercare regimes. As Untha lamented, “not all families who hire domestic workers are in a very good financial situation...they resent that their entire month’s salary goes to paying the worker...at the same time, this live-in format (*ru zhu xing shi*) is not the best for providing care, especially medically”. In keeping with the spirit of thinking intersectional lived experience as an unknowable and unpredictable “bundle of journeys geared toward social transformation” (Dhamoon, 2023: 162), this chapter has focused on the structural elements of coercion that affect how the individuals in the next few chapters go about care and caring. The macro-framework of gendered-racialized women (Glenn, 2010) helps us understand the division of labour in care work for the eldercare regimes in question.

Overall, Singapore's eldercare is encompassed within a financialized healthcare regime based on self-help, individual consumption, and savings potential geared toward national economic goals. In contrast, Taiwan's awkward status in international diplomacy coupled with its mixed colonial legacies contribute to a marked hesitancy toward care marketization. Still, Taiwan's LTC system, especially since political democratization in the early 2000s (Hsu, 2021), has gravitated toward its counterpart's "avowedly capitalist" style where high-cost, low-quality healthcare prevails (Wijeysingha, 2005: 188). The role of human agency in shaping the eldercare regime's trajectory through consumption patterns, as Peng (2018) argues, deserves greater attention as it is also in human reactions and responses where transition points (alternative choices) can be forged. That is, state power is usually emphasised in discussions of East Asian welfare regimes and a popular 'all in the family' (anti-welfare) mentality (Chen, 2016; Liang, 2021; Teo, 2018). But while these institutional policies may look path-dependent and largely determined by government actors' interactions, the bargains and choices made when people consume care resources also reproduces care relations.

From this above perspective, embodied tensions in care itself as a concept, ethics, and practice in everyday life is a fruitful domain from which to approach people's diverse meaning making practices (e.g. Raghuram, 2019: 613). Far less information exists on privatized negotiations over care, but coming to terms with its intonations of power allows for a fluid "care-ethical approach" to intersectional lives: one that acknowledges the "connections and movements through (macro, meso, and micro) scales and within them" in migrant care work (Williams, 2018: 550). Intersections (conceived as identity categories, like gender and race) can break down or do not account for a more complex "matrix of meaning-making" among marginalized groups (Dhamoon, 2019: 2); FDWs' resilient narrative of "we are the maid" in Chapter Four, for

instance, is one such matrix where boundary work needing its own expositions takes place. Hence, following the research interviews (see Introduction's positionality statement), I construct broader narratives about care ethics, morals, and what it means to care for a good life and interweave these themes into my later chapters as areas for further investigation in the intersectional care work literature (Hankivsky, 2014; Raghuram, 2019). Sha's opening words, for instance, was the tip of an iceberg of a larger narrative consisting of unreliable recruitment agencies, poor training standards, elderly abuse, and bad filial piety – what she called a “sad situation of old people here”. As Patricia Hill Collins (2015) observes of intersectionality's definitional dilemmas³⁵, intersectional lives are not composed of static identity categories that function in the same way across contexts or for people.

The FDWs in my study have no “unified and singular injustices” (Hankivsky and Dhamoon, 2013: 913), and differ in cultural exposure, social upbringing, socioeconomic status, religious affiliations, and ethical orientations toward care, among other areas. For example, race changes the meaning of care (Raghuram, 2019), but diverse FDWs experience racialized effects differently depending on nationality in particular and working destination; Taiwan's segregation of Indonesians (nationality is conflated with skin colour) into eldercare and Filipinos into housekeeping/childcare is an anomaly in the American-led preference for Filipinos (Choy, 2003). Some FDWs in the next chapter (e.g. Maylene and Desy) recognize that popular opinions of ‘Filipino’ vis-à-vis other nationalities of migrant workers often encourage ‘maids’ themselves

³⁵ Much of this research problematic lies in whether analysts treat intersectionality as an analytical requirement of institutional projects these days (e.g. Hankivsky and Dhamoon, 2013) or whether intersectionality is also viewed more deeply as capable of transcending the power relations it critiques (e.g. Cho et al., 2013; Dhamoon, 2023; May, 2012). From this view, intersectionality embodies the living thought experiments of those we encounter who seek social transformation. While it is impossible to arrive at clear answers of which intersecting dimensions matter more (ranking the variables), accounting for the historical inequities of knowledge claims (e.g. racial projects) is necessary before envisioning how our interlocutors may push past them (Collins, 2015). This analytical agenda would implicate how agency and resistance (e.g. in social movements) is understood for differentially empowered migrant workers, starting from redefining the political to account for power imbalances in migrant care work (see Chapters Four and Five).

to compete against one another through a simplistic self-racialization. As we will see, asking ‘maids’ about ‘race’ to some extent “participates in the very power relations that it (intersectionality) examines” (Collins, 2015: 3), hence the need to analyse Singapore’s and Taiwan’s imperial genealogies of racial configurations (see Chapter Two). Intersectionality perspectives in care work still tend to privilege certain lodestone identities without nuancing these enough from FDWs’ perspectives (e.g. Raghuram, 2019; Williams, 2018). That is, the myriad versions and visions of care that mobile carers embody go beyond mainstreamed identity cards. With these in mind, Chapter Two considers the macro-to-micro relevance of race in Singapore and Taiwan before turning to Chapter Three, which considers age as a political position in social reproduction theory. But first, a note on expropriation and age relations.

Expropriated care relations, not just expropriable racialized ‘maids’

Nancy Fraser has argued for a dynamic and more encompassing understanding of capitalist relations of exploitation that consider the overdetermined role of class (a Marxist intellectual legacy) and ongoing mutations of accumulation by dispossession. This view that “capitalism is racial capitalism from its inception” instead of the dual picture of haves and have-nots implied in Marx’s writings is not new (Byrd et al., 2018: 5). As Jodi Byrd and colleagues demonstrate in their account of predatory economies of dispossession, what is often left out by even so-called ‘progressive’ activist circles (e.g. the Marxist Left’s omission of eldercare in Federici, 2016) is a consideration of how old forms of appropriation³⁶ constantly evolve and alter care relations in our midst. The institutionalized aspirations of a national home ownership society

³⁶ Propriation, as a means of accumulation, is at heart about standards of properness. In liberal capitalism, propriety revolves around the property relation to nature and people (Byrd et al., 2018: 10); the idea that (non)humans can be commanded and owned by other people (economic actors) who have adequate financial means and market power. In this sense, scholars who see racial capitalism as living and breathing appropriations imagine alternative pathways of cooperation if land (and human bodies) are seen as a source of relationship building rather than an invitation to construct boundaries.

(Chua, 2015) is, in that sense, an example of social engineering into the norms of appropriation: anything and everything under the sun can be brought into the financialized systems of purchase and valuation of private property that now define human registers of giving and taking. In saying that labour is expropriated not just exploited, scholars understand capitalism not only in terms of Marx's political economy but as always already incorporating extra-economic background conditions of possibility; traditional ethical hierarchies of gender and age are constitutive of ongoing expropriations (e.g. Joyce and Mamo, 2013; Katz, 2001; Mezzadri, 2021).

Expropriation "confiscates capacities and conscripts them into capital's circuits of self-expansion" (Fraser, 2018: 4). For the 'maids' interviewed, this process is not blatantly violent but sugarcoated with uplifting promises of commercial sociality that still leave the women exposed with "a lack of recourse to political action" (Fraser, 2018: 7). At the same time, the specific pairings of vulnerable people (elderly and 'maids') enabled by the aforementioned policies throw up ethical conundrums that point to ongoing expropriations of care relations. Expropriation, in this sense, is particularly useful for drawing out those most blurry and muddy intangibles of dispossession that are far from 'dead'; often, these play on people's emotions in ways that feel discomfiting and unpleasant yet demand to be seen through. In Chapter Three, social ageism is not 'invented' by capitalism but rather reflects relations of expropriation that have negative implications for some family members more than others. The eldercare and family planning policies above are not just economically convenient strategies meant for different tiers of human capital (citizens and 'maids') but must also be analyzed for what else is being extracted (taken out) from human relationalities without as much conscious realization.

Taiwanese culture places a lot of attention on elderly people and there's a lot of LTC debates, but we should do more for our children... Obviously, those below 15 years and older than 65 years get the most attention in social welfare policy. Especially in the past ten years, our focus on old age care has been huge. But we have not actually been as active when it comes to policies about

giving birth. This is a very special problem (*hen te bie de wen ti*) because these groups don't have working capacity and need support: in welfare terms we call them the ones being taken care of. But they are also different; one is you can see the future. How should I put it?

Well... Taiwan's big problem is the population growth rate is really not there. Our newborns are far outnumbered by those dying (*sheng bu ru si*), which is very scary. And Taiwan's young people have a unique problem, which is "I don't want to have kids".

Kuan Long, Taiwanese LTC institution manager

At a layperson's level of popular media consumption, themes of child valorization and the touting of academically successful teenagers are innocently conveyed through humorous dramatizations of reality. To use a now ubiquitous cultural reference, Korean pop culture and television productions have taken the world by storm. In an opening scene of *Birthcare Center* (2020), set in a postpartum recovery facility, the main characters who are first-time parents jump exaggeratedly in an effort to dodge everybody else (a potential source of contamination and harm to their vulnerable new-born) once outside their impeccably sanitized suite. In an awkwardly satirical fashion, the new mother's own mother sneezes and the couple reels back in shock while shielding their new-born's face. The senior woman smiles apologetically before shuffling away: "It's better for me to leave". The remainder of this eight-episode series revolves around competitive peer pressure among a group of new mothers who squabble over the quality of breastmilk (e.g. comparing who produces the most and what nutrient composition theirs has) and bicker about whose husband has the best social capital to set their babies up for a promising corporate future. In *Sky Castle* (2018), one of the highest rated series in Korean cable television history, four sets of high-earning parents in an exclusive gated community do anything it takes for their children to succeed academically; an Ivy League degree is a most prized bragging asset. Viewers witness one teenage daughter faking a Harvard admission to placate her overbearing father and desperate parents resorting to underhand means (e.g. bribing university admission consultants) for a spot in a highly coveted institution. In yet another critically acclaimed series

and a household name in Singapore and Taiwan (Netflix audience), *Green Mothers' Club* (2022), five mothers in a prestigious elementary school community engage in endless displays of top subject scorers (when it is their own child) and boast about the brownie points they earned as parent volunteers. The list goes on. Such caricatured acts of competitive parenting have parallels with American movies such as *Your Place or Mine* (2023), where Peter (Ashton Kutcher) tells Debbie (Reese Witherspoon) that she ought to let go of that “saran wrap parenting”; an extreme manifestation of the well-known ‘helicopter parenting’ trend.

Chapter Three looks at instances of intensive parenting through education as care labour in Singapore and Taiwan (Teo, 2018), which is part of a global trend of ‘parental involution’ (Katz, 2018). Child-centric ideologies and divisions of community labour are an age-old custom but take on distinct commercialized qualities that have adversely impacted contemporary senior cohorts. Distinct from Lee Edelman’s existential reproductive futurism³⁷ (e.g. Evans, 2014) expressed through the child’s body, the people interviewed relate better to competitive parenting anxieties about children becoming a potential waste or failed investment. As I note later, Southeast Asian states such as Singapore and Taiwan are popular sites of ‘discretionary mothering’ (Yeoh and Huang, 2010: 32) in implementations of universal higher education and an affective longing to instill a sense of certainty through emotional and material investments in children’s future. In discretionary or selective mothering, a couple’s financial ability to afford a ‘maid’ is praised precisely because it allows mothers to offload the ‘dirty’ custodial care and concentrate on their child’s psychological development. Cleaning up after infants is often seen as

³⁷ American Studies Scholars refer to this term as a broader social process of channeling a cultural fantasy of an undying self (denial of death) through the communal duty of reproducing children: a personal (patrilineal and male-centered) legacy (e.g. Evans, 2014: 307). The child offers a solution for adults to cope with existential uncertainties and to deny the inevitable trauma of death by channeling those insecurities into collective child-centrism (Edelman in Evans, 2014: 309). Critical race views point to reproductive futurism’s gendered assumptions (e.g. mothers are natural caretakers) and implied white supremacist beliefs in the “racial valence of slavery” (Evans, 2014: 308).

one such aspect of ‘dirty’ care that is necessary but ideally not what highly educated working (or stay-at-home) mothers should be preoccupied with. In Chapter Three, one Singaporean working mother has their FDW supervise her son’s shower and meals (“he’s a slow worker”) to ensure he makes time for homework and tuition classes. She directs her energies³⁸ into keeping in touch with her child’s performance in school and looking out for good tutor recommendations.

From an expropriation perspective of human caring capacities, this state of affairs preconditions how people can relate to care activities that are distinct but nonetheless equally necessary for life to continue. How are people expected to make sense of care activities that are an inherent part of our corporeal neediness vis-à-vis educational rearing in such scenarios? Raising successful children in Singapore where competitive education systems reign supreme, as Kristina Goransson (2015) finds in her interviews with working parents, is not unique to the Chinese middle-class families in this city-state. Kuan Long, the Taiwanese LTC facility manager quoted above, was sneaking glances at his eight-year-old son who was “supposed to be doing homework but is more interested in playing with his sister” as we spoke. As a key institutional actor in Taiwan’s eldercare regime who participates in LTC planning (see p. 29 above), Kuan Long is well aware of the government’s “favouritism of Taiwanese care workers” that causes “LTC institutions like mine to suffer”. As he explains, the fact is “we have no choice but to hire many Vietnamese and Thai people (illegally) off the record” – no formal documentation is issued

³⁸ Pel’s household kitchen was stocked with artisan groceries from high-end organic food stores. While tutoring Kayden, I overheard Pel giving their helper instructions about food preparation strategies for added hygiene, nutrition, and “less risk of upsetting Kayden’s sensitive stomach”. The aspect of organic farm-to-table consumption, including an increasing buying in of ‘eco-green’, ‘natural’, or ‘cleaner’ food and household products in general, is a behavioral trend among anxious parents that centers more heavily around biophysical wellbeing. In *Raising Global Families*, Pei-Chia Lan (2018) compares the parenting strategies of Taiwanese parents in the United States and in Taiwan. Apart from chasing a Western-centric curriculum (e.g. Wharton and Montessori-branded schools), she finds some overlaps with eco-anxiety (climate change-induced uncertainties) and a general sense of existential crises that drives people’s efforts to reclaim food consumption. More Taiwanese parents are opting for rural living in favour of its serene environments and farming for children’s formative growth compared to fast-paced urban lifestyles.

and salary payments are informally settled – because “there simply aren’t enough Taiwanese”. Both ‘maids’ and study mothers (*pei du mama*) in immigration policy – targeted at mostly mainland Chinese in Singapore and Filipino or Vietnamese migrant mothers in Taiwan – reflects the coming together of racism against female care workers and global practices of childhood as a site of accumulation (e.g. Katz, 2001, 2018; Lan, 2019; Teo, 2022; Yeoh and Huang, 2010a).

In establishing an intimate connection between expropriation and racial oppression, Fraser (2018: 13) observes that “countless generations of postcolonials are condemned to expropriation, some long before they are born”. Another illustration of such processes of confiscated-and-conscripted human capacities is given by Sarah Bracke’s unpacking of resilience (an internalized subjectivity) of mostly Global South populations who are trained to view overseas migration as a ‘necessary evil’ (Bracke, 2016b: 852). The FDWs interviewed have been schooled to rationalize their humiliating ‘maid’ status as an utmost economic necessity to justify tolerating even the most dangerous or even life-threatening circumstances (e.g. “mentally *siap* (ready for anything)” in Chee, 2020: 367). In an evolving landscape of expropriation, however, citizen actors (Singaporean and Taiwanese domestic employers) are not as cushioned or protected by competition-inducing capitalist states as many would like to believe. Recall the Taiwanese who complained about LTC’s predatory financial requirements: “in the past it was a flat fee system (pay by hour) but now we have to pay by each service item” (Heidi). Also consider one Singaporean caregiver who observed that the state’s means assessment covers mostly the “truly destitute” but not the “majority of people who are middling” (Siok Pin in Chapter Three), most of whom are increasingly subject to exploitation in an ad-hoc gig economy. The normalization of side hustling work culture – where one pursues other income-generating channels in their spare time to get by – is most acute among single and low-income mothers in

Singapore (Teo, 2015, 2018). In Taiwan, NGO workers allude to “the expropriated-and-exploited citizen-worker” who labours in “formally free, but acutely vulnerable” conditions (Fraser, 2018: 13). Alongside an expansive understanding of capitalism as an always adapting accumulation by other means (not yet theoretically established or socially recognized) also comes an elastic view of racial oppression as not just about a ‘maid’s’ unfortunate fate.

For many of my interviewees, the boundaries between ‘maids’ racist subjugation and their economic precarity are more slippery than is comfortable enough to admit. An expropriated status may seem more obvious for ‘maids’ as the human ‘subjects’ of care labour migration. But expropriation also happens to the care relations among family members. The idea of confiscated-and-conscripted capacities to care is illuminating in scenarios where young and older persons are each taught to accept a certain set of pre-defined roles that shape age relations and expectations in the moralizing dimensions of neoliberal migration. At one point, Wei Dong spoke of a larger sense of disenchantment and jadedness among younger generations of Taiwanese who feel that reproduction (marriage and bearing children) are not attractive or enticing prospects. In fact, posterity may be a hard sell or even undoable in the modern economic climate.

“I can use my situation as an example. I’m not married and don’t have children so I don’t have these woes. I’d say for people of my generation (mid-40s), it’s quite common to see one’s parents being economically more well off than ourselves. If my parents need financial support, some of my income will go to them and I might choose not to have children...If my parents have enough to take care of their retirement expenses and I also happen to have enough to get a house, I might choose to spend any spare money on married life and having children. I think it’s this kind of situation...I don’t think it’s an investment value decision of whether children or elderly is more ‘worth it’: I am coerced to make those decisions”.

Wei Dong, Hope Workers’ Centre

Still, in KL’s above comment, expropriation for market ends may be dominant in capitalism but people’s desire for intergenerational posterity through perpetuating the family legacy in reproducing the population goes beyond plain dollars and sense. Put another way, my

interviewees may sound primarily oriented toward economic cost-and-benefit analysis of reproductive life choices but also belie more complex positionalities that are not so easily expressed. I sensed from Kuan Long, for instance, a raw human desire for one's "personal and family legacy to continue (*yi ge ren he jia ting de chi xu*)" that spills past monetary concerns, even if pragmatic phrasing seems to override: "I would say the issue of whether young people want to have children is far more difficult but significant for Taiwanese than how much we invest into LTC" (Kuan Long). In that regard, capitalism cannot be identified with "an official economy" (e.g. Fraser, 2018: 13) but metamorphoses alongside financial entanglements with extra-economic dimensions of human life as people cope with monetized formats of engagement.

As Wei Dong said, "There are many people who want children just because (*jiu shi xiang yao*). It brings a different meaning to life. Who can deny that? It's just that if say my own wage cannot support a family, a lot of people would choose to not get married or get married but not have children". This same NGO worker also made references to the social harms elicited by pairing vulnerable groups of elderly citizens with 'maids' (see p. 49 above). In a similar vein, his NGO counterparts (e.g. Untha and Jaya) saw that any chance of liberation (in citizen employer to 'maid' dynamics) lie in combined struggles against unreasonable work-life demands rather than mutual antagonization. Beyond explicit instances of racialization, then, also worth considering are expropriations of human capacities in unfolding care relations in our midst.

Conclusion: Finding an intersectional passage into age relations

"People go to a nursing home and it is not unheard for them to be diagnosed with or develop dementia. The institutional condition³⁹ itself is a big trigger...there's some integration of depression. Because I'm in this particular sector itself, my greatest fear is putting him (my

³⁹ Television presenter Anita Kapoor experienced living in a Singapore nursing home for two weeks, and can be seen numerous times in tears: I did not prepare myself for how bad that actually was." (Courtesy of Lien Foundation: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=unsO_yLHghs). Some studies find that well over one-fifth of nursing home residents had clinical depression. The largest risk factors are: lack of social contact, prior mental illnesses, and staying above two years (Tiong et al., 2013: 728).

father) inside a nursing home. Because I know what it is like to be there, and I'm not convinced even the best is good enough".

Gabriel, Lien Foundation Singapore, 10 November 2022

Especially in Singapore, the state's pragmatic *modus operandi* infuses the planning of aging infrastructures and prioritizes functionality over human aspirations. In fact, Singapore's nursing homes come under the *Private Hospitals and Medical Clinics Act*, which approaches elderly persons from a "medicalized" perspective – i.e. the management of sick people – even if the majority do not require bed-bound care (Basu, 2016: 64). Nonetheless, in both locations, people identified a causal relationship between elderly institutionalization and the onset of depression. Time and again, family caregivers described how visit after visit only confirmed that nursing homes "are not an option" because there was no humane touch: "after seeing quite a few we just felt depressed, so definitely no." (Pel, 5 February 2022). Pik Wan (30 November, 2021), also in Chapter Three, echoed that it was "never an option from the start": "She's still perfectly lucid, I don't think I could (send her in) because she would really go into depression, right?"

One particular version of intersectional identity (prioritizing gender and race as structural forces) tends to overshadow other possible forms of social relations and subjectivity in research with FDWs (Hankivsky, 2014; Williams, 2018). But a few women interviewed raise questions about care relations that have not yet been thought of in equal measure. Building on the view that "the new frontier of work-family conflict involves care for elderly and disabled kin" (Glenn, 2010: 3), I see age relations as a spectral aspect of intersectional lived experience. It was from some FDWs who gushed as passionately about elderly abuse as labour rights violations where I got the idea to pursue some less explored themes, such as age relations and resilience, in intersectional lived experience. But before that, let us consider how localized configurations of "race" in Singapore and Taiwan profoundly affect the lives of FDWs and ordinary citizens.

Chapter Two Taken Over by Development: Porous Races and Racialization

Introduction

“I believe we Filipinos are more aware of our rights than other race. For example, because of the pandemic my boss was preventing me from taking off day, worrying that I might get COVID outside. So I have to argue that it’s not fair. I only have off on Sunday but I go out during the week for groceries and to pick up the kids. What’s the difference between those days and my only rest on Sunday? He would say I might get it in the bus or even in Grab (taxi), which is ridiculous, because the kids are always taking Grab and their play dates that come to our place all come by Grab. I have to mention all those to make him realise I know my rights.”

Irene⁴⁰, Filipino FDW in Singapore

“Everything is up to the employer, right? Whether we finish the contract or not. But sometimes, as a Filipino or whatever the race is here to work, sometimes we *tahan* (bear; endure; tolerate; ‘stick it out’) our work to have a good record you know. For two years, we will *tahan* our employer.”

Maylene, Filipino FDW in Singapore

In this chapter, I illustrate an analytical framework of “Porous Races” as a contribution to the FPE literature on care work in the context of Singapore’s and Taiwan’s care labour migration. I draw inspiration from Ann Laura Stoler’s observation in colonial Southeast Asia that “racial categories are porous and protean” at the same time (Stoler, 1992: 536). Although her usage of this phrase was directed at obvious colour differences among the colonized in French Indochina and the Netherlands Indies, its meaning still applies to postcolonial Southeast Asia where Euro-American multicultural ideology in state nationalism has taken root (Stoler, 1992: 545-550). Porous in this sense implies the presence of bottom-up rebellion, meaning to say processes of racialization⁴¹ and racial categories are never fully secure and are always prone to unexpected interferences by less powerful actors. My invocation of porous races is keeping in

⁴⁰ The people quoted significantly in this chapter are three FDWs (Irene, 4 October 2021, Maylene, 6 June 2021, and Desy, 10 June 2021), two NGO workers (Lynn Koi and Fatimah interviewed together on 21 September 2021), and one domestic employer (Phyllis, 15 October 2021) in Singapore. I also quote two NGO workers in Taiwan (Untha, 2 December 2021 and Wei Dong, 18 January 2022).

⁴¹ Race and racialization are intertwined in real life. But for analytical purposes, I use ‘race’ for established categories of human difference (“structuring principles”) and ‘racialization’ for its processual aspects, such as the ongoing social constructions and fabrications of said differences (Ang, 2022: 757; Dikotter, 2008).

mind that hegemony is never complete for “where there is power, there is resistance” (Foucault in Hoang, 2017: 8). However, as this chapter’s title suggests, I situate this phrase in the confines of Singapore’s and Taiwan’s chase for economic development (see Chapter One). As I illustrate later, the politics of racialization in labour migration policy hinges more on bargaining within the competitive relations of ‘personhood’, where consumption and wealth are central to ideas of valuation and human worth, rather than colour tropes (Ho and Kathiravelu, 2022: 637). Processes of racialization are formative to care labour migration (Glenn, 2010) and at the regional level, feed into nationalist guest worker policies across East Asia’s eldercare institutions (Peng, 2018). But among my interviewees, explicit invocations of ‘race’ is largely an absent narrative. Only three FDWs in Singapore and none in Taiwan mentioned ‘race’. When probed further, two Singaporean NGO workers referred to the racialization of migrant workers as part of national economic priorities, while no Taiwanese did so. How can we make sense of this disjuncture between the analytical salience of race as a structuring principle and its apparent irrelevance in everyday conversation? For the few people who did talk about ‘race’, however briefly, in what circumstances and for what purposes did they do so?

Conversing with existing studies of FDWs’ self-racialization (e.g. Paul, 2011; Soco, 2011), I argue that race at this microlevel of personal interaction in care labour migration (see Williams, 2018: 550) can only be invoked by the women from a subordinate position of structural vulnerability. Considering FDWs’ narratives more expansively, I suggest that the domain of care itself is a more fruitful and representative arena for political resistance and anti-racist relationships than intellectualizations of race in theory and practice (see Chapters Four and Five). In other words, for the FDWs interviewed, interlocking effects of race and care (e.g. Raghuram, 2016) are more prominent in lived experience than an identity politics of race (see p.

86). Hence additional methodological caveats of ‘race’ as a travelling concept between differentially powerful actors are needed to qualify FDWs’ ability to negotiate with race as a (discursive to material) form of resistance. My usage of ‘porous’ is ambivalent about the extent to which researchers can identify solid claims to knowledge making by less powerful actors who cannot predict when, where, in what ways, and for what purposes they activate ‘race’.

The FDWs I spoke to work with a learned knowledge of the host society’s racial capital, here referring to how migrant workers are racialized differently depending on place of birth (‘origin’) and occupational sector, among other indicators. The women quickly realize that racial effects are experienced through subtexts of modernity, such as technical skills, standards of remuneration, and even how they should care for elderly patients (see Chapters Three to Five). In that sense, I provide some nuances to the conceptual and empirical assumption that FDWs can actively partake in their own versions of racial projects (on an equal footing) vis-à-vis employers and other migrant workers. Bringing in the imperial legacies of power relationships in Southeast Asia’s races without racism (Velayutham, 2017: 458), I complicate the existing consensus in the care migration literature (not yet unpacked) that FDWs’ participation in race as a “defensive strategy” (Paul, 2011: 1071) is a legitimate indicator of the women’s subjectivity; a sign of complicity or even perpetration of racial stereotypes that reinforce white imperial legacies.

As noted above, race was always already porous in colonial Southeast Asia where British discourses of multiculturalism for industrial market purposes took hold (Stoler, 1992). But the typical Singaporean and Taiwanese mentality of multiculturalism in their postcolonial climate of a superdiverse population (Goh, 2019) committed to formal state institutions of equality manages to be racist while disavowing racism and the reality of ‘race’ in its disparaging forms (Velayutham, 2017: 458). Other comparative race scholars have commented likewise in

Singapore and Taiwan with respect to other state-endorsed (economic) multiracial projects (e.g. Ang et al., 2022; Ho and Kathiravelu, 2022). In both locations, pragmatic cost-benefit analysis of labour migration to maximise economic output, especially in guest worker policies (e.g. Lee, 2019), takes center stage ahead of racialization per se. At an everyday level, people relate to race with self-congratulatory attitudes of embracing or tolerating diversity rather than with derisive categories. What can migrant actors, who are protagonists rather than heroes or victims (see Chapter Five), teach analysts about the circulation of race? This question cannot be answered without at least a general understanding of ongoing processes of racial capitalism in our locations of interest. At the macro global level, formative inequities built on racist foundations were formalized through the United Nation's post-war modern state system (Getachew, 2019). This mode of international disciplining was, in more cases than not, experienced as a hegemonic coercion to assimilate into a standard format of political community for market ends.

“We ask ourselves, what is a Singaporean? In the first place, we did not want to be Singaporeans. We wanted to be Malaysians. Then the idea was extended and we decided to become Malaysians. But twenty-three months of Malaysia – a traumatic experience for all parties in Malaysia – ended rather abruptly with our being Singaporeans”.

Lee Kuan Yew, late Prime Minister and Minister Mentor of Singapore (Hill and Lian, 1995: 12)

“Under these circumstances, there thus emerged among the Taiwanese a new question: What does it mean to be “Taiwanese”? Note that at this time the Taiwanese were facing the humiliating fate of having formerly been under the domination of an alien nation (Japan), and now becoming dominated by the Chinese nation. Put another way, in the Japanese period, Taiwanese were like the “marginal man” who had no individual dignity.”

Lee Teng Hui (2014: 20), late Former President of the ROC

Singapore's and Taiwan's incumbent leaders perceived the global systemic integration into nation-states – the political culture *sine qua non* – as a *fait accompli* to be dealt with. The question of national identity in postcolonial Southeast Asia is hence interwoven with the post-war climate of racial hierarchies; white settler colonial states at the top, the fledging nations of Southeast Asia in the middle, and African and Latin American nations at the bottom (Archarya,

2022: 36; Getachew, 2019; Takezawa, 2015; Stoler, 2010). Crucially, the *raison d'être* of catch-up⁴² development for newly independent states, i.e. becoming more modern than one's colonial masters, was and continues to be a key form of anti-colonial resurgence. The above words by Lee Kuan Yew and Lee Teng Hui reflect case-specific experiences with the national identity question and state formation⁴³. Still, in both cases, the non-negotiable pressures of chasing economic development amidst intensifying market competition override political considerations of 'race' in policy (inferred from Chan and Lan, 2022; Ho and Kathiravelu, 2021; Lee, 2019). That said, the connections between Euro-American racism and localized racial configurations⁴⁴ that emerge in national social welfare planning have not received that much scrutiny (Acharya, 2022: 24). Southeast Asia's gendered and racialized labour migration in '3Ds' (dirty, dangerous, and demeaning) sectors cannot be analyzed as an independent economic domain. Rather, state-endorsed 'foreign maid' immigration policies go hand in hand with racialized framings of the population's social reproduction, especially for the 'ideal' nuclear family (Teo and Piper, 2009).

On that note, the rest of this chapter proceeds in the following manner. Drawing on the emerging literature on 'new racisms' in Asia, the next section presents racialized Chineseness as

⁴² A co-eval or plural modernities approach points to the affective and emotional dimensions of modernity in its most banal forms, e.g. street signs, fashion trends, and product advertisements. For Harry Harootunian (2019), Japan's experience with Western imperial trauma has triggered a sort of reactive drive to industrial modernization of a qualitatively distinct nature worthy of its own explication (e.g. Nakano, 2004; Sakai, 2010). Despite the significant role of Asian empires with their own versions of state racism, at the emotional level, people cannot easily dissociate with binary orderings of West/Rest and white/non-white when dealing with modernity as a general problematic in social life.

⁴³ Singapore was a product of free port trading under the British Empire while Taiwan experienced interchanging Asian imperial (Japanese and Chinese) state rule. Singapore experienced a brief merger with Malaysia from 1963-1965 that ended abruptly with its precarious emergence as an 'unlikely' island-state without a nation (Hill and Lian, 1995: 12). In contrast, Japan's introduction of a *de-facto* functioning state in colonial Taiwan is formative for the materialization of Taiwanese identity. Unlike their senior predecessors who proclaimed loyalty to mainland China, many second-generation islanders found a distinct sense of cultural identity, having been given a "semi-peripheral status" relative to the Japanese imperium yet "superior to China" (Chu and Lin, 2001: 112). Taiwanese claims of independence today stand at odds with Beijing's one-China demand.

⁴⁴ I elaborate more on this below when discussing Singapore's and Taiwan's care labour migration in a context of racial nationalism (racialized Chineseness). FPE scholars situate everyday narratives of race observed among ordinary citizens and migrant workers in the larger backdrop of white imperial legacy types in Southeast Asia (Amrith, 2010; Loveband, 2004; Paul, 2011; Soco, 2011; Lan, 2019).

a key feature of Singapore's and Taiwan's national identity, albeit with key differences in political institutions and state recognition. Here, I touch on Japan's and China's imperial role in constructing hierarchies among 'Asian races' for the purposes of industrial modernization. This topic is important for two reasons. Firstly, racial capital theorists have tended to favour Anglophone experiences despite the significant contributions of Asian empires⁴⁵ to the worldliness of race (Shih, 2008). The Japanese Emporium's settler colonial expansion throughout Southeast Asia was formative for affirming an unconscious bias of white supremacy in Social Darwinist promulgations. At least on paper, examples abound of Japanese and Chinese imperial officials who "uncritically adopted the racial hierarchy of Europe and America" (Takezawa, 2015: 17). Although the agency of race as resistance⁴⁶ by Asian empires is more complex than that, competitive interactions to lead modernization always already embody a (catch-up) version of development that privilege Western typologies of race (Getachew, 2019; Kowner and Demel, 2015; Takezawa and Tanabe, 2023). Hence secondly and more crucially for the people in this chapter, I argue that the imperial continuities of "racial nationalism"⁴⁷ supersede 'race' such that country names, for instance, appear innocent but swallow colonial racism in its diverse manifestations. I then turn to race and care as an interactive unit in labour

⁴⁵ Japanese literary critic Kato Shuichi (in Takezawa, 2015: 8) notes the prevalence of cross-cultural translations of words to describe 'race' between America, Europe, Japan, and China during the 1850s-70s. For accounts of Japanese colonial governance through interethnic marriage in Taiwan, see Matsuda Kyoko (2003) and Paul Barclay (2005).

⁴⁶ At the macro state level, Yasuko Takezawa defines race as resistance as: "the use of race as a discursive strategy to expose existing (or contemporary) racial discrimination...and to put identity politics into operation" (Takezawa, 2005: 9). Japan's historically formative role in refashioning Social Darwinist texts and China's strategic appropriation of Chinese racial identity for regional hegemony are key exemplars. See the edited volume *Race and Migration in the Transpacific* (Takezawa and Tanabe, 2023) for detailed case by case breakdowns.

⁴⁷ I borrow this term from Shih's (2016: 150) discussion of Cold War models of post-war development in the 1960s wave of decolonization. Although she does not define this, she closely follows Chakrabarty's (2005) critique of Euro-American imperial race categories in the modern state order (Ibid). Whiteness remains a globally circulating value while newly formed states have become guilty of perpetuating their own forms of racism through state institutions; Chinese ethnic hegemony in China's racial nationalism is a case in point (Cheng, 2019). For Singapore and Taiwan then, I use racial nationalisms to refer to the fusion of a racialized understanding of Chineseness with national identity.

migration policy for FDWs. The final section revisits this chapter's opening quotes and outlines a methodological caveat to 'race' that considers its power-laden invocation.

Varieties of Racialized Chineseness (racial nationalisms) in racial capitalism

A few attempts to pull out an "Asian narrative of this big picture (of race)" (Ang, 2022: 759) have been simmering subtly (e.g. Takezawa, 2005, 2015) but gained significant traction amidst the pandemic's ongoing politics of sanitization (Chan and Lan, 2022; Cheng, 2022). Today, China's strategic appropriation of a 'Third World' status (e.g. Shih, 2016: 150) in projections of Chinese ethnic hegemony is key in the racialized understanding of Chineseness (Cheng, 2019) carried in the names 'Singapore' and 'Taiwan'. During my research interviews, fears of China's (Han Chinese) racial chauvinism were (and still are) running high in Taiwanese society. NGO workers there were frustrated about policy roadblocks caused by Taiwan's entrapment between American global hegemony and Beijing's one-China demand. As one interviewee said, "the government has pressure to curry favour with America, and this Taiwan-is-a-part-of-China issue" (Untha). On the other hand, Singaporeans have never registered similar concerns about encroached political autonomy. This crucial difference of international state recognition (and the lack thereof, in Taiwan's case) enables the Singapore government to maintain its geopolitically neutral stance on China's meteoric rise. Taiwan, however, remains trapped in a diplomatic impasse between American hegemony and Beijing's one-China demand (Chun, 2022; Dittmer, 2004). Taiwanese interviewees (e.g. Untha) were quick to point out that Taiwan's global invisibility in the international system compromises its citizens' (their) access to ideas of Chinese ethnic supremacy. Still, Chinese ethnic hegemony is a conditioning force of both Singapore's and Taiwan's racial dynamics. Taiwan's experiences with Japanese settler

colonialism and its marked emphasis on genetic (bloodline⁴⁸) lineage among peoples who otherwise looked the same – so-called ‘invisible’ differences (Takezawa, 2015) – makes for an intriguing contrast of racialization. Furthermore, a transimperial view of British Singapore’s and Japanese-Chinese Taiwan’s racial configurations brings together a diverse set of imperial actors for a fuller appreciation of post-war racial nationalisms.

The edited volume *Histories of Racial Capitalism* is one of the few in its field to consciously tread beyond a traditional bias toward European white settler colonial expansion in the Americas and Atlantic slave regimes. Its editors, Destin Jenkins and Justin Leroy, ask at its outset: “how well does the concept of racial capitalism travel to various global contexts?” (Jenkins and Leroy, 2021: 16). Most relevant to the people living in Singapore and Taiwan is the small but significant conversation around state projects of racialized Chineseness that can be traced back to longer genealogies of Japanese imperial racial taxonomies (Ang, 2022; Dikotter, 2008; Shih, 2008). Japan has a historically prominent role in constructing hybrids of European scientific racial categories – often downplayed in the literature (Kowner and Demel, 2015). European scientists had formalized the monolithic classification of a “yellow race”, but the Japanese resisted with claims of cultural superiority in “Japanese blood” over other Asians (Ang, 2022: 761). Had I not ended up with Taiwan as an ‘accidental’ research location instead of the

⁴⁸ Taiwanese society exhibits significant vestiges of biological and primordial aspects of Chinese racial supremacy. Although multicultural discourses of Taiwanese identity dominate media framings (Lan, 2019), some in the population science community have argued that “Taiwanese” is defined by “Minnan and Hakka ethnic groups” who are descendants of an “ancient Yueh” community indigenous to China’s south-eastern coast, and also ancestors of the Singapore and Thai Chinese (Liu, 2010: 246). Such narratives are part of a broader stem cell geneticist movement that asserts a distinct Taiwanese blood lineage, in contrast to China’s ethnic claim of “a common ancestral, territorial, and cultural origin...traceable back to Huang Di, the Yellow Emperor, and spatialized on the Central Plains of northern China” (Liu, 2010: 242). Marie Lin and colleagues at Taipei’s Mackay Memorial Hospital have used human leukocyte antigen (HLA) techniques to separate the “core genetic foundation” of Taiwanese descendants from Han Chinese (Liu, 2010: 246). Despite self-identifying with Aboriginal ancestry, multicultural Taiwanese identity does not break away with a Han Chinese settler colonial heritage that sees darker-skinned Indonesians as lacking (e.g. Lan, 2019: 326).

originally planned Hong Kong and Singapore, both previous British Crown Colonies, there might have been no need to venture significantly into Japanese variants of racism. But Meiji Japan's imperial racial taxonomies, themselves dynamic responses to the trauma of Western colonial domination, have left stronger imprints on Taiwan's social fabric.

While Singapore's multiculturalism is historically affiliated with the British Constitution, contemporary Taiwanese understandings of race and population diversity have a longer genealogy in the political rivalry between "a declining Qing Empire" and the Japanese Emporium (Kyoko, 2003: 181). Here, Yasuko Takezawa's race as resistance⁴⁹ is apt for illustrating the porous uptake of racial schemas in Asian imperial state economic competition, especially among co-ethnics (e.g. Ang et al., 2022; Goh, 2019; Hirano, 2023; Raghuram, 2022). With particular emphasis on Japanese variants of racism, race as resistance points to instances where minorities who are negatively racialized "mobilize racial identities within a repertoire of several other possible identities" as a way of asserting political agency against colonial hegemony (Takezawa and Tanabe, 2023: 5). Such discursive wars, encapsulated in Japan's and China's positive spin on 'yellow races', are major cases in point (Takezawa, 2015). In today's Singapore and Taiwan, state-endorsed Chinese privilege⁵⁰ is mediated by different colonial

⁴⁹ Race as resistance is the third component of Takezawa's three-dimensional framework. The first, lower-case 'race', is used to refer to customary forms of differentiation in indigenous cultures where ascribed ("inherited and unalterable" social hierarchies prevail (Takezawa and Tanabe, 2023: 5). Prior to the formal institutionalization of modern states, Japanese historians have identified instances where "the concept has emerged without any modern Western influence" (Ibid), such as in Kyoko (2003) and Hirano (2023). Upper-case 'Race', the second dimension, marks a crucial turning point where the *fait accompli* of country names began taking hold in global race and relations. Western colonial racism mobilized the armed tools of scientific mapping to classify people by "racial ancestry", giving rise to labels such as "Caucasian", "Mongolian", and "African/Ethiopian" (Takezawa and Tanabe, 2023: 5). These dimensions are empirically intertwined in reality but framed as useful analytical constructs to illustrate the complexity in 'race'.

⁵⁰ Following a relational comparative approach (see Introduction), I do not see Chinese privilege as similar, much less equivalent, to white supremacy (see Sai Siew Min, 2021). Ideas of Chineseness that propel citizen privilege are informed by a visibly racialized understanding of 'yellow' peoples that follow transatlantic racial stereotypes, ideas of the 'Asian' model minority, and the like (Goh, 2019). The absence of robust public debates of Han settler encounters and imperial genealogies of 'Chineseness' sanctions a qualitative ignorance about its racial effects against Taiwanese Aborigines, as well as Malays, Indians, and Other 'races' in Singapore (Velayutham, 2017).

legacies, political culture and institutions, and contemporary statehood. While accounts of race as resistance are important for the agency of postcolonial leaders and ordinary citizens (albeit constrained by Beijing’s one-China demand), the backdrop of Cold War lineages in Singapore’s and Taiwan’s normative acceptance of ‘development’ deserve greater reflection.



Photo source: Taken by the author in Taroko National Park, Hualien county, Taiwan (26 April 2023). Shakadang trail cuts through aboriginal reserve land. People of the Taroko tribe transport goods on motorcycles along narrow pathways “to make a living”. But according to park authorities, their livelihood activities are an “inconvenience to visitors” and should be kept out of sight as much as possible.

Unlike Singapore’s experiences as an exploitation colony under British indirect rule (Lowrie, 2018), the vestiges of Japanese and Han Chinese settler colonial occupation can be observed in Taiwan’s highland areas. In high tourist traffic areas such as this one I visited,

aboriginal communities are instructed to stay out of sight from visitors and tour groups. Similar to European settler colonial expansion, Japanese mobilization of racial constructs were invested in optimizing the quality of living labour power, namely by effectively operationalizing said racial categories to maximize the subjugates' economic productivity. During the early 1900s, civil administrator Goto Shimpei wrote of Taiwan's Indigenous peoples as "uncivilized savages" compared to the Han Chinese population "who live in the developed part of the island" (Kyoko, 2003: 183). As Katsuya Hirano writes of Japanese settler colonialism in today's Hokkaido, at least two layers of encounters informed its "politics of racialization" and the consequent "ranking and categorization of human beings...based on perceived innate abilities derived from particular physical traits" (Hirano, 2023: 24). These were first the interactions between Wajin (Japanese) settlers and Indigenous Ainu, and second between North American settler colonial expansion and Meiji Japan's experiments with emigration policy. The strategic utility of Ainu labour power for the total mobilization of Japanese economic productivity would eventually motivate their shift in status from disposable ("vanishing race") to useful bodies (Hirano, 2023: 32), so long as they exhibited the qualities of an acculturated and loyal imperialistic subject. Meiji Japanese authorities reacted hostilely to doctrines of white supremacy but retained "the notion of historical progress and the Lockean conception of *terra nullius*" that relegated the Ainu to a backward category of peoples who needed schooling on "the system of private property and desire for it as the driving force behind civilizational progress" (Ibid).

As Yasuko Takezawa finds, early Meiji Japanese textbooks had used 'race' in ways that evidently pointed to frequent intercultural exchanges⁵¹ with Western scientific classifications and

⁵¹ Prominent Chinese intellectuals such as Liang Qichao, who studied in Japan had introduced these terms in Chinese during the early 20th century. Watanabe Kazan, a late Edo Japanese intellectual, had argued in 1838 that mankind could be grouped into "Tartar", "Ethiopian", "Mongolian", and "Caucasian" types (Takezawa, 2015: 8). In his understanding, Japan were the Tartar race, not Mongolian, which meant Chinese. A year later, however, the Johann

Chinese language characters: *jinshu/renzhong* (人種) and *minzoku/minzu* (民族) are prominent examples (Takezawa, 2015: 6-7). But in the absence of clearly visible differences, formative transmutations of race were introduced; Japanese interpretations stressed their innate civilizational superiority to lead a population's commercial development. Meiji-era Japanese textbooks had paid particular attention to the differences between Japanese and Chinese leadership. One *Haruperu-shi no chishi* (Mr Harper's Geography Textbook), a source text in *Bankoku chirishi* (World Geography, 1877), contained the following description: "Although the Japanese live so near the Chinese, they are a very different kind of people. They [Japanese] are more intelligent, and do not have so many odd notions. The Chinese dislike foreigners, and have learned very little from them; but the Japanese welcome Americans and Europeans, and make use of their inventions, such as railroads and telegraphs". (Takezawa, 2015: 13). In such a spin⁵² on modernization theory, "visible, essential markers and devices" such as "skin colour and head shape" that justified Euro-American colonialism "never had the same significance" in Japanese valorizations of civilization (Takezawa, 2015: 18). In this sense, transpacific encounters were a "contact zone" for "plural forms of racialization", namely those that emerge from the mixing of a "racial order of Western origin premised on 'visible' phenotypical differences and that of Asian origin founded on other often 'invisible' differences" (Takezawa and Tanabe, 2023: 7).

In Paul Barclay's documentation, social institutions that physically separated whites from non-whites were prevalent among North American and European occupied territories. But "ethnic boundary drawing" was more relevant for Japanese Taiwan than explicit "fears of racial

Blymenbach's racial thought was palpable in his revised writings, where he states that "the theories of Westerners" regard "Tartar" and "Mongolian" as the same race, and classifies Japanese and Chinese people in this category (Ibid).

⁵² The Japanese twist on modernization theory can be found in geography textbooks that explained the "Stages of Civilization" (*bunmei no tokyu*) with examples of countries in the corresponding phases of "Barbarian", "Not Yet Civilized", "Half-Civilized" and "Civilized" (Takezawa, 2015: 10).

contamination or colonial hybrids” (Barclay, 2005: 352). Evan Dawley (2014: 286) notes that Japanese authorities separated Indigenous peoples into sub-categories of supposedly uncivilized aborigines (*banjin*) and more culturally endowed islanders (*hontojin*). Social evolutionist Ino Kanori’s “degree of civilization”, according to Matsuda Kyoko, recalibrated the Qing Empire’s tribal taxonomy to further differentiate “cooked barbarians” (*jukuban*) from “raw barbarians” (*seiban*); the former were offspring of Han-Aborigine relations (Kyoko, 2003: 186). In Qing and Japanese Empire political rivalry, race was mobilized to discriminate based on not visible colour differences but cultural, linguistic, and developmental markers – what Pei-Chia Lan calls the “naturalization of cultural difference” in contemporary migration governance (Lan, 2006: 15).

The politics of exclusion in colonial Southeast Asia have long been grounded in “a new collusion⁵³ between race and culture”, which gave rise to forms of racism “located in its strong cultural inflection” (Stoler, 1992: 535). Project “entering Europe”, that is “attaining civilization of the same level as Western nations” (Takezawa, 2015: 11), was seen as the responsibility of future generations of young Japanese tasked with amassing the necessary patriotic spirit to advance their nation’s path; China’s loss to the British Empire and handover of Hong Kong was used as an example of failure. Upon reaching Taiwan, Japanese saw themselves as fitter protectors of Taiwanese Aborigines, who were ‘weak’ in comparison to Han Chinese but still not benefitting from the latter’s lackluster mentorship. Postwar Taiwan, in that regard, was and continues to be formative for the Chinese Nationalist Kuomintang’s (KMT) construction of

⁵³ The realm of interracial unions (*metisage*) in French Indochina and the Netherlands Indies as a form of colonial rule unfolded in relation to similar developments of interethnic marriage between Japanese men and Aboriginal wives in colonial Taiwan, who were “central to cultural brokerage” (Barclay, 2005: 334). Most Japanese women settlers subscribed to state-endorsed images of modern womanhood in the form of *ryosai kenbo* (good wife, good mother), and were key agents in the colonial civilizing mission of social and cultural reform (Dawley, 2014: 291).

national identity in terms of race, language, and its compelled need to reinvent⁵⁴ culture and tradition to suit the purposes of modern state institutions (that the Japanese had utilized and left behind⁵⁵). When the Chinese took over Japanese colonial Taiwan, Taiwanese elites who had climbed the social ladder in a Japanese-infused education curriculum suffered tremendously. The Taiwanese caught unawares in between this regime exchange straddled the identities of an imperial Japanese subject with “some political powers” and that of a “disenfranchised non-Japanese” (Chu and Lin, 2001: 111). KMT occupation “turned the world upside down for a great majority of the native Taiwanese elite” who saw their hard-earned cultural and political credentials “suddenly degraded into a potential liability” (Chu and Lin, 2001: 112). Racialization in such interactions, as it did for my interviewees, takes precedence first of the background industrial conditions of competition among (what are now) Asian developmental states.

Compared to Taiwan’s (Han) Chinese and Aboriginal racial schema, Singapore’s multiracial solution to the problem of a ‘plural society’⁵⁶ (in British public servant John Sydenham Furnivall’s sense) has proven to be an exception to the otherwise prominent ethnic racial nationalism (also ethnonationalism) throughout modern East Asia (Kowner and Demel, 2015: 13). Unlike other postcolonial states that inherited a rather homogenous local population, Singaporeans-to-be at the time of formal independence in 1965 were a superdiverse racial

⁵⁴ Chinese folk ideology (*minzu zhuyi*), by custom, perceived the project of nationalism as closely aligned with “the principle of a common people” rather than the rationality propelled by a bureaucratic state apparatus of socio-political institutions (Chun, 1994: 52).

⁵⁵ Japanese colonial boundaries and rules introduced a territorialized version of political community that was formative for the materialization of contemporary Taiwanese identity. Unlike their predecessors who were loyal to mainland China, many second-generation islanders grew up with a distinct sense of cultural identity, having lived with a “semi-peripheral status” secondary to the Japanese imperium yet “superior to China” (Chu and Lin, 2001: 112).

⁵⁶ Furnivall’s post-war identification of the plural society problem was a major preoccupation for Asia’s colonial port cities, namely in the former British Crown Colony of Straits Settlements: the four trade hubs of Penang, Singapore (capital), Malacca, and Labuan in and around Malaya (modern Malaysia).

In his depiction, a weak political system and government without the capability to “foster social cohesion” among its “myriad ethnic groups” would soon see a nation-state suffering from “mob violence and internecine ethnic conflict” (Furnivall in Goh, 2019: 35).

mosaic consisting of imported Chinese and Indian labourers alongside native Malays and a smaller number of Eurasians. The government, recognizing that it did not have the raw material to claim a “common ancestry and descent of members” sworn by lineage to the nation (Kowner and Demel, 2015: 18), turned to an official Chinese-Malay-Indian-Other (CMIO) mixed races principle (Goh, 2019: 359). The ruling party’s multiracial strategy was adopted from the start as a social engineering of “racial harmony”, and to instill “a sense of commitment in the various race groups to the state” (Velayutham, 2017: 458). In Singapore, the absence of a public discourse of racialized indigeneity shows up as “a particular flavour of Asian racism” (Raghuram, 2022: 784). Singapore’s strong authoritarian political censorship of civil society and the media is a main character in this story; indigenous Malays are not acknowledged as such under the banner of Singaporean (Goh, 2019). In Taiwan, some scholars have called out a form of cultural nationalism relying on an indigenization (*bentuhua*, a process of acculturation of “Taiwan for native Taiwanese”) strategy in the mobilization of contemporary Taiwanese identity (Chun, 2022: 89), effectively bypassing the settler colonial question for Han Chinese while erasing internal diversity (Shih and Liao, 2015), but such voices remain few and far in between.

By no means was KMT’s presence in post-1945 Taiwan its first experiments with co-ethnic othering. As Yinghong Cheng observes, the emergence of explicitly racist undertones to highlight difference instead of previously dominant points of reference such as region of birth and social rank among Chinese peoples had started gaining momentum after China’s 1895 defeat to Japan. Nonetheless, Chinese officials’ leadership disputes with Japanese legacies of racial segregation proved formative for consolidating a modern state system where the idea of territorialized Chineseness for China took hold (Chun, 1994: 51). That is, Chinese encounters with Meiji Japanese state institutions were crucial for introducing many of the terms and

practices that associated ethnic Chineseness (*zhonghua minzu*) with the citizens of China (*zhongguo ren*) in a single political community (Chun, 1994: 51). For Yinghong Cheng, arguments about the superiority of Han Chinese civilization were so caught up in critiquing Western imperial arrogance that they omitted the significance of co-ethnic racial discrimination in China's state violence, such as against ethnic minorities (e.g. Mongols, Uyghurs, and Tibetans) and "barbarian foreign devils" (Cheng, 2019: 16). For example, Chinese nationalist revolutionaries in the early 20th century had endorsed a "distinct category of the Han Chinese race" in their exclusion of then-reigning Manchu elites, who were also 'yellow'⁵⁷ (Ang, 2022: 761). In this sense, racialized Chineseness reduced and homogenized class differences between peasant and emperor. Chinese racial status (of *huaren*) then enables a relational "Han-centric imaginary" that embodies the inferior status of some at birth (Cheng, 2019: 12). To many people living in Singapore and Taiwan, Chinese ethnic hegemony is above all a cultural claim of civilizational superiority in Asia that relies on colonial legacies of racialized Chineseness – "a racialized understanding of Chinese identity" (Ang, 2022: 762).

Today, racial dynamics in postcolonial Southeast Asia has contradictory connotations that showcase localized racial configurations (e.g. Chinese supremacy vis-à-vis Malays, Indians, and darker-skinned foreign workers) within broader global racial hierarchies (e.g. perceptions of Chinese employers vis-à-vis white expatriates). While formative colour divides do matter (Virdee, 2019), competing Asian empires (namely Meiji Japan) and Southeast Asia's colonial port cities have found the Cold War order of development and modernization to be far more

⁵⁷ China's proud reversal of 'yellow race' as a source of ancestral and cultural pride instead of a racial slur resonated with already existing Indigenous lineage feuds and townsfolk customs of "kinship solidarity" and "the cult of patrilineal descent" (Dikotter, 2008: 1484). The colour yellow occupies a customarily significant place in ancient Chinese civilization and had "positive connotations" associated with a centralized status of importance (Dikotter, 2008: 1483); symbolizing the valley of the Yellow River (*huang he*), ancestral home of the Yellow Emperor, and his descendants.

salient in constructs of racial difference (Ho and Kathiravelu, 2022; Raghuram, 2022). Still under the banner of ‘race’, groupings of people in many such instances rely not on obvious visible differences but on covert judgements of comportment and disposition, with intense preferences for forms of conduct and mannerisms that point to commercial sophistication in advanced modernity (e.g. Cheng, 2019; Harootunian, 2019). These hierarchies overwhelmingly favour embodied standards of market civilization and commercial sociality for citizens and foreigners alike. Indeed, racial discrimination among co-ethnics⁵⁸ in Singapore and Taiwan is often explained along such lines. In one comparative analysis of Indian and Chinese migration to Singapore, Elaine Ho and Laavanya Kathiravelu develop a framework of “polysemic immigration hierarchies” to explain a concept of competitive personhood (see p. 67) where race relations exceed images of colour (Ho and Kathiravelu, 2022: 637). The role of ‘race’ in effecting social relations is highly circumstantial, even random at times, rather than a structural force that can be assumed in advance. As Daniel Goh (2019) observes of Singapore’s superdiverse population, the Chinese-Malay-Indian-Other (CMIO) racial schema inherited from British colonial masters has integrated certain competitive (colour-informed) relations between ‘yellow’ and darker-skinned indentured labourers (e.g. Look Lai, 2004). Similar ideologies of an alleged biological and genetic inferiority of non-Chinese peoples in Taiwan can still be observed in interactions between Taiwanese Han Chinese, Aboriginal Highlanders (Taiwanese Indigenous peoples of Austronesian heritage), and foreign workers (Lan, 2019).

⁵⁸ Sylvia Ang, Elaine Ho, and Brenda Yeoh define co-ethnics as “a group of people who may be perceived as of the same race in terms of phenotype but have different cultures and/or beliefs” (Ang et al., 2022: 586). As the authors argue, despite an increasing recognition of culturally inflected racism, the bulk of ethnic and racial studies does not necessarily go beyond the colour paradigm; the focus seems to centre mostly on acts of othering by whites against non-whites (Ang et al., 2022: 585).

In both locations, Chinese racial superiority and privilege are interpellated with “civilizational and developmental discourses” that complicate ‘race’ relations with the interactive markers of skills, legal status, country of origin (sometimes residence), and more forms of difference making that arise on the move (Ho and Kathiravelu, 2022: 638). Beyond lamenting that “race is such an American issue!” (Shih, 2008: 1348), scholars of Asian racisms chart the shifting practices of racialization, from biological/genetic essentialism (visible phenotypic differences) to cultural and linguistic markers; especially English language supremacy and “Western versions of modernity” (Ang et al., 2022; Lan, 2003; Raghuram, 2022: 781; Stoler, 1992). The Singaporean and Taiwanese I spoke to are rather proud, sometimes self-congratulatory, about their nation’s claim to a sophisticated multiculturalism that apparently absolves them from racist perpetration (e.g. Velayutham, 2017). As scholars of racial capital note, neoliberal logics of deregulation, liberalization, and privatization for profit maximization have now taken over many governments’ *modus operandi* such that economic development is prioritized over social care (Melamed, 2015: 79; Raghuram, 2016). Multicultural citizenship⁵⁹ is a crucial ideological support for the particular racial nationalisms in question, allowing Chinese racial privilege (state racism) to hide behind a façade of global diversity (Lan, 2019).

The state-endorsed multiculturalism of the United States, Singapore, and Taiwan carry an “increasingly covert and institutionalized” racism that draws on implicit markers such as English linguistic skills, liberal rights (freedom to make choices) language, and modern consumption

⁵⁹ States that chase economic development promote multiculturalism for industrially productive means, integrating its imagery of human diversity into citizenship and immigration policies that treat people as market assets, e.g. projects titled ‘multiculturalism means business’ (e.g. Kymlicka in Lan, 2019: 320). Pei-Chia Lan uses “neoliberal multiculturalism” to describe the Taiwan government’s strategy of marketing the ethnic diversities among, for instance, mixed-marriage (Indonesian-Taiwanese) second generation children, as embodied “multicultural capital” for national development (Lan, 2019: 321). The Singapore state has historically incorporated a global-facing narrative of multicultural citizenship since its founding days, which was a political strategy to galvanize national loyalty from an ethnically diverse populace (Goh, 2019).

patterns rather than “explicit racial terminology (of colour)” prevails (Moras, 2010: 235). At the social level of everyday conversation, domestic employers draw on a self-identified multiculturalism to support colour-blind narratives such as ‘I am not racist’ and turn racial discrimination into a non-issue (e.g. Moras, 2010: 246). However, what these layperson perspectives miss is the creeping dimensions of colonial racial hierarchies that operate through the vectors of white supremacist political subjectivity in modernization and development models, seen as a general problematic of a global “naturalization of cultural difference” favouring a fictionally constructed ‘West’ over ‘the Rest’ (Lan, 2006: 15). The ‘race’ question in Southeast Asian nation-states unfolds “not merely vis-à-vis whiteness” but more crucially, in how the “variegated ethnoracial relations” in these spaces are politically manipulated for economic purposes (e.g. Shih, 2016: 146). At stake is the complicity of ordinary citizens and governments of postcolonial states where hasty scrambles for commercial prowess are in full force. The burgeoning interest in everyday race relations among non-whites revolves significantly around state projects of modernity, namely among Asian empires that have mobilized categories of ‘yellow races’ for anti-imperial resistance (Takezawa, 2015; Takezawa and Tanabe, 2023). China’s racial nationalism displays broader similarities with race and ethnic distinctions as scholars writing in the United States find (Moras, 2010: 236). But the undercurrents of Chinese racial superiority show up in Singapore’s and Taiwan’s racial nationalism not through explicitly racist markers (skin colour) but rather through cultural and linguistic differentiations vis-à-vis mainland Chinese nationals (e.g. Ang, 2022).

Crucially, everyday race consciousness is often ambivalent about Chinese ethnic identity because for Singaporeans, class-based economic superiority tends to come first; implied in comments such as “at the end of the day, you fall back under Singaporean” (Lynn Koi). Also

hidden beneath this statement is a Singaporean sense of citizen privilege relative to guest workers on precarious short-term visas. As Lynn Koi's example (see p. 95) shows, many foreign entrepreneurs who are now naturalized citizens or PRs are well aware of their non-citizen employees' socio-legal vulnerabilities and exploit these for profitable ends. In Taiwan too, Robert Tierney has noted the existence of a civic nationalism driven by insecure class status and resentment against stagnant wages (Tierney, 2011: 310). In this framework, migrant worker 'runaways' are understood as sources of mob violence (e.g. Chien Wei, Taiwanese labour broker in Chapter Three). But for my interviewees, Taiwanese hostility to a supposed Chinese racial unity hinges less on industrial results but rather on historical disagreements over the island state's political independence and rights to self-government. In fact, Taiwanese attributed the lack of economic prospects and an increasing sense of disenchantment among younger generations to their nation's global isolation⁶⁰ in political economy. Nonetheless, the complicated terrain of race and relations in racial capitalism tends to revolve around diverse colonial and imperial actors and state institutions. It is hence not surprising that most studies approach the topic from the perspective of privileged government actors and citizen activists, if not by interviewing people from an internationally mobile cosmopolitan class (e.g. Yeoh and Soco, 2014). In the next section, I build on the overview of care labour migration policies (see Chapter One), situated in global racial capitalism and racialized Chineseness, by unpacking race and care as an interactive unit from ordinary citizens' and FDWs' perspective.

⁶⁰ I understood my Taiwanese interviewees' preferences to not engage with 'race' head on as an expression of dissatisfaction with their exclusion from political autonomy as Chinese peoples. A recurrent theme of their frustration was the back and forth between American dominance and Chinese ethnic hegemony in which Taiwan is a mere political pawn.

Interactive Race and Care in “race to the bottom” development relations

Fatimah: “I think not so much about whether race or nationality or who they prefer to employ but rather who is cheaper to employ. I mean, from my experience the Chinese laborers are more expensive compared to the Bangladeshis, right?”

Lynn Koi: “Okay, I think it’s because of the skill set. So like what Fatima pointed out, it’s not really...definitely there’s some stereotypes that employers have toward certain nationality, they will feel that certain nationality tends to be more, you know, hardworking or lazy, or naughty or may cause trouble or some are too honest.”

At one point during my interview with two workers from the Migrant Workers Centre in Singapore, I invited them to “comment on the foreign worker issue with respect to local race politics”. While the above section offers a macro perspective of racialized Chineseness in global racial capitalism, this section discusses race and care as an interactive unit in Singapore’s and Taiwan’s eldercare regimes. Beyond state-sanctioned processes of racialization, I bring in the broader implications of competitive relationships of development for care relations in everyday social interactions. The migration-for-development policies that promote the global circulation of FDWs rely on racial othering on top of gendered ideologies about housework. But as Raghuram (2019) argues, less well-explored in the care work literature are interactions between racial constructs and care itself as an ethic and practice, which is one among multiple aspects of the moralizing dimensions of market commodification (Nguyen et al., 2017). Where eldercare is hugely reliant on migrant women for that matter, the intimate weaving together of racialized FDWs’ mobility, common place understandings of racialized migrants as caregivers, and the implications of such one-sided mobility for valuations of care in people’s minds warrant deeper reflection (Raghuram, 2019: 618).

As Fatimah and Lynn Koi above acknowledged, stereotypes of race and nationality conflated together (analyzed as racial nationalisms in the literature) after all require incentives such as “who is cheaper to employ” to gain traction. John Gee (personal interview, 12 November

2021), British expatriate and long-time research chair of the Singapore NGO Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2), agreed: “What we have had for 40 years is really a race to the bottom”.

Beyond eldercare and distinct types of care work as an empirical issue for investigation, then, the migration-for-development nexus raises questions about the ethical implications of care labour migration for the quality of social bonds. More than race, a politics of personhood couched in antagonistic working relationships between entitled citizens and FDWs is at play. It is telling that ethnographic researchers of the migration broker industry (‘maid’ agencies in the local parlance) rarely single out ‘race’, instead move back and forth between (non)citizenship or legal status, gender, race, and occupation or work classifications that manufacture conditions of long-term precarity (e.g. Lan, 2022; Lindio-McGovern, 2004; Wee et al., 2018). Firsthand observations in training centers by Andy Chang (2018), Liberty Chee (2020), and Anju Paul⁶¹ (2017) show that building up the mental resilience against racist behavior is a prerequisite for deployment. Here, FDWs in training learn about the racial capital that applies to their relationships with employers; nationality-based stereotypes that the women use to self-racialize as a survival strategy. The more prescient factor for FDWs as a racialized workforce for social reproduction is the never-ending trap of precarious conditions set up by migration brokers that, more often than not, prevent the women from achieving long-term security. This scenario is illustrated by Kellynn Wee, Charmian Goh, and Brenda Yeoh through a chutes-and-ladders analogy. The authors argue that migration brokers⁶² are at the center of enabling and/or loosening “the conditions of non-citizenship as set up by the state” (Wee et al., 2018: 2675). What they describe as a

⁶¹ I explore this set of studies in Chapter Four’s discussion of puncturing resilient subjectivity with care. The authors draw on frameworks of technologies of the self (following Foucault) in labour migration governance, where a key outcome of racialization is doing the emotional labour of coming to terms with “yes, we are the maid” (Maylene).

⁶² Migration brokers in Singapore and Taiwan are essentially an unregulated for-profit sector, called employment or recruitment agents (EAs), labour brokers, and ‘maid’ agencies in the local parlance. This has been an emerging conceptual interest in unpacking this ‘black box of migration’ (Lindquist et al., 2012: 7; Xiang and Lindquist, 2014) although relatively scant.

“compounded conditionality” (Wee et al., 2018: 2677) for FDWs in Asia is especially apt for the women interviewed, the majority of whom attributed their current circumstances to sheer luck and randomness – above all, “what type of employer you end up with” (Desy).

As noted above, racial nationalisms in Singapore and Taiwan manifest most explicitly through the political unit of the modern state, which was hardly a matter of choice but coercion for the vast majority (Acharya, 2022; Anghie, 2015). For the people interviewed, the key implication of race and racialization is not the contents of its discursive wars but the function of difference making and codification of status hierarchies that can be used to offload social reproduction. Similarly, Taiwanese NGO workers described the “Taiwanese mentality” about live-in care as such: “In people’s minds, eldercare is associated with the foreign worker already. Since 1992, there’s no going back” (Wei Dong). Although Taiwanese expressed frustrations that “Us Taiwanese are not recognized out there” (Untha), the ‘cheapening’ effect of liberal market policies on foreign labour (*wailao*) came to the fore. That is, ordinary citizens understand FDWs’ presence with ideas of cheapness, disposability, and expedience rather than racial categorization writ large (e.g. Cheng, 2020: 454).

“Taiwanese society is very used to hiring foreign caregivers: the moment a care need shows up in the family, she will be there 24 hours and she can not only take care of the old person, she can also go to buy groceries, clean the house, go to my sibling’s place to clean their house too. So this kind of situation has become Taiwanese society’s habit, a default practice...”

Untha, Taiwan International Workers Association

As Christine Chin (1998) has observed of Malaysia’s developmental state and Asia’s distinct ‘maid’ culture more broadly, racialization in care and labour migration policy incorporates FDWs into the national economy not just for economic purposes, but more crucially as indispensable welfare pillars who reproduce society. The type of policies in Singapore’s and Taiwan’s eldercare regimes (in Chapter One) have institutionalized a social sense of entitlement

in which hiring a ‘maid’ was a status symbol at first, and gradually a rite of passage for most middle-income households. In this affective atmosphere of social reproduction, ‘maids’ are considered as having “no status but as a worker” (Yeoh and Soco, 2014: 174). Brenda Yeoh and Marie Soco note that urban cosmopolitan citizenship in Asian global cities such as Singapore accede to cultural hierarchies in Euro-American versions of modernity, including English linguistic supremacy (Lan, 2003), which is conventionally associated with a “global upper class who subscribe to western ideals...and cultural capital” (Yeoh and Soco, 2014: 176). The authors have called for studies of FDWs’ “working-class cosmopolitanism” to challenge class bias in this elitist notion. It is telling that they do not mention ‘race’, instead underscore the extent of structural subordination in labour migration that necessitate a power-sensitive reading of FDWs’ social presence beyond the women’s political and legal status.

My version of porous races thus considers the backdrop of migration-for-development policy (see Chapter One) to lay out a methodological caveat for race (in the next section), namely by questioning the concept’s validity as a mode of resistance from FDWs’ perspectives and positionality. Many of the women are ambivalent about one-way diffusion models of modernization even as they cannot help but self-identify with the associated markers of development and civilizational rankings; for instance, framing one’s urban family background as an employment advantage vis-à-vis rural counterparts (e.g. Amrith, 2010; Ueno, 2010). But an equally important consideration for the forthcoming methodological qualifier is thinking through race and care as an interactive unit; care is not restricted to its empirical variants but conceived expansively as the quality of social bonds. Unlike Taiwan, the Singapore state does not differentiate between general domestic help (‘maid’) from live-in caregivers (see Chapter One). But popular ‘maid’ agencies do use ‘caregiver’ to cater to many employers who hire for family

care needs. It is also common for the FDWs in any given agency to have lived and worked in multiple country destinations before, which employers often use to pre-assess a ‘maid’s’ quality (tolerance for hardship). Women who have endured two-year contracts in Gulf destinations such as Saudi Arabia in particular are informally touted as ‘the best of the best’; the toughest and most resilient of the lot (e.g. Chang, 2018: 704; Chee, 2020: 367). At the social level, what foundations for human relations in eldercare regimes are put in place when (the ideas embodied) in country names are the first point of contact between employing households and FDWs?

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Maidcity website (maidcity.com.sg). The navigation bar includes links for Home, About Us, Biodatas, Au Pair, APS, Caregiver, Other Services, Biz Opportunity, and Help. A search bar is located in the top right corner. Below the navigation bar, there are five profile photos of women, each with a different background color. Below the photos, there is a text box that reads: "To view FDW profiles, registration is required in compliance with MOM (Ministry of Manpower, Singapore) policy to protect the privacy of FDWs. Please register [here](#)". Below this text is a search form titled "MAID SEARCH" with various filters: Nationality (No Preference), Age (18 to 30), Marital Status (No Preference), Education level (No Preference), Expected salary (< \$1000), English fluency (No Preference), Religion (No Preference), and Type Of Maid (No Preference). Below the search form are buttons for "All Biodatas", "New Maid", "Transfer Maid", "Ex-Singapore", "Ex-Abroad", "APS", and "Caregiver". At the bottom of the page, there are flags for Philippines, Indian, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Indonesian, Cambodia, and Others.

Photo source: Maidcity agency website, <https://maidcity.com.sg/biodata/>.

For domestic employers such as Pik Wan (in Chapter Three), the first step in searching for an FDW is an online biodata search through one of MOM’s many affiliated websites (e.g. Maidcity above). Racialized assumptions are mobilized through the nationalities (e.g. the listed country flags and names) of prospective hires and an employer’s knowledge of the associated cultural differences. For FDWs then, I invoke porous races to signal the concept’s potentially

transformative intent on the one hand (e.g. in Maylene's usage) while keeping in mind the structural inequities of care labour migration in Eurocentric models of development. In other words, while racial schemas constantly take on "porous and protean" patterns (Stoler, 1992: 536), these identity debates occur at a degree of power far removed from FDWs' scope of influence. As clients of the state (Chua, 2000), Singaporean and Taiwanese consumers actively partake in shaping a developmentalist view of the postcolonial world (Shih, 2016: 143), also what Dipesh Chakrabarty calls "the pedagogical style"⁶³ of developmental politics" (Chakrabarty, 2005: 4814). In this worldview, Southeast Asian states adopted migration-for-development policies in an uncritical emphasis on 'catch-up' modernization, in the process replicating civilizational hierarchies that justified Western imperialism.

The race as resistance of Asian empires (Takezawa and Tanabe, 2023), manifest in Singapore's and Taiwan's state-endorsed racialized Chineseness, occurs in a larger backdrop of whiteness as a circulating value (e.g. Raghuram, 2022). Despite competing notions of modernity and progress, the United Nation's political hegemony of a 'family of nations' incorporated all the newly independent members as white imperial outposts (Getachew, 2019: 152). As Yasuko Takezawa and Akio Tanabe note, only a minority of states in 17th century colonial America used "a skin colour-based system of classification" for its population, while most were then coerced into doing so by the early 18th century (Takezawa and Tanabe, 2023: 4); new Asian leaders could hardly avoid this. In this co-figurative regime of the international world, a subconscious racially

⁶³ Chakrabarty revisits the 1955 Bandung Conference in Indonesia as a key event where a West-centric style of learning about development was taught to the incumbent leaders of newly minted nation-states. Almost 30 "newly independent countries from Asia and Africa" with around 600 diplomats gathered over seven days to discuss decolonization (Chakrabarty, 2005: 4812). The United Nations regime of territorial unity across distinct nation-states was well-established by this time; this operational structure of policy making hindered Asian and African leaders from forms of solidarity beyond economic competition (Chakrabarty, 2005: 4813). Building on this insight, Adom Getachew (2019) demonstrates that the radical anti-imperialism imagined by many African, African American, and Caribbean anticolonial nationalists were overshadowed by power plays that favoured Westphalian state institutions over other forms of political organization.

coded bias of Western civilizational superiority is preserved in country names that leave intact imperial power geometries of ordering differences. In that sense, legal scholars note the Janus-faced nature of the United Nation’s “colour-blind” egalitarianism, which covered up its racist foundations of ranking states from most to least advanced (Acharya, 2022: 31). In this taxonomy, the supposedly equal opportunities emphasis on commercial criteria, namely scientific technology, private property rights, and infrastructure provision, was reserved for mostly white peoples while the vast majority of non-whites were relegated to “savage” or “barbarian”, never “civilized”, positions in international society (Buzan in Acharya, 2022: 32). In Shu-mei Shih’s reflection, the Bandung organizers’ failure to interrogate its sexist⁶⁴ dimensions only added to a general unwillingness to interrogate other unprogressive aspects of indigenous cultures. Notably, claiming a status of victimhood in Cold War exploitation enabled many postcolonial participants – including the Philippines and Indonesia – to deny the existence of already existing forms of ethnic othering that amounted to racism in the modern state system (Chakrabarty, 2005: 4817).

For the Singaporeans and Taiwanese interviewed, China’s racial nationalism contributes to a backdrop of Han Chinese ethnic supremacy that troubles Taiwan’s government more. As mentioned above, fledging Southeast Asian nations experienced significant mainland Chinese migration during critical phases of Chinese nationalist⁶⁵ emergence. But while Singapore’s strongly established sovereignty allows the state to maintain a geopolitically neutral stance, Taiwanese expressed frustrations with their nation’s lack of independent agency. Compared to

⁶⁴ In an issue commemorating the Bandung Conference’s 60th anniversary, it was revealed by a Indonesian-based radical journal that the host organized a “hospitality committee” consisting of many “beautiful women” to “offer, among other things, sexual services to the delegates” (*TEMPO* in Shih, 2016: 150). Many of these women were married and pressured into obeying the committee’s orders.

⁶⁵ For China as it was for Japan, anti-colonial economic resurgence through modernity was shot through everyday life on the streets, in contrast to ‘Western versions of modernity’ that recognized a split between its abstract and lived forms (e.g. Harootunian, 2019). Hence the need for a ‘co-eval’ or ‘plural modernities’ approach that considers the diversity of modernity, as process(es) of collective participation, in place of associating the term with an ambiguous ‘West’.

Fatimah's and Lynn Koi's above invocation of pragmatic concerns, Taiwanese NGO workers such as Untha framed the race question in drastically different terms.

Lynn: What do you think of the foreign live-in caregiver issue in Taiwan's local race (*zhong zu*) politics?

Untha: Rather than spending all that money and energy on say, buying military weapons, why not use that money to improve LTC? Taiwanese mainstream society has more fears about international reputation...the government will follow these concerns and think they should adhere to America's wishes (*ba jie mei guo ren*). Furthermore, not just the eldercare sector suffers but in general, the Taiwan government is very much coming from an investor's decision-making point of view when weighing its policy actions".

Compared to Singaporeans' matter-of-fact acknowledgement of race as a structural force on social life, Untha, following his Taiwanese counterparts, did not seem willing to engage head-on with 'race'. The time of my research interviews coincided with Taiwan's zero-COVID policy, also when public health scholars Po-Han Lee and Ying-Chao Kao were arguing against China's diplomatic power trips. For the authors, the "state-centrism of international institutions" overshadows international organizations' "systemic, structural, and institutional racism" with sensationalist framings of Chinese and American competition for political hegemony (Lee and Kao, 2021: 2). In no cases did NGO workers use the Mandarin term for 'race' or 'type' (*zhongzu*). Rather, they took issue with Beijing's manufactured imagination of a supreme Chinese civilization (*zhonghua minzu*) that lays claim to political and territorial domination. In their view, a sort of "inclusionary racism" constrains Taiwanese access to Chinese ethnic identity: China's propagandist narrative of ethnic similarity coexists with abuses of state power that sanction Taiwan's "geopolitical annexation and misidentification" (Lee and Kao, 2021: 15). That said, in both cases, the colonial *fait accompli* of country names channels a simplistic endorsement of economic imperatives that supersede intermingling European racial hierarchies and Chinese racial distinctiveness.

For the topic at hand, co-ethnic racialization into domestic servitude (Lowrie, 2018), distinct from the (coloured) racialization of migrant care workers (Glenn, 1992), prevails in eldercare regimes with significant implications for care itself. Pik Wan, for instance, had explained her family's decision to hire a Burmese after "weighing the pros and cons" of each nationality's known culture of caring and behavioural tendencies (also found by Huang et al., 2012: 199). In this case, the family risked bringing in someone "too smart around the house" if they chose a Filipino. A Burmese may be more likely to run into "communication and language issues" but is still better at "being patient and timid", which makes them "greatest at caring on the whole" (Pik Wan). Such layperson perspectives, representative of domestic employers' views in my study, allude to a racial nationalism couched in the cartographic mapping of geographical referents and its implied civilizational distance between regions and states. At the level of everyday conversation, this taken-for-granted treatment of statehood as a natural state of affairs elevates South to North (and 'lesser South' to 'greater South') directional transfers of care resources (Kofman and Raghuram, 2012). Even in Taiwan where people are skeptical of Chinese ethnic identity, racialized Chineseness is a force to contend with for FDWs.

Long before the pandemic, the contagious image of sending countries such as Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, and India to name a few (but not China and mainland Chinese nationals) vis-à-vis Euro-American receiving countries could be observed from the medical exam criteria for foreign workers (Lan, 2016). The Executive Yuan's pandemic-specific legislations for medical examination rules referenced global racial hierarchies of advancement and backwardness, associated with "countries in Europe and America" and the "labour exporting countries" of "Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Thailand" respectively (in Cheng, 2022: 299). Comparative race perspectives that keep in mind longer genealogies of the racialization of

diseases against diverse non-whites caution against reading pandemic-induced policy changes as exceptions or novelties to an otherwise ‘normal’ order (e.g. Chan and Lan, 2022). As one Taiwanese labour broker (Chien Wei in Chapter Three) complained, in the first half of 2021, the government ignored the proliferation of live-in caregivers taking on piecemeal contract jobs in various blue-collar sectors, in theory a violation of job scope (*xu ke wai gong zuo*).

The Singapore government did not go as far as to allow FDWs to take up work outside the home, but temporarily eased the transfer rules and medical check requirements (Koh, 2022; Poh, 2021). Such a short-term “loosening of occupational mobility” for FDWs may seem like a marked deviation from usual patterns, but nonetheless leave intact the double standards administered to skilled expatriate classes compared to ‘unskilled’ manual labourers in “dirty, dangerous, and difficult (3D)” sectors (Cheng, 2022: 305, 298). Beyond the domestic sector, as Lynn Koi from Singapore’s Migrant Workers Centre recalls, it is common to hear of Chinese bosses perpetuating corporate violence unto co-nationals working in their factories.

“Some of the worst abuse cases we see come from employers who are from the same country as their workers. For example, they (workers seeking redress) tell us that their boss is actually from China, and had become a PR in Singapore... We find that maybe because they understand the culture and background, they take advantage. You know, like *guanxi* (connections), so things like “oh we are family, you can let me have more time with your salary payment” or “you can help a friend out with this favour”, and that’s exploitation.”

Lynn Koi, Migrant Workers Centre

Mainland Chinese nationals who are PRs or have converted to Singapore citizenship can perpetuate a class-based intra-Chinese discrimination⁶⁶ where “at the end of the day, you (employers) fall back under Singaporean”. Lynn Koi’s comments reveal what comparative race

⁶⁶ One China Labour Bulletin (2011) study conducted in Singapore (since taken down from official Chinese government websites) reports on cases where ethnic and/or racial affiliation is overtaken by pragmatic calculations of “who is cheaper to employ” (Lynn Koi). Some of the featured stories include delayed/non-payment of salaries, refusal to compensate occupational injuries, and neglect of living conditions in workers’ dormitories. See Singapore NGO TWC2’s summary: <https://twc2.org.sg/2011/11/06/hired-on-sufferance/>.

scholars in Asia have observed about the novel forms of racism among co-ethnics in multiracial spaces. As the previous section suggests, for the people in this chapter, hierarchies of racialized Chineseness⁶⁷, such as among Singaporean Chinese, mainland Chinese nationals, and Taiwanese Han Chinese, constitute lived experiences of racialization that have not achieved the same theoretical legitimacy as most Euro-American accounts centered on (non)white binaries (Ang in Raghuram, 2022: 779). So far, this chapter has shown that the global relational arc of post-war development in the modern state system, embodying imperial racial legacies in specific aspects of national development (e.g. care labour migration and family planning in Chapter One), is the primary social condition that textures relations between FDWs and ordinary citizens compared to “race as a discursive strategy” per se (Takezawa and Tanabe, 2023: 5). Interestingly, mainland Chinese women are excluded from Singapore’s FDW policies because the state prefers to incorporate Chinese migrants into ‘higher-class’ forms of social reproduction, namely education (study mothers, *pei du mama*), family reunification, and intermarriage routes (Teo, 2018). The recruitment of mostly male blue-collar workers from China into construction, manufacturing, and food processing sectors is still popular. Now, I revisit the topic of race in care labour migration as a few FDWs invoked, illustrating the layers of power inequities that prevent the women from drawing on race knowledge as a form of transformative agency and resistance.

Porous Races: A Methodological Caveat for Studying FDWs’ Resistance

“I think in Singapore’s current context, the employer holds a disproportionately large amount of power over the helpers...they’re quite a vulnerable group that might be hard for people to recognise because they are not vulnerable in the sense of, say, homeless people without a shelter. I mean helpers are staying at home, they have a roof over their head, meals and all that, so you don’t see what is going on inside the house. You don’t know what kind of physical and mental

⁶⁷ For accounts of different racialized understandings of Chineseness, see Ien Ang (2022) and Yinghong Cheng (2019). For examples of contestations and reframing of racial identity by Asian expatriate classes, see Elaine Ho and Laavanya Kathiravelu (2021). In the context of intense class competition, Yao-Tai Li (2019: 554) finds that many Chinese labour migrants in Australia react to racial microaggressions with humour or even apparent disregard (e.g. “It’s not discrimination”), and situate racialized comments in indicators of human capital, foreignness, and modernity.

treatment they get at home? I think that power imbalance makes it very difficult for domestic helpers to really enjoy their time here?”
Phyllis, Singaporean domestic employer

In this section, I draw on the small pool of existing research studies on FDWs’ engagement with racial categories as a form of resistance, which at an interpersonal level, refer mainly to the women’s everyday coping strategies in the face of abusive and/or exploitative treatment. I suggest that factoring in the extent of “power imbalance” (Phyllis) between the host society and FDWs and between differentially racialized FDWs for that matter, warrants that care work analysts treat empirical observations of “reverse racialization” (Paul, 2011), among other frameworks, with additional nuance. In saying that the live-in regime’s asymmetrical working relationships constrain FDWs’ capacity to reframe racial constructs, I mean that the women can only seem to invoke ‘race’ from a subordinate position of self-racialization, which is often an economically necessary act of survival.

As I elaborate below, Irene, Maylene, and Desy referred to ‘race’ with the knowledge of how employers usually micromanage FDWs (e.g. Kantachote, 2023). Porous races, in this sense, is situated in a broader agenda of unpacking care work and constructions of value in modernity while approaching my research interlocutors as agentic beings who are capable of enacting social transformation. As the later chapters hint at, FDWs’ contributions to anti-oppressive relations lie more in what they have to say and do about commodified care relations than in race (as an externally imposed identity) configurations. Let us revisit this chapter’s opening quotes by reflecting on the power-laden circumstances of ‘race’ in FDWs’ speech.

“I believe we Filipinos are more aware of our rights than other race. For example, because of the pandemic my boss was preventing me from taking off day, worrying that I might get COVID outside. So I have to argue that it’s not fair. I only have off on Sunday but I go out during the week for groceries and to pick up the kids. What’s the difference between those days and my only rest on Sunday? He would say I might get it in the bus or even in Grab (taxi), which is

ridiculous, because the kids are always taking Grab and their play dates that come to our place all come by Grab. I have to mention all those to make him realise I know my rights.”

Irene, Filipino FDW in Singapore

“Everything is up to the employer, right? Whether we finish the contract or not. But sometimes, as a Filipino or whatever the race is here to work, sometimes we *tahan* (bear; endure; tolerate; ‘stick it out’) our work to have a good record you know. For two years, we will *tahan* our employer.”

Maylene, Filipino FDW in Singapore

In Chapter Four, I dive deeper into the ambiguities of care itself as FDWs experience and live through gendered-racialized domestic servitude (Glenn, 2010). But for my methodological note, porous races center the power differentials that allow certain actors instead of others to impose external definitions that cause “a meaningful intervention in their lives” (Jenkins, 1994: 199). As mentioned earlier, I draw on Ann Laura Stoler’s (1992) observation of “porous and protean” racial categories in colonial Southeast Asia and argue for a stronger consideration of an imperial backdrop of modernization and development (Chakrabarty, 2005; Shih, 2016) when analyzing ‘race’ in research encounters. Viewing social categories from this power-sensitive perspective foregrounds the dynamics in who gets to name and apply ‘race’ politically ahead of its identity debates; what ‘Chinese’, ‘Filipino’, ‘Indonesian’ and other racialized terms mean.

For both of the above responses, I had asked the women about their thoughts on the common perception that Filipinos have a stronger labour rights consciousness. Irene’s response throws up ethical dilemmas where an interviewee’s narrative contradicts a researcher’s social justice beliefs. Irene works for an American-British expatriate couple in Singapore, and was helping their kindergarten toddler⁶⁸ with his English spelling as we spoke. Apart from rehashing

⁶⁸ I interviewed FDWs who had eldercare as their primary job scope. Irene is not currently undertaking eldercare but has significant experience (three years) doing so. She made offhand remarks about eldercare being “more difficult than being with kids” because “it really plays with your emotions...no matter what you do it’s never enough”. She found childcare to be more stimulating and rewarding not only because “you can see the little ones grow over time” but also because “I am hyper like the kids”. Chapter Three’s discussion gets into the meaning of eldercare vis-à-vis childcare.

popular tropes that conflate ‘race’ with ‘nationality’ (“Yes, I believe we Filipinos are more aware of our rights than other race...”), she seconded the view that “(white) British expats allow more freedom” and are “easier to work for” compared to “local (Chinese Singaporean) employers” who are “too fussy and don’t allow sleeping out on Saturdays” (e.g. racial stereotypes found by Paul, 2011: 1077). Compared to this standard narrative of Filipino racial/cultural superiority, a well-established trend in the migrant care work literature (Amrith, 2010; Choy, 2003; Kofman and Raghuram, 2015; Lan, 2000; Tungohan, 2023; Wee et al., 2018; Yeates, 2012; Yeoh and Huang, 2010), I sensed that Maylene was perhaps trying to do something else with ‘race’, even if her usage is trapped in master-servant hierarchies that mirror the employer-FDW relationship. She tried to turn the tables on peoples’ negative assumptions about ‘maids’ by pointing to the common suffering – across nationality and cultural differences – experienced by all FDWs as a marginalized collective. But her intention behind this covert resistance is perhaps better observed from her pushback against marketized care (in Chapters Four and Five) than from strategic self-racialization by racialized minorities themselves.

In the FPE literature on care work, one of the most formative studies that analyzes race as resistance at the microscale of FDWs’ everyday conversation is Anju Paul’s (2011) *The ‘Other’ Looks Back*. Surveying almost one hundred FDWs in Singapore, Hong Kong, and the Philippines, she finds that the women engage in discursive “racial boundary work” to psychologically cope with the degrading and demoralizing situations they encounter daily as ‘maids’ (Paul, 2011: 1077). Experiences of contradictory class mobility (Lan, 2022; Paul, 2017), for instance, are common among Filipino FDWs in particular, as many are university graduates and were working professionals back home. The disorienting reality that being a looked-down upon ‘maid’ in a foreign land provided more income than a highly respected office worker in

Manila is not easy to swallow: “In the Philippines I used to work for IT, because I learned computer science. So I didn’t expect to be up for this type of job...but we have to do this for the future of our family” (Maylene). In addition, the normative sense of entitlement that ordinary citizens have over ‘maids’ shows up in social infrastructures of micromanagement, including intrusive monitoring and disparaging remarks (Kantachote, 2023). As Maylene had remarked snidely, “stupid is the code word (for employers)”. In Paul’s (2011) study, racial tensions between FDWs, themselves differentially racialized, Chinese employers and white expatriates run high. What she calls an “identity-driven (racial) boundary work” refers specifically to FDWs’ tactics of “racial alignment” with white employers and “racial distancing” from Chinese employers (Paul, 2011: 1069-1070). This framework recognizes the backdrop of white supremacy in Singapore’s and Taiwan’s race and relations for FDWs (e.g. Ueno, 2010), some of whom invoked similar tropes of Chinese and Western (American or European) employers.

Similarly, in Taiwan, Pei-Chia Lan (2003, 2006) finds that Filipino FDWs differentiate themselves from Taiwanese employers with linguistic markers of English fluency. Indonesians, on the other hand, are usually less fluent in English and resist racial tropes through care and work ethic, such as by framing their own nationality as less assertive and fussy as well as patient, which are embodied qualities that make them superior caregivers (Loveband, 2004). Paul’s framework of racial boundary work and the few ensuing studies, in this regard, have conveyed an important message: the structurally oppressed can and do fight back against unjust circumstances. But beyond that, for care work analysts looking at our interlocutors’ intersectional lives as sources of social transformation (e.g. Raghuram, 2019; Tungohan, 2023), it is equally important to turn ‘race’ in FDWs’ invocation into a study of how power operates rather/other than what the women are saying as such. If the traveling concept of ‘race’ is viewed

methodologically rather than at face value, there is more room to explicate the multilayered power imbalances that constrain FDWs' usage of racial constructs than exists in current scholarly output. That is, despite the well-acknowledged prominence of gender and race constructs in care labour migration, the ambiguity of these core social identity labels is not often dredged up for questioning in accounts of migrant resistance (e.g. Williams, 2018).

It is worth noting that 'expatriates' are a diverse group and includes many non-whites, albeit not often unpacked in this manner. To a significant extent, more than race (skin colour), an expat employer's national context and social exposure to the practice of domestic service influences how they treat FDWs. Generally, among FDWs, Scandinavian domestic employers are known to be the most generous followed by European and North Americans (e.g. Lundstrom, 2012: 153). FDWs understand these nationalities to give the highest salaries (well above market rates) and a wider range of off day plus recreation opportunities. It is also heard of for many expats to maintain contact with FDWs long after parting ways, reflecting a different approach to this relationship (e.g. as friends) in contrast to the more common practice of distancing.

On the above note, my visual metaphor of porosity emphasizes the overwhelming forces of market commodification for FDWs who are the living beings of human capital in migrant-in-the-family care models. Andrea Soco's "transcendent boundary work", in this sense, offers a more comprehensive take on FDWs' meaning-making practices: "a kind of boundary making (between self and other) not dependent on typical normative categories, and which is also learned in the course of migration" (Soco, 2011: 68). Learning to construct aspects of similarity and difference vis-à-vis employers and other migrant workers is important at an emotional level for FDWs who draw on these social encounters to inform their sense of identity and ways of interpreting the world. As Soco's framework suggests, these notions of "sameness and

difference” are unique to their experiences as mobile carers on the move, and cannot be fully explained with “clear-cut categories” such as gender, class, and race (Ibid). Building on this insight, I suggest that for the FDWs interviewed, it is necessary to attempt reading between the lines of race to unpack the moralizing dimensions of care itself in modern care regimes.

Furthermore, power asymmetries in the social infrastructures of racialization unto ‘maids’ implies that few women can invoke racial categories beyond reactionary boundaries (e.g. Irene).

It is important to clarify that my engagement with Paul (2011) does not constitute a critique per se. Racial alignment with white expatriates and racial distancing against Chinese employers, following a common knowledge of racial stereotypes, is in many cases the most popular narrative among FDWs. Frameworks that account for this empirical reality are important for highlighting that marginalized populations possess creative agency and resourcefulness in pushing back against derogatory treatment (e.g. Lan, 2003; Ng, 2023; Soco, 2011). Rather, I focus on the power imbalances underlying the political usage of racial categories in care migration policy within the observation that not only the powerful traffic in racial stereotypes: “racial othering is not the domain only of dominant groups” (Paul, 2011: 1069). In addition, I note that my analytical agenda of porous races is only possible with contrasts of a few women’s unprompted invocations of the term (e.g. Irene and Maylene), in contrast to the deductive analytical approach of ‘race’ in large-scale survey studies. FDWs’ “voluntary, unprompted selection of race” (Paul, 2011: 1076) in this latter instance is offered as part of the researcher’s analytical frame; an example of imperial white supremacist legacies on the ground. My approach of Maylene’s and Desy’s words, on the other hand, considers their positioning in race and care as an interactive unit in labour migration (e.g. Raghuram, 2019) and contextualizes reactionary race discourses in interpersonal power asymmetries.

One possible shortcoming of framing race as resistance where extreme power asymmetries exist⁶⁹ is arriving at simplified accounts of agency and subjectivity that imply an active participation, even complicity, in perpetuating imperial legacies; American-centric stereotypes of Chinese diaspora as “selfish, stingy, racist and exploitative” and Filipino cultures of caring as superior (in Paul, 2011: 1072). In other words, researchers should not treat FDWs as hapless victims in “an interlocking web of gender, race and class relations” (Yeoh and Soco, 2014: 176), but they also need to read between the lines of FDWs’ invocations of ‘race’ that belie more complex subjectivities. The point of this exercise is less about trying to identify the ambiguous contours of race or even how less powerful actors perceive race than about “honestly locating academic work in the scary wider structures of all our social lives” (Bhattacharyya, 2013: 84). State actors and the citizens of Singapore and Taiwan may take issue with exoticized tropes of Chineseness, but are still beneficiaries of Chinese privilege at least to some extent. In contrast, FDWs are incorporated into national economic objectives as ‘maids’⁷⁰, not as citizens (Ong, 2011: 39), and have “no non-racialized ground” here on which to debate racism (Raghuram, 2022: 782). Before the women even set foot in receiving destinations, they are taught to expect abusive treatment, unreasonable workloads, and disparaging insults in pre-departure training centers (Chang, 2018; Chee, 2020). Self-racialization is but a necessary act of survival that forms part of the hyper-resilient persona required to compete for employment opportunities (Loveband, 2004; Ortiga et al., 2021; Wee et al., 2018). While I agree with the

⁶⁹ The isolated circumstances of resistance in Chapter Five attest to the social infrastructures of isolation that hinder FDWs from public displays of solidarity, especially in Singapore. Hence the need for conceptual frameworks that allow for the subjectivity of subversion and uprising through FDWs’ engagement with care itself, even if the women do not broadcast these transformative intentions.

⁷⁰ There are strong parallels between FDW (migrant-in-the-family) labour migration and marriage migration policy in Southeast Asia. Both “foreign (mail order) brides (*wai ji xin niang*)” and ‘maids’ are viewed as potential threats to a supposed national ‘purity’ (Lan, 2019: 322). Most public debates of these immigration streams reflect social anxieties about the women’s alleged motivations for pledging loyalty to the nation-state and/or the quality of their contributions to population reproduction, e.g. in mixed-marriage offspring.

importance of asking unconventional questions such as “How do migrants resist and/or racialize others?” (Ang et al., 2022: 588), care itself may harbor more possibilities as an arena of political resistance and anti-oppressive relationships than intellectualizations of race (see Chapters Four and Five). In one last instance, Desy, an Indonesian FDW in Singapore who previously worked in Taiwan, mentioned “the race thing” as an obstacle to solidarity building.

“The race thing⁷¹...there’s language barrier right, you know some Indonesians don’t really speak and understand English very well...Sorry to say but some Filipinos, they always pose here pose there, because they speak English well, they are well-educated, then they do like this (compare based on these markers) to each other. Oh, you come from this poor country, you don’t have this and that (e.g. refrigerator, microwave, television, and vacuum cleaner) – I really don’t like to see this. But in Taiwan, most people speak Chinese so they prefer Indonesians.”
Desy, Indonesian FDW in Singapore

Desy’s comments belie an understanding that when labour brokers pit different nationalities of FDWs against one another, it is common for racialized people themselves to incorporate hegemonic understandings of racial tropes as a form of “internalized discipling” (Hoang, 2017: 7). As she recognized, Filipinos often characterize Indonesians (and other nationalities of women such as Vietnamese, Thai, and Sri Lankan) as uncivilized and unschooled in modern hygiene, dishonest and lazy, and possessing a hypersexualized nature: “flirtatious with their male employers” (Lan, 2006: 90). Conversely, Indonesians resist such labelling by framing Filipino domestics as arrogant, self-assertive, fussy about job scope, playful (promiscuous), and snobbish about their English linguistic skills⁷² (Lan, 2003). However, like Maylene, Desy felt

⁷¹ Desy’s choice of words relied on the knowledge that as a native Singaporean, I understood what this “race thing” in local state-endorsed multiculturalism meant; when referring to migrant workers in Taiwan, she used the term for foreign labour (*waiji* and *wailao*), in line with the Taiwanese parlance.

⁷² Such embodied hierarchies in everyday race relations are a volatile interface of status negotiations between ‘maid’ and ‘madam’ when Taiwanese employers are wealthier but less fluent in English. In Singapore, English has long been an administrative language. FDWs use English skills to differentiate themselves from other FDWs but can seldom do so against employers. But Taiwan’s Mandarin-speaking situation attests to how the assumed relationship between whiteness and privilege can and do break apart. For example, Pei-Chia Lan’s interviews with foreign English teachers in Taiwan finds that social legitimacy is attached to white skin and only particular accents are considered ‘proper’ and valuable” (Lan, 2011: 1670). But the malleable quality of white English identity, in this sense, comes to the fore when native speakers from Australia, Canada, and New Zealand fail to translate their Taiwanese working experience into comparable symbolic capital back home, and end up prolonging their sojourn in the Global South.

that FDWs should have more to bond over by virtue of their common structural oppression. She was frustrated that some of her peers did not recognize how Filipino-Indonesian racial discursive wars ultimately reinforce the subordination of ‘maids’ as a collective.

Nearing the end of our interviews, I had asked the women if they would like to air any policy suggestions. What I heard closely echoed a landmark NGO research report that surveyed over a hundred 100 FDWs (AWARE and HOME, 2020). In Desy’s experience, the Singapore government fell short of providing adequate emotional care for FDWs, as she was struggling to access community counselling resources: “we get a lot less than Singaporean caregivers”. Maylene’s suggestions were directed at labour politics concerns, such as free eldercare training, mandatory off days (at least once weekly), and the right to release papers (to quit and transfer employers). She situated these ideas in the root problematics of “us caregivers cannot depend on the government”. In Maylene’s account, subjective ‘race’ debates did not matter as much as the lowly social status of ‘maid’.

At the heart of this ‘maid’ status, in Maylene’s view, was learning to tolerate (“*tahan*”) the most dangerous of employment circumstances because the alternative (of no income) is unthinkable. Maylene felt that it was all-the-more important for domestic employers to “be more understanding” of “how tough being a caregiver is”, referring to some emotional experiences of live-in employment – beyond the caregiver-patient dyad – that are seldom discussed as emotional labour in care work: “How to unwind and recharge? They are suffering a lot with the emotion, especially because the work is so tough already plus their family is back home...”. Maylene’s self-understanding of what it takes to survive as overseas ‘maids’ shows that FDWs’ ability to manipulate racialized ideas of sameness and difference, unlike state and citizen actors, does not come with the power to act upon other people’s lives. Taking this approach to FDWs’

words would nuance the empirical fact of “how little participants questioned their essentializations about both white and Chinese employers” and complicate their “claims of superiority over Chinese and their similarities with whites” (Paul, 2011: 1080). Specific to the FDWs interviewed, predatory migration intermediaries⁷³ that manufacturing debt bondage (see Chapter One) and social isolation contribute to their fatalistic reading of ‘maid’ agencies; the women unanimously agreed that these institutions “cannot be trusted”.

My version of porous races does not suggest an idealist romanticized view of care as an always benevolent or positive presence in FDWs’ moral compass. As social anthropologists have observed, FDWs and other groups of migrant workers can and do (unwittingly) fall into regressive usages of care ethics (e.g. Amrith, 2010). It is common to hear ex-FDWs who have transitioned to institutional healthcare, usually after obtaining a higher-tier work visa or permanent residency, now look down on ‘maids’ (Amrith, 2020). That said, some of my interviewees hinted at care relations more comprehensively beyond eldercare practices, finding more room here for personal autonomy to emerge (e.g. caring for a patient differently than how one is ordered to), and invoked ‘race’ as an adjective of structural vulnerability, i.e. “we are all ‘maids’” (Maylene). In light of their insights, I recap this chapter’s sequential take on porous races and conclude with the need to examine ambiguities in care work.

Conclusion: From Racism to Ageism

As a concept, race has imperial genealogies in Euro-American settler colonial state projects (Shih, 2008). Comparative race scholars have called for contrasting perspectives from locations where racialization has historically been quite divorced from the colour paradigm. In

⁷³ Taiwan’s liberal democratic regime appears to be a more appealing destination because there are no prohibitions on public protests and no pregnancy screenings. But in reality, state authorities ignore unethical practices; as per employer demand, labour brokers have created new markets for companies to approve reproductive checks in sending countries instead (Cheng, 2022).

Singapore and Taiwan, linear ideologies of development and anti-colonial modernity (e.g. cultural assertion of ‘Asian Values’) drive processes of racialization and social categorization. This chapter’s take on porous races started from the macro level observation of ongoing racial capitalism as manifest empirically in these research locations, where racialized understandings of Chineseness are embedded in the social fabric. In both cases, FDWs are considered external (outside of) the public consensus of racialized Chineseness in national identity. The point here is not contestations over the content of ‘Chineseness’ but whether and how states have been able to draw on racial identity for economic purposes; compromised in Taiwan’s case where state independence is not recognized. In care labour migration, ‘maids’ are treated as neither deserving citizens nor political subjects but faceless labourers whose sole purpose is to work.

The majority of accounts about FDWs’ agency and resistance revolve around overt and covert forms of protest against oppressive care labour migration policies (see Chapter Five), such as confrontational social movements and street marches in democratic regimes (Piper and Rother, 2014; Rother, 2017), but also clandestine styles of ‘acting out’ in private where authoritarian political environments do not allow for public shows of solidarity (Yeoh and Huang, 2010; Tungohan, 2023). Few studies have explored the meanings of major identity categories (e.g. class, gender, and race) in FDWs’ daily lives. Indeed, since Anju Paul’s (2011) ethnography of ‘racial alignment’ and ‘racial distancing’ by FDWs with white expatriate and Chinese employers respectively in Hong Kong and Singapore, there have been close to no studies investigating similar themes (e.g. but see Yeoh and Soco, 2014 on working-class cosmopolitanism). Crucially, while race is mobilized in ad-hoc and highly situational ways, all FDWs and NGO workers interviewed referred, either explicitly or implicitly, to ideas of personhood; in-built character and ‘quality’ or ‘value’ of a person attached to a given task.

Furthermore, variations of personhood were discussed with reference to familiarity (or the lack thereof) with modern household gadgets, digital proficiency, English fluency, cleanliness and hygiene standards, and a gamut of embodied dispositions and bodily comportments “imbued by modernity, especially Western versions of modernity” (Raghuram, 2022: 781).

Despite their social exclusion as ‘maids’, the women each participate in constructing similarities and differences alongside other groups of migrant workers, which is a form of what Rita Dhamoon calls “relational othering”: “subjugating formations of difference which operate not only in contexts of dominance but in relation to one another as well” (2021: 874). Irene’s shield of ‘Filipino superiority’ and Desy’s cognizance of its reversal in Taiwan (where Indonesian caregivers are preferred) both draw on structures of racialization as a coping mechanism. Where the majority of Taiwanese employers prefer Indonesian caregivers, racialization takes on different empirical tones. The usual list of ‘compliments’ reserved for Filipinos in the global care labour market are instead applied selectively to Indonesian and other nationalities (e.g. Loveband, 2004). Hence the assumed content of ‘race’ twists and turns in ungraspable directions, and are fragile and shaky for FDWs using them in everyday conversation. But in any case, antagonistic or even hostile racial effects can be expected.

The women I spoke to often feel racially discriminated against through an alien/foreigner social status, human capital rankings in labour migration, and even in people’s double standards for the type of work they do (e.g. when eldercare is socially respected back home but despised⁷⁴ in the host society). On this note, FDWs can teach analysts plenty about ongoing expropriations

⁷⁴ The right to care adequately and satisfactorily for oneself and others involves complicated process of feelings management, and can be understood as a unique form of emotional labour that escapes paid care settings and the caregiver-recipient relationship. In Chapters Three to Five, discomfort with ageism, the pressure to function as impersonal (not emotional) caregivers, and the lack of political opportunity to address care gaps in labour migration policy overlap in FDWs’ lived experience.

(what else is being taken?) of caring capacities in human relationships, especially as they are often witness to intergenerational care for family members of different ages. In both cases, a strong cultural presence of filial piety claims to respect, even valorize, elderly persons in the community. Often, having a ‘foreign maid’ in the house is considered a filial (*xiao shun*) act. However, much less well-recognized are the ways in which competitive market relations infuse family dynamics such that tensions arise in a household’s resource allocation for childcare and eldercare activities. Compared to other types of socially necessary care (e.g. for child and youth development), eldercare is tainted with negative (not positive) connotations of dependency.

In light of the Introduction’s call for a transnational relational approach to eldercare, I note that several FDWs (e.g. Sha and Maylene) were crucial inspirators of my next chapter’s (impulsive) foray into ageism. In particular, Sha’s tearful outbursts about her patient’s unfilial adult children seemed to raise questions about the limitations of understanding care work from a social reproduction perspective; Marxist working definitions of market productivity and value throw up conceptual and ethical dilemmas for the FPE scholarship (Mezzadri et al., 2022). Put in another way, feminist intersectional takes of care work (see Chapter One) are primarily attentive to gender and race constructs as institutionalized for the market purposes of cost minimization through care labour migration (Williams, 2018: 550). But at the microlevel of everyday interactions, these meta-categories require some pulling apart to get at the unruly emotions simmering beneath “just do your job” (e.g. Maylene in Chapter Four). In that vein, Singapore’s and Taiwan’s cultural circumstances of intergenerational family care offers a unique empirical opportunity to dig into unsaid tensions between caring for the young and old in a modernizing milieu (e.g. Ng, 2023). This analytical experiment is what I turn to next.

Chapter 3 Reproductive Ageism: Choosing For Whom to Care

Introduction

“Employers have more expectations for helpers who are taking care of children because they are still young. So they would expect a lot more from the helper, cleanliness, the attention, you know, everything...they would not tolerate any problem that will put the child at risk.”
Pel⁷⁵, Singaporean working mother and domestic employer

“Taiwan society, for the most part, puts more importance on children than old people. Yes, because they feel that children are the main characters of the future, and they might do their best to cultivate them. But old people, they are going through, like a setting sun period (*xi yang lian*) like that, you can only accompany and take care of them, you can’t hope for them to do anything. I think people’s attention and focus is more centered around taking care of children.”
Li Chien Wei, Taiwanese working mother, domestic employer, and labour broker

In this chapter, I propose the idea of “reproductive ageism” for social reproduction analyses, which is built on the intersecting frameworks of feminist political economy (hereafter FPE) and racial capitalism (Folbre, 2006; Fraser, 2013; Federici, 2020; Glenn, 1992; Mezzadri et al., 2022; Stevano et al., 2021; Virdee, 2019). Although scholars of social reproduction across Feminist Political Economy of Development (FPED), Feminist Economics (FE), and Feminist International Political Economy (FIPE) have challenged the dominant “productivist bias of work” (Mezzadri et al, 2022: 1788), they have neglected to contemplate ageism and the body adequately. Feminist geographers, drawing on Shu-mei Shih (see introduction), have been at the forefront of thinking with and beyond Marx’s ‘value’ in proposing methodological frameworks for relational Marxist postcolonial geographies that recognize intersectional power dynamics of class, gender, race, sexuality, and nation (Katz, 2008; Hart, 2018; Shih, 2015). FPE discussions of care work tends to be preoccupied with birthing and motherhood issues in child rearing, grounded in preparing future labour power, but seldom the evolving age relations and social

⁷⁵ The main characters of this chapter are Pel (5 February 2022), Li Chien Wei (7 January 2022), Heidi (17 February 2022), and Pik Wan (30 November 2021). Two older FDWs, Jennifer (8 June 2021) and Sylvia (30 November 2021), are featured leading into chapter four’s discussion of skills constructs.

constructs of aging. I foreground the gendered-racialized allocation of this sector in formal (institutional) and informal (private home) settings from the previous chapters' combined reading of FPE and racial capitalism perspectives.

In contrast to much care work literature on Asia that focuses on (masculine) welfare state comparisons, government budgeting, demographic profiles of aged populations, and family planning policy among other meso-level institutional studies (Ochiai, 2009, 2011), I foreground the necessity of research agendas that nuance the meaning of feminist care ethics across geographical locations and cultural contexts (e.g. Raghuram, 2012: 156). Macro-frameworks grounded in the developmental state typology like East Asian welfare familism, care diamonds, and variations of the liberal migrant-in-the-family model dominate the literature, referring to key actors of state, society, and community in orchestrating care transfers (see Chapter Two). Feminist migration scholars have offered gender-specific frameworks such as global care chains, nurses' brain drain, diverted mothering, and the transfer of reproductive labour (Hochschild, 2000; Parrenas, 2015), which will benefit from recognizing the concept of 'reproductive ageism' to attend to the "locational specificities of the genealogies of care" (Raghuram, 2012: 156).

My observations of peoples' reproductive choices in home-based care demonstrates the necessity of an intergenerational approach that considers child-elderly personhood concurrently. By theorizing phenomena of reproductive ageism from a non-Western context such as Southeast Asia, I also hope to engage with FPE scholarship by showing that research findings from 'minor' nations are constitutive of world history; this view connotes a decolonial agenda that is skeptical of the Anglophone bias in theoretical valence. A concurrent weighing of child-elderly personhood in reproductive choices, I argue, is where Confucian East Asian states ('small cases')

can offer the Western⁷⁶ scholarship some reminders of the blind spots in reproductive politics, which tend to favour procreation and child rearing at the expense of intergenerational or later life issues. Generally, end-of-life and palliative care have gained noticeable popularity in recent years amidst rising anxieties about rapid aging. But eldercare is still usually analysed as an independently separate domain rather than as part of the chain of social reproduction. In Singapore and Taiwan, ageist structures are disguised by a benevolent filial piety (stay-at-home) culture (Rozario and Hong, 2019). I return to this point in the conclusion after narrating this chapter's stories⁷⁷, reiterating that 'minor nations' can 'teach' the Anglophone dominant care work literature about some underplayed foundations of care relations, namely its intergenerational nature (Williams et al., 1999; Wang and Chan, 2017). By combining FPE with social gerontology, "reproductive ageism" calls for a stronger focus on age relations, elderly marginalization, and the experiences of older adults in diverse empirical and social contexts.

The two bodies of literature advocate for anti-ageist (oppressive) politics through thinking with the body, but rarely speak to each other; the awkward differences between FPE's theoretical heaviness and social gerontology's practice-based orientation is an elephant in the room. In flagship journals like *Cross-Cultural Gerontology*, local scholars on Singaporean-FDW interactions present caregiving challenges – behavioural stresses, filial responsibility, work-life

⁷⁶ East' and 'West', as geographical and cultural referents in Area Studies (e.g. Sakai, 2005; Shih, 2008), are slippery constructs that belie an irreducible diversity of cultural views and contexts. I use 'West' and 'non-West' cautiously and mainly for the purposes of analytical reasoning rather than implying that stark contrasts in intergenerational relations exist. Cooperative divisions of labour among extended family members are not unique to Asian cultures of eldercare and indeed, may be underrated in (liberal/individualist) understandings of care work in Euro-American contexts (e.g. Bodner, 2017; Calasanti and King, 2021). That said, this general distinction is useful for illustrating some cultural realities of eldercare that do differ markedly from that observed in Euro-American societies, namely a social ostracization, not just dislike, of nursing homes (Basu, 2016). Filial piety feeds into an adult child's strong sense of obligation to organize live-in care whereas elderly institutionalization is frowned upon (Rozario and Hong, 2019).

⁷⁷ My interviewees operate within a heteronormative framework, hence their stories must be complemented with FPE views of queer identities and alternative reproductive choices that disrupt the nuclear family and heterosexual marriage model (e.g. Oswin, 2014; Wilkinson, 2020). Nonetheless, their reproductive lives show that age relations and identities are downplayed.

(care) balance, and coping with FDWs – as themes in their own right (Mehta and Leng, 2017). FPE scholarship, on the other hand, rarely accepts empirical research findings on their own. Instead, scholars advocate situating these trends in unequal political economies of care and how ‘maid’ culture is socially reproduced (e.g. Yeoh and Huang, 2009, 2014). Gerontological scholars in *The Need for Theory* bemoan the data-rich, theory-poor nature of their field, which stems from its post-war history as an applied practice of improving lives (Biggs et al., 2003: 5). One major downside to this practitioner emphasis, as I witnessed at the 2022 Aging and Social Change Conference⁷⁸, is the hasty endorsement of short-term action models like “active aging” (Pik Wan’s story below) at the expense of deeper understandings of negative attachments to old bodies. An integrative research agenda is necessary for deeper understandings of ageism and intersectional perspectives of age relations. Below, I give a conceptual overview of reproductive ageism with three accompanying stories.

Reproductive ageism: bringing together FPE and Social Gerontology

By “reproductive ageism”, I refer to intergenerational interactions in the family between children, parents, and grandparents that contribute to discriminatory views of the elderly that, even if unintentionally, normalize ageist outcomes in private and public settings when old people are left out of reproductive priorities. These processes apply to sending and receiving destination societies although, as we shall see for FDWs, age identity in labour migration is also understudied (Amrith, 2022). Unlike Western scholarship that analyses childhood as

⁷⁸ The Aging & Social Change: Twelfth Interdisciplinary Conference was held at Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland, from 22-23 September 2022. I presented a paper based on observations of childcare and eldercare that gave me the ideas for this chapter’s framework. Most other members of my panel (Social and Cultural Perspectives of Aging) offered quantitative surveys of active aging and debated action models for improving seniors’ health, following the conference’s focus on local-global ageing policies. I am grateful to the Common Ground Research Networks, University of Illinois, for granting me an Emerging Scholar Award, which greatly enhanced my participation. I am thankful to Amanda Reyes and Shu-Ling Chen Berggreen for their insights about media framings of women and horror and ‘rogue’ live-in caregivers in Taiwan.

accumulation strategy and ageism in LTC facilities separately (Herron et al., 2021; Katz, 2008; North and Fiske, 2017; Pratt and Johnston, 2021), the women in Singapore and Taiwan cannot do without generational assumptions⁷⁹ of care obligations. From a relational comparison perspective where localities inform one another's knowledge (see introduction), 'unexpected' observations that "East Asians are no more reverent of their elders than are Westerners" must be treated seriously for theories of aging (North and Fiske, 2017: 92). All my interviewees saw childcare and eldercare as "two separate things", reflecting FPE's analytical state. But their cultural circumstances of filial piety necessitate a multi-directional view of care responsibility.

The concept of age relations in social gerontology helps expand FPE's awareness of reproductive life beyond its childhood and youth bias. FPE scholars use 'social reproduction' to refer to key aspects of life-making: biological reproduction including motherhood issues; social (re)production of the paid labour force including that of inequalities across class, gender, and race; and care work for family members that is sometimes socialized by states but mostly privatized into families where women's care predominates (Stevano et al., 2021: 272). In domestic caregiving, reproductive labour is "the array of activities and relationships involved in maintaining people...daily and intergenerationally." (Glenn, 1992: 1). These activities include "purchasing household goods, preparing/serving food, laundering and repairing clothing, maintaining furnishings and appliances, socializing children, providing care and emotional support for adults, and maintaining kin and community ties" (Ibid). On the rescaling of childhood in vagabond capitalism, Cindi Katz's (2001: 711) "fleshy, messy, and indeterminate stuff of everyday life", which is "a set of structured practices that unfold in dialectical relation

⁷⁹ East Asian states have a special claim to "Confucian norms of intergenerational solidarity" that traditionally emphasize reciprocal care transfers (Lin and Yi, 2019: 1915).

with production”, has gained tremendous popularity. Scholars discuss the reproduction of class and racial inequalities in birth and motherhood rights including assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs), ideologies of ‘good’ motherhood, and education as care labour (Cattapan, 2016; Chavkin, 2008; Katz et al., 2015, Katz, 2018). The Singapore and Taiwan literature contributes localized analysis of parenting that nuance US-based frameworks of the ‘child as spectacle’ (Katz, 2008), however remain centred on child rearing and academic nurturance for social capital (Goransson, 2022; Lan, 2018; Teo, 2022). Scholars have been careful in foregrounding the role of FDWs as ‘agents of development’ in East Asian receiving destinations where liberal migrant-in-the-family model replaces government responsibility. FDWs’ emotional labour as caregivers for the elderly and society’s disregard of their professional contributions has gained traction (Huang et al., 2012; Ortiga et al., 2020; Yeoh and Huang, 2009), yet has not touched upon deeper tensions in ‘care’ allocation (between family members of different ages) that are unavoidable for the people in this chapter.

Whether and how eldercare features in ‘social reproduction’ nuances the broader concepts of abstract family care, such as care diamonds, East Asian welfare models, and global care circuits that lump childcare and eldercare into ‘private family care’. In my study, Taiwanese are more filial in demonstrating deeper ideological affiliations with Confucian virtues of elderly valorization and respect for senior dignity (Munkejord et al., 2021; Yeh et al., 2013). But even here, adult children feel helpless about being forced to choose whom to prioritize amidst welfare cutbacks. These observations call into question well-known definitions of ‘carework’ that contain multiple, often conflicting, components like “emotional and nursing care for children, elders, the sick, and the disabled, as well as domestic work such as cooking and cleaning.” (Misra in Lan, 2018: 417). Studying processes of reproductive ageism in intergenerational care

transfers recognizes that not all forms of care are valued equally, and ageism is a major unrecognized outcome of care organization.

While local scholars' contributions are important interventions to the status quo of patriarchal capitalist states, feminist arguments for equitable divisions of labour must also consider the evolving status of the aging population in reproductive processes, which implicates the foundations of work and the worker that 'Asian Tiger' successes are built on (see Chapter Two). In the first story below, a working mother's inconsideration of her elderly mother's care needs proves that "younger women exploit their elders, whether they intend to or not." (Calasanti, 2006: 215). If FPE scholars consider age relations, new questions about normative dependency arise. Why, for instance, are the higher economic and emotional costs of raising children not as heavily judged? By recognizing that age is a master "social organizing principle" with intersectional implications (especially class), also that older adults gain and lose identities and power (Calasanti, 2006: 203), FPE scholars can alleviate the field's preoccupation with preparing the (future) workforce. In calling out the American-led dependence on immigrant women in the international division of reproductive work, Silvia Federici calls for "a cultural revolution" in "the concept of old age" by linking racialized eldercare with the devaluation of workers and recipients (Federici, 2014: 236). This discussion, grounded in Western neoliberal welfare cutbacks, rightly identifies the ageist assumptions of economic productivity in public policy and even social activism. However, instead of rehearsing the developmental state's well-known preoccupations with welfare regimes, care migration, and labour demand/supply (Ogawa, 2018; Peng, 2018), I turn to the relational structuration of ageism in the intergenerational family. By doing so, I provide a glimpse of how ordinary citizens learn and reproduce ageist assumptions, not without resistance, in life's work. I present these stories of "reproductive

ageism” as resources to reconcile the divergent focus of FPE’s reproduction (theoretical debates of child rearing) and social gerontology (everyday practices of ageism) in intergenerational life.

Reproductive ageism: Childhood bias of ‘the future’

As working mothers with aged parents, Pel and Chien Wei are typical middle-age ‘sandwich generation’ adults who straddle dual care obligations. While in Singapore from July 2021 to April 2022, I was a home tutor in Geography for Kayden, a 14-year old boy studying at a local elite secondary school. Pel is Kayden’s mother, whom I first knew through a tuition agency and interviewed after his last class in April 2022. Pel lives with her husband, her son Kayden, and a Myanmar FDW in their condominium apartment. Her elderly mother lives 20 minutes away, by bus, with a Burmese FDW who assists her with ADLs. I did not expect my tuition encounters with Kayden to lead to a story of reproductive ageism, but apart from an overanxious parenting – namely in education as care labour (Teo, 2022) – that feminist geographers call the child as an accumulation strategy (Katz, 2001), it is the absence of elderly personhood in Pel’s narrative that is striking. Intergenerational reproduction of age relations involves bodily valuations across the life course, and must speculate about the elder’s plight while children’s academic prospects take centre stage. Pel’s actions are aligned with her above description and self-confessed *kiasu* (*pa shu*, fear of losing out) mentality that pervades Singapore’s parenting culture (Teo, 2022). She regularly checked in about Kayden’s progress, asking if he was on track, and whether I had any assessment books or practice exercises to recommend. This enthusiasm bled into her concerns for his other subjects. At one point, I mentioned that my older brother is a math and science tutor who studied at the same prestigious school as Kayden. Pel immediately asked for his contact.

Singaporean schoolchildren are not unique in facing increasingly stressful academic environments, which to Marxist revisionists are fabricated needs for capital that obstruct the common wealth from prioritizing elderly welfare (Federici, 2014). In secondary one, Kayden had at least one private tuition teacher for each of the eight subjects he took. These classes lasted almost two hours per week and occurred outside of regular school time, which was typically from 7.30 am to 2 pm at the earliest, often after 4 pm due to ad-hoc remedial classes. Two to three days a week, Kayden has music band practice in school until 6 pm. Because I had flexible schedules, Pel arranged for our classes on an ad-hoc basis each week to allow for changes in Kayden's timetable. I had no set day and time, but I met Kayden once to twice weekly for up to two hours, depending on what Pel felt was necessary; for example, some weeks had a more complicated syllabus topic or mock exams. Pel's education labour, namely her intense hands-on involvement with Kayden's schooling, demonstrates a helicopter parenting trend associated with heightened risk perceptions for vulnerable children (Lan, 2018).

The phenomenon of the overscheduled studious child is not unique although notably intense in Singapore, which enjoys a renowned reputation for producing 'smart kids' in international assessments (Teo, 2022). Kayden's schedule looks busier than a working adult's; every nook and cranny of disposable time outside school hours is occupied by expensive enrichment classes. Kayden's overall grades were nothing short of stellar but the poor boy was overstretched and mentally overwhelmed. Even I, a neoliberally-minded tutor who instinctively slipped into coaching him into 'the system' I grew up in, failed to realize this until he teared up one day. It is in this context of tuition fashion that feminist geographers describe childhood as spectacle, "parental involution", and intense mothering in reproductive processes where children represent a method of accumulation but also potential waste (Katz, 2018: 727). The high

premium placed on children's bodies, youthful activities of studying and approaching work, and their always-mobile schedules occur in broader structures of fear that the child, ripe with potential, becomes a failed product of wasted investment. Reproductive ageism emerges in the intersections of the spectacular image of the always-moving child, transformations of family love language into a means of productive ends, and the corresponding resignation attached to old bodies that are already 'finished' (wasted). Cindi Katz speaks of the commodification of our deepest social relations through the affective structures of market culture in daily life: "the spectacle is capital accumulated to the point that it becomes image" (Katz, 2008: 8). Scholars studying children's schedules in East Asia note that after-school activities in cram schools (*hagwon* in South Korea) and private tuition (*bu xi*) are a booming industry. Attendance is so normalized in a child's out-of-school time that even government agencies have opened education charities and volunteer tuition centres for the lower-income (Teo, 2022).

Taiwanese sociologists, drawing on concepts of sociocultural capital from Annette Lareau and Melvin Kohn, observe strong relations between parents' socioeconomic status (SES) and their child's accumulated psychological capital, including not just social credentials but habits of taste and refined mannerisms (Shih and Yi, 2014). Swedish ethnographer Kristina Goransson (2015) has conducted in-depth observations of middle-class Chinese parenting practices in Singapore, where she found numerous examples of the overburdened child labouring under parental involution, much like Kayden. While competitive education systems are not at all unique to these parts of the world, Singaporean geographers use "discretionary mothering" to describe mothers' reconfiguration of tasks in childcare, which is now centered around education success while they outsource cooking, basic caregiving, and physical nurturing to FDWs (Yeoh and Huang, 2010: 37). These are important contributions to FPE thinking about reproduction's

allocation, but their focus remains on integers of social capital, economic privilege, and cultural advantage mediated through gender and race discrimination rather than intergenerational age relations and the dialectical interactions between child and elderly welfare. In Pel's family, reproductive ageism refers to the valorization of childhood competition, hypervigilance, and the pressure on parents to invest more than they ever imagined, economically and emotionally, in their children at the unbeknownst expense of the elderly. As we shall see, in Pel's family, it is those processes that beget this last aspect of negative age relations and ageism among loved ones, in unintentional and unknowing ways, that the scholarship on social reproduction neglects.

The insights of feminist thinkers who conceptualize caring for dependents in and against 'value' (Mezzadri, 2019; Stevano et al., 2021), grounded in the Marxian intellectual legacy of (re)production, necessitates theorizing reproductive relations across the life course and generationally. In that regard, I acknowledge that reproductive ageism occurs in a backdrop of material and general advancements that have enabled dramatic extensions of people's bodily lifespans. If this concept is ultimately about how people nourish and sustain their lives, the lack of attention on reproducing old bodies in chains of value generation is striking, which is where the reproductive politics of age relations mediating ageism, materially and ideologically, externally and internally, deserves a stronger role in FPE discussions. Pel's disproportionate attention on Kayden, juxtaposed with her dismissiveness of her mother's circumstances, is telling for what it shows but also what goes unsaid. Her intrusive involvement in Kayden's academic affairs contrasts starkly with the lack of awareness and speculation about the possible gaps in her mother's care (see Chapter Four on FDWs who resist an 'unskilled' status). The two quotes below capture the contrasts between how Kayden and his grandmother are valued and understood, which in Pel's eyes, are unrelated.

“I’m still uncomfortable with leaving the helper and him alone at home. Kayden is not very independent so he needs someone to watch him and I don’t think helper really bother, like tell him go and do your homework. He’s a very slow worker, you know, do things very slowly. He takes an hour to finish his lunch, one hour to shower, so he’s a very slow worker. He needs supervision.”

“Nowadays more helpers choose to take care of elderly because you know just bring them to see doctor, feed medicine...you don’t clean the house very well they also don’t really bother...Childcare you need to send to school, then you need to play with them, you know, the attention that you need to give your kids is much more than the elderly.”
Pel, Singaporean working mother and domestic employer

As FDWs point out, there are serious dangers in underestimating the professional nature and skilled requirements of eldercare, especially when medical work is required. Pel is typical among domestic employers for thinking that “you just teach them (FDWs) how to carry, that’s all, (eldercare is) not really very (needing of) a lot of training in that way.” In contrast to this casual approach, dangerous for what it might miss of an elderly’s needs, Pel seems like a typical helicopter parent who works with an idea of ‘risk society’⁸⁰; children must be protected and sheltered in their vulnerability while striving for the best academic competencies. In education labour, the heads-down attitude of parents committed to helping entire families succeed, through their children, stems significantly from a growing list of manufactured uncertainties related to modernization gone overboard; climate catastrophes, environmental pollution, food contamination, over-medicalization, and consumer choice intermingling with ignorance (Beck, 2006; Katz, 2018; Lan, 2018). These observations are apt for situating competitive childhood regimes in the education arms race, but how they affect elderly prospects requires more attention. Pel’s devotion to the “micromanagement of holistic development” holds that “time control and progress monitoring” is “the only way” in the contemporary lifestyle that will benefit Kayden’s

⁸⁰ German Sociologist Ulrich Beck outlines a framework of global risk society, where the intensification of modernity has brought affective conditions of fear, dejection, and a “tragic individualization” that resigns to uncaring experts – politicians, state authorities, scientists, and policy planners – while emphasizing individual responsibility over consumption choices (Beck, 2006: 336).

future (Lan, 2018: 56-57). Her rationale of “he is still young” legitimizes a child-centred future that facilitates ageist relations by expecting grandmothers to perform after-school childcare, cooking, and marketing.

Pel’s assumption of child and eldercare as mutually exclusive is reflective of the youth bias in FPE scholarship on social reproduction, reproductive politics, and the framework of aspiration management rooted in child and motherhood anxieties (Katz, 2008, 2018). An intergenerational context of care, steeped in the local cultures of Singaporeans and Taiwanese, provides a much-needed analytical ‘corrective’ to the liberal nuclear bias in Western research that assumes working adults are only preoccupied with nurturing younger folks, while institutionalizing the elderly is undesirable, perhaps inevitable, but not laden with social stigma (Calasanti, 2006; Hyde et al., 2014; North and Fiske, 2012; Twigg, 2004). This research pattern conceptualizes parental involution and elderly neglect separately, which does not do justice to the customary preferences of receiving destinations in East Asia and the sending destinations of FDWs; many bemoaned not being able to stay by their parents’ side. It also neglects the effects of cultural alienation among older adults as nuclear family hegemony gains popularity among younger couples as well as the longstanding dominance of informal labour in Global South states where people are least able to outsource non-market work. In the spirit of interconnected comparison (Shih, 2016), noticeable differences between East and West in approaches to family care – for example, at-home care is an automatic obligation for working adults in much of Asia unlike in the West, where institutionalization is not stigmatized – cannot be glossed over. Intergenerational foundations of care in competitive parenting, couched in a benevolent family support of “do what’s best” for younger folks, finds it impossible to decouple caregiving relationships into life stages.

Thinking about age relations means recognizing that age, chronologically and biologically, is historically a “master social organizing principle” that changes in substance and quality over time (Calasanti, 2006: 203). To enter an aging phase or become old also means that identities and power adjust and shift, which then intersects with other power relations. Pel mentioned her mother as a childminder who “cooks for Kayden” when “he goes to my mother’s house after school”. The older woman’s skillful marketing also compensates for their Myanmar helper’s ineptitude at picking out fresh ingredients from the wet market. Pel’s family gets groceries from her mother: “they (Myanmar nationals) kill their own chicken to eat, you know, so they don’t know how to buy from the market. My mum will do the marketing and buy the vegetables, the meat, all of that, then she will go and pick it up.” For Kayden’s grandmother, gender and ageism intersect when grandparenting expectations for older women must be fulfilled for them to retain some ‘value’ in the family, by extension their own physical and financial security. Grandparents may very well happily and willingly do childcare⁸¹, but it is also the case that younger couples, intentionally or not, exploit their elders in a milieu where youth mobility has a premium. Reproductive ageism points to the absent expectations of one’s old age future, like in Pel’s account, and what impressionable children like Kayden learn in value-generating relations: his grandmother does not and should not expect anywhere close to the attention he receives as the centre of the family’s universe.

Perhaps of most interest to intensive parents like Pel is the observation that reproductive ageism occurs in a wider context of ‘edginess’, a hallmark of capital’s encroachment on the human psyche. People’s structural participation in ‘the system’ takes on an almost unconscious

⁸¹ Some research finds that Singaporean seniors are growing disenchanted with grandparenting expectations and instead desire to explore hobbies and travel itineraries but feel too guilty to ‘rebel’ (Thang et al., 2011).

character, with forces independent from what people may truly desire. In *The Problem with Work*, Kathi Weeks (2011) associates this pervasive atmosphere of feeling ‘on edge’ with the valorization of productive mobile activity. Unsaid uneasiness over the idea of retirement, or spending spare time in ways that seem unrelated to market demands, reflects a deep-seated discomfort with the idea of not moving that old bodies trigger. It is important to note that neither the young nor old benefit from these ideological forces of reproduction. Giving children ‘the best possible’ may, in many cases, be a huge source of unhappiness with deep implications for the young’s mental health (e.g. Katz, 2008; Lan, 2018). Kayden became progressively unhappier as the weeks went by, homework piled up, and exams drew closer. Not once did he perform badly, but it was obvious that he was becoming frustrated with excessive deadlines and mock exams.

This tutoring mentality that Kayden, an upper middle-class elite student, is subjected to is similar to the *kiasu* parents in Goransson (2015: 218): although their children were far from “weak”, they assume and “perceive it” anyway. As a hired tutor with a contracted responsibility, I restricted my interactions with Kayden to Geography instruction. He was shy and introverted and disliked speaking for extended periods of time. Most of our time together was spent on timed essays and practice papers where Kayden demonstrated his exemplary preparedness. The boy was a model student and quiet learner. He was academically inclined, had quick analytical perception, and musically gifted. On one occasion, however, I was caught by surprise when he sobbed momentarily. We were in the middle of going through the practice essay outlines for that day’s writing exercise when I looked up from my notes earlier than usual only to see Kayden, as stunned as I was, quickly swipe a hand over his face where a tear had just rolled down. I was still thinking of how to respond when he saved me from the awkwardness: “Miss Lynn, I’m ready to write the essay”.

This fleeting interaction could not have lasted beyond ten seconds. Neither did it interrupt Kayden's efficiency, speed, and performance. However, it alludes to reproductive ageism: the overstressed child (an accumulation strategy) is suffering mentally while their elder's existence is circumscribed⁸² to make way for the young's future. This first part of the chain is the key idea that Cindi Katz asserts about competitive parenting in the United States, where academic stress and youth depression is treated too causally (Katz, 2018). Like most parents, Pel is ambivalent about intensive education, which is a dilemma ("a mother's heartache") between what her heart and mind say. Still, adult children who are socially obligated to financially and emotionally care for their aged parents (Goransson, 2015), not just children, are important teachers of age relations. What sort of age-appropriate roles and expectations (including the lack thereof) are people being socialized into, if not getting used to? Seeing childcare and eldercare as "two separate things" is an analytical gap: over-attentive parenting and elderly neglect are both legitimate forms of care that are more harmful than its recipients can assert. This observation calls for feminists to analyze this term creatively by unbounding it from labour power and market production, hence working with multiple meanings of 'value' in "the fleshy, messy, and indeterminate stuff of everyday life." (Katz, 2001: 711). Keeping the focus on family interactions that shape age relations, I now turn to one Taiwanese labour broker whose realist logic of survival has ageist implications, most notably for the foreign live-in caregivers she traffics but also for her toddler's and her own future.

⁸² I did not get to observe the quality and type of care received by Kayden's grandmother, but I inferred that the older woman had rather heavy grandmothing obligations; supervising FDWs together with their grandchildren is common (e.g. Thang et al., 2011). My observations of intergenerational dynamics in this case is not the only indication of what I am calling "reproductive ageism", which is not unique to Pel's household. A broader swathe of research studies in family care point to childcare and youth development increasingly taking over an entire family's priorities (e.g. Lan, 2018; Teo, 2022), which offers empirical opportunities to analyse changing age relations in contemporary care markets.

Reproductive ageism in racialized labour brokerage

As mentioned earlier, Chien Wei is a Taiwanese working mother, domestic employer, and head labour broker of a recruitment agency (*zhong jie*). Scholars emphasise the centrality of intermediary agents in reproducing permanent temporariness in a chutes-and-ladders system that traps FDWs in “precarity chains”: “the transfer of insecure jobs and financial insecurity (low wages and indebtedness) across places and people” where the tripartite network of state actors, unregulated brokers, and employers are key (Silvey and Parrenas, 2020: 3461). Labour brokers are key nodes in reinforcing a revolving door of permanent irregularity through their wilful oversight of unethical human trafficking and underhand brokerage in rural source areas (Silvey, 2008). Also, they demarcate the differential deservedness of foreign workers according to nationalist-based essentializations, most notably the ‘Filipino versus Indonesian’ trope (Lan, 2016; Loveband, 2004). Some recognize their significance in shaping arbitrary standards of skills, namely by cleansing the ‘dirty’ realities of caregiving for female citizens while coercing FDWs to continually expand their caregiving scope (Ortiga et al., 2020). However, seldom if ever are connections made to the implications for age relations in sending and receiving families that, although not accepted passively, incentivise ageist ideologies.

Chien Wei’s five-year old daughter has not entered elementary school, so the overscheduled child is yet to be seen. However, like Pel, Chien Wei’s offhand comments deskill eldercare by dismissing its difficulty. Her rhetoric of survival and practical work ethic may seem unrelated to ageism, but brokerage activities in a policy context of prolonged visa stays naturalize negative age relations by worsening the lives of caregivers and recipients. The Taiwan government has repeatedly lengthened the maximum stay duration for ‘unskilled’ migrant workers to nine and now 14 years to compensate for the lack of Taiwanese workers in

‘unattractive’ occupations (Henley, 2021; Lan 2022). Researchers have started noting the higher average ages of blue-collar migrants in physically demanding sectors (Parrenas et al., 2021). As we will hear from one older live-in caregiver⁸³, Sylvia (pseudonym) in chapter four, young women in their 20s (herself thirty years ago) dream of migrating to break their families out of poverty. Now almost 55, Sylvia remains in a revolving door of precarity incurred before migration (debts incurred), during labour contracts (circumscribed rights), and into the future (low savings). She has opted to renew her permit under the new policy with mixed feelings; her precarity also encompasses “visceral and pervasive” processes of natal alienation and long-term estrangement from one’s community (Silvey and Parrenas, 2020: 3460). Also, caregivers suffer from poor health as occupational injuries are inevitable. Sylvia (personal interview, 30 November 2021) has incurred her fair share of accidents, bruises, and falls that have left permanent ailments: “I’m getting older myself...what if I can’t continue making money?”. None of these concerns about the plight of aging migrants matter for Chien Wei’s brokerage business, which she proudly claims operates with her pragmatic realist philosophy: “If you can’t be ruthless, you can’t stand steady (*xin bu hen, zhan bu wen*)”. FPE scholarship will be interested in what her toddler is internalizing as she says “Yes, mama” to Chien Wei’s constant implorations of “Do you understand?”. Work ethic, racism, and ageism are learned in the family.

“Like they did this assessment framework for us, I think that is just meaningless. Why? They find scholars to assess us, those scholars are also not insiders in our industry, how are they to judge our work? Like those professors, teachers, and those kinds...Then they will do their assessment and say the agency has to set up training courses...I mean we already went through the licensing procedure, what more training courses do you want? If there are no concerning situations happening, I think the company is basically okay.”

Li Chien Wei, Taiwanese working mother, domestic employer, and labour broker

⁸³ Live-in caregivers enable Taiwanese to age-in-place and are officially termed “social welfare foreign workers” in labour policy, but remain excluded from Taiwan’s LTC regime (Lan, 2022: 5).

Chien Wei's tone bears an uncanny resemblance to the transactional worldview of the Chinese human traffickers in *Sold People*, set in Republican North China⁸⁴ (Ransmeier, 2017). Her impersonal, matter-of-fact rationalization of the lesser worth of 'foreign maids' (*wai yong*) remains unchanging despite the drastically different socio-legal and political context of commercial brokering⁸⁵ in modern Taiwan. Interpellations of feminine inferiority and racial hierarchies (lighter-skinned Filipinos preferred) occur amidst self-congratulatory attitudes of political democratization (in Taiwan) and market liberalism (Lan, 2016; Loveband, 2004; Yun, 1996). When we spoke at the height of Taiwan's zero-COVID policy, Chien Wei complained about the diminished migrant inflows and their worsening quality: "Especially the younger ones, these Indonesian maids only want to come here to play." Heidi, a Taiwanese caregiver who I introduce below, admitted that Taiwan's "huge runaway maid problem" is triggered by households' unbearably stressful environments. She grieved extensively about the health risks posed to elderlies by an "uncaring (*bu guan*)" government, holding labour brokers equally accountable. Unfortunately, Chien Wei sees caregiver training requirements as a hindrance to restoring pre-pandemic levels of economic migration. From a profiteering managerial perspective, labour supply and instrumental exchange take priority over the quality of eldercare training and delivery. Indeed, she praised Singapore's ease of hiring FDWs while resenting Taiwan's bothersome caregiving specifications: "Over here, if you want to hire you will have to

⁸⁴ Drawing on archival sources from late Qing and Republican China in between the years 1912 (collapse of Qing Empire) and 1949 (founding of the PRC), Johanna Ransmeier demonstrates that human trafficking was a most banal and ordinary fact of Chinese families' livelihood strategies and not an exceptional measure taken by only the poorest or most desperate. Arguing that "Chinese families were transactional families", she further illustrates that "family boundaries were more permeable than traditionally appreciated" (Ransmeier, 2017: 2, 4). Importantly, tensions between Qing customs of human trafficking as a survival strategy and encroaching Western discourses of personal freedom point to gaps in legislative implementation. Reformist efforts to build a stronger (state) image for China prohibited the sale of people but targeted the surface aspects of exchange instead of its underlying ethical hierarchies.

⁸⁵ Like Chinese masters of trafficked servants, Singaporean/Taiwanese domestic employers feel "they had purchased a stake in the entire body and time of the woman" (Ransmeier, 2017: 270; Teo, 2018). Migration labour regimes nowadays, however, predominantly focus on quality of work and labour power – contracts of formal professionalism – in transnational outsourcing of geriatric care.

give a Barthel care index form, only that kind of form can get you a maid. Not like in Singapore where you can just hire as long as you want to.” There was no mention of the later life prospects of her trainees, many of whom are likely aging as they opt to renew contracts in legally and socioeconomically precarious conditions that hardly guarantee savings prospects (Silvey and Parrenas, 2020: 3466); the “rent-seeking behaviour of government officials” and black-market intermediaries in sending destinations is a shameful fact (Silvey, 2008: 117). In her account, elderly safety, caregiver training, and aging live-in caregivers’ welfare are dismissed.

In these two stories, the reproduction of intergenerational age relations (here reproductive ageism) is observed from the angle of childhood valorization (Kayden) or migration brokerage (Chien Wei) in a non-exhaustive list of family interactions. Pel contributes to ageist structuration as an overanxious yet well-meaning mother while Chien Wei does so primarily as an instrumental labour broker. Still, reproductive ageism is not a negative catch-all system. Now, we consider a Taiwanese caregiver’s resistance against state ageism.

Reproductive ageism: Resisting the diminution of old people

“In theory, the nursing and healthcare manpower management should be given to the health ministry (*wei sheng fu li bu*) but the government only oversees Taiwanese workers. The moment you bring in foreign workers the government only looks at the labour-salary match, contract disputes, these things only. But they are looking after patients!”

Heidi, Taiwanese domestic employer and caregiver

Heidi rightly observed that live-in caregivers are not regulated under an appropriate government authority: “They are managed by the labour department instead of health ministry, so our regimes don’t match”. If family members are unequipped to train them or cannot learn how to, which is where her personal efforts are directed at, the old person suffers. In stark contrast to her counterparts’ indifference, Heidi was visibly angered by the status quo of unregulated recruitment agencies, run by brokers like Chien Wei, left to compete among

themselves at the severe expense of caregiving preparedness⁸⁶ (see Chapter Two). Although she did not go as far as migration analysts who compare live-in caregivers with unfree bonded labourers (Yun, 1996), Heidi was cognizant of the arbitrary skills constructs in the double standards of “hypocritical” (*xu wei*) state policy. She did not, at least verbally, essentialize the civilizational quality (*su zhi*) of live-in caregivers or give derogatory remarks about their homemaking skills, suggesting an awareness of what Lan (2022: 6) calls “deferential competence”: subservient bodily comportment that appeals to employers’ ego rather than ensuring relevant caregiving expertise.

The intensity of Heidi’s work-life is startling: a university professor in hospitality management at I-Shou University (Kaohsiung, Taiwan) by day and a primary caregiver to her 88-year old father by night. She admits that “I have no life, my personal life is basically non-existent. You know, university professors are an overwhelmed bunch...the moment I’m done with my tasks and can get away for a while, I’m by his side.” She is also active in the NGO, International Association for Employers of Caregivers and the Disabled (IAFED), where she chairs policy information sessions. Heidi’s largest complaint is the government’s indifference to poorly trained live-in caregivers being “asked to perform acts of medical intervention for patients, such as suction of sputum or tube feeding.” (Lan, 2022: 6). She was referring to an unpublicised discussion with MOL officials that IAFED participated in. Officials at this closed meeting in early 2022 announced that live-in caregivers, by definition, are part of the household: a family member. Taiwanese can instruct them to perform invasive tubing procedures, ideally

⁸⁶ This problem is worse in Singapore where ‘maid agencies’ (as they are called) commonly fail the minimum requirements of at least 90 hours of vocational care training (Lan, 2022: 6; Ortiga et al., 2020). Three quarters of FDWs in Singapore reported receiving insignificant or no training, while just below one quarter in Taiwan had inadequate training and none had zero exposure. It is unheard of for Taiwanese agencies to not have a training system, however rudimentary, in place (e.g. Yeh, 2020, 2022).

alongside a licensed professional, but still at great risk: “We can ask the live-in caregiver to do *san guan*; that’s no longer illegal. But if anything happens, it’s the family’s problem because they chose (to take the risk).”

“I think that in Taiwan there is indeed a difference between how people treat childcare and eldercare, in my personal observation and experience. But there is a bias for me because I don’t have kids, so my focus is on my parents. Me and my younger sister, the average family wouldn’t pay so much attention and spend so much money on their parents. We often encounter comments like: oh you two sisters care a lot about your parents. It is very rare.”

Heidi, Taiwanese domestic employer and family caregiver

Among domestic employers, Heidi is the most well-versed and proficient in medical work. She learned to perform invasive nasogastric tube insertions and taught her live-in caregiver. Her filial piety differs drastically from Pel and Chien Wei because she is not convinced that eldercare can be offloaded to family members: “the loading on Taiwanese families is too heavy, it is not manageable”. Neither does she believe that good care can be reduced to a physical criterion⁸⁷ of stay-at-home care supported by live-in caregivers, which Singapore and Taiwanese society strongly endorse, albeit with a stronger gender culture for adult daughters and daughters-in-law in Taiwan (Liang, 2021; Rozario and Hong, 2019). She referred to an uncle as an example of a married adult son, “with kids and all”, who “does not care much” about her grandmother. She felt helpless about her uncle’s indifference toward their live-in caregiver’s request that “grandma wears diapers because I don’t want to accompany her to the toilet”. Most unacceptable are the disregard for elderly dignity and if their health worsens, serious care gaps that are life-endangering.

⁸⁷ Especially in Singapore, adult children perceive the hired presence of a live-in ‘maid’ as a sign of filial piety; many consider it standard practice to do so for their elderly parents as long as they can afford (Teo et al., 2006; Rozario, 2012). This mentality is likewise common among Taiwanese, but research and anecdotal evidence suggests that many among the older generation still feel that ‘maids’ cannot adult daughters and/or daughters-in-law (Chung, 2022).

This personal devotion to her father's care is outstanding, but Heidi cites the absence of marriage and motherhood as the primary reason: "I must say, my view is biased because I have no kids". She does not fundamentally disagree with the idea that childcare's value is self-evident, unlike eldercare, which seems to be a labour of love that is performed only when one is free from child rearing responsibilities. In this sense, the social good of child education as care labour is a well-established consensus (Folbre, 1994), but society lacks reasons for paying similar heed to eldercare. My framework of reproductive ageism comes 'full circle' when child-elderly valuations are considered dialectically as filial piety undergoes individualization processes. Anthropologists point to the phenomenon of "descending familism⁸⁸" in one Xiajia village (Heilongjiang, Northeast Asia), referring to shifts in "existential meanings of life" from older to younger generations (Yan, 2016: 245). In this process, "the centripetal power of the third generation of children" gradually overtake traditional elder-centric social habits (Ibid). Scholars have taken these insights to Singapore and Taiwan where education as care labour dominates family life (Pel and Kayden). Goransson et al (2022: 4) describe this "descending" trend as one where all members of the extended household, not just parents, collectively strive to empower children's prospects through academic performance. Given these trends, there are theoretical merits to bringing age relations into FPE and social gerontology to overcome the common separation of generations in care work analysis. Although this story implies a childhood bias, Heidi's exemplary efforts demonstrate an extraordinary agency that betters her father's otherwise depressing quality of life.

⁸⁸ Traditional Chinese family culture and filial piety (*xiao shun*) has historically emphasized the younger generation's obedience and submission to older generations. Following Yan (2016: 246), scholars use this term to refer to rising values of individualism that can be observed in the modernization processes of Confucian societies, including Singapore and Taiwan (e.g. Goransson et al., 2022). Generally speaking, in descending familism, traditional parental authority becomes less coveted while attention and resources center disproportionately around children.

Our next story steps on less explored paths like the connections between old people, reminders of death, and ageism. Evolutionary views of ageism are grounded in socio-cultural changes of capitalist modernization, like digital smartphone usage, that introduce novel effects on age relations (Bergman, 2017: 4). Psychologists note the difficulties of technological mastery, for example, which Pik Wan mentioned: “And let’s not kid ourselves. Nowadays the little ones are all glued to their iPhones. Nobody bothers to talk to grandma anymore. The old are no longer seen as that necessary or wise, like in the past...”. A reproductive ageism framework reserves a predominant role for the money economy in structuration of negative age relations, but the multi-faceted “existentialistic utilities of preferring young over old” in age discrimination is not wholly reducible to economic modes of production (Bergman, 2017: 25). Below, I recall a Singaporean caregiver’s recollection of family tensions preceding the death of their terminally ill father.

Reproductive ageism: Dialogue between active aging and mortal anxieties

“Mum still hasn’t given me an answer. We’ll cross the bridge when we get there.” Pik Wan lamented the impossibility of discussing late-life care, legal will, and death arrangements with her widowed mother. In this story, the family’s valorization of active and successful aging (used synonymously) interacts with mortal anxieties – social gerontologists’ observation that “death is the only certainty” (Greenberg et al., 2017: 106). Terror management perspectives suggest that older bodies are stark reminders of death’s inevitability, hence rouse anxieties among younger people who “psychologically distance ourselves from old people” (Greenberg et al., 2017: 117). The impossible task of getting Pik Wan’s mother to discuss impending mortal vulnerabilities, like how and by whom she wants to be assisted with bodily needs (“she dodges around the question”), reflects strategies of denial that distract and detract from poignant reminders of processes imminent to death. Considering death’s emotive triggers like discomfort

and fear shows that ageism is complicated and not a straightforward devaluation in economies of accumulation. Despised frailty and active aging's drive to forestall ugly old bodies (reminders of the end-point of death) is seldom connected to ageism, but is necessary for open-ended definitions of reproductive processes (Bodner, 2017; Calasanti and King, 2021). Pik Wan's mother "does not look 89" – an automatically understood compliment – and "reeled in horror" when their new FDW (six years ago) asked if she needed to be bathed. Frailty and incontinence are out-of-bounds conversation topics that trigger unwanted cues of vulnerability; indeed, the FDWs interviewed are privy to their patients' emotional struggles with losing bodily control, a hallmark of civility. We will return to her reluctance to contemplate disability and death after considering unsaid anxieties about her husband's passing.

Candidness toward death in the family can be a great source of unhappiness. Between laughs, Pik Wan recalled her mother and sisters being "absolutely horrified" at their father's instruction to "Don't waste time" – his first words to the palliative care doctor. Even more upsetting was that he informed only Pik Wan, knowing she would consent, to accompany him for an appointment⁸⁹ where she identified as a key witness. As expected, the others were inconsolable. Matter-of-factly, Pik Wan said there was "no point prolonging a zero-quality life...he had been in and out of ICU a number of times and decided it was time." One form of ageism that has received scant attention is the cultural expectation of extending life despite the low quality of emotional and spiritual health. Pik Wan's father had to 'cut corners' among his loved ones to prevent compromising personal autonomy to choose euthanasia. Their "terribly pragmatic" and "rational" approach to mortality did not sit well with social conventions of

⁸⁹ Together they made an Advanced Medical Directive (AMD), Singapore's legal procedure for patients who wish to decline and/or stop life-prolonging treatment. An AMD form must be signed and approved by the doctor-in-charge and one chosen witness above 21 years old: <https://www.moh.gov.sg/policies-and-legislation/advance-medical-directive> (MOH, 2021).

delaying death no matter what, embodied in the popular Chinese saying “better alive, even if hanging by a thread, than dead” (*hao si bu ru lai huo*). Had Pik Wan not happened to be “hyper-rational, just like dad”, this old man may have suffered in untold ways at his family’s insistence that he stay breathing.

“If my mum could just stay like this it would be great, because I can’t imagine if she was bedridden, and then if she has dementia and then, you know...I would imagine the minute her health switches, she becomes a big thing...it just changes, right?”

Pik Wan, Singaporean domestic employer, retiree, and family caregiver

Compared to Taiwan LTC’s emphasis on disability management for its advanced aged population, Singapore’s population planning hinges largely on a national active aging⁹⁰ strategy, focusing on personal, family, and community responsibility respectively (Feng and Straughn, 2017; Hsu, 2021; Maulod and Lu, 2020). Pik Wan’s mother “likes her independence”, and keeps a habit of staying out and about in their district’s active ageing hub⁹¹ or senior activity centers where she attends *taichi* and yoga classes. Pik Wan beamed with pride as she showed me a family photo with her mum in the center, dressed to the nines with the “exquisite make-up she still bothers to put on, amazing right?”. Not only does she not look 89, she was “kicked out of the community rehab exercise classes because she was too healthy!”. Pik Wan’s words betray self-ageism – she too prides herself on youthful standards of activity and productivity that make one appear younger than their years – as much as it reflects her mother’s internalized ageism; she would be “extremely unhappy” if she were no longer “generally very healthy” and “mentally fine”. Pik Wan emphasized ground rules like allowing her to manage finances: “mum’s in

⁹⁰ Younger generations of Singaporeans and Taiwanese tend to perceive successful aging in terms of pragmatic learning, while older adults prefer to “learn for learning’s sake” and personal growth (Hsu, 2021: 532; Maulod and Lu, 2020: 629). In vocational reskilling, instructors are often prone to ageist behavior like patronizing speech that impose an incompetent and ‘child-like’ stereotype.

⁹¹ These are integrated compounds for healthy living, constructed as part of the Active and Healthy Singapore campaign (Maulod and Lu, 2020: 633), where people can combine exercise with office work. They are mainly but not only for older Singaporeans above 55 who are encouraged to maintain fitness routines and avoid burdening state welfare.

charge, she has her brain, so use it.” Active aging’s popularity as a happy self-discipline stems not only from economic appeals, but also its existential comfort because physically mobile elders demonstrate life’s continuity.

“So while most people keep their parents home, especially with COVID, I would tell her that she’s boosted, please go out. Don’t sit here and rot, because it does nothing for their wellbeing. You know, they don’t have that wits about them, right?”

Pik Wan, Singaporean domestic employer, retiree, and family caregiver

Critical gerontology does not foreclose the benefits of agency-preserving measures expounded in active aging policies, but connects the physicality of aging and social positioning (Tulle, 2003). Fears of physical frailty (“becoming a burden”) necessitate a self-dialogue with one’s body and regulation politics. Her mother becoming “a big thing” once she hits certain (red-flag) boundaries like dementia and wheelchair-bound reveals a sociology of old bodies: appearance management (dress), strategies of bodily maintenance (staying fit), and appropriate social conduct (community participation). FDWs like Sylvia above said that caregivers attempt to put themselves in their patient’s shoes by doing relational work of imagining one’s downfall when bodily functions are lost, memory fades, and ailments dominate. Needing a stranger’s help with bathing and incontinency makes anyone undignified, which puts many elderlies into cranky, temperamental states. Pik Wan had no difficulty imagining so for her almost-90 mother who is still tight-lipped about how she wants to be cared for when the first signs of immobility arrive.

The ‘messy’ roles that mortal anxieties have in uncanny scenarios of ageism, like debates of (not) prolonging life⁹², goes beyond standard vocabulary of social reproduction.

Gerontological critiques (instead of endorsements) of active aging are rare, but even when done, tend to focus on neoliberal assumptions of the market’s invisible hand; ‘good aging’ lifestyles

⁹² Contrary to Western hypotheses that filial piety in Chinese culture – cultural reverence for elders’ wisdom and respecting their wishes – would endorse optimistic valuations of old people in the face of mortality (Greenberg et al., 2017: 123), empirical realities of implicit ageism in the said Asian societies prove otherwise (North and Fiske, 2015).

are accessible to a privileged minority while their less fortunate counterparts cannot afford to quit paid work or outsource grandparenting (Calasanti and King, 2021). Psychological interpretations of mortality salience are rarely consulted. Pik Wan raised an example, this time outside their family, where her mother's preferences to delay death, regardless of extenuating circumstances, emerged full force. A longtime family friend with dementia became brain-dead after a stroke. His family insisted on resuscitation and brought him home. As Pik Wan rationalized, "The real question is what quality of life is there for this man? But my mother says oh it's good! It's good to keep the person there (laughs)". We can only surmise about the old lady's agitated rejection of advice to contract a death will, her palpable discomfort with bodies showing weaknesses, and absolute refusal to contemplate scenarios imminent to death. Such irreconcilable differences in psychology of mortal vulnerability escape filial recommendations like respecting elderly wishes, and are irreducible to a devaluation (unproductive population) framing. Investments in active aging reproduce ageist ideology, but existential anxieties during end-of-life also complicate human relations in reproduction.

Reproductive ageism: Age relations in social reproduction

Following the above stories, a reproductive ageism framework calls for paying heed to age relations within and beyond the family. The trend of 'descending familism' (Yan, 2016), used by family ethnographers in Singapore and Taiwan, is used to set the context for intensive mothering (education as care labour) rather than how family members interpolate age relations (see Goransson et al., 2022; Lan, 2018; Teo, 2022). The aforementioned literature traces continuities of classing, gendering, and racializing processes among and between women, but age constructs in sending and receiving contexts, also labour migration analyses, remain neglected (Amrith, 2021). This closing section references the forgotten 'herstories' of Chinese

amahs' and contemporary FDWs' eldercare to reiterate the analytical necessity of a framework that integrates age relations into social reproduction.

None of this chapter's main characters acknowledged the ugly history of Asian Tigers' developmentalism where its diversity of 'maids' are concerned – these paved the way for enduring sexism, racism, and ageism in reproductive responsibilities. While it is difficult to discern how and where eldercare fits into East Asia's domestic sector, prior to migration streams for 'foreign maids' (see Gaw, 1988), local historians have traced the connections between devalued Chinese women and racialized FDWs. Compared to research interests in FDWs' role in the migration-development nexus (see Chapter Two), FPE scholars are hindered by the empirical paucity of *amahs*' old age experiences. However, the few archival sources on *amahs* who settled in Singapore, and rural Taiwanese *obasans*⁹³ (referring to aunt or older woman) in urban areas, allude to their invisibility in the government's eyes (Topley, 1954; Gaw, 1988; Ooi, 1992, 2013; Lai, 1986). Firstly, in labour policy, the home's awkward legal status (as a workplace) remains the status quo to the great frustration of FDW activists (see Chapter Two and Five). Second, archival evidence of workers' quarters (*kongsi fong*) and vegetarian houses (*zhai tang*), operated by Chinese sisterhoods⁹⁴ in what is now Singapore's Chinatown (*niu che shui*), can be analysed as social ageism – an out of sight, out of mind attitude to destitute old women (Gaw, 1988; Lai, 1986). In a scathing critique of America's eldercare, Silvia Federici notes that old age welfare

⁹³ The Taiwanese articulation of *obasan* (おばさん) is a colonial remnant from Japanese language and is pronounced in Mandarin as "ou ba sang" (歐巴桑). Its Chinese characters do not have any meaning but sound almost exactly the same. *Ou ba sang* in Taiwanese parlance typically refers to an older auntie with a homemaking background. People often use the term with reference to a popular social image of "the vegetable market auntie" who speaks loudly, gossips around, and tends to come across as annoying to younger people. See netizen forums: <https://gaoshancha.wordpress.com/2009/01/14/japanese-terms-in-taiwanese-mandarin/>.

⁹⁴ These closely-knitted social institutions boomed during the 1930s in Malaya from the collective efforts of Chinese women emigrants who could not and/or chose not to return to China for retirement. Those in present-day Malaysia and Singapore are highly similar in activities, form, and function.

was not a purview of Marx's labour politics, and is a blind spot in today's Marxist Left activism "who, with few exceptions, also seems to have written the elderly off the struggle" (Federici, 2014: 246). From the get go, there were virtually zero old age protections for retired *amahs* who reproduced other families (Gaw, 1988; Lai, 1986). There is an uncanny resemblance between the mutual aid philosophy of friendly societies in Marx's time and *amahs* who looked after one another. *Kongsi fong* were common living quarters for women in the same occupations, while *zhai tang* provided old age security through "care while alive and a funeral at death" (Gaw, 1988: 144). These informal clans were organized along provincial and village ties (*laoxiang*). Many *amahs* found much-needed peace of mind here through the emotional solace of having proper funerals⁹⁵, guaranteed mourners, and soul tablets.

Many *amahs*' sad endings, however, stand in stark contrast to their privileged counterparts in these archives, and necessitate deeper reflections of socialized age relations entrenched in systems of care. More destitute old women than researchers will ever know eventually moved into overcrowded "death houses" – the original community nursing homes⁹⁶ – to "await death" (Gaw, 1988: 141; Lai, 1986: 88). Kenneth Gaw's *Superior Servants* illustrates that no other group was hit harder by sexism-ageism confluences; the dominance of charities, philanthropists, and voluntary welfare organizations (VWOs) in eldercare has roots in the solidarity work of these combative women. Feminist activists have important lessons from *amahs*' 'failed' radicalism; local historians establish that *amahs*' social support networks "were

⁹⁵ Luckier *amahs* secured "death benefits": "showy funerals" with elaborate offerings, music bands, professional mourners, and a dignified burial (Ooi, 1992: 80). Many *amahs*, especially those estranged from family, held extravagant funerals in high regard and devoted their life savings to them.

⁹⁶ The layperson association of nursing homes with a place where the old go to await death (*deng si de di fang*) not only stems from filial piety culture, but also its history as resource-poor institutions of mutual aid. These "dying houses" were understaffed, redlined, and apprehended with fear. Many *amahs* did not move in willingly, but were skeptical of (invasive) Western medicine and hospitals.

to a large extent feminist in character” through anti-marriage ideals⁹⁷ and “principles of sisterhood, solidarity, and support.” (Lai, 1986: 86). These were valiant women who rejected marriage, marital domesticity, womanly servitude, and a life of submission under patriarchy despite strong pushback and often, natal estrangement (Ooi, 1992; Topley, 1954). A smaller number were widows or married women escaping unhappy relationships (Ooi, 1992: 82). Still, plain economics obstructed equitable and progressive age relations in delivering mutual support. These spaces relied on pooled savings and regular income to sustain operations, and could only admit able-bodied youngsters or lucky retirees who had accumulated small fortunes. Informal criteria like financial screening and word-of-mouth reputation prevented many *amahs* from gaining long-term entry into safe retirement.

It is important not to over-glorify their living conditions; overcrowded cubicles (ten or more women sharing one rented room) and poor sanitation were common (Ooi, 1992: 77). In *zhai tang*, financial contributions decided the division of labour; those who “cannot afford to pay their way must do the heavier work of the house” (Topley, 1954: 58). Despite mostly identifying with ‘radical’ feminist ideals⁹⁸ like anti-marriage (*bu hun zhu yi*), financial independence, and a refusal to live a closeted life in patriarchy, *amahs*’ alternatives lay in gender-appropriate roles of baby (mothering) *amah*. By the late 1980s, this group of women had faded out; no economic or social supports catered for retired *amahs*, whose plight we can only surmise.

⁹⁷ *Amahs* were trailblazers of flexible family structures and female-only households based on filial mother-daughter relations. Many adopted daughters (*yangnu*) from single mothers, impoverished families, and even traffickers, preferring girls for being more filial than boys, and raised them with anti-marriage ideals in the hopes that *yangnu* would care for them in old age (Lai, 1986: 85).

⁹⁸ Historians consider *amahs* radical for their time, given their assertion of individual value, independent of male judgements, in social contexts of patriarchy that all but foreclosed such options. However, it is worth noting that the application of ‘feminist’ is not without debate. Many *amahs* called out male entitlements and were unabashedly vocal in declaring their unwillingness to submit to patriarchal structures (Topley, 1954; Gaw, 1986; Ooi, 1992). However, a smaller number aligned with traditional marriage ideals and feminine marital duties but chose to prioritize economic support for their families, and regret not having children of their own for their own care (Low, 2014: 191).

Taiwan's situation is similar in gendered allocation of eldercare labour, with the important difference of rural to urban migration across a vaster territorial expanse, unlike the tiny city-state of Singapore which quickly resorted to foreign women (Lee, 2019). Taiwanese *obasans* headed to Taipei for employment as housekeepers (*guan jia*), nannies (*bao mu*), and did what live-in caregivers do now; the biography of Ching Ching (2012) is indicative for the many families in *Taiwan After China* whose mothers became 'maids' (*yong ren*) for wealthier urban households. Unlike *kongsi fong* and *zhai tang*, which grew out of Chinese emigrants' (who chose not/could not return to China) settlement needs (Topley, 1954: 67), Taiwanese women shuttled back and forth between city and countryside. Today, their numbers have rapidly dwindled and cohere around the first two categories (Chien, 2018). As Heidi commented, "Taiwanese domestics are almost non-existent nowadays. Furthermore, they are too costly and don't do much. Your parent won't be safe in their hands!" Overall, patriarchal state interests of consolidating women's work (full/part-time homemakers) have been more successful in Taiwan owing to its larger demographic, rural/urban divides, and deeper affiliation with gendered culture of Confucian filial piety. Many married couples see an advanced 'maid' culture as synonymous with gender equality in the household (Chung, 2022). Singapore's government was no less patriarchal in intent but very quickly conceded to pragmatic priorities – gender and racial equality in virtually all national laws, at least in official administration – of elevating the country onto the world stage. If the personal statements of the late strongman Lee Kuan Yew are taken as determinative for the republic's history, the Lee government harbored primordial sexist, racist, and eugenic views of humanity (see Zakaria, 1994: 113), however had the unparalleled capacity to drive policy with the formalistic ideal of 'equal opportunity for all' because the national economy's performance came over and above personal biases. Singaporean women do not

escape patriarchal demands to be responsible for all things ‘domestic’, with many tolerating unhappy marriages, but they enjoy relative class privilege and can often outsource care altogether. While half of the live-in caregivers described cooperating with daughters-in-law as co-caregivers, this expectation was not found in Singapore where I saw FDWs struggle alone.

It is important to note that people also adopted daughters in colonial Japan’s Taiwan, many of whom became *amahs* when older (Ishikawa, 2017). However, a complete discussion of female trafficking among Chinese emigrants’ families who set foot in Singapore and Taiwan is beyond my scope (see Ransmeier, 2017), which focuses on early records of informal eldercare. This sector started growing markedly in the late 1970s when increasing lifespans triggered concerns about aging populations (Sciubba and Chen, 2017). The scholarship predominantly discusses the explosion of ‘foreign maid’ migration for eldercare; *amahs* and *obasans* seem to have minor roles here, and were preoccupied with housekeeping and childminding (e.g. Peng, 2018: 1123, 1127). Strong attachments of eldercare to FDWs (Singapore) and live-in caregivers (Taiwan), rather than the Chinese women who predated them, also indicates childhood bias in welfare planning that prefers child/youth reproduction (see Chen, 2016; Huang et al., 2012).

With these contextual differences noted, the key takeaway for social reproduction analyses is the intersections between sexism, racism, and ageism across the diverse pools of Chinese domestics and foreign ‘maids’ whose old age was uncared for, and remains uncertain. In all cases, older women face insecure futures. Themes of abuse, exploitation, and abandonment connect the lives of bygone *amahs* and modern ‘maids’, but with crucial differences of racial privilege, social integration, and migration circumstances. Considerable *amahs* in Chinese households enjoyed high social standing and respect, and were addressed respectfully as *amah-jie* (older sister), especially by children, who were disciplined harshly when rude. Those working

together for wealthier households in large bungalows, unlike today's maid-of-all-trades, specialized in distinct tasks, especially cooking and infant care, which got their undivided attention. Some fortunate ones during the 1940s-50s commanded wages equivalent to an English-speaking clerk and higher than public service jobs like waitressing, hairdressing, and janitorial work (Lai, 1986: 79). An even smaller minority of "leisure *majies*" did not work for private households but for brothels, clubhouses, and courtesans, and accumulated fortunes unthinkable to the common folk (Low, 2014: 197). Anecdotal evidence from foster daughters suggests they were skillful traffickers who bought adopted daughters for forced concubinage and resold them for thousands per sale (Si, 2002: 11).

Compared to the regulated temporality of FDWs, whose work permits must be renewed every two years, *amahs* typically stayed with their house masters for at least ten years, with many only leaving upon retirement⁹⁹ at 65. Such relationships were characterized by extended familiarity, emotional bonding, and even mutual care responsibilities that took care of *amahs* after retirement – some lived with the same household, were gifted safe passages back to China, or sponsored entry into *zhai tang* – as an "honorary member of the family" (Ooi, 2013: 419). *Kongsi fong* also functioned as recruitment agencies, safeguarding *amahs*' economic prospects and job scope, while *chi mui* (fellow sisters) supported one another in labour disputes. It was not uncommon for *amahs* to quit on their employers and move back to their quarters. Unlike FDWs whose residence rights and social mobility are legally restricted, *amahs* found little difficulty in using public space for collective organization (Low, 2014). One documented 1960s misunderstanding involved a Chinese woman wrongly accusing Ah-Ling *jie* of breaking a vase,

⁹⁹ Most *amahs* were anti-marriage "single women without families", which made it 'easier' to be a "totally devoted" employee to the household (Gaw, 1988: 158-160). In contrast, three quarters of FDWs in my study were remote mothers who left their children out of financial necessity from locations that withstand the worst of neoliberal SAPs. All were supporting loved ones like parents, children, siblings, and relatives.

only to show up at her *kongsi fong* days later, apologizing profusely and pleading to have her back (Ooi, 2013: 421). The FDWs who complained about false accusations and being treated like a thief can only dream wistfully about such scenarios. They repeatedly emphasized that “agencies have no use” because “we pay them so much money but they always side with the employer. Aren’t agencies supposed to protect us?”. Impersonal labour brokers in the migration-development nexus are very different from Chinese sisterhoods that negotiated remuneration rates and worked hard to prevent members’ exploitation. While Filipino FDWs at least benefit from keener labour rights enforcers at the POEA (Paul, 2017), Indonesians like Sylvia are resigned: “Indonesian maids can bear (*tahan*) and tolerate (*ren*). That’s what we do best.”

FDWs cannot access equivalent spaces of community activism, social support, and mobility that Chinese *amahs* had (Ooi, 1992, 2013). What remains the same across differently privileged women, however, is the complete absence of enforceable labour legislation that recognizes the home as an actual workplace. This practice has its roots in the British colonial administration’s double standards in Singapore. In the 1930s, the British outlawed the trafficking and rearing of *mui tsai*¹⁰⁰ (little sister) but also did not formally recognize this practice’s continuance, relegating it to legal limbo (Lai, 1986: 50-51). Chinese patriarchy in Taiwan left *obasans* to their own devices in informal labour markets that governments did not care to regulate. Unlike ‘foreign maids’, though, Taiwanese women’s status closely resembles *amahs*. In Singapore, repeated attempts throughout the 1930s to improve the working conditions of young girls, some not even ten, were ineffective because their circumstances of adoption were untraceable. Ultimately, the Protectorate wielded an absolute authority over issues of

¹⁰⁰ These were young girls sold or trafficked by their families for various reasons, and compensated for the shortage of adult females in reproductive labour (Lai, 1986: 45). They did domestic servicing and were often young brides-to-be or little daughters-in-law for the family, who married them off to a man of their choosing, typically their own sons.

registration, placement, and transfer decisions. Like FDWs today without access to release papers, *mui tsais* did not have the right to switch employers. In both locations, present NGO initiatives to standardize the labour recruitment process for village intermediaries remain futile because, as governments insist, underhand embezzlement is undetectable beyond sovereign demarcations (Lan, 2016). As Lynn Koi (21 September, 2021), head project manager of Migrant Workers' Centre Singapore, explained, "The way some employment agents (EAs) do the accounts won't be captured in Singapore". She spoke of untraceable community ties in migrants' home villages, where many ex-migrants now lead headhunting efforts, that are "impossible to detect or punish the moment it's outside our borders." Lynn's exclamation that legal protection is feasible "only within our jurisdiction" was echoed by numerous Taiwanese NGO workers, like Jing Cheng of Global Workers' Organization and Grace Huang of the Domestic Caretakers' Union, both of whom called out unscrupulous government-to-government politicking – this line of documentation is well-travelled among migration ethnographers who follow FDWs' trajectories. Taiwanese referred to the Philippines's stronger labour politics, thanks to the POEA (Killias, 2018; Yuen and Paul, 2020), that they did not see Indonesians accessing. FDWs, though, are generally not caregivers by choice, and cannot claim to be moving for aspiration. Away from home, they are also forcibly alienated from community ties and excluded from forms of social inclusiveness.

Many Chinese masters entrusted *amahs* as cultural guardians, educators, and reproducers of filial piety for younger generations. Still, the exploitative realities of 24/7 live-in servitude cannot be glorified. Even *amahs* who were treated well found themselves in "precarity chains" (Silvey and Parrenas, 2020: 3461). These women were economic migrants fleeing political turmoil, economic crises, starvation, poverty, and unsustainable family relationships in China

(Low, 2014). The majority likely harboured a “lifelong dream of retiring in their homeland” with accumulated money but only a lucky few could (Ooi, 1992: 76). Furthermore, stories of happy *amahs* were confined to Chinese households, given that Europeans in colonial Malaya were eager to flaunt their superiority. *Amahs* had to wear a chequered black-and-white uniform symbolizing deference and servitude, were not addressed with honorifics, and could not talk back (Chin, 1998; Ooi, 2013: 417; Gaw, 1988). Still, Chinese sisterhoods had a cohesiveness and solidarity that served as base supports, which are social privileges compared to FDWs’ confined solitude. Not only are FDWs subject to strict social surveillance, employers (irrespective of ancestry and ethnic affiliation) have internalized the idea that ‘maids’ are personal property. Neither their own governments or migrant communities have set up old age securities in Global South states that are depleted by neoliberal SAPs.

Most invisible in global care chains is the ageist exploitation of FDWs as they struggle in an international division of eldercare where “the elderly care for the elderly”, as Parrenas (2015: 192) finds in Rome and Los Angeles. The predominantly online circumstances of my contact sourcing process, during the height of COVID-19 in 2021, likely depressed the age range of FDWs compared to researchers in ‘normal’ circumstances who recruited in face-to-face settings. Special issues on transnational aging finds, unsurprisingly, that younger migrants’ digital proficiency allows them to experience a closer replication of family intimacy compared to their older counterparts who struggle with physical distance (Ho et al., 2022). The social media communities where I sourced for interviewees are unlikely to be frequented by older FDWs like those interviewed by Megha Amrith (2022), whose project team had way more extensive resources and time (before COVID-19) in the field. However, I did encounter a few FDWs in their early to late 50s whose aging futures illustrate an ambiguity of retirement. Precarity chains

in unfree labour regimes and regulated stints of permanent temporariness in migration policy impose uncertainties on FDWs' aging futures, with most unable to accumulate savings in cycles of remittance and depletion for their loved ones' reproduction; children's education, parents' medical expenses, home mortgages, and other miscellaneous costs in day-to-day living.

Paying closer attention to age relations necessitates shifting our attention to the lives of aging FDWs. What the women say (or not say) about aging futures reveals an elusiveness of retirement and alternative anxieties brought on by a new phase of (returnee) life that often, cannot be as rosy as they initially hoped. The Singapore state (and many employers) proclaim their preference for older domestic workers, since they are "more mature and better equipped to provide full-time domestic care" for all ages (MOM, 2006 in Yeoh and Huang, 2009: 76), yet enforces a mandatory retirement age of 60 years, after which FDWs must leave regardless of their willingness and necessity of work. Some employers have tried to apply for permanent residency by appealing for their FDW's 'indispensability', but thus far have been rejected because "they (government officials) say we domestic workers do not contribute anything to the economy" (Amrith, 2022: 1918). For long-time FDWs like Jennifer (personal communication, 8 June 2021), a 57-year old FDW in Singapore who has been abroad for over 30 years, 'retirement' is far from a linear, straightforward process of slowing down (relaxing) that Singaporeans and Taiwanese have in mind. Visibly worried, she spoke of one adult daughter and two grandchildren in the Philippines, whom she was getting ready to go back to (and grandparent for) in three years. With even more anxiety, Jennifer shared ruefully that her daughter was preparing to become an FDW to continue providing (in place of her) for the children's education expenses.

Despite important differences in socioeconomic prospects and standards of living, reproductive ageism implicates sending and receiving destinations, falling most adversely on

(migrant) women. Singaporean and Taiwanese grandmothers face cultural expectations of laborious childminding, counted as ‘non-work’ in people’s minds (Pel’s mother), which are hard to rebel against when generational intimacies are at stake (Thang et al., 2011). However, FDWs’ uncertain aging futures enable the retirement of these women and their aging-in-place.

Gerontological discourses of active ageing, in that regard, would look ridiculous to FDWs who are ‘ageless’ in state policy that assigns them a “single function: to work”, and whose aging bodies have never been associated with reduced activity (Amrith, 2021: 249). FDWs disagree with the state’s perception of themselves as too frail, useless, and unproductive, but the number 60 screams ‘time’s up’ for their workable bodies. Forced to depart from a lifetime of established labour routines, work identity, and social networks accumulated from decades abroad, ‘retiring’ FDWs often feel trepidation and uneasiness of what lies ahead. Unlike some economically privileged grandmothers, most FDWs do not return feeling financially secure. Some express guilt over being unable to accumulate sufficient savings and seeing their own children go overseas to become ‘maids’ (Paul, 2017); I did not probe because Jennifer’s uneasiness was palpable, but she probably thought likewise.

Taiwan does not impose mandatory retirement (departure) ages for live-in caregivers, but does require, like Singapore, that they be under 50 at the time of work permit application, from which they can stay up to 14 years (Lan, 2022). Local sociologists have used the lens of structural violence to document the numerous physical and mental repercussions that long-time caregivers like Sylvia face at work – asymmetrical power relationships, excessive care burdens, chronic fatigue, overuse injuries from falls, depression, and other troubling conditions associated with being ‘disposable’ – that labour brokers like Chien Wei conveniently dismiss (Liang, 2021). Sylvia was less candid than Jennifer on aging futures, and became considerably unsettled at the

topic. I did not ask Sylvia about retirement, but started to sense some discomfort as she mentioned nearing the end of a 14-year stay, after which she must return to what seemed like a network of broken relations and estranged relatives. Any mention of family issues dredged up unwanted memories and visible discomfort. Sylvia placed her hand on her heart and lamented, tearfully and wistfully: “My life story? Forget it, telling it will take forever, can’t finish telling (*jiang bu wan*). Too tough already (*tai ku le*)...”. Sensing her obvious averseness, we shifted to her patients instead, whom she talked about with great delight and grief when recalling their last moments. Sylvia’s aging anxieties are not just financial, but also the fear of returning to antagonized relations and community ties that have changed irreversibly with decades apart. After a short six-month stint in Singapore with an unbearably abusive household, Sylvia arrived in Taiwan during the late 1990s, after which she periodically returned to Indonesia (for one to three years each time) where she had set up a small home business. Her time in Taiwan was approaching 14 years, and she seemed unable to contemplate the prospect of leaving on positive terms. While many Filipinos are invested in stepwise serial migration, based on subjective rankings of destinations’ attractiveness, Indonesians are likelier to prioritize family reunification (returning home) instead of relocating onward to popular Western destinations (Paul, 2017). Most Indonesians do not enjoy similar social, economic, and human capital compared to Filipino counterparts, and tend to feel less culturally affiliated with the Anglophone world (Paul, 2017). Sylvia did not report a hierarchy of destination preferences¹⁰¹ – Canada and the United States at

¹⁰¹ Commonly held destination hierarchies are inextricably linked with Filipino privilege in the global healthcare migration industry (Choy, 2003). No Indonesian FDWs in my study reported wanting to eventually ‘make it’ to Canada or the United States, and seemed set on maximizing their earnings in regional (Asian) stepwise migration. Upon hearing that I was an international in Canada, numerous Filipino FDWs peppered me with questions about how I got there, and how they could migrate there.

the top, East Asia in the middle, and the Middle East at the bottom – unlike Jennifer who expressed resignation at not being able to land in the West.

For both women, though, age factored crucially in their “option of non-action”, or staying put (Paul, 2017: 148). Both described being, although not necessarily feeling, ‘too old’ for certain active pursuits; even important theoretical interventions like ‘multinational migrations’ risk neglecting the importance of age in experiences of transnational (im)mobility. Stepwise journeys, defined as “short-term, multi-year overseas contracts in a series of countries” (Paul, 2015: 440), implies an ableism that overlooks age relations and its implications for aging futures. In articulating these ideas, Anju Paul and Brenda Yeoh provide an important task for feminist migration scholars, who as a group have neglected the field’s classism and methodological nationalism. Cosmopolitan frameworks of transnational movement have centred on a capital-rich global elite instead of recognizing that capital-constrained migrants are key participants of mobility patterns (Paul and Yeoh, 2021). The authors propose ‘multinational’ instead of ‘transnational’, pointing out that the latter does not go beyond two (sending and receiving) countries’ preoccupations (see Baldassar et al., 2007). FDWs’ journeys do not correspond with privileged frameworks of destination rankings; their job hopping brings them to unexpected locations through unpredictable means, and these movements have a “circular, repetitive, and temporally nested” quality in their lives (Paul and Yeoh, 2021: 7).

For aging FDWs nearing or older than 50 (when new work permits are no longer granted), such pathways of incremental goal-seeking in a snakes-and-ladders game are abruptly discontinued, dredging up painful reminders of what comes next. As Chapter Four’s stories show, FDWs engage in a lifetime of skilful emotional regulation when confronted with natal alienation, contradictory class mobility, and the unwelcome challenges of ‘dirty’ work. The more

than three decades each of labouring abroad for their families' reproduction have made Jennifer and Sylvia accustomed to elongated precarity, around which they have learnt to shape a complex self-identity, however in-flux, that is rudely terminated. Moving on to new destinations and 'upskilling' into institutional employment, for both women, are 'milestone' endeavors that were only possible only for younger FDWs. Back home, how FDWs are welcomed (or not) by their loved ones, long used to benefitting from their economic remittances, is one key area of investigation. Where strained relations have emerged, 'retiring' FDWs must confront uncomfortable questions about social reintegration, living amidst (now alienated) peoples, and loved ones who suddenly become distant when FDWs cease to have an instrumental presence in the family's consumption standards. Sylvia's unsettledness hinted at this more than Jennifer, who seemed most perturbed about continued separation with her daughter.

I end this chapter by circling back to the need for a reproductive ageism framework that connects the ageist exploitation of these diverse women. What awaits Jennifer and Sylvia is likely no different from the childminding fate of Kayden's grandmother, but the paradoxes of 'ageless' labour migration policy deserve more attention in feminist analyses (Amrith, 2022). An integrative research agenda for FPE and social gerontology takes *amahs'* and FDWs' eldercare (and the lack thereof) to recognize the centrality of age relations in experiences of gendered and racialized caregiving. Singapore and Taiwan, as 'Asian Dragons', have achieved remarkable economic miracles in record time. Both would do better to recall legacies of British colonization, Western imperialism, Japanese pan-Asian expansionism¹⁰² (Huang, 2006; Takeshi, 2006; Zhang,

¹⁰² Japan's colonial status as an unparalleled regional aggressor throughout Asia is often underplayed relative to the wartime atrocities of Western imperial powers. Legal historians and journalists have documented the currency of primordial 'Japaneseness' (*Wajin*) ideology which denies the existence of racism based on the claim that "there are no other races in Japan to have relations with"; an assertion of an 'ethnically pure people' (*tan 'itsu minzoku*) that disenfranchises minorities born and bred in Japan's jurisdiction (Arudou and Center, 2013: 160-161). One renowned bestseller, *The Rape of Nanking*, provides a devastatingly poignant account from the eyes and ears of those present during the 6-week massacre of 1937, illustrating a military training enterprise of killing machines like never before

2009), and its roll-on effects on colonized populations that have led to further internal differentiations (see Chapter Two). Taiwan fares better in distinguishing the job scope of live-in caregivers, but everywhere, employers' responsibilities over the work-life of 'maids' are conveniently dismissed.

Eldercare has a negligible presence in the global historical sociology of housework: "Only one element of women's domestic work necessarily expanded as a result of the historical developments...and that is childcare." (Jackson, 1992: 162). It is in the above historical context and positioning of eldercare's intensified marginalization, plus the empirical and policy contexts laid out previously, that reproductive ageism is grounded. This framework reserves a predominant role for capital accumulation systems in accounting for ageist tendencies, including in social psychology. This belief is supported by the rich empirical and theoretical research showing the confluence of market ideology with social structuration in everyday life. Comparatively, no such historical development of whole industries of aspiration making, character molding, and productivity cultivation ("they are the future") exists for aging adults whose care supposedly revolves around self-management and charity assistance in liberal ideology (Bodner, 2017; Calasanti, 2020; Federici, 2014). Yet, as Pik Wan's family shows, human psychology carries an inertia that is irreducible to market logic; the overlaps between death or mortal anxiety and ageism are apt in intergenerational settings (Greenberg et al., 2017). Benevolent ageism, elderly neglect, and unconscious biases that favour the developmental aspects of child rearing are some observations from the featured women.

(Chang, 1997). The author's unfortunate suicide at a young age has been framed as an indirect death due to trauma caused by the sheer monstrosity of this Japanese atrocity.

Conclusion

This chapter aims not at analytical synthesis of FPE's reproductive debates but rather a grasp of connected yet divergent and temporal (time and place-specific) accounts of ageism. In all cases, the intergenerational nature of care is underrated. "Reproductive ageism" sends a message to the broader FPE literature, and specifically care work in East Asia, to integrate a generational lens of child-to-elderly reproduction. Compared to the intersectionality of class, gender, and race, theorists have not come to equal terms with age experienced as negative social status; active aging, successful aging, and anti-aging are some everyday lexicons that do not arouse the same anger (Calasanti and King, 2021). Apart from connecting overscheduled children with neglected elderly, reproductive ageism speaks to feminist geographers' call to retain post-structural perspectives in social reproduction (Strauss and Meehan, 2015). For the women here, old age was not a topic like it was not in Marx's species-being (Federici, 2020), but philosophical speculations about death anxieties (Pik Wan's family) point to untheorized connections with ageism.

In these stories, one Singaporean mother channels the spirit of *kiasu* parenting in the global education arms race, also elaborated by FPE scholars on childhood as spectacle, concerted cultivation, intensive mothering, and parental involution (Katz, 2001; Goransson, 2022; Lan, 2018; Teo, 2022; Yeoh and Huang, 2010). Another Taiwanese mother is not yet caught up with cognitive rearing and devotes her energies to labour brokering transactions. In this case, her toddler has not become over-schooled like Pei-Chia Lan (2018) documents in *Raising Global Families*, but the little girl learns to think about practical survival¹⁰³ (work ethic) with ageist-

¹⁰³ Chien Wei reiterated Taiwan's need to be "ruthless when necessary" in its foreign labour policy: "being a good person does not give you money. If you cannot be bad, you cannot survive".

racist implications. In these households, ageism and sexism intersect for Kayden's grandmother who is expected to service Pel's family, unlike Chien Wei's father who spends his days "watching dramas, playing mahjong, and enjoying life". However, value-generating chains also include learning processes between family members that implicitly endorse ageist outcomes. Old people are deemed insignificant in their family's reproductive life compared to child rearing and income-generating avenues. Neither did the women contemplate their own aging prospects.

This chapter's framework advocates for more attention to interactions based on age-appropriate roles and relations with older adults; these intergenerational interactions, which the women's lives allude to, crystallize social attitudes about people's 'right' place. Heidi's caregiving showcases resistance against ageist policy, but childlessness is cited as the reason for being exceptionally attentive to elders; the social good of child education as care labour is well-established (Folbre, 1994), but the reasons for paying similar heed to eldercare is absent. Through mundane routines of work and life, the featured characters partake in (and complicate) ageism through education as care labour, labour brokerage, and neoliberal tropes of active aging. What it takes to survive the frontlines of caregiving for the elderly, where FDWs' tenacity in skills cultivation hold down the fort, is what we turn to next.

Chapter 4 Punctured Resilience: Summoning the Strength to Soldier On

Introduction

“I consider 90%, our life (as ‘maids’), very struggle. But maybe I’m considered a strong woman and I always think positive. Even sometimes I feel like hanging myself, but we need to be strong because it’s not just for ourselves, we have a family. Just think positive, and what makes your life happy, just do it.”

Sha¹⁰⁴, Filipino FDW in Singapore, 2 June 2021

Human life is resilient. Human life, unfortunately for some more than others, is also rather easy to take. Many FDWs I interviewed struck me as physically and emotionally resilient in ways that aligned with host societies’ expectations of unbreakable ‘supermaids’ (e.g. Chee, 2020). Indeed, as coerced carers (see Chapter One), FDWs are forced into a lifetime of skilful emotional regulation. In this chapter, I offer a framework of “punctured resilience” informed by the FPE scholarship on emotional labour, social constructions of skills, and feminist theories of gendered resilience. Punctured resilience refers to the women’s defence of care itself, unique in each case, that pierces through and stabs at resilience, conceived as a bounded entity of coping mechanisms directed at recovering from trauma to bounce back into the labour market (see Chee, 2020; Neocleous, 2013). Sha and her counterparts quoted resist dominant assembly-like styles of care when with their elderly patients more than as migrant workers enduring tough times abroad. Indeed, the women’s infallible strength and infinite perseverance is precisely what enables those above them to take their resilience for granted. But labour market subjugation does not mean that FDWs are incapable of puncturing or putting some holes into this modern subjectivity, especially when care for another person is implicated. My framework weaves together the vibrantly

¹⁰⁴ This chapter’s main characters are two FDWs: Sha (30 September, 2021) and Maylene (6 June, 2021), while Sylvia (30 November, 2021) is featured briefly, leading into Chapter Five.

contested arena of care activity (Raghuram, 2012, 2019) and the urgency of feminist critiques of resilience (Bracke, 2016b; Gill and Orgad, 2018). Theoretically, my framework argues that FPE scholars have made tremendous inroads by connecting emotional labour and skills in care work, which would do even better if associated with research agendas, nascent in feminist political thought, of critical resilience (e.g. Bracke, 2016a, 2016b).

Echoing Chapter One's take of intersectionality as an essentially contested but indispensable social justice tool (Dhamoon, 2023), I argue that despite its associations with normalized struggle to cope with structural inequality, resilience is far from depoliticizing (e.g. Neocleous, 2013) when studied for its complex and untidy nuances, because to situate FDWs as external to the fight to destabilize resilience reinforces the whiteness of feminist agency. Read as "an affective capacity for surviving and weathering the mounting insecurities of neoliberalism", resilience in theory compels all actors but has been 'critically' debated only with the white "middle-class woman and her children" in mind, as current conversations in existing feminist studies go, although themselves meagre compared to orthodox uses of resilience (e.g. Gill and Orgad, 2018: 480-481; Gorton, 2021). It would seem that FDWs are instruments, not subjects, of resilience as a psychic project; these women always already wield what Sarah Bracke calls "the resilience of the wretched of the earth" (Bracke, 2016b: 852). As Mark Neocleous notes in his critique of resilience in poverty alleviation programs, resilience "turns out to be something that the world's poor already possess" (Neocleous, 2013: 4). The FDWs I interviewed have been socialized into overseas migration as a rite of passage into economic survival. A resilient subjectivity is hence readily apparent among these women. However, a few FPE thinkers argue for a greater inclusion of Global South dynamism and diversity both in the concept of care (Raghuram, 2012) and accounts of emotional labour, to give more prominence to migrants'

embodied movements (Kofman and Raghuram, 2012; Tungohan, 2019; Vaittinen, 2014). Taking these insights into punctured resilience, the possible meanings that care activity can take on have too often not considered how FDWs, through the everyday subversion of banal and mundane routines, contest the powerful's moral picture of care. These works can be leveraged on to intervene in the dizzying (and worrying) uptake of resilience, in its simple bounce-backable sense (e.g. Garabiles et al., 2017, 2022; van der Ham et al., 2014), that is unfolding rapidly in migration psychology.

I invite other care work analysts in the field of FPE to draw on ideas of punctured resilience and the temporalities of care (Amrith, 2020; Raghuram, 2012; 2019) to pushback against popular notions of middle-class resilience. Doing so will help existing FPE conversations move past a penchant for meso-level debates that congregate around the receiving destinations' political economy of marketized eldercare (e.g. Lan, 2016; Liang, 2021; Yeoh and Huang, 2014; Yeoh et al., 2021). This analytical suggestion does not imply that the host society's dominant constructs of eldercare policies and skills regimes should be downplayed. Social constructs of care needs and wants shape how FDWs experience care work in individual households. Scholars should continue to investigate these topics alongside micro-level accounts of emotional lives in care labour migration.

In what follows, I illustrate the conceptual resources supporting my notion of punctured resilience, which I see as part of FDWs' emotional labour. Thereafter, I link these insights to what we know about the social construction of skills in care work. What comes out of this discussion alongside my interviewees' words is their (unrealized) desire to resist the status quo of resilience; a made-up exterior and surface persona one projects that belies contradictory feelings. I then unpack some well-established criteria of care work that host societies use to

assess the resilient quality of ‘maids’, showing that some who ‘succeed’ (e.g. having an impressive list of caregiving credentials) do still mentally fight against the reductive effects of, for instance, ‘skills’ – a yardstick of professional competence and deserved quantum of respect that overplays technical over emotional aspects of care. In some scenarios, caring (in ways opposite to what an employer dictates) is resisting. Analysts would need to dive into deeper speculations of our interviewees’ inner worlds and thought processes to better appreciate this point (see p. 179). After going through some vignettes, I conclude with a note on care itself – its ethics and practices – as a key conduit of agency and resistance.

The Punctured Resilience of Care Itself

My formulation of punctured resilience situates FDWs as structurally coerced carers in transnational care labour migration (see Chapter One), of which many women are deeply cognizant. However, by picking up on Parvati Raghuram’s astute but not widely pursued lacuna of FPE’s “relatively unvariegated concept of care” (Raghuram, 2012: 156) despite its strong migrant presence, I suggest that the realm of care ethics and practice is one domain that FDWs puncture the market imperatives of resilience with. FDWs are not content to leave the common knowledge of “resilient self-formation” unscathed (Bracke, 2016a: 63), that is, its fatalistic rendering of “the future as a cycle of disaster and recovery”, which “thwarts the developing of skills of imagining otherwise”. The use of ‘punctured’ illustrates the subversive contributions of FDWs who, intentionally or not, do not succumb to a “colonization of the political imagination”, a zone of foreclosure where “we are not permitted to even imagine an alternative” (Neocleous, 2013: 5), hence would find alternative worlds of valuation impossible. But consider Sha, who has accumulated an impressive array of more than ten caregiving credentials despite unsupportive employers. On surface, she would embody what Liberty Chee’s “hyper-resilient

supermaid” possesses: a “superhuman endurance and malleability” that recruitment agencies strive to drill into pre-departure trainees (Chee, 2020: 369). But in our interview, she broke down into inconsolable sobs at times when care itself was mentioned, gushing as passionately about how *ah ma* was mistreated by her adult children as much as she argued indignantly against labour rights breaches. Even Maylene, a much older woman who felt intimidatingly stoic at first, recounted events where she took actions to protect an elderly person’s safety despite facing backlash and risking unemployment.

For political reasons, FPE scholars are ambivalent about the internalization of colonial gendered ideals of femininity that many FDWs cite (Tungohan, 2021), and challenge labour export/import policies that naturalize women’s sacrifices for “resilient transnational families” (Amrith, 2023: 205). Maylene’s staunch declaration of “we are here to work” (out of motherly responsibility) and “yes, we are the maid” can be read as a show of resilience in the job market, but how she saw one late *ah gong* off (till he passed) despite an opportunity to upskill into institutional employment are ‘irrational’ choices that counter expectations of resilient decisions. In making these observations, punctured resilience suggests to the care work literature that its nuanced insights of interconnected issues – such as regional institutional variations (Peng, 2018); FDWs’ embodied emotional labour (Huang et al., 2012); discriminatory skills regimes (Lan, 2022; Ortiga et al., 2021); and differentially privileged (non)citizen women tasked with ‘cleaner’ and ‘dirtier’ types of caregiving (Yeoh et al., 2021) – will be augmented with a richer moral faculty by considering instances where FDWs confide about topics that spill past labour and skills: the care itself.

FDWs are not only workers but also mothers, daughters, sisters, friends to fellow migrants, and human beings with aspirations and dreams of care. Their commitment to

puncturing resilience through care ethic remind us that resistance against eldercare's devaluation is not lost. In that regard, as Silvia Federici's case for recognizing domestic workers as feminist political activists notes, FDWs' resilience does not overturn asymmetrical power relationships but this should not detract from appreciating their intellectual agency in reframing domestic caregiving (Federici, 2016). As Gail Lewis (2013: 873) asks of her colleagues in feminist intersectionality: how do the "empirical subjects" of intersectional lived experience "feel themselves to be?". FDWs disrupt and interrupt resilience with care ethics, which is an arena for forms of relationality and humanity beyond the work-based ones of emotional labour and skill. Sarah Bracke notes sharply that "Resilience has friends in high places" (Bracke, 2016a: 52). It is no coincidence that the term is debated and contested in academic settings rather than used by FDWs themselves, even if it is the resilient ones who are most active in grassroots organizations and appear in research publications (e.g. AWARE and HOME, 2020).

Amidst this research dilemma, I construct punctured resilience as a back-and-forth dialogue between my interlocutor's categories and the analyst's schemes, suggesting that its narrative complexities can be explored from multiple positions. I derive this framework from a belief in "who you (researcher) are is part of the data" (Feng Xu, personal communication, 22 February 2023). I see gendered resilience, for instance, as an analytical realm that connects the very different circumstances of more and less fortunate women. That is, resilience needs to be analysed for its gendered consequences: "a feminine mode of survival...profoundly connected to the work of reproduction" (Bracke, 2016b: 850). In her pedagogical reflection of fieldwork methods classes, Tania Murray Li talks about the resilience of undergraduates at the University of Toronto, who referred to 'the Man'. In response, she asks: "Why is it the figure of a man, not a woman, who wields this unaccountable form of punitive power?" (Li, 2022: 220). In my

teaching, the use of trigger warnings in FPE courses have deeply gendered connotations: these usually warn about sexual abuse/violence on female bodies. These qualifiers weigh disproportionately on the souls of female students whose emotional labour in “everyday feats of building resilience” is “not acknowledged as work” (Gill and Orgad, 2018: 490).

For Tania Li, “neoliberal subjects make their own lives into an enterprise, defining goals, developing capacities, maximizing their human capital, and honing their minds, bodies, and lifestyles through endless projects of self-fashioning.” (Li, 2022: 219). This entrepreneurial spirit extends into techniques of anxiety management and stress relief when life’s pressures build up. Academic Aunties¹⁰⁵, an inspiring podcast hosted by Ethel Tungohan at York University, is devoted to critical discussions about sexism and racism in predatory universities, and surviving the alienating hallways of departments. The platform partners with scholar activists from all walks of life who “have survived and even thrived while navigating this treacherous world”, while not losing an eye for opportunities to “plant the seeds for structural transformation”. Like their colleagues in Chapter Two at Congress 2023, care work for and alongside one another pokes and stabs at the avalanche of instructions to be resilient against structural injustice.

So, how do diverse women in circumstances of coerced care, such as this chapter’s FDWs, complicate and contest the content of resilience? Thus far, the astoundingly few critical gendered analyses of resilience (e.g. Bracke, 2016a, 2016b; Gill and Orgad, 2018; Gorton, 2021) have made crucial interventions in its incipient but already rapidly expanding popularity, which mostly discuss resilience in straitjacket, market-driven ways. I give an overview of the FPE literature on emotional labour and skills in care work, and suggest a synthesis with feminist theoretical agendas of resistance against resilience. However, I argue that a diverse meanings of

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.academicaunties.com>

care approach (Raghuram, 2019), a spectral body of thought in care work literature, can make ‘resilience’ uncomfortable – an analytical set up for Chapter Five’s protagonist (not victimhood) view of agency in social transformation. I introduce the main characters of punctured resilience, how they stray from the analytical confines of emotional labour and skill, then conclude with a note on care’s diverse meanings.

Linking emotional labour and skills to resilience, but what about resistance?

Few discussions of emotional labour in care work can begin without referring to Arlie Hochschild’s 1983 classic, *The Managed Heart*. Using the now iconic figure of the flight attendant, Hochschild made an important feminist intervention by foregrounding the emotional aspects of interactive service work, which is socially necessary work that is invisible under the auspices of the market, and most often born by women. As an immaterial and unquantifiable sort of work, emotional labour demands the skill of emotion management, which “requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others” (Hochschild, 1983: 7). In noting that institutional caregivers “must give something of themselves”, Nicky James argues that “it is a form of skilled, regulatory labour” that takes place in both public workplace and private home settings (James, 1986: 19). Her definition of emotional labour as “dealing with other peoples’ feelings” is less confined to outward appearances and instead emphasises the “regulation of emotions”, which often entails hiding sorrow and pain (James, 1986: 15). This location friendly account recognizes that emotional labour is contingent on people, space, and place, given that the environment, organization, and actors play a part in how it emerges. Hochschild’s chapter on emotional surplus value at the turn of the 21st century, when the ‘Filipina nanny’ had become a well-recognized phenomenon in transnational care migration, outlined a picture of “global care

chains” (hereafter care chains): “a series of personal links between people across the globe based on the paid and unpaid work of caring” (Hochschild, 2000: 131). As this and other works on globalized care recognized, emotional labour looks and feels different for caregivers depending on why, where, and under what conditions care is provided. In the case of migrant mothers, there is the management of natal alienation on top of the stresses of financial and legal uncertainty in the mobility process. In Asia’s middle-class consumerist culture, which Christine Chin (1998) connects to the household practice of hiring ‘maids’ as a status symbol, FDWs’ emotional labour also includes surviving the moving geographies of ‘maid’ abuse (Huang and Yeoh, 2007: 202).

Canadian FPE skills analyst Pat Armstrong and colleagues have for long argued that although there are some objectively measurable aspects of skills in care work, it is primarily “socially constructed and defined, relational, and a contested terrain” (Armstrong, 2013: 267). Rather than debating its content (what skills are or should be), this approach urges analysts to study how power operates (how skills come to be) to shape the forces that enable/prevent people from accessing and mastering the skills needed. Some false dichotomies this body of work identifies are: individual/job; learned/unlearned; hard/soft; manual/mental; routine/complex; visible/invisible; and the extent to which workers have (lack of) control over skills cultivation (Armstrong, 2013; Barken and Armstrong, 2018). In *Gendered Migrations and Global Social Reproduction*, Eleonore Kofman and Parvati Raghuram (2015) argue for an expansion of the range of skills that are taken into account where female migrants’ contributions to the host society’s social reproduction (and themselves) are concerned. Emotional labour falls squarely into the (in)visible dilemma and goes unrecognized by caregivers themselves; “normalized as part of gendered and familial relationships”, and seen by men and women as “a marketization of skills developed within the household” (Kofman and Raghuram, 2015: 104). This view contrasts

with some public sector analysts who claim that classifying emotional labour as skill, a quality deserving of higher remuneration, risks conceptual fuzziness or is even pointless (e.g. Payne, 2009 in England). Using a range of service workers – cashiers, waitresses, janitors, and receptionists among others – as examples, Jonathan Payne surmises that the emotional labour involved in interacting with customers falls short of some key criteria of ‘skilled’, “namely task complexity and discretion/control in the labour process” (Payne, 2009: 355). He does not deny that everyday activities, such as holding polite conversations and staying calm in the face of rudeness, are amazing feats. But these are “skills which most of us acquire” anyway during formative socialization, where most people are taught to integrate such dispositions into “part of a person’s ethical or moral self” (Ibid).

In contrast, the cited FPE scholars have put together and defend the pairing of emotional labour and skill because its conditions of work matter. Privatized home care by FDWs relies on transnational coercion and involuntary alienation, and is not delivered on comparable grounds as public facing service employees (Armstrong, 2013). Feminized care work is undervalued in all settings, but it is in the live-in organization of work where “employers feel they own the worker” that this ugly head rears its worst (Romero, 2018: 1183). For FPE analysts writing in East Asia, it is not just the “paradoxical nature of domestic space” (Huang and Yeoh, 2007: 200) that they emphasise but also its cultural, economic, and policy context, which often differs widely from Anglophone studies of emotional labour in modern care systems. In the United States, Canada, and England, Julia Twigg, Kim England, Isabel Dyck, and Sarah Dyer offer nuanced accounts of ‘body work’: “paid work on the bodies of others in health and social care” (Twigg et al., 2011: 173). Body work comprises physical and emotional dimensions that have become increasingly

complex since the 1990s shift to New Public Management (NPM¹⁰⁶), which require “new ways of understanding” amidst the growing hastiness and stress of working environments, such as for Ontario’s home care workers (England and Dyck, 2011: 206).

The localized configurations of developmentalism, race, and othering in Singapore and Taiwan notwithstanding (see Chapter One), in both locations, FDWs’ bodies are a physical proxy for the social meanings attached to their patients. In the case of elderly persons, because “eldercare is invested in discourses of embodiment associated with caring for decaying, leaking bodies”, body work is compounded with an “intimacy and disgust” that attaches to the “similarly devalued” bodies of its providers (Huang et al., 2012: 198). Increased demand for eldercare inside and outside the home has had to look to migrant labourers from outside national borders (Dyer et al., 2008) because citizens shun this work (Kofman and Raghuram, 2015). Also, as the extensive literature on Asia’s regional care circuits show, FDWs’ bodies are also the medium of outsourced filial piety in the liberal migrant-in-the-family model (Lan, 2016; Yeoh et al., 2021). The layers of affective and emotional triggers they experience hence goes beyond the patient’s body, such as feelings of ambivalence toward handling a stranger’s body in ways that “violate the norms” of “touch, smell, or sight” (Twigg et al., 2011: 172). In explaining the stubborn immutability of a woman-carer model (resilient gender norms), Yeoh et al (2021) follow their predecessors’ performance approach to care, which recognizes its immaterial emotional dimensions and skilful meaning; apparently ‘repetitive’ and ‘unstimulating’ tasks actually require tremendous cognitive skill. The authors argue that although exclusively women are

¹⁰⁶ NPM is embedded in a “managerialist model” that acts as “a vehicle for redrawing the boundaries between state and market” (Strauss and Xu, 2020: 131-132). Principles of objective accountability, organizational efficiency, and professional ethics are infused in eldercare policy, now subject to a gamut of competitive restructuring processes that allow a larger variety of non-state actors, such as non-profit and for-profit providers, to bid for service provision. Such changes meant that Ontario hospitals are “releasing patients sooner to save money” (England and Dyck, 2011: 208), imposing tighter eligibility criteria on recipients, and splitting up home care into separate payable components.

expected to perform emotional labour, adult children engage in preferable aspects (non-custodial) of care while FDWs cannot choose what and which forms of care to take on.

FPE thinkers combine these insights of emotional labour and discriminatory skills regimes to argue that care work is shouldered by “an international labour force” that is “gendered, racialized and undervalued” (Huang et al., 2012: 198). At East Asia’s regional level, Reiko Ogawa notes “no clear consensus” on what eldercare skills entails, but FDWs are expected to shoulder emotional labour to “free up citizens’ labour force output” (Ogawa, 2020: 172). Comparing Japan and Taiwan, Pei-Chia Lan (2022) finds that foreign live-in caregivers are framed as ‘professional others’ and ‘deferential surrogates’ respectively, reflecting each government’s different emphasis on the preferred settings of care; institutions, not the home, in Japan but the reverse in Taiwan. In Singapore, Yasmin Ortiga, Kellynn Wee, and Brenda Yeoh define the local eldercare skills regime as a “loose configuration of policies, programs and institutions that govern what constitutes appropriate skills for elderly care and who can be suitably equipped to perform such tasks” (Ortiga et al., 2020: 437). The authors argue that receiving governments deploy a range of ‘filtering’ strategies that present Singaporean women with “cleansed” and rosy narratives of eldercare, such as spiritual rewards, while FDWs are expected to embark on an arduous journey of “mastering nursing techniques” for the physical and emotional labour of body work (Ortiga et al., 2020: 436). In this scenario, it is impossible to standardize meritocratic criteria for assessments, training, accreditation and recognition. This sieving of care’s various components to maintain “different configurations of care workers” (Ogawa, 2018: 187) show that skills exit individuals and enter the geopolitical realm of social reproduction (Kofman and Raghuram, 2015). While not all FPE scholars have focused on the structural and institutional processes of eldercare skills regimes, their underlying message aligns

with a social constructive view of its power-laden nature: skills “reflect discrimination rather than any appropriate evaluation” (Armstrong, 2013: 60).

As these impressive fusions of emotional labour and skills are growing in extent and scope in the FPE literature, resilience has causally and secretly crept in. Recall Sha in Chapter Two, who said that global care chains leave Filipino mothers and daughters like herself with no choice but to “live to love”. I argue that despite the term’s seemingly hostile connotations to FPE’s arguments about FDWs’ emotional labour and skill, there are important reasons to take up feminist theorists’ call for critical takes on resilience. Doing so would elevate FPE’s insights further by attending to the less well-taken-up yet most timely agenda of unpacking “the relatively unvariegated concept of care” (Raghuram, 2012: 156), including when its activities seem to occur in different worlds of valuation. My interviews with FDWs suggest that asking what migrants understand by care, an idea with Eurocentric foundations that has been well-elaborated by contextually astute FPE thinkers (Narayan, 1995), can help the field attend to issues of transferability in care work. For instance, what happens to “place-based caring skills” when the context and location of care(givers) shift? (Raghuram, 2016: 184). Punctured resilience, in this analytical scene, argues that FDWs are “critically resilient subjects” (Arthur Kroker, personal communication, 22 March 2023) who resist its imperatives with forms of care that are not well-recognized in transnational care migration. Other than enriching the FPE scholarship, this framework also notices the relatively secluded voices of anthropologists such as Megha Amrith (2023: 205), whose challenge of migration psychologists’ use of resilience deserves more traction. As she argues, contrary to Garabiles et al’s (2017: 206) claim that Filipino FDWs feel stronger and motivated to endure hardships abroad when they visit home, the picture of harmonious transcultural nuclear families is a myth.

Trips back home are preceded by intense joy but then involve “strenuous relational work” of navigating anticipation mixed with fear, as “marital betrayals, moral judgments and sibling conflicts” can no longer be avoided (Amrith, 2023: 204). Sha’s rambling, for instance, went from *ah ma*’s mistreatment to how her brothers and uncles remain unhappy with her decision to not jump at the chance to work in a nursing home despite knowing “it pays much higher”, then circled back to her mixed feelings about having “so many (skills) certificates”. Sha is a single mother of two teenage daughters who has separated from her husband; he had an extramarital affair just over a decade ago. It is important to note that Melissa Garabiles and colleagues have pioneered resilience studies for domestic workers, and promote mental health strategies such as friendship circles, digital communications, and social networks with other migrant workers as ways that enable FDWs “prevent future problems and thrive despite adversity” (Garabiles et al., 2022: 3136). These optimistic manuals, as Amrith (2022) argues, do not account for the actual realities of alienation and estrangement that emerge among family members who have spent lifetimes of social reproduction physically apart; return opens up new phases of anxiety, not pleasure or relaxation. The uncontrollable and unbounded trajectory of Sha’s narrative, infused with a dream of care that does not discriminate between its receivers and providers, constitutes a point of departure from “yet another tale of neoliberal governmentality” (Bracke, 2016b).

In the care work literature, examples abound of acknowledgements (not endorsements) of “women’s sacrifices and resilience” (Yeoh, 2016: 79), which authors also associate with the durability of patriarchal systems, gender ideals, and racialized servitude (Lee and Piper, 2007). Scholars respect FDWs’ tenacity in going to great lengths, often at huge personal cost, to amass the necessary competencies that safeguard their patient’s health (Liang, 2021; Lin and Belanger, 2012; Yeoh and Huang, 2014). My framework picks up on these observations of resilience that

recognize FDWs' fortitude but sees the domain of care itself as capable of stabbing or making holes in resilience to understand resistance in desperate circumstances (see Chapter Five). Out of raw financial need, FDWs cannot afford the idealistic privilege to debate or dodge the need to be resilient for their loved ones relying on them. But intentionally or not, they sometimes take issue with or 'rebel' against certain instructions given to them that imply not caring enough or as much about an elderly's health and safety (e.g. Sha in Chapter Three). The women's agency on this front of orchestrating care is at the end of the day trapped by but momentarily still manages to speak past a straitjacket economic idea of "they come here to work". Following a multiscale intersectional approach to lived experiences of eldercare (see Chapter Two), a similar approach to resilience thinks creatively about diversifying care to explore the ways that people do not leave its air-tight assumptions intact.

Spectral zones of emotional labour and mixed feelings about valuable 'skills'

Resilience is a "traveling concept" that spans from the macrolevel of climate change and ecological systems to the microlevel of people and selves (Bracke, 2016a: 55). Sociologist Sarah Bracke (2016a) has led the call for a politics of resistance against resilience, which is mostly discussed and critiqued at transnational rather than interpersonal scales. Using examples of the World Bank's structural adjustment programs (SAPs), she argues that the resilient qualities of "notably those in the Global South" is appropriated as "raw material" for the "greedy global economy" (Bracke, 2016b: 852). Going from this global to meso level of recruitment 'maid' agencies in Indonesia and the Philippines, Anju Paul (2017), Andy Scott Chang (2018), and Olivia Killias (2018) join Liberty Chee (2020) in documenting pre-departure scenarios of abuse and exploitation. Labour brokers, doubling up as trainers, instruct FDWs to be solely responsible for their own safety and guard against legal, professional, and sexual abuses. The women are told

to educate themselves about personal and labour rights, including where to seek redress, because “our own initiative” (Maylene) in preventing harm matters most.

Crucially, the vast swathe of broker firms providing “resilience training” (Chee, 2020: 377) was until not long ago still a fledging industry, but since the early 2000s, has become virtually unavoidable for current generations of FDWs (Wee et al., 2018). Filipinos have for long had greater exposure to these in their POEA preparation courses (Schumann and Paul, 2020), whereas for Indonesian FDWs, older women (e.g. Sylvia) are often not aware of its orientation content compared to their younger peers. Interestingly, senior FDWs role play as dementia patients throwing tantrums and advise their younger counterparts to “answer violence with patience” (Killias, 2018: 122). It was common for trainers to reprimand the women for being “lazy” when they could not respond fluently in a mix of Cantonese, Mandarin, and English (Chang, 2018: 706). These authors’ attention to the inequitable foundations of care transfers that coerce FDWs to endure such degrading treatment do the necessary contextual work of situating FDWs’ resilience, which would challenge the widely popular usage in psychological theories that romanticize coping strategies for market ends (e.g. Garabiles et al., 2017; Ho et al., 2022).

Other than the model of resilient transcultural families that have gained explosive traction (Garabiles et al., 2017, 2022), for instance, public health researchers advocate for the “collective culture (*bayanihan*)” of Indonesians and Filipinos to be integrated into informal peer support, storytelling, and mutual aid programs, which are preferred over formal counselling services since FDWs seem more comfortable that way (Ho et al., 2022: 10). Some humanistic psychologists note that FDWs’ migration is caused by structural inequalities in the global care market, which trickle down into oppressive live-in regimes; no protection system is in place for FDWs’ lives, which hinges on the charitable goodwill of individual employers – “the luck of the draw” (Loh

and Estrellado, 2019: 836). However, the authors derive suggestions for “capability development” to build resilience: the ability to not just weather through obstacles but “despite these adversities, continue to progress and thrive” (Ibid). Embedded is the core expectation that negative emotions, tears, and weaknesses can be validated only for the sake of mental recovery and productivity (Ha et al., 2018; Terrighena and Barron, 2020). In contrast, joining her counterparts’ critiques of pre-departure training, Chee’s account of FDWs who “acutely instantiate the kind of subjectivity called forth by neoliberalism” leads to an emotionally mindful definition of resilience as “internally marshalling resources to keep going” (Chee, 2020: 366, 377). Where FDWs are trained to hold back from breaking down in front of employers, lest they “scare” them into sending them back, “to be resilient in this case meant doing emotional labour” (Chee, 2020: 371).

To flesh out its details more, punctured resilience argues for recognizing the aspirations and dreams of care for elderly persons that FDWs do not give up on, even as their actions adhere to “resilience training”: “developing a set of cognitive skills to withstand employment conditions in zones of risk and danger, where the worker’s security and well-being cannot be guaranteed” (Chee, 2020: 377). Andy Chang’s fatalistic self-regulating subject, drawing on Foucault’s critique of liberal governmentality¹⁰⁷, likewise argues that Indonesia’s pre-departure regimen “embodies a paternalistic logic of protection” that demands FDWs enact self-discipline (Chang, 2018: 699). The women are ‘subjects’ in the sense of being exposed to and expected to internalize certain principles of resilient conduct: “becoming an ethical subject takes place

¹⁰⁷ Michel Foucault had acknowledged that liberal ideology in governmentality combines state power with techniques of conduct management that feed into, not without resistance, the aims of government institutions. Chang argues that liberal governmentality, in this case for FDWs in training, always already harbors “the illiberal exclusion of some individuals” (Chang, 2018: 700) who are deemed wanting of “coercive interventions” from being “found not to possess the necessary capacity” (Li, 2014: 39). This view draws from Uma Narayan’s “paternalistic caring”: benevolent moral rhetoric of care and responsibility for “inferior Others” fuses with colonial intrusion (Narayan, 1995: 135).

through modes of subjectivation that are supported by practices of the self” (Foucault in Bracke, 2016a: 62). Punctured resilience does not deny that resistance occurs in power-inflected labour export policy that glorifies the matrix of assumptions in the resilient shell of “we are a/the maid” (Sha and Maylene). But it does urge accounts of gendered resilience to gravitate toward what our interlocutors mean by “they don’t care about my feelings” (Sha). Care cannot be confined to an infrastructural function of labouring bodies who are just here to work, but is interpellated by the women’s intellectual appetite for care construction. Consider, for instance, the sheer sprawl of issues warranting emotional concern that poured out of Sha.

“If I really want to give up, (I would have) long time ago. Because the life is not really good...but we come to Singapore because we have a foremost determination in life, we need to send money to our family, you know? So we live to love, to put care in everything.”

“In the Philippines, we are a very loving people. We can never do this (abandon) to our parents. I’m very sad about the situation here in Singapore, you know, I feel a lot of pity for the elderly. The children don’t bother about the mother, they just put everything on the helper”.

“Her children don’t bother. Always too busy, cannot come, this and that. *Ah ma* pain until cannot sleep at night! They only kept saying just give her Panadol Extra, every morning and night give her Panadol. Normal painkiller, you know. You see, Lynn, they are very rich. Big boss in office and bank, that type. But their mother, don’t want to bring to see a doctor. She’s suffering so much from the pain (deep sigh).”

“But for me I’m already attached with her, you know. Can you imagine, for six years, only we two people here, nobody around. Eat together, sleep together, I do everything for her. I get attached (cries), very difficult for me to leave, you know.”

“All my life, I learnt from my mother how to love elderly, and to *sayang*¹⁰⁸ (shower with tender loving care) old people. Sometimes I cannot take it, the way she say bad words, you know. Sometimes after (appeasing) *ah ma*, I have to call my mum, otherwise I cannot carry on. No way. I communicate with mum everyday, and she always tells me: love them like me, you know? Treat *ah ma* like your own mother. *Sayang, sayang* all of life.”
Sha, Filipino FDW in Singapore

¹⁰⁸ *Sayang* is a colloquial term in Singaporean English (‘Singlish’), Malay, Indonesian (Malay dialect) and Filipino Tagalog. It is a term of endearment, akin to darling and sweetheart, that implies a form of love that bonds equally dearly to all present – applied flexibly and spoken in a variety of situations.

Sha is a 35-year old single mother of two teenage daughters who migrated overseas because she “married early, had a child, and needed money for their education”. These complex narratives poured out of her in the above sequence, but also traversed into a whole host of other issues about her employing household and her own family problems. The Philippine’s labour export policy would praise the resilience of its nation’s self-sacrificial “Maria Claras (chaste and obedient)”, hailed as “*bagong bayanis* (new heroes)” (Tungohan, 2021) and responsible mothers and daughters who know they must “live to love” (Sha). This is “the resilience of the wretched of the earth”, that is, “the subject of the global South” who endures the repeated austerity packages of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (Bracke, 2016a: 60). Embodied emotional labour for FDWs in Singapore and Taiwan means coping with ideas of ‘less developed Asia’ that associate ‘foreign maids’, as racialized others, with the ‘demeaning’ work of care. FDWs shoulder not only ‘dirty’ body work (Twigg et al., 2011) and the emotional labour of appeasing dementia patients’ tantrums (e.g. Liang, 2021), but also its social implications.

Shirlena Huang and colleagues make an important connection between the degradation of elderly persons and the FDWs caring for them: because eldercare is associated with “decaying, leaking bodies”, its workers are “similarly devalued, marginalized and managed” (Huang et al., 2012: 198). The second and third quotes from Sha above, however, allude to how FDWs experience and resist dominant constructs of ‘care’. In FPE’s care work literature, there is room for these research findings (critiques of local filial piety) to go beyond acknowledgments of strength and resilience in the labour market, to factor in the implied pleas for valuing them as not just workers, but human beings with emotional needs. Sha’s moral economy of care, across the transitions in her above quotes, go beyond workplace-induced ones. There was also a lack of clarity around who the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ actors are in “they don’t care about my feelings”. This

statement most obviously calls out *ah ma*'s adult children for their oblivion to the old woman's pain and suffering, which Sha felt heartache towards, and their disrespect for her repeated attempts to care properly for *ah ma* in ways that she would feel comfortable with: "For them, they don't appreciate what I did. To them, it's just I pay you a salary, do your job, and that's it. I am like a reporter, you know. Shouldn't you be happy when I tell you how your mother is doing? But no! They don't even care..." (Sha). Firstly, FDWs' cerebral role in navigating the collisions of care work's vectors, such as its yardsticks for assessing competence and recognition (Raghuram, 2012), are often not dredged up when care activity is approached from the host society's perspective of labour supply and demand (e.g. Lin and Belanger; Parrenas et al., 2016; Yeoh et al., 2021). I invoke punctured resilience to shift the focus from FDWs as objectified referents (of labour imports/exports) in state policy (Lan, 2016; Ortiga et al., 2020) to how power operates in affecting the women's emotional lives; reactive feelings of grieve and annoyance at being poorly trained in a rapid-fire model. This angle increases our sensitivity to different worlds of valuation in care work, such as questioning the benign assumptions in 'skills'. Also, this perspective moves toward care as the political – an important conceptual setting up of Chapter Five's argument that FDWs are socially transformative actors.

Secondly, the confines of who and what can hurt "my feelings" (Sha) and what these emotions revolve around often go beyond accounts of emotional labour that analyse care as work only, that is, prioritize the employer-sponsored arrangements of the caregiver-patient dyad (e.g. Huang et al., 2012). This is not to suggest that such FPE arguments are lacking, but rather that they can be used to generate critiques of resilience more effectively by considering the narrative complexities from FDWs who talk about care not just as working bodies in the host society. The negative repercussions on Sha's dreams of care of acting according to the resilient transcultural

family (e.g. Garabiles et al., 2017), for instance, drives a wedge in her extended family relations. “But I’m already attached (to *ah ma*)” is emotional resilience to her employers, invisible in their eyes, but a source of discord and tension with her brothers and male cousins who “still cannot understand” why she did not seize an opportunity to upskill out of the domestic sector, as income-maximizing migrants supposedly do (e.g. Loh and Estrellado, 2019: 824). At that point, Sha had been with *ah ma* for almost six years, and had spent the past three years enrolled in a part-time nursing accreditation course at a prestigious public hospital. This certificate, on top of a long list of accolades earned over the years, made Sha eligible for work in a nursing home once her third contract with this household (renewed every two years) came to an end. The popularity of skills training that counted towards the points FDWs can accumulate to qualify for institutional employment is well-documented (AWARE and HOME, 2020). Many of the women I interviewed remarked that this was their only ticket out of domestic servitude, but was almost impossible to access since enrolment (costs and time) relies on the generosity of employers.

Sha’s hard-won skills credentials were ironically credited to a combination of micromanaging yet neglectful employers and Filipino advantage¹⁰⁹ in the FDW community, not a supportive training environment. She understood how arduous and thin on the ground this upskilling journey was. But when she received that long-awaited call from a nursing home manager, she found herself unable to terminate the contract, unwilling to leave *ah ma* with her

¹⁰⁹ Sha’s employers forbid her (“they don’t allow”) from leaving the house on weekdays to go for paid courses, even when she suggested doing so at her own expense (out of pocket) to cope with *ah ma*’s worsening condition. But because “they don’t care what I do with *ah ma* at home”, she could find ways to attend free online webinars (“I just listen in while doing my work”) and spends most Sundays, her only off time, at church-based courses. Her many grassroots contacts have assisted with credentials granting courses at, among others, Khoo Teck Puat Geriatric Ward, Tan Tock Seng Hospital, and Singapore General Hospital. As a self-confessed “lucky” Filipino, Sha understood her advantages in medical skills training, labour rights education, and activist resources for political organization (Paul, 2017; Killias, 2018). Her emotional support network includes high-profile activists (e.g. Singaporean Jolovan Wham) and extensive NGO connections. She also has regular off days and no restrictions on phone usage, which are not readily available to many non-Filipino counterparts.

worsening pain in the lurch: “This was my chance, finally (out of the domestic sector). But I just couldn’t. *Ah ma* was starting to suffer so much”. Between Sha’s complaints about the adult children’s lukewarm response to medical help and her justification for staying, what she found most hurtful was the hostility from her brother and male cousins who disagreed with her decision to delay the move. These are the same people who “never bothered to contact me” in the Philippines, but developed a “changed attitude” after she went abroad because “they think, oh sister, now you are rich...and treat me like an ATM”. They remain at odds about her insistence on accompanying *ah ma* “until she goes (passes)” despite knowing that her credentials can pay off “over there (nursing homes)” where “the pay is much higher”.

Sha’s actions and thoughts throughout this turn of events work in and against the expectations of resilient migrant labourers, given that she fought against all odds to obtain those prestigious credentials, only to forgo a timely golden opportunity. The complexities of her decision revolve around care itself, and recalibrates care work’s benevolent treatment of skill (not just its unequally distributed nature) and the direction that negative emotions from feeling unappreciated flow from, as well as who is involved¹¹⁰ in caring for the carer. Speaking to emotional labour literature, Eileen Boris and Rhacel Parrenas develop a concept of intimate labour, referring to the “shared secrets” of intimate relations¹¹¹, meaning ones that involve “knowledge and attention that are not widely available to third parties” (Parrenas et al., 2016: 2). Sha’s attachment to *ah ma* embodies such encounters with exposed vulnerability, but her

¹¹⁰ Sha stated that during a particularly dark and depressing phase, there was “no way” she could have stayed on without her mother’s remote emotional labour of “many hours of listening to me cry and complain”. This informal counselling work by older women, in this case caring for Sha’s daughters, is often not accounted for in the global care chains framework (Kofman and Raghuram, 2012).

¹¹¹ Rhacel Parrenas, Hung Cam Thai, and Rachel Silvey use this term to refer to the relations in a range of burgeoning female-dominant “intimate industries”: domestic labour, marriage migration, rented companionship, adoption, surrogate motherhood, and sex work among others (Parrenas et al., 2016: 2). They note that the migrant women who maintain relations of intimacy inhabit diverse social worlds of sending and receiving destinations.

critiques of institutional care point to its inability to “*sayang* old people”, revealing different worlds of valuation. She teared up at the thought of *ah ma* being left in “a sad situation” of staying in a nursing home if she left.

“If stay there? *Ah ma* cannot watch her favourite TV show. Cannot control the lights. She will get nightmares. She thirsty, I cannot immediately give her water. One nurse take care of five old people, sometimes more. How can it be good?”

Sha, Filipino FDW in Singapore

Indirectly, Sha unsettles the assumed superiority and professional image of institutional healthcare workers vis-à-vis ‘maids’ (e.g. Amrith, 2010). Her ambivalence toward successful skills accumulation, then, embodies “very different notions of skills” (Raghuram, 2019: 623) than that implied by its association with meritocratic empowerment. Wanting to give her daughters a better future, Sha pursued enrolment in programs that “enhance skills and minimize exploitation” (Yeoh and Huang, 2009: 72). But she was sceptical about the industry’s rapid-fire¹¹² “teach-and-just-go” practice, and resented its double standards. Despite her professional medical accolades, this was a “hypocritical” skills regime that normalizes verbal insult: “my employers call me maid, you know, it’s so hurtful”. In Asia’s distinct ‘maid’ culture, middle-class households see hiring one as a social entitlement, akin to education and healthcare (Chin, 1998). Aihwa Ong notes, “as unattached female migrants, domestic workers are seen as moral outsiders...her externality to kinship is what marks her as a kind of slave” (Ong, 2006: 207). Seldom does emotional labour in care chains analysis account for that of resilience (Chee, 2020) that FDWs often have enlarged sympathies for, as they traverse the various infrastructures of

¹¹² My findings on training by recruitment agencies corresponds with a landmark NGO report (AWARE and HOME, 2020) seconded by AWARE (email interview, November 2021). NGO workers (Chapter Two) referred to a rapid dumping model that FDWs found wholly insufficient. Those headed to Taiwan all had some form of exposure, unlike many in Singapore who had not encountered any semblance of eldercare-related materials, as Don (9 November 2021) had said of the “modular add-on”. But even for the former, as Taiwanese pointed out, training can be akin to “being at an airport in transit waiting for my employer to pick me up, and while waiting I learn these things haphazardly for 2-3 hours then arrive at their house...one of those money collecting tools.” (Wei Dong, 18 January 2022).

gendered racialized servitude; these simultaneously devalue ‘dirty’ and ‘demeaning’ occupations and the bodies of those who provide eldercare (Huang et al., 2012). In other contexts where domestic caregivers are not international migrants, as my panel members at a 2023 Healthy Aging Conference in Shanghai¹¹³ said of rural migrant caregivers in China, personal conscience (*liang xin*) tells them what to do. Similar to FDWs in Asia, what is given scant attention is the embodied emotional labour of coping with denigrative conversations about one’s innate human quality (*su zhi*¹¹⁴) that rank eldercare workers, in all cases, as ‘lesser people’.

Arlie Hochschild observes that care relations occur in a “commodity frontier”: “the place where elements of intimate and domestic life become objects of sale, and where market forces and the private self combines to shape the subjective meanings of objects and possessions” (Hochschild in Parrenas et al., 2016: 2). The care work literature finds numerous instances where FDWs “rework moral regimes to their own benefit” by presenting their (physically absent from families) labour as “morally upstanding in part because of the income it provides” (Parrenas et al., 2016: 8-9). While this financially minded narrative is often one of the few modes of resistance accessible to FDWs (Ueno, 2010; Yuen and Paul, 2020), the women have more convoluted feelings about the sneakily intact assumptions of commercialized care organization and its implications for care itself.

¹¹³ This event on healthy aging at New York University (NYU) Shanghai on 18-19 March invited scholars, geriatric practitioners, and industry professionals in the digital ‘smart’ eldercare sector to present their ideas to a public audience. I thank the conference organizers at Duke Kunshan University for roping me on board. I am especially grateful to Dr. Baozhen Luo and Dr. Zhe Yan for an informative discussion about the emotional labour of nursing home workers in Chinese cities, mostly rural migrant women, when handling dementia patients and verbal abuse from unappreciative family members (Yan and Luo, 2023). Our research connections between the internalization of urban superiority by rural migrants and FDWs self-identification as “just a maid” further inspired this chapter’s framework for resilience, given that marginalized populations exert agency within the parameters of neoliberal capitalism.

¹¹⁴ *Su zhi* refers to ideologies of urban superiority/rural inferiority that shape rankings of deservedness and the movement patterns of labour migrants. Family members of elderly patients in Chinese nursing homes often make comments like: “Only rural migrants could bear such a workload and the working conditions here!” (Yan and Luo, 2023: 5). *Su zhi* is usually discussed with reference to China’s rural migrants, but FDWs like Sha noted that many employers assume that the women “don’t know how to use microwave or washing machine, like we are from the backward village.”

Reading between the lines of resilience to puncture it with care

“We cannot start any one thing without any suffering, right or not? Step by step, you know, from lower to upper. Deal with it, right? Sometimes these young girls (newcomers) very small thing only complain here, complain there. As long as they won’t kill you, don’t treat you badly, leave it. Work is work, okay?”

There’s a lot of abuse, but for me, sometimes I don’t know why they allow the employer to abuse them. There’s a lot of things we can do. What did you learn from the MOM training before dispatch? You cannot say I don’t know this, I don’t know that. What’s the use of your phone if you don’t want to do the reading, right? Get up and use your initiative”.

Maylene, Filipino FDW in Singapore

In Chapter Three, I noted that FDWs’ bodies are ageless in labour migration policy that does not associate their aging bodies with slowing down, yet imposes an expiry date on their labour with enforced departure laws at age 60 (Amrith, 2023: 1912). When I first met Maylene, a Filipino FDW in her late 40s and remote mother to three schooling children, the diverse meanings of care did not come to mind. In stark contrast to Sha’s emotionally charged mannerism and tone, Maylene felt intimidatingly stoic at first and conveyed a drastically different approach to labour politics as a domestic: “Yes, we are the maid. It’s just a word, who cares?”. While this can be interpreted as a direct relationship between age and increased resilience, Maylene’s matter-of-fact tone and authoritative presence in the conversation, as we shall see when she objected to one of my question’s assumptions, also reflects the multidirectional nature of power relations in research encounters (Hunt, 2017). I may have been the university researcher, but not a senior or tenured one, while Maylene was well over two decades my senior, and possessed way more experience of actually existing eldercare in Singaporean households – she coached me about this toward the end, but not without first asking “so what do you need to know about your research?”. Unlike Sha’s immediate outpouring of tears, it took significantly longer to sense and recognize the stabs at resilience that Maylene took through care itself: an encounter of a wheelchair incident in public and a (last resort) decision to

confront her employer despite a steadfast belief in “Who am I to complain? It’s part of my job scope”. These events allude to the latent affective economies (Brown, 2016) beneath her reserved exterior.

“Just the other day, I met one...I think she’s an Indonesian taking care of her *ah gong*. I saw this uncle standing on his wheelchair and he started walking, about to jump! So I went to catch him. I said “where’s the maid?”. His wheelchair was unlocked. At training, they always say to lock the wheelchair for your patient. All I got was scolding (in return). Even other people told me, “why you bother?”. But I see something dangerous, I don’t ignore. For his safety.”

Maylene, Filipino FDW in Singapore

Where Sha’s above ambivalence toward professional ‘skills’ in eldercare are concerned, as Amrith (2023) and Raghuram (2019) have noted, alternative worlds of care and relationship making in the dynamic and diverse Global South are modes of resistance against market norms. These can emerge in awkward feelings about the substance of medical care, especially its invasive biomedical model (e.g. Amrith, 2010) and other cross-cultural tensions in worlds of valuation that rarely centre FDWs’ formative learning experiences. This wheelchair incident, for instance, involves Maylene’s judgment of social responsibility for elderly strangers when out and about in public, which she defended even when passers-by advised her to “not take on extra trouble, you’re not getting extra pay for that”. One other incident she recounted involved a late *ah gong* who was in her care. A few weeks into the job, she realized that *ah gong*’s adult children, who lived together in the same mansion, were remiss to the old man’s health condition, which could no longer keep up with the daily afternoon walks that were part of his mobility routine. Unlike Sha, she did not refer to the employing household as morally lacking, nor did she make snide remarks or mock them to release stress; Sha had mimicked her employers’ disgust by making loud vomiting noises, saying that they were wealthy people of high status but “can never learn to care for their own mother like what I am doing”. Perhaps it was the instinct of a senior woman facing a fresh-faced researcher (me) who reminded her of her teenage children, whom

she channelled a mothering philosophy of tough love (“teach them to be strong, even if my heart aches”) toward – with a coaching element. Maylene seemed rather insistent on a work ethic that emphasised learning how to “not complain so much”, as she advised her younger counterparts. Her employers had instructed her to take *ah gong* out, sitting in his wheelchair, every other afternoon for long walks that lasted up to three hours or more.

“For me, okay because it’s a part of my job scope. Who am I to complain? But my concern is what if something happens to him under the hot sun? Who’s to blame? So, I keep explaining to the family that their body cannot take it, I think this routine must change.”

Maylene, Filipino FDW in Singapore

Maylene’s repeated shoring up of “our own initiative” against abuse and exploitation, in other words the resilient “mentally *siap* (ready)” (Chee, 2020: 367) fatalistic self-regulating subject in pre-departure training camps (Chang, 2018), extended into her account of *ah gong*’s care needs going into crisis at one point. As a researcher who after all does not witness private interactions between FDWs, elderly patients, and their family members, I am struck by how the same possible situation, in this case adult children’s neglect of an elderly’s health situation, could trigger such drastically different reactions and responses among the women. I argue, taking inspiration from scholars who caution against the conceptual limits of the care chains framework (Brown, 2016; Kofman and Raghuram, 2012; Tungohan, 2019; Yeates, 2009), that punctured resilience is one way to conceive the affective dimensions of emotional labour that have not had much publicity in care work. For all we know, Sha’s *ah ma* and Maylene’s *ah gong* could have had equally ‘filial’ adult children. They are occupied with 9-5 workdays and have their own family lives to lead in the way that most busy young adults are. *Ah ma*’s leg pain and *ah gong*’s struggle under the scorching sun could have looked and felt as serious, and ended up pushing both women to resort to measures perceived as a last resort (confronting employers). But their recollections had contrasting priorities, emphasising certain elements, and downplaying others.

Both women mentioned benefitting from Filipino advantages in the FDW community, notably in skills training and labour rights consciousness. But even so, the differently chaotic and manifold emotional experiences that FDWs feel, as experts of affective economies of eldercare, are not often acknowledged in care chains analysis that treat emotions as a finite reserve, rather than expansive, generative, or capable of taking on renewed trajectories. Rachel Brown (2016) builds on Kofman and Raghuram (2012) to argue for an affective lens of embodied emotional labour, which for Tungohan (2019), is crucial to understand migrant caregivers' agency beyond the common victimhood framing. Drawing on Sara Ahmed's thought on affect and spectral histories, these authors caution against using care chains as an analytical backdrop for migrant care work because the empirical realities of care in a dynamic and diversifying Global South are often not accounted for in its privileging of South-to-North directions of movement (Raghuram, 2019). Brown's affective lens traces a longer genealogy of "emotional associations with similarly raced and gendered bodies" (Brown, 2016: 212). This approach considers how emotions are not just contributed by individuals but also 'stick' to certain bodies; prior experiences with gendered and racialized bodies, for example, linger on to affect emotional associations with other similar bodies that people see.

From this perspective, care chain's favoured direction of South-North care transfers and a Marxist feminist grounding of emotional labour (language of 'surplus love' in Brown, 2016: 215), as politically necessary and illuminating as they are, may not account that well for new and multiplying emotions beyond FDWs' lives as workers. Consequently, Brown identifies some imaginary constraints of care when conceived with a geographical penchant for the North: privileging heteronormativity; assuming that physical proximity is necessary for adequate love and nurture; and implying that migrant women lead a linear reproductive life as carers (e.g.

Brown, 2016: 212- 214). For Tungohan, care chains are likewise well-intentioned analytical tools that have vastly improved our understandings of global structural inequality, but need to be complemented with Raghuram’s “locational specificities of genealogies of care” (in Tungohan, 2019: 232) so that FDWs’ own families are not treated as “in an inferior position” vis-à-vis their employers who often do not have the ambivalence and trepidation of forced separation to deal with (Tungohan, 2019: 230).

“So firstly I came to Singapore for financial stability for my children, because they need more support especially for education...so being apart is not so easy but we need to do (this) for the good future of our family.”

Maylene, Filipino FDW in Singapore

Maylene’s care ethic, which she pushed through with unconventional choices (e.g. knowing her actions would not be appreciated), is an agency that feminist political thought in social movements ought to recognize as socially transformative resistance (see Chapter Five). This inspection of agency validates diverse sites of feminism while retaining the spirit of what Taiwanese indigenous feminist, Liglav A-Wu of the Paiwan tribe, calls a “reciprocal criticism” of “women’s sympathy”, where no one is exempt from learning and teaching (in Shih, 2014: 185). The celebration of migrant caregivers’ agency in transforming meanings of ‘good’ motherhood, as Tungohan (2013: 41) writes of Filipina caregivers’ “transnational hyper-maternalism” in cyberspace, can and does coexist with structural critiques of internalized colonial gender ideologies, such as the social media backlash against the “ungrateful Filipina” (e.g. Tungohan, 2021). Maylene’s affirmation of breadwinner mothering can be read as an incorporation of feminine responsibility, while her goodhearted exhortations to fellow FDWs to “get up and use your own initiative” can, for political reasons, be advised against by FPE analysts. Yet her interweaved account of responsible remote supervision of her children’s screen time (game playing habits and internet surfing) so as “not to affect their homework and grades”,

through “financial support and thorough surveillance techniques enabling close communication” (Tungohan, 2013: 41), challenges the displaced emotional labour in care chains where “physical proximity” is held up as “the necessary condition” for satisfactory care (Brown, 2016: 218).

As Black feminists have long argued, this version of marital domesticity and intensive motherhood is a mostly middle-class white experience that the social reality of parenthood in many black families, such as “activist mothering” for “collective survival (against racism)”, can hardly relate to (Pittman, 2023: 56). In large countries like China and India, the household registration (*hukou*) and caste system respectively shape hierarchies of desirable and less desirable populations, hence where people tend to move in and out of, such that “international migration simply does not appear to be nationally significant” (Kofman and Raghuram, 2012: 417). Although this is not the case for the Philippines, rural to urban movements are nonetheless prevalent, as are provincial distinctions. In Indonesia, where FDWs tend to come from less educated and poorer backgrounds (Paul, 2017), regional and internal migrations are often more outstanding. Sylvia, as we shall see, unlike her Filipino counterparts, is engaged in circular migration between Taiwan and Indonesia, where she returns “whenever circumstances allow” for two to three years at a time, tending to a small home business, an elderly father, nieces and nephews, and other relatives. That is to say, one can never assume or know for sure that the ‘Third World’ woman has left her biological children behind to care for the ‘First World’ woman’s children instead, since that prior configuration of domestic life may not have been in place where FDWs have engaged in a lifetime of long-distance caring, perhaps not just for biological children but for extended and fictive kin. Their reproductive roles as carers and social nurturers, then, cannot be reduced primarily to a linear mothering and/or daughtering one.

Punctured resilience takes the heed of scholars who call for taking care chains in new directions (Kofman and Raghuram, 2012; Tungohan, 2019), and draws inspiration from Tiina Vaittinen's (2014) call to centre migrant trajectories instead of institutional path-dependence. Vaittinen argues for an affective economies approach that recognizes migrants' emotional legacies as they provide care from one place to another. In focusing on the materiality of structural injustice, Vaittinen (2014) suggests, care chains unwittingly assume a spatiality of care where migrants, the empirical subjects, flow into certain (as yet untraveled) spaces, such that their agentic presence is reduced to "labouring bodies, governed by the rules of GPE (global political economy); as opposed to lived beings" (Vaittinen, 2014: 13). For Brown, the impossible wide range of "embodied experiences", a matter for empirical investigation, powerfully shape the "very routes, trajectories, and economic structures" of care chains (Brown, 2016: 212). In my framework, then, what I am calling a theory of sentient flesh¹¹⁵, carried by the agentic, embodied imprints that FDWs and their emotions leave on macro, meso, and microstructures of care as they move from place to place, is useful for reading between the lines of resilience. Sha and Maylene are socioeconomically advantaged compared to non-Filipino counterparts like Sylvia below, and were aware of and could access the gamut of POEA information, resources, and NGO contacts. Still, the women rationalize and express "resilience training" (Chee, 2020: 377) differently. In stark contrast to Sha's willingness to shed tears, Maylene was markedly restrained, perhaps even unemotional, in her interview performance that espoused variations of "don't complain so much, just deal with it".

¹¹⁵ Brown borrows the concept of "an ethic of social flesh" from Beasley and Bacchi, referring to a "shared embodied reliance" that does not distinguish between hierarchies of "givers/receivers" and "weak/strong" actors (in Brown, 2016: 224). Theories of the flesh are associated with Cherrie Moraga who argued for a socially necessary politic by virtue of corporeal (bodily and physical) reality.

An affective instead of observational take of Maylene's caregiving experiences, vivid in her memories, requires researchers to downplay certain hallmarks of resilience on the surface (e.g. stern mannerism), and open up their sensibilities to the power of sentient flesh in conveying the microturbulent landscapes of feeling¹¹⁶ in migrant care work. Attempting to read interview encounters in this way is a first step to uncovering stories of care beyond a "narrow range of relationships, institutional arrangements, and care regimes" in care chains (Kofman and Raghuram, 2012: 416). Other than productive transfers of physical and emotional labour, FDWs also bring to the table affective concerns that coalesce from life experiences and sociocultural familiarity with infrastructures of (non)care, among others, from wherever they are living in.

East Asian care work literature, similar to its North American and European counterparts, has tended to situate care and labour migration policy, where FDWs are 'agents of development' (Lee and Piper, 2017), in the analytical backdrop of care chains analogy. There is some impressive work done by sharp observers who interweave intersectional lived experience (gender, race, and class), sometimes calling on their colleagues to go beyond this tripartite lodestone (Hankivsky, 2014). Nicola Yeates (2009: 48-55) had earlier already called for deepening the care chains analysis along at least five lines of inquiry: 1) nationally specific historical developments of care institutions; 2) care settings other than the domestic home-space; 3) migrant caregivers of other occupations and skills levels, not only the global nanny; 4) the varied circumstances leading to emigration, which go beyond motherly obligations and parent-child relationships; and 5) unpacking the broad umbrella of care work instead of looking at only childcare. In her later work, Yeates (2012) has focused on global nursing care chains (GNCCs),

¹¹⁶ The feasibility of doing this during the interview, however, is an issue for methodological reflection. In this instance, I could only speculate about whether Maylene would have spoken about her patients endearingly in another research setting, or disagree at length about social justice assumptions that leaked through in the researcher's (my) words.

which is a useful analytical enhancement of care chains that Kofman and Raghuram (2015) pick up on in their comparative skills analysis of migrant nurses and teachers. From the transnational political economy of care (Hochschild, 2012; Lan, 2000; Lee and Piper, 2007; Yeates, 2012), regional variations in migration and skills regimes (Ogawa, 2020; Peng, 2018), down to the strategies of resistance in the household that complicate agency and structure (Huang et al., 2012; Tungohan, 2013; Ueno, 2010; Yeoh and Huang, 2009), the interpretive scene is largely couched in global care chains (popularized in Hochschild, 2000; Parrenas, 2002).

To be sure, care chains exist in real life, and are apt reminders to FPE thinkers of the global structural inequality that so many of us endeavour to write against. Be that as it may, its account of FDWs' feelings may inadvertently regard emotions as a limited reserve, with fixed capacities and directions for development (Manalansan, 2008; Tungohan, 2019), that do not factor in its unfolding and unruly trajectory. In Sha's story above, I noted how any single concept (whether emotional labour, skills, or resilience) is conceived has rollover implications on others. I would argue likewise for Maylene, even if she did not express what she felt about medical training or divulge "my feelings", instead shores up a defensive personalization of resilience that needs peering beneath its surface to understand some of its nuanced realities. Punctured resilience, at heart about care itself, shows that emotions in care chains are chaotic, contradictory, coexisting, and have the potential to be socially transformative for worlds of care. For a brief moment, our interview became a pedagogical space when Maylene corrected a social justice assumption implied in the researcher's (my) question. This may not have transpired had I looked or felt different to her, but reflected an episode of the "complex and messy emotions that result from care migration" (Tungohan, 2019: 231).

Lynn: "In all your caregiving experience, have you met Singaporean employers who maybe didn't really care about the elderly? Because sometimes you hear stories about the family

themselves (thinking of Sha's interview), not really, like they don't really bother about their own people, did you have that experience?"

Maylene: "The thing is they trust you. They don't care about their elderly? I think I didn't have (experiences like that). Not because they leave their parents they don't care or what, I think whatever it is they care. They won't give a maid for their parents if they don't care, right? They leave everything for you but I cannot say they don't care, they care. Because they won't give the parents a caregiver, they would throw them into the nursing homes, right or not? So that's a very sad part of the old people (here). But you cannot say that they don't care about their old people, they care because you know why? They put a maid over there! All the responsibility is for the maid, yes, because they trust the maid!"

When I explained that I was referring to the most unfortunate of instances where elderly abuse cropped up, and did not mean to generalize across Singaporean employers, Maylene softened considerably and began elaborating on how nursing homes are "a very sad part of old people (here)" because in her view, "especially for us Filipinos, we always honour our parents". However, her obvious defensiveness against an implied "don't care" mentality to eldercare was a crack in her otherwise serene composure. Reading this interaction affectively allows a validation of the above words as embodied resistance, while a non-hierarchical approach to feminist intersectionality cautions against the primacy of 'gender' in claiming the structural oppression (victimhood narrative) of other women (Dhamoon, 2023; Hankivsky, 2014). Maylene's shoring up of "our own initiative" recognizes the broader moral inequalities that normalize 'maid' abuse (Huang and Yeoh, 2007), but has only individual solutions to offer. While not all FDWs mentioned their families, well over 20 out of the 26 interviewed did, revealing a deep cognizance of the impossible choice between forced alienation and economic survival in care chains.

To follow Xiang Biao's suggestions to colleagues in his field, "Do migrants need anthropologists to tell them that migrants are suffering?" (Xiang, 2021: 235). As he observes, migration studies documents "exploitation and discrimination" but has also "celebrated their creativity and resilience" (Ibid). FPE scholars of care work have done this tremendously, but they might find the setting up of groundwork to interpret the grey areas of emotional limbo

useful. Punctured resilience is an emotional battlefield where conflicting feelings wrestle with one another, taking on different expressions depending on who and what is in the interaction. For instance, had Maylene received the same question from, say, migration psychologists looking for air-tight accounts of “resilient coping strategies” (Garabiles et al., 2022: 3136), who are also likely to appear intimidating vis-à-vis a young novice interviewer, other portions of her narrative (e.g. using handphones to catch up on readings) might very well be quoted as a reference model in catalogue-like endorsements of self-help mental health strategies. As alluded to above, Maylene’s loving affection for her elderly patients came through in her calm yet impassionate tone. Her unflinching composure may have felt intimidating, but was negated by an ardent recollection of her late and current patient(s), unlike the seemingly detached and uninterested caregivers in documentary settings, e.g. *Paper Dolls* (Manalansan, 2008).

What felt like a jarring contrast between an unemotional air and outpouring of feelings, however, may be an affective experience unique to this interaction, shaped by dynamics of seniority that muted the relevance of institutional (university researcher) power. Research on FDWs’ strategies of resistance suggests that many migrants go through an emotional limbo or “in betweenness” arising from their constantly moving and changing circumstances of care, which “can become a springboard for resilience and a means of coping” (Brown, 2016: 220; Ueno, 2010). Oddly enough, the idea of Maylene puncturing resilience occurred to me through those momentary ‘mini-lectures’ when she reacted to the implications of “don’t care” in my statement, and proceeded empathetically but also rather desperately, in my view, to correct what she felt was a misplaced assumption. It felt like a coaching moment that would be inaccessible to a different researcher or setting where Maylene might have concealed her feelings because it was not appropriate to let disagreement show. Her agency in this instance is situated in an affective

context of “in betweenness” (Brown, 2016: 220) where contradictory care ethics and goals are forced to coexist. Her life experiences tell her that physical separation from one’s natal family is not an ideal caregiving scenario, and “being apart is not so easy but we need to do (this) for the good future of our family”.

Maylene’s description of remotely supervising her children’s school performance challenges mainstream views of good motherhood as reliant on physical proximity (Tungohan, 2013), which matters less than her financial ability to provide them with good quality education. Her take on the hiring of ‘maids’ as representing employers’ trust, although not addressing the structural roots of coerced care in the migrant-in-the-family model (Huang et al., 2012; Yeates, 2009; Yeoh, 2016), has its place at an interpersonal level and demands to be heard on its own terms – a “radical alterity” in the meaning of care (Raghuram, 2019: 623). In other words, her resilient shell of “yes, we are the maid”, if taken at face value, would hide the tumultuous emotional negotiations over care itself that spill past the realm of contract work. Maylene herself straddles different worlds of care as she traverses between her home in the Philippines and her employers in Singapore. Could she have reacted more sensitively to my statement because she too employed a domestic worker to care for her parents, and understood the internal war that entails? At one point, I had mentioned that my late grandparents had both been cared for by a Filipino FDW before they passed. Was she worried that I had thought that way (“they don’t care about their old people”) about that caregiving situation, and felt compelled to teach me otherwise? Foregrounding the migrant’s trajectory in this case would also mean factoring in the agentic “embodied movement of care labourers” (Vaaitinen, 2014: 13) who leave imprints on

care circuits. For Maylene, the confusing reality of contradictory class and/or occupational mobility¹¹⁷ may not be morally antagonistic to where from and what about care itself she knew.

“For me, your parents took care of you when you were a child. So, when they grow old, care for them the same as how they did for you. Before that, I really didn’t expect to be up for this work, you know. Because I studied computer science and all that...I ended up for this kind of job, so I enjoy it. Not because of this job, but my heart is always in this”.

Maylene, Filipino FDW in Singapore

Diverse meanings of care is a neglected domain in the FPE literature, compounded by huge methodological challenges: analysts have “inadequate empirical data to achieve any kind of comprehensive understanding” about place-based configurations of care other than what happens ‘here’, i.e. the United States and other receiving destinations, although care’s compartments, expectations, and norms differ (Kofman and Raghuram, 2012: 411). The directionality of emotional labour grounded in care chains analysis risks simplifying an uninhibited range of feelings into intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, such as “emotional attachment” and “economic returns of workers’ sacrifices for their families” respectively (Lin and Belanger, 2012: 308-309). The always emotionally turbulent experiences of coping with familial alienation is sometimes unintentionally reduced to transferability: “One worker even transferred her emotional attachment from her deceased father to the elder in her care”, which “compensated for her inability” to look after him before he passed (Ibid.). To complicate things, there is also unequal representation, for instance: “How do non-Western concepts that are not easily translatable in English, like the Sikh principle of *Ekk Onkaar* (the force of Oneness), collide against intersectionality?” (Dhamoon, 2023: 162). The affective reach of *sayang* (Sha) spans a wide variety of emotions and messages depending on the circumstances of its articulation, the stories

¹¹⁷ This refers to the divergent economic and social status that FDWs experience in an unevenly remunerated global labour market (Ueno, 2010: 84): “many FDWs are professional and highly skilled employees in their home countries but are paid way less than what they get as overseas” (Ng, 2022: 88). This can often feel isolating, perplexing, enabling, and life-changing all at once.

of its user, and their relationship to who and what is present. Commonly associated with an outpouring of love, *sayang* at times can also harbor an intense hurt, woefulness, regret, and pity, as if to say something is spoiled or has been wasted. Attending to embodied forms of care (e.g. Sha's "*sayang* old people"), as scholars seeking to unsettle the confines of emotional labour in care chains call for (Kofman and Raghuram, 2012; Manalansan, 2008; Tungohan, 2019; Vaittinen, 2014), is a research effort directed at approaching care itself with "feelings" (Sha).

Toward an insurgent politics of care in resilience

My interview findings suggest that rosy presentations of community resilience, such as promoting the women's friendship circles and informal counselling networks to enable resilience (Loh and Estrellado, 2019), operate with pre-determined agendas of market activity that cherry-pick amongst their words. In other words, analysts assisted by the funding imperatives of market actors often illustrate resilience with a confirmation bias of joyful recovery – acts of crying, complaining, and disquieted moments of resentment against the 'system' do not take centre stage in such policy-oriented research accounts. The institutionally dominant role of psychologists in geriatric studies (see Chapter Three) and resilience theorizing has not found the courage to break with power, instead going with the flow of optimistic economic endorsements of "happiness studies" in wage labour to convince us that hard work pays off, gives immense joy, and more than anything, makes us "resilient" human beings (Federici, 2020: 87). It is not surprising that many FDWs internalize the hallmarks of resilient subjectivity under tremendous pressure to act gratuitously towards their so-called benefactors (e.g. Tungohan, 2021). But why not, for instance, do care work analysts (and psychologists of resilience for that matter) not study domestic workers' lengthy rebellions against judgments of 'maids', or their negative assessments of local filial piety?

Resilience needs resistance, but the immense diversity and personas that each character brings to the table is riveting for care work. As *Matatag*¹¹⁸, photovoice project of Filipina live-in caregivers in Canada showcases, how the women stay strong deserves celebration, but women's resilience is often used to dismiss the need for policy change. It is important to clarify that my framework does not claim, much less endorse, that FDWs be resilient individuals, given that this term implies they are emotionally malleable enough to have something else done to them. Rather, opening up care as a conceptual domain has plenty of potential to hack at the currently snowballing path of romanticized resilience. Its endorsements are most obvious in the extensive and burgeoning pool of social-ecological systems (SES) resilience in the Global South. Scholars of SES resilience offer critiques of technical appraisals of ecological resilience, where the concept started gaining traction in the early 1970s. One prominent advocate, Carl Folke (2006), emphasizes that human agents are flexible, dynamic, and malleable in the face of disturbance. Contrary to the field's mostly non-linear assumptions, SES resilience argues for injecting humanistic considerations in disaster recovery efforts, given that "collaboration of a diverse set of stakeholders", each with norms of "leadership, trust, vision and meaning, in social relationships" are needed (Folke, 2006: 262). Although this perspective stressed the obstacles to collective action, its mandate of adaptive governance is couched in capital-centric futures of development and social stability.

Today, social resilience is circulated in ways that often (dangerously) suggest that marginalized populations will be able to overcome unforeseen obstacles: "the capacity of groups

¹¹⁸ As I saw at the photovoice exhibits at the Third Global Carework Summit, 7-9 June 2023, University of Costa Rica, *Matatag* (steadfast amidst challenges) is a series of participatory photovoice recordings by Filipina caregivers, personal support workers, and home nurses during COVID-19 of their everyday realities: <https://filipinacareworkers.com/#intro>. The Filipino methodology of *kwentuhan* (talk-story) was used to explore how the women navigate work challenges, hostile immigration, and family separation. The research team, led by Dr. Ethel Tungohan, hope to celebrate the women's critical hope, faith, and strength.

of people bound together in an organization, class, racial group, community, or nation to sustain and advance their wellbeing in the face of challenges to it” (Hall and Lamont in Bracke, 2016a: 55). International organizations, notably the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), United Nations, European Union, and the International Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) among others, use ‘resilience’ as a central policy planning tool¹¹⁹. In one scoping review, Mark Neocleous (2013: 4) finds that from 2009-2013 alone, ‘resilience’ features in almost 2000 IMF documents, often in the titles of working papers. With remarkably little variation, these are strategies “to build knowledge, incentives, and learning capabilities” to appropriate unwelcome crises for renewed capacities of strength (Folke, 2006: 262). A keyword search on Google Scholar found just two articles, one in disaster management and the other in feminist international relations, that advocate for SES resilience to admit alternative autonomist perspectives: mutual aid in Project Lyttleton, New Zealand, charting “a transformative alternative to capitalism” in the wake of the 2011 Christchurch earthquake (Cretney and Bond, 2014: 29), and indigenous Liberian women peace activists resisting UN demands of security governance (Martin de Almagro and Bagues, 2022).

As an itinerant concept, resilience “spans the macro-level of ecological and economic systems to the micro level of selves”, hence can also be analysed as a conduit of “contemporary operations of power” and “processes of subjectification” (Bracke, 2016a: 52, 61-62). Many FDWs I spoke to have been trafficked by their own “neocolonial labour brokerage state” (Tungohan, 2021: 36), where austere governments invest even less in social reproduction than in the Global North. Sha and Maylene hail from communities that have learnt to not expect care from their governments, and were socialized into overseas migration as an inevitable reality.

¹¹⁹ See the IMF’s Resilience and Sustainability Trust (RST): <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Podcasts/All-Podcasts/2023/01/26/resilience-and-sustainability-trust-podcast>.

These women, as Silvia Federici calls “those who migrate”, are “combative women” who are “prepared to face many hardships and even a loss of social status to give a better life to their families” (Federici, 2016: 11).

In the contemporary milieu where understandings of agency have shifted from resistance (pushing back against) to resilience, that ability to critically apprehend the future as a cycle of “disaster and recovery from disaster” (Bracke, 2016b: 853), care activity becomes a principal sphere to disentangle – more so than labour rights, care is often represented for FDWs instead of by or alongside them. If resilience is imagined as having the properties of an inflatable tyre, eventually rebounding no matter how deflated, processes of puncturing are those moments where care resists (or even escapes) control and governance, inevitably piercing, stabbing, or at least firing some shots that damage its rigid armour. FPE scholars writing from all parts of the world continue their structural critiques of global austerity that are at the root of exploitative care chains and its “global heart transplant” (Hochschild in Manalansan, 2008: 10). The underlying message driving this effort is the ideal that no one should be forced to choose between leaving their loved ones and ensuring their economic survival. Punctured resilience also refers to living in alternative worlds of valuation where perhaps the notion of ‘resilience’ need not necessarily be only a reaction to “negative experiences”, which is often implied in the normalized struggle of, say, white middle-class working mothers (Gill and Orgad, 2018: 486).

In my reading, resilience studies are in its infancy and already being reproduced at breakneck speed, but in instrumental ways that the sidelined aspects of FPE thought (contentions in care) can be put in conversation with, which enriches its own analytical horizons. As Parvati Raghuram implores, “Can engagement with the practices or philosophies of non-Western care or indeed of global feminist thinking beyond the West really leave the ethics of care untroubled?”

(Raghuram, 2019: 623). Decolonial approaches to feminist care ethics and social movements, domains where migrant caregivers are underrecognized (Tungohan, 2019), argue that the experiences and perspectives of certain groups of women (middle-class white) tend to take priority, “an ongoing problem” then and now (Narayan, 1995: 137). This chapter’s stories give analysts good reason to conceptualize resilience in the spirit of “reciprocal criticism” (see Introduction), or what indigenous Austronesian (Paiwan tribe) feminist Liglav A-Wu refers to as “women’s sympathy”: the idea that no one, whether more or less privileged, can be immune to reminders by others of the possible blind spots in their vision of ‘progressive’ futures (in Shih, 2014: 186). On this note, there is a small yet spectral effort in nuancing care itself that has the potential to break in on resilience, which with even fewer exceptions, have not been heckled.

Conclusion

Punctured resilience intermingles emotional labour and skills with critical interpretations of resilience, suggesting that diversifying the versions and visions of care that FDWs contribute is a way to not lose sight of the women’s agency through care. As the prior review shows, scholars who study skills ‘filtering’ and stratifications of intimate labour have disrupted traditional political economy’s masculine binaries (Armstrong, 2013; Lan, 2016, 2022; Huang et al., 2012), which reproduce power dynamics in the “gendered contours of the woman-carer model of care” (Yeoh et al., 2021: 1). These works, among others, recognize that emotional labour is not the same for all women, given that FDWs live with forced alienation and (im)mobility.

By suggesting that the FPE literature in care work draw on some of its own underrated voices to speak out against resilience, I do not imply that FPE neglects emotional labour, much less that care chains analysis should be done away with. Rather, in congregating around the

unbelievably clever ways that states sieve the ‘dirty’ work to differently positioned gendered racialized women (Ortiga et al., 2020; Lan, 2022; Yeoh et al., 2021), they risk leaving out the affective dimensions of what might really matter to FDWs when unsolicited, also unpredictable in advance, feelings and emotions are triggered. The few ethnographic studies on emotional journeys of socialization into resilience offer important structural critiques of (il)liberal governance in care chains (Chang, 2018; Chee, 2020; Killias, 2018; Paul, 2017). Detailed explorations of care itself reveal deeper subtleties of emotions in migrant care work that personify transnational care transfers.

Transitioning into Chapter Five on the socially transformative presence of “Care Uprisings”, this chapter’s framing of punctured resilience argues for an expansive and regenerative direction of analyzing emotional lives, not just labour, in care itself, which researchers’ encounters with FDWs can pick up on in more depth. In fact, this chapter’s rendering of punctured resilience alludes to some ‘gaps’ in neoliberal subjectivity between FDWs of different nationalities, given that Sha and Maylene are familiar with the POEA’s pre-departure programs, have solid grassroots connections, and are engaged in medical training with plans to eventually enter institutional care. Sylvia, an Indonesian live-in caregiver in Taiwan whose story I save for the next chapter, instead did not discuss earning any such ‘skills’, although she had learnt how to perform nasogastric insertions more than 20 years ago, when she first set foot in Taiwan – a violation of job scope that she was wholly unbeknownst to. Unlike her Filipino counterparts, her off days are negotiated and approved on an ad hoc, not regular, basis. She was also not in full control of our interview time, as she started with a heads-up: “*lao ban niang* (female employer) is not in. If she comes back, I have to hang up, okay? They don’t like to see me using the phone”. Researchers have found such differences between Filipinos vis-

à-vis other nationalities that manifest in the social infrastructures of hiring norms; employers and FDWs understand the unspoken rule that Filipinos receive many ‘perks’ that otherwise need to be fought for (Setyawati, 2013; Schumann and Paul, 2020: 1713).

Visions and imaginaries of actually existing care by women like Sylvia, who perhaps do not fit the conventional ideas of political resistance and transformative action by FDWs participating in social movements, attest to the stark reality of “inessential solidarities” that deserve greater inclusion in studies of FDWs’ resistance (e.g. Amrith, 2010; Hankivsky and Dhamoon, 2013: 911). Too often, the women’s irreducibly heterogenous divergences are reduced in studies of agency and resistance, given that FDWs, as a group, indeed face many common structural challenges to getting their voices and claims heard and known. However, the disproportionate representation of the Filipino nationality in this realm (Choy, 2003; Yeates, 2012), with few exceptions (e.g. Mintarsih, 2019), deserves greater scrutiny for what it may reveal about the colonial and imperial legacies of care as a concept (Narayan, 1995). For FPE-minded analysts, what becomes apparent is the Philippine’s stronger cultural affiliation with the Anglophone world, namely the United States, in its domestic political economy of nurse training, a model that enjoys global theoretical and social legitimacy (Choy, 2003; Paul, 2017; Yeates, 2009). It follows that Sha’s ambivalence to ‘skills’ in the care market and Maylene’s references to labour rights education, for instance, are elements of contention in migrant worlds of care that seemed far away from Sylvia, whose profoundly relational narrative spoke past these vectors of competence and recognition: “Just love (*jiu shi ai*), love them with all our heart”. These differences matter hugely for Chapter Five, where Sylvia’s agency in “how I treat *ah gong*” requires incorporating a corporeal approach to care that acknowledges the unpredictable

materiality of every body's neediness, an inescapable reality of human life, to be recognized as socially transformative – the vulnerable body is powerful (Vaaitinen, 2015).

For all three women, “even with little resources, care for the elderly is a firmly grounded ethical responsibility” (Amrith, 2020: 251). However, most so for Sylvia, a normative sense of entitlement to self-care, and the knowledge to articulate these needs, wants, and rights may look and sound unfamiliar to FDWs who hail from socially resilient communities (Raghuram, 2019: 626). The content of recognizable care work, and hence what it means to resist unfree labour regimes, is dominated by case studies of the Philippine state and Filipinos abroad, especially in North and Latin American, European, and Scandinavian locations (Amrith, 2018). Chapter Five considers the power-inflected solidarities of marginalized groups, with diverse and unequally represented members, and argues for validating FDWs' intellectual roles as feminist political activists who redraw the contours of care activity from different sites of feminism (e.g. Federici, 2016). I build on this analytical spirit in the forthcoming accounts of migrant protagonists, whose banal and mundane routines of care are a form of radical insurgency.

Chapter Five

Care Uprising: Subversive Care as a Mode of Insurgence

Introduction

In this chapter, I draw on the subversive (against the grain of established norms and institutions) caring practices of three Indonesian women¹²⁰ and a Facebook group (“FDW in Singapore”) to illustrate a landscape of “care uprising”: an insurgent (implying an active revolt and rebellion) politics of care that resists, but sometimes escapes, the oppressive structures of care labour migration. Keeping in mind that resilience in its simple bounce-backable sense is increasingly co-opted into migrant agency and resistance (Bracke, 2016b), my word choice of uprising, subversion, and insurgence is in light of the FDWs I interviewed who demonstrate a care ethics and practice with autonomist elements of human aspirations for alternative worlds of care that ‘resistance’ does not connote. I argue that the empirical policy realities of FDWs’ subjugation (see Chapter One) necessitate an analytical reorientation of ‘the political’ (away from formal institutional mechanisms) for a fuller appreciation of the women’s transformative agency in resisting¹²¹ the exploitative relations that sustain care provision. Care uprising is informed predominantly by the scholarship on FDWs’ acts and strategies of resistance, such as (un)organized social movements in public and private spaces (Constable, 2009; Lan, 2003; Piper and Rother, 2014; Soco, 2011; Yeoh and Huang, 2010) and the autonomies of migration (AoM) and mobile commons in digital solidarities (Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2013). I combine these

¹²⁰ This chapter’s main characters are Sylvia (30 November 2021), Fajar (26 November 2021), and Sammi (11 November 2021), all FDWs in Singapore or Taiwan. Three NGO workers are quoted: Untha (2 December 2021), Grace (15 December 2021), and Jaya (1 November 2021).

¹²¹ Power asymmetries in care labour migration set ordinary citizens (domestic employers) apart from FDWs (‘maids’) such that the former almost always wields an upper hand (Ng, 2022; Setyawati, 2013). Especially in Singapore’s authoritarian climate, FDWs’ are unable to find significantly visible avenues to express their subversive intentions of disrupting an established order. Insurgence through collective rebellion and purposeful dissent is then an embodied aspiration rather than feasible action.

frameworks of migrant resistance and social movements with affective theories of care as a corporeal (body to body) relation (Hoppania and Vaittinen, 2015; Vaittinen, 2014, 2015).

At first glance, a corporeal view might seem to clash with emotional and feelings-orientated approaches to care. Corporeality usually refers to the raw physicality of evolving bodily needs that emerge from the tangible qualities of a body such as its shape, size, or resistance to force; in that sense, has a strong scientific connotation. But in the context of eldercare regimes that rely on pairs of vulnerable populations (elderly and ‘maids’), conceptualizing care relations along corporeal lines enables an understanding of what I call the speaking body. As this chapter’s vignettes show, this sensuous view of care is necessary to comprehend FDWs’ resistance – especially where power abuses prevent the women from realizing and speaking out about their own care needs – to push past accounts of insurgent politics beyond that of visibly confrontational or structurally effective action, which tends to preoccupy social movements analysis of migrant care workers (e.g. Constable, 2009; Ford and Piper, 2007; Rother, 2017).

Feminist care theories have not contended enough with the open-ended nature of care relations thrown up by “the needy body that belongs to each and every one of us” (Vaittinen, 2015: 1). For Tiina Vaittinen, the FPE literature’s general tendency to center global care chains overplays Marxist working definitions of reproductive labour, namely by enforcing economic frames of care as (only) work at the expense of contemplating the “political potential of the vulnerable body” (Vaittinen, 2015: 5). On a related note, Ethel Tungohan points to the spectral aspects of migrant caregiving, namely its “complex and messy emotions”, that are under-accounted for in a care chains analogy that prioritizes economic value and market transfer (Tungohan, 2019: 231). For some women such as Sylvia, all the researcher might get is affective

and sensory messages of raw, unprocessed emotion. But how can Sylvia's caring decisions (e.g. to learn tubing techniques despite its grave dangers) be analyzed as a transformative act with life-changing outcomes instead of as a commendable sacrifice that ultimately does not enter 'politics' proper?

The transformative power of FDWs' resistance can only be understood in political domains that are actually reachable for the women in question: usually not the streets or political assemblies but private contestations over care relations. The rest of this introduction summarizes the conceptual frameworks informing my notion of care uprising, then offers some illustration of this phenomena in Singapore's and Taiwan's political context. Thereafter, I elaborate on a corporeal view of care that challenges popular conformist (follow the formal rules of the establishment) approaches to politics with a particular focus on care work research conducted in East Asia. Following this conceptual backdrop (see p. 217 onwards), I then explore three distinct yet interrelated instances of care uprising undertaken from different sites: the private home (Sylvia), grassroots and NGO communities (Fajar), and online cyberspace (Facebook).

Elsewhere, I have drawn on the autonomies of migration (AoM) perspective to show that the asymmetrical power relationships between employers and 'maids' necessitate a different understanding of 'the political': one which attempts to comprehend migrant acts (embodied intentions) of resistance as distinct from its (publicly visible) strategies (Ng, 2023). In the context of European states' guest worker migration, Dimitris Papadopoulos and Vassilis Tsianos have argued for an autonomist lens of migrant resistance that chips away at the unspoken assumption of "political participation in our (state) institutions" as a desired end outcome (Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2013: 187). As the authors gather from observations of mutual help facilitated by digital communication, migrant workers construct their own unique shared "codes", "practices",

and “logics” of cooperative solidarity that seem “almost imperceptible from the perspective of existing political action” (Papadopoulous and Tsianos, 2013: 188). In citizenship studies, Peter Nyers has demonstrated likewise for “clandestine aspects of migration” (Nyers, 2015: 29), which I understand as “the unseen tactics or hidden acts of resistance that chart a world of their own” among FDWs for whom caring is resisting (Ng, 2023: 82).

From this perspective, migrants’ everyday sociability and the worlds they create resist yet do not always get to engage capitalist labour relations head on. In other words, the care relations forged in these circles of solidarity point to ideas of human valuation and motivations in life that speak past the surveillance systems working against them (Trimikliniotis et al., 2015). Given that the smartphone revolution has empowered the vast majority of migrant workers, the AoM perspective foregrounds an ontology of the *mobile commons*: “the sharing of knowledge and infrastructures of connectivity, affective cooperation, mutual support and care among people on the move” (Papadopoulous and Tsianos, 2013: 178). As my discussion of a Facebook group below shows, increased access to digital communication tools have indeed enabled a great number of FDWs to speak up against errant employers. But the unique live-in situation of ‘maids’ warrants several caveats to an otherwise uplifting imagery of the *mobile commons*; governments are unable to micromanage online activists but domestic employers still wield an upper hand (Ng, 2023).

In a scenario where ‘maids’ have never been treated as rights-bearing political subjects, the formally established rules of political order and participation hardly have a notable presence in FDWs’ consciousness. The women interviewed are rudely confronted by the raw vulnerabilities of naked bodies and caring to sustain life, which is also how some of them have come to view the frail body as a “political necessity”, not a negative state of dependence, that is

“part and parcel of our very embodiment” as human beings (Vaittinen, 2015: 8). More than any other interviewee group, FDWs are thrown into an ‘everyday looks different¹²²’ reality of eldercare (e.g. Brown, 2016), which the women took pains to stress when describing their daily routine. In general, the women are hyper-aware of contradictions between linear time and the corporeal fact that bodily needs are unfathomable until they show up. Providing care is hence an always unfolding process of reacting and responding to a needy body’s erratic idiosyncrasies, which involve care activities that cannot be containerized into windows of time, much less put into a pre-planned itinerary. It is in this sense of care as a corporeal relation that Tiina Vaittinen, speaking referring to elderly citizens in Finland, argues that “the body in itself is politically powerful, even when incapable of articulating itself as a subject” (Vaittinen, 2015: 7).



Photo source: Shih, H-C. (2023). Filipino helpers and Indonesian caregivers gather outside Taipei Main Station on 18 June, dressed as metaphorical “robots”, to protest overwork, low salaries, and lack of regular days off.

¹²² I had anticipated that there is no typical or standard template for how a day of eldercare looked like, and mentioned this at the outset when asking FDWs to “describe the main activities in your daily routine” with their patient. Even so, the majority of those interviewed found it important to emphasise this on their own. In fact, many understood a non-standardized schedule of caregiving to be one of the most important for an elderly’s mental health (e.g. “she eats/watches TV when she wants to”) and saw this lack of autonomy in nursing homes as the main downside of institutional care.

The above said, FDWs' vulnerability stems not so much from physical frailty but political exclusion as able-bodied foreigners. The women's decisions of if and how to cooperate by caring for an elderly alongside their need for self-care is a key facet of care uprising that unfolds behind closed doors. Not all women, for instance, have stories of engaging with NGO activists and grassroots communities, much less participating in public protests or street marches. FDWs in democratizing Taiwan are likelier to have had such experiences compared to those in authoritarian Singapore, who take subversive acts underground or to the internet. However, even in Taiwan's 'open' political environment, women like Sylvia in this chapter still do not find their way into publicly visible lines of protest. In such circumstances, alternative definitions of what it means to be and act politically, as FDWs and feminist thinkers who reshape the contours of domestic caregiving (Federici, 2016), are needed. Some analysts (e.g. Anju Paul, Brenda Yeoh, Kayoko Ueno, Megha Amrith, Michele Ford, Nicole Constable, Nicola Piper, and Pei-Chia Lan) have discussed FDWs' insurgent and subversive acts, viewed as synonymous with FDWs' strategies of resistance, and note the wide variety of spatial settings where these take place as well as the possible contradictions between the 'victories' of empowerment and 'losses' of submission. Items like mobile phones and the right to regular days off are not a given, and must be tactfully bargained for, often becoming a long-drawn out battle with no guarantee of success.

As Margaret Schumann and Anju M. Paul show in a nuanced investigation of FDWs' decisions around weekly rest days¹²³, "a qualified version of resistance that operates *within*

¹²³ Thanks to the laborious efforts of grassroots activists, the Singapore state passed a 2012 amendment requiring employers to give FDWs weekly rest days, where previously there could be none. However, employers have the option of buying this rest day with additional compensation, often resulting in a power play of economic coercion. Furthermore, due to the domestic sector's exclusion from public labor laws, there is no way to ensure that all employers give due compensation. One 2015 HOME report found that 58% of the surveyed FDWs were not remunerated for working on Sundays (Schumann and Paul, 2020: 1698). In early 2023, employers were told that at least one rest day per month cannot be bought off. However, the same issues of political unwillingness to govern employers' conduct remains; much ambiguity exists over the definition of a rest day, with many employers treating it as a few hours break/reprieve instead of a 24-hour work-free arrangement (HOME, 2023).

oppressive structures” is necessary, given that accepting rest days “comes with high risk” in many circumstances (Schumann and Paul, 2020: 1700). Where FDWs simultaneously inhabit different zones of power, the same act (choosing to give up weekly rest days) can be “submission in one arena...their Singaporean workplace” and “resistance in another...their life of precarity back home”, hence embodies “both resistance and victimhood” (Schumann and Paul, 2020: 1708, 1715). Still, compared to the coupling of Filipinos and North American (the United States and Canada) destinations, where public-facing organized movements are favored in dialogues about transformative action (Gibson et al., 2001; McKay, 2005; Tungohan, 2023), other locations like East Asia and multifaceted approaches to the political – care itself, for instance – beyond government institutions are less well-attended to (Amrith, 2018; Raghuram, 2012).

Taiwan’s live-in caregiver sector is an anomaly in the globally recognized model of Filipino-majority presence in care chains, given that theirs is a predominantly Indonesian workforce. According to the latest available breakdowns, 56% of FDWs in Singapore are Filipino and 32% are Indonesian out of a total of 261 000 as of 2017 (Westcott and Hunt, 2017), Meanwhile, out of Taiwan’s almost 260 000 live-in caregivers as of 2019 (Everington, 2019), just 22% are Filipino while over 77% are Indonesian (Su et. al., 2022: 1694). Rarely have attempts to analyze resistance looked at this particular group’s capacity, among other ‘neglected’ non-Filipino nationalities, to act in socially transformative ways (e.g. Mintarsih, 2019; Mong, 2016; Platt et al., 2016). The notion of care itself as a political battlefield has also not been contemplated at length in studies of resistance that are tied toward labor market discrimination, often at the expense of appreciating how simply being there for one another, such as engaging in recreational activities like singing, in this photo below, is no less a political statement than loud chants on the street of “No to labor export policy!” (e.g. Soco, 2011; Tungohan, 2023).

As Sammi had explained of her “unusual” and “fortunate” situation, most FDWs do not experience the same level of community participation and social mobility that she does, thanks to “a very very long time with this employer, who has always been supportive of all of these things I do”. Also, not all of the women, especially non-Filipinos, are at ease with confrontational styles of political engagement. Some Indonesian FDWs contrasted their preferred methods of resistance, which leaned on the defensive rather than assertive (e.g. “I prefer not to argue”), with the “demanding” and “bossy” inclinations of “some Filipinos” (Desy). Such comments point to misalignments of and unequal access to toolkits of social protest, hence the need to distinguish between “politics” as “traditional political institutions” and “the political” as “an open concept, understood as pertaining to power relations more widely” (Hoppania and Vaitinen, 2015: 71).



Photo source: Provided by Sammi Gunawan, with her consent of usage for a public website. Indonesia Family Network (IFN) support group members participate in a purple parade choir activity to destress and unwind.

Not all versions of care uprising have a public face, nor does every woman’s insurgent transformation to worlds of care make it to readily observable domains, such as the internet’s social media visibility. But a micro-revolution of sorts is always already happening when FDWs’ efforts invert the rigid norms of care organization and result in an otherwise unthinkable outcome, making available an experience of care that their patient would otherwise not have

access to. The ongoing conversations about FDWs' agency, subjectivity, and resistance engage with the varied topics and sites of the women's efforts to negate structural isolation arising from the absence of personal and professional boundaries, which scholars note is the root factor of rampant abuse/exploitation for live-in domestics (Soco, 2011; Schumann and Paul, 2020; Yeoh and Huang, 1999, 2010). The featured stories exhibit a similarly wide range of extent, scope, and ways of resistance, ranging from lonesome fights in solitude to social gatherings in the community to virtual connections with other FDWs – scenarios of insurgence through care that are not rigid in form, but occur contingently and fluidly in each setting. What these stories can offer the existing scholarship are forms of appreciating care as an insurgence, hence (latent) transformation to care and labor migration policy, that can be made visible if care itself is recognized as an arena of political contestation.

Relying on corporeal instincts of care to depart from conformist politics

While FPE scholars emphasize the contemporary significance of colonial and imperial ideologies of gendered and racialized servitude, they have not lost sight of the need to appreciate and understand migrant care workers' agency to recalibrate and resist oppressive labor regimes. More than 15 years ago, when FDWs were entering East Asia most rapidly, Michele Ford and Nicola Piper pointed out that their cross-border agency is more nuanced than the dichotomous framing in most Asian migration accounts of “either passive victims of global power structures” or “isolated actors exerting micro agency through acts of everyday resistance” (Ford and Piper, 2007: 1). Analysts have documented and theorized these acts and strategies of resistance from various angles, the most prominent for FDWs' resistance being the myth of ideological separation between public and private space – their live-in condition, where present, can hardly be overstated for its isolating consequences for social life (Federici, 2016). As Brenda Yeoh and

Shirlena Huang wrote longer ago, the historical exclusion of women from meaningful spaces for public participation rendered all female bodies to the non-political (Yeoh and Huang, 1998).

In the context of East Asia's rapid economic ascendancy, the 'maid trade' (Heyzer and Wee, 1995) was an indispensable labor import policy to 'liberate' the latent productivity of female citizens into the workforce, since they no longer needed to be housewives. Although female citizens are nonetheless held to gendered role obligations of feminine marital domesticity, that this often includes 'managing the maid' means that FDWs feel the specter of intrusive monitoring 24/7: "these women are viewed first and foremost as workers...no more than a form of commodified labor" (Yeoh and Huang, 1998: 584). Not all FDWs are bound to live-in situations, a condition of employment that can hardly be overstated for its isolating, even fatal, consequences. But regardless of the political environments and state of civil society where migrant care workers live, scholars agree that the majority of domestic employers and members of the public at large adopt a simple benevolent view to their 'control' of the women's everyday mobility (Heyzer and Wee, 1995; Yeoh et al., 2021). From East Asia to Europe to North America, domestic employers have always justified their routines of excessive monitoring with self-congratulatory attitudes (e.g. "for her own good/security/safety" in Yeoh and Huang, 1998: 590) that betray the (il)liberal assumptions of paternalistic care governance (Chang, 2018).

Analysts of FDWs' resistance who are sympathetic to the women's stifling circumstances of work and life have conceptualized resistance in a gamut of ways to contextualize their creative resourcefulness. Sometimes, strategies of resistance are observed in open research settings, such as when migrant care workers organize with labor unions or in conjunction with grassroots activists in front of assemblies, in crowded city spaces, and other public facing events. However, ethnographers have also found that many FDWs, especially in censored political environments,

are unable to gain significant access to spaces outside their employing household (Schumann and Paul, 2020; Yeoh and Huang, 2010). In such instances, nuanced assessments of migrant agency and power to transform social values are needed, which account for the ideological discourses and material structures of domination – including when migrants themselves internalize these (Tungohan, 2021) – while not losing sight of the creativity, strength, and resilience that marginalized populations deploy to contest unfair treatment. On that note, a recent special issue in *Ethnos* on the ethnographic entanglements of care and control in Asian Migration is of particular interest to perspectives of agency, subjectivity, and resistance that stress the chaos of human subjectivity, ambivalence, and uncertainty (Johnson and Lindquist, 2020). This interpretive view recognizes that migrants’ “bifurcated reactions” may “believe more complex positionalities” that challenge researchers’ social justice assumptions of care and control in surveillance systems (Constable, 2020: 3). Maylene in Chapter four and Sylvia in this chapter, despite seeming to have internalized imperial hierarchies of domestic servitude, engage in an insurgent politics through care that “suggest a subtle reclaiming and redefining of the meaning of care and of the confluences of care and control” (Constable, 2020: 6).

Researchers of FDWs’ resistance have divided their attention across the myriad of scales and sites of resistance, in which the women have made themselves present. The most visible would be transnational political spaces (Rother, 2017), such as social movements, organized street marches, public speeches, and high-profile media publicity events. Observations of these tend to be dominated by research done out of Hong Kong (Constable, 2009; Law, 2002), the Philippines, and Canada (McKay, 2005), where social movements frameworks of “political opportunity structures...for migrant organizing” (Rother, 2017: 970) are prevalent compared to Taiwan, and in stark contrast to Singapore where heavy censorship makes it hard to discuss

resistance in clear-cut overt ways (Tungohan, 2023; Yeoh et al., 2021). For Nicole Constable, the Hong Kong government's political desire to maintain an activist friendly image has contributed to a social tolerance for migrant advocacy work. The heightened visibility of FDWs in central districts, often with loud blaring horns and eye-catching placards (Constable, 2009: 156), stands in stark contrast to Singapore, where the outlawing of random activist gatherings makes it impossible to use public space for overt political ends. Hence, less visible but equally important arenas are that of the apparently ungovernable domestic home-space, where privatized care and closeted interactions with members of the employing household occur.

FPE scholars have found that where access to days off are not given, micro-acts of subversion proliferate: fabricating family emergencies to elicit sympathy, crying in front of employers, consuming expensive (forbidden) food items in secret, leaving corners of the house uncleaned, and even feigning ignorance in the face of interrogation, are some among a long list of examples that illustrate FDWs' imaginative resourcefulness (Yeoh and Huang, 1999). While most studies of resistance concentrate on distinct empirical domains, involving particular spaces in or outside the home (Ford and Piper, 2007; Yeoh and Huang, 1998), these come together in a common agenda to disrupt the simple hero versus victimhood narrative that mainstream representations of migrants' capacity to act for themselves are couched in. As Nicola Piper and Stefan Rother explain, "the question of subjectivity and agency" is often trapped between the opposing perspectives of "mainstream gaze of government" and "grassroots left-oriented NGOs", either exploiting migrants' bodies for economic remittances or standing against the use of labor export policy for capitalist development (Gibson et al., 2001: 367). In contrast, a fluid approach of appreciating resistance extends to not only FDWs' flexible ways of negotiating contradictory class and labor positions or social statuses (Asoto, 2004; Lan, 2003), but also the

boundary work of identity management (Soco, 2011; Ueno, 2010; Yeoh and Huang, 2000), and their reframing of personas beyond work, such as digital hyper-maternalism that challenges gendered discourses of blame on migrant mothers for being physical absent (Tungohan, 2013).

The above said, the framework of care uprising is an invitation to these ongoing attempts to take the latent subversive impact of FDWs' resistance further, that is, to translate these into concrete changes in care and labor migration policy, beyond their own circles (AWARE and HOME, 2020). Other than institutional reforms, care uprising recognizes the simultaneous existence of alternative worlds of care. For instance, Sha in the previous chapters and Sylvia here clinging to everyday acts of subversion in and against the norms of neoliberal care organization, sometimes annoying their employers, to give their patients the care they need. In this sense, many FDWs' insurgent politics create supposedly impossible outcomes of care (micro-revolution), embodying non-capital-centric elements, even as these come at great personal costs in unsupportive working environments. To envision this already changed reality of care, FPE conversations could follow Vaittinen (2015) in understanding care as the decisive political battlefield, rather than as one among many contested elements of the political system to be advocated for. This intellectual experiment of merging care as the political realm with agency and resistance does not intend to romanticize the love that prevents an otherwise depressing quality of life from befalling care recipients. In most cases, better worlds of care for elderly persons entail more suffering borne by FDWs. Rather, a facet of this well-known feminist structural critique of care chains must also involve a contemplation of how care itself can be transformative, even revolutionary, on its own terms, in order to alter the status quo in which care is given, received, and thought of. In Chapter four, I noted that the FPE literature in care work, especially studies coming out of East Asia, have tended to construe FDWs' physical and

emotional labor from the viewpoint of the host society's political economy of eldercare needs. Doing so has reductive implications for our understanding of FDWs' emotional lives, not just labor, as they continually run into novel care situations and experience new emotions in an expansive and generative, not bounded, manner. Emotional lives beyond labour are important to recognize not only for its ethical significance but also for what these can teach policy planning about the (missing) welfare of caregivers.

Since Yeoh and Huang's (1998, 1999) influential studies on FDWs' styles and strategies of resistance in Singapore's authoritarian urban governance, there have been surprisingly few studies that follow up on this topic. The East Asian care work scholarship has since gravitated toward structural critiques of care chains, with fewer focusing on migrant-led resistance efforts. Those who did have also tended to favor a few high-profile destinations, locations that were perhaps 'easier' to access and more 'out there', namely the Philippines and Hong Kong (Constable, 2009; Ford and Piper, 2007; Tungohan, 2023), occasionally Indonesia (Rother, 2017), whereas Singapore and Taiwan have 'dropped off the radar' in comparison. However, especially since the early 2010s, scholars have theorized migrant agency in the context of digital revolutions in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), showing that the ubiquity of affordable smartphones and digital connectivity on friend-finding platforms have empowered many to accumulate social capital for community activism (Thompson, 2009).

So significant are these digital affordances to reshaping migrant agency that, for Dimitris Papadopoulos and Vassilis Tsianos, an ontology of the mobile commons emerges as a mode of "insurgent configuration of ordinary experiences of mobility against this regime of control" (Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2013: 178). The always online status of migrant workers, who can see one another virtually, also make for novel renditions of insurgent communities of care

through “the sharing of knowledge...affective cooperation, mutual support and care among people on the move” (Ibid). Most studies applying these insights to FDWs focus on its benefits for transnational family connections, such as enabling the women to keep track of their loved ones’ routines and whereabouts in the “ambient co-presence” of polymedia¹²⁴ environments: “the peripheral awareness of the actions of distant others” (Madianou, 2016: 186). For FDWs in extreme isolation, the smartphone is an indispensable means to converse with the outside world for a sense of “subjectivity, connection and freedom” (Lin and Sun, 2010: 190). Maria Platt and colleagues caution that despite the many newfound freedoms associated with the “ascent of the smartphone”, power asymmetries mean that “negotiations over ICTs are always ongoing” instead of a given (Platt et al., 2016: 2211), since employers wield disproportionate right to dictate the terms and conditions of usage.

Yeoh and Huang have used the term “spatial deference” to symbolize employers’ exclusive autonomy over the right to use domestic space: a ‘good’ FDW is one who “knows her place”, “when and where she is needed”, and most importantly, mastering that perfect balance between “being present and ready for service” and “making herself scarce” (2010: 229). The structural realities of institutionalized physical and social isolation that ‘foreign maids’ are thrown into, then, continue to haunt the otherwise empowering function of cellphones that are used for political education and movement organization. For many FDWs, “the issue of whether an off day is granted must first be resolved”; research studies “typically cannot include the worst cases of isolation” (Ng, 2023 forthcoming). The home for FDWs is then more accurately conceived as a site of (im)mobilities.

¹²⁴ For Mirca Madianou, polymedia is “a composite environment in which each medium is defined relationally to all other media” (Madianou, 2016: 186). Nowadays, social media news feeds (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, TikTok), traditional call and text services, and instant communication applications (e.g. WhatsApp, WeChat) fuse together to create a media-like environment of managing relationships.

Complementing these existing works of agency, subjectivity, and resistance with a new political understanding of care, as Tiina Vaittinen suggests in the case of an aging Finland, is a timely analytical agenda so as to visualize the already transformative consequences of care outcomes on the ground. For Vaittinen, feminist care theories have not contended with the transformational forces that the vulnerable and needy body, belonging to each and every one of us, shores up. In her view, FPE conversations of care chains have overplayed feminist Marxist perspectives of reproductive labor, more broadly through a dominant focus on care as work only, at the expense of ushering in the “political potential of the vulnerable body” (Vaittinen, 2015: 5). This view requires going back to the basics of life itself: frailty is a “political necessity”, not a negative state to be shunned, that is “part and parcel of our very embodiment” (Vaittinen, 2015: 8). Care needs show up as an unfolding and always unknowable terrain, having to react and respond to the idiosyncratic materiality of the needy body, rather than something that can be pre-empted. Hence, “the body in itself is politically powerful, even when incapable of articulating itself as a subject” (Vaittinen, 2015: 7).

In another article, this time on the disorganized (unsustainable) household, Hanna-Kaisa and Tiina Vaittinen elaborate further on the political implications of a corporeal relation of care, namely that it disrupts the neat separation of ‘politics’ and ‘economy’, also ‘politics’ and ‘the political’¹²⁵ (Hoppania and Vaittinen, 2015: 71). Their argument that care is “a political relation that defines life itself...the body-in-need lies in the very origin of all care relations” (Hoppania and Vaittinen, 2015: 76) goes a notch further than feminist care ethicists who center an ethical comportment of interdependency in caring institutions (Tronto, 2013). Most so for Sylvia, who

¹²⁵ The authors follow a post-structural definition: ‘politics’ refers to ideological contestations with immaterial elements, whereas ‘the political’ refers to the traditional institutional structures in place that represent various interest groups in democratic society (Hoppania and Vaittinen, 2015: 71).

we now turn to, this sensuous approach to interpreting the possible meanings of care is necessary to situate her agentic power, given that neither online activism nor street protests in public have entered her repertoire of resistance. What it means to engage in “transformative” action when care itself is the political hence deviates from the usual “visible behavior easily recognizable by targets and observers” (Piper and Rother, 2014: 48-49). As we shall see, even if FDWs have a well-established presence in community activism (Fajar and Sammi below) and exploit the loopholes (its ungovernable nature) of transnational cyberspace, it is not always the case that the women’s alternative worlds of care lead to substantial policy changes “via institutional change pushed from below” (Ibid). Furthermore, relations of solidarity do not come automatically or even easily to FDWs who are rather used to the rules of competing amongst themselves by playing up to employers’ racial expectations. Sometimes, FDWs also invoke superior/inferior versions of care work that are associated with migrant workers of differing legal statuses (e.g. Amrith, 2010). In this sense, the mobile commons maintained¹²⁶ by FDWs is amorphous and fragmented with internal discord rather than having an equally empowering effect (Ng, 2023).

For all that, insurgence in care uprising embodies autonomist elements of thought and resistance, meaning to say that FDWs’ personas are not wholly taken over by the laboring (and resilient) subjectivities of migrant care workers. As “a practice of producing alternative forms of life” (Trimikliniotis et al., 2015: 1046), the women’s digital worlds reveal that “they do not want to be solely identified as migrant domestic workers” (Mintarsih, 2019: 73). Still, most narrative examples of FDWs’ resistance tend to look towards Filipino interlocutors who are usually more

¹²⁶ Scholars following an AoM approach conceptualize the mobile commons as a moving resource pool that migrant workers construct for themselves and by themselves; online support groups and real-time forum updates are a key example. The mobile commons do not belong to any one actor in particular (e.g. private/public or state/civil society) but “exists to the extent that people share it and generate it as they are mobile and when they arrive somewhere” (Papadopoulous and Tsianos, 2013: 190). Because FDWs and migrant workers are themselves diverse and split across legal statuses and nationality, the mobile commons is not only a positive expression of collective solidarity but also a reinforcer of common knowledge about ‘maids’, especially nationalized stereotypes.

articulate and expressive in English. Some ongoing studies of digital activism show that younger Indonesian FDWs are increasingly gaining public visibility (e.g. Platt et al., 2016), but especially older and non-Filipino women tend to be excluded from discussions of political agency. Below, I discuss Sylvia's interactions with *ah gong* at home, then turn to Fajar's community activism and a Facebook support group for FDWs. I consider these sites of care as resistance and resistance through care as part of the many faces and facets of care uprising.

Care is taken aback by the force of bare vulnerability

“In my relationship with him, I treat him like my own father. In my caring role, I really regard him as my own dad, and I just love him so much. I am thinking, if my father is in this state, what would I do? My heart and my mind is just, my father, simple as that. It's my motto.”

Sylvia, Indonesian live-in caregiver in Taiwan

In the weeks and months after meeting Sylvia on LINE, Taiwan's most widely used instant communication application, our interview gnawed at me for reasons unknown. Without a doubt, it would have been easier to leave a research encounter like this one, consisting of few repetitive ideas and mostly guttural raw emotion, unaddressed for now. But Sylvia's animated gestures and body language unsettles understandings of resistance through care that assume there will be coherent human rights claims and/or organized political action, which tend to favour Filipino migratory circumstances (e.g. Paul, 2017; Piper and Rother, 2014). While the researcher's vocabulary still takes center stage in a decolonial intersectional lens of care (Raghuram, 2012), an affectively grounded approach of care as a corporeal relation is necessary to recognize the transformative caring practices of many more 'silent' FDWs; Sylvia's actions speak louder than words. In *Ghostly Matters*, Avery Gordon considers it imperative for social analysts to treat our interlocutors as having “the right to complex personhood” (Gordon, 2008: 5), meaning to say that interview narratives will always contain unresolved ambiguities and contradictions. In fact, the analyst's inability to draw out singular truth(s) or the 'correct

answers’ often throws us into an uneasy “structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience...as a transformative recognition” (Gordon, 2008: 8). With Sylvia, the complete absence of identifiable pushback against the social subjugation of ‘maids’ was a somewhat discomfiting moment for me as an FPE analyst trained to expect certain familiar appearances of resistance; critiques of state policy and assertions of the right to public spaces (e.g. Ford and Piper, 2007; Gibson et al., 2001; Law, 2002).

Unlike Sha and Maylene, Sylvia’s responses to issues of training background, professionalism, and skills credentials seemed to escape (speak past) many of care work’s assumed indicators of competence. Here, Vaittinen’s (2015) suggestion to view power anew through the corporeality of the vulnerable and needy body’s care emerged to the fore. Sylvia left me with a thoroughly bodily account of care itself, unfolding in unknowable ways in “how I treat *ah gong*”, that seemed reduced to but profoundly affective in its love and pure physicality. No matter the question asked, she seemed to center on a certain well-rehearsed set of *ah gong*’s bodily conditions.

Lynn: What does being a professional caregiver mean to you?

Sylvia: Oh, I think for *ah gong*, paying attention to their mood is the best possible thing, like that. Let him be happy everyday and find ways to make him laugh aloud (*ha ha da xiao*). And then just love, you know, love from deep down in the heart. Love them with all our heart, and trust that the old person will be able to feel our intentions. Simple as that.

I got to know from Sylvia that when she first arrived in 1999, she was thrown into a hospital ward and forced to learn nasogastric insertions (*sanguan*) for her ex-patient. During our video call, I caught a glimpse of *ah gong*, a bedridden 80-year old man who had abdominal tubing apart from nasogastric ones. In stark contrast to Sha and Maylene in Chapter Four, however, Sylvia lacked the verbal eloquence about skills credentials in caregiving and the related medical work that was often involved. Neither was she accumulating certificates that scored her

brownie points in the system or that would benefit future attempts to gain institutional employment. In contrast, Sha had garnered an array of skills certificates from prestigious training institutes, and knew how to make the most use of her exposure to hospital resources (e.g. when *ah ma*'s adult children made her stay in the ward), even contacting grassroots activists who then helped to secure course spaces.

Likewise, as of this time of writing in August 2023, Maylene has completed a phlebologist course at Singapore General Hospital, where she passed several written and practical examinations that count towards an official transition to a nursing home. These technical qualifications of care work, however, was not a direction that Sylvia was steered toward. This trend likely reflects the well-founded Filipino privilege among FDWs in the global nursing care chains (GNCCs), given that the Philippine Nursing Board follows American standards while the nurse training industry has taken over many provincial and village economies (Choy, 2003; Yeates, 2012). The close cultural affiliations between Filipinos, more than any other nationality of migrant workers, and American modernization pervades the “identity-driven boundary work” of FDWs (Paul, 2011: 1070). At an interpersonal level of care as a corporeal relation, Sylvia's embodied care does not intellectualize the content of caregiving as a knowable domain. That is, she did not mention what training background she came with or the medical skills she possessed but only how she embarked on “figuring out” certain things as she lived with patient after patient. Their “appetite”, “weight”, “mood (*xin qing*)”, and how they were coping bodily and in spirit were the most prevalent in her repetitive answers.

At first he kept coughing and coughing, until I felt very heart pained. When I take care of him, we just accompany each other. He is very happy, his mood is very good...we will make jokes so he will always laugh with me smile. When I first came he had no tummy, but since I am here to care for him, he has put on some weight.

Also at first when I came here, he didn't walk, he was really was not walking on his own. So I bring him go next door to practice everyday. The neighbours were so surprised. They said, Ah! How come you can do this? I say yes, I will let him practice walking everyday. And then passing motion is also the same...I let him get used to controlling his bowel movements...if he has not gone for a few days I will give him some medication for that but otherwise it's normal. Since his walking problem got solved it has been better, so overall his condition is a lot better.

“No one was telling him jokes, you know, that kind of boredom is not good. So everyday I will make him laugh, he will laugh out loud. Even his son and daughter-in-law were shocked, they came out of the room and were like, what's happening? *Ah gong*, everything okay? I said it's nothing, I was just joking with him.”

Sylvia, Indonesian live-in caregiver in Taiwan

Rather than rehearse structural critiques of care labour migration, another interpretation of Sylvia's emotionally charged care is that of the vulnerable body as powerful in its corporeal openness. Importantly, this realization of care as a corporeal relation is not a one-sided theoretical affair of care ethicists but an empirical possibility that FDWs' cooperative efforts (as a vulnerable body themselves) make true. From this perspective, care labour migration may be analyzed from a tragic victimization perspective where FDWs have not encountered ideas of self-care and often do seem to internalize gendered ideologies and their racialized status (Romero, 2018; Ueno, 2010; Tungohan, 2021). I do not deny that there will always be room for the important work of political consciousness raising. But Sylvia's contributions to social transformation lie mostly in her deliberative ethical practices of cooperating with *ah gong*'s corporeal demands (the body speaks), even if this work intensifies her socioeconomic vulnerability. So, it is also the case that despite FDWs' subjection and internalization of structural oppression, many of these women are living pioneers of care relations where one's “concrete bodily needs of nurturing” are recognized and attended warmly to (Vaaitinen, 2014: 15). I may have at first instinctively slipped into the temptation to treat Sylvia's light-hearted humour as a sign of an older woman's seasoned resilience in the face of serial adversity. She had described what must have been a harrowing experience of being coerced into learning (by doing)

nasogastric tube insertions in a remarkably causal tone: “I’m very *kaypo* (busybody) in the hospital (laughs), always ask this ask that and annoy the nurses, that’s how I know”. Yet beneath her stoic persona, there are care relations bounded by a conscious acting upon corporeal knowledge that can only be felt rather than seen or even talked about. In this microworld of care that Sylvia controls, corporeal relations unfold alongside the “living organism of the vulnerable body” and is at once “concrete material and psychic-affective” (Hoppania and Vaittinen, 2015: 77). Sylvia, contrary to what many citizens and labor brokers might think, is a political agent and decision maker whose choices and actions to act for or against something has quite literal consequences for the fate of this bedridden *ah gong*.

To recall Parvati Raghuram’s suggestions, the philosophical grounds of care as a concept ought to be constantly prodded, punctuated, and renegotiated, starting with the premise that care is risky for racialized migrant women: “how race reshapes care as practice, and therefore its ethics” (Raghuram, 2019: 616), is a question for empirical investigation. The normative (unquestioned) valorization of clinical pharmaceutical ‘skills’, which Filipinos are structurally and ideologically closer to (Amrith, 2010; Choy, 2003; Yeates, 2009), are also the very ones that enable white Scottish doctors to denigrate their Tamil Indian colleagues’ customary knowledge of witchcraft, the example raised in Raghuram (2019: 623). Bearing in mind that “some versions and visions of care are much more likely to be reproduced” (Raghuram, 2019: 619), the sensuous grappling with care as it unfolds in Sylvia’s case here, is perhaps a way to (un)learn care’s analytical lodestones, namely that of competence and recognition, that have for long been associated with certain practices rooted in Western biomedical scientific models. We might ask: How is a caregiver’s competence calibrated and defined? In what ways does an American-centric favoritism of Filipino culture in migrant care work shape popular standards of recognition and

competence? Is an emotionally raw and unprocessed personification of care any lesser than those who speak eloquently of medical skills?

Following a corporeal theory of care would suggest that the answer is no, despite the challenges to FPE analysis that ‘non-intellectualized’ narratives of care work present. Furthermore, FDWs’ vulnerable bodies, not just their elderly patients, have not been seen as a dangerous force to be reckoned with. While Vaittinen focuses on Finnish elderly bodies as the vulnerable, hence powerful, political subjects, my usage of a corporeal view of care aims to transform mainstream views of FDWs’ non-political status, in that employers feel they are “just workers” whose “sole purpose is to contribute reproductive labor for the host community” (Constable in Tungohan, 2023), so will provide eldercare anyway. FDWs are likewise not in structurally privileged enough positions to translate their care needs into policy entitlements. But rather than a refusal of relation, this situation reflects powerful actors’ decision to respond with relations of neglect. Also, elderly persons are in a receiving position while FDWs are providers, albeit coerced ones, that after all wield way more power to enact care/harm on the citizenry than many people care to admit. Thinking of care as corporeal necessity alters our understanding of, for instance, elder abuse at the hands of FDWs (Yeoh and Huang, 2009), a trend that has seen noticeable acceleration since the pandemic’s onset (Ang, 2022).

The public response has overwhelmingly been that of immigrant resentment and blame on ‘ungrateful’ foreigners, who apparently do not know how to treasure a higher-paying job that ‘Asian Tigers’ are kind enough to ‘donate’ to peoples from ‘less developed Asia’ (Lan, 2003; Lindio-McGovern, 2004; Yeoh, 2016). These views were echoed by all domestic employers and labor brokers I interviewed, such as those in Chapter Three. What is missing in this worldview of migrant care work is the rough fact that there is nothing at all to guarantee that FDWs, living in

dangerous situations of extreme neglect (structural oppression of live-in regime of domestic servitude), will still find it in themselves to respond with adequate or satisfactory provisions of care instead of, as more are doing so nowadays, choosing to abscond or worse, react with misplaced violence. This was a point that even the most resilient looking interviewees, such as Maylene in Chapter Four, had raised: “sometimes there’s too much frustration, especially if employers don’t give off day, don’t give handphone, cannot talk to any friends...you see some people jumping off (suicide)”. The most unfortunate blow-ups of ‘maid’ abuse that trigger an elderly’s tragic end is reinterpreted into a social threat for the citizenry, who has failed to care enough about the bodies it has assigned to provide care. This is not to say that the actions and choices of the FDWs in question are not morally questionable, but rather to recognize the seething anger giving rise to such eruptions: who cares for caregivers?

The next scene of care uprising is a drastic change from the confined isolation of a household: NGO activist work on Sundays in central city spaces and friendship groups focused on assertions of self-care. Corporeal care in Sylvia’s case seems wholly devoted to *ah gong* and has not been articulated into something political on the public agenda for FDWs’ rights; her deep mindfulness and sensuously driven care decisions are nonetheless life-altering. Care uprising projects for some other FDWs during off days, however, ventures into self-care with other migrant workers and the ongoing efforts of consciousness raising and policy advocacy.

Insurgent Practices of Care in the Community

As I note later, Facebook groups for FDWs (featured below) were my largest contact sourcing platform. The women who responded to my research interview post reflected a Filipino-majority presence in discursive activist spaces that care work scholars have long recognized. Fortunately, I was able to float the idea of contact referrals (snowball sampling) during my

interviews with Taiwanese NGO workers who then introduced me to Fajar. Prior to our video call, I had gathered from several news stories that Fajar has a strong social activist presence in Taiwanese media (e.g. Lin, 2023; Shih, 2023). As chairperson of the Ganas Indonesian solidarity network, she regularly speaks out against labour migration ‘reforms’. In August 2023, the Taiwan government issued a series of initiatives to increase minimum wage levels and loosen the criteria for permanent residency status for foreign caregivers (Taipei Times, 2022). As Fajar told a reporter, these promises are low-hanging fruit that do not fundamentally tackle the systemic issues of “modern-day slavery” (in Lin, 2023). Her community-engaged activism in this instance is part of a longer endeavor of care uprising between spaces of social engagement and eldercare in the hospital and at home for *ah ma*. When Fajar called me on WhatsApp one Sunday, she was waiting at the basement of a large hospital (where *ah ma* had to stay temporarily) for some friends to join her for a rally preparation (featured in Taipei Times, 2021). We hung up when these several others showed up with the art supplies to make protest banners: “I’ve got to go make the posters now. I’ll call you back!”.

When Fajar dialed back that evening, she was in the hospital corridor, taking a break from watching over *ah ma*. Here, she confided that “migrants are trafficked merchandise” for profit-obsessed labour brokers (*zhong jie*); it is common practice to promise salary increases over time and then negate these by imposing ad hoc miscellaneous fees (see Chapter One). Fajar is a keen advocate of direct hiring to bypass labor brokers (“no middlemen”) and spends most of her days off to mentor “the new girls” at community workshops on abuse and exploitation. As Sammi Gunawan, chair of the Indonesian Family Network (IFN) in Singapore also said, such legal yet unjust practices of contract replacement/substitution are rampant but are simply ignored by state authorities. With all that, care uprising’s vision of politics does not center primarily on

state institutions and civil society regulations but most so on the open-endedness of interpersonal care relations. Sylvia may not be articulating the same ideological critiques that Fajar has no problem announcing but at a corporeal level, both women physically and emotionally comprehend the social infrastructures of neglect in the elderly-foreign caregiver pairing: “in people’s minds, eldercare is already associated with the foreign worker” (Wei Dong). Intangible care relations more than its tangible social welfare manifestations contain the greatest openings for acts of insurgence that question those policy assumptions.

“When we take care of old people, we care for them ourselves. This patient is your old person, like your mama, right? So if we keep being treated like a foreigner (*wai lao*) it’s not good for the worker and for the elderly person. If they need more things and hospitalization, and if the boss does not care much, no support or other people to help, it will be unmanageable, and (tensions) blow up.”

Fajar, Indonesian live-in caregiver in Taiwan, Chairperson of Ganas Community

Like Sammi in Singapore, Fajar made connections between the care relations of neglect that marginalize live-in caregivers alongside elderly persons who face social ageism. Both women saw their predicaments as part of imperial legacies of economic dependence that subject mostly Global South populations to forced labour export and familial alienation (Tungohan, 2017: 490). When I informed Sammi of my plans to use a picture of IFN’s choir group for a contribution to the Asia Research Institute (Ng, 2022), she requested that I mention their participation was for a Purple Event (LGBTQ+ advocacy) because equitable care relations extend into broader anti-colonial agendas: “you cannot separate our rights from these other kinds of rights”. Unlike Taiwan’s democratic civil society, Singapore’s authoritarian political environment does not allow public demonstrations for citizens themselves, much less foreign workers on temporary work permits. Nonetheless, Fajar’s and Sammi’s commitment to taking care of other FDWs embodies an assertion of one’s right to be cared for and to care for other vulnerable people in the community. Social movements theorizing tends to neglect the affective

(intangible) dimensions of advocacy work among political allies, instead favors stories of substantial policy changes that produce sensationalist headlines (Tungohan, 2023). However, it is precisely these emotions and feelings in care relations among FDWs supporting one another that run counter to mainstream perceptions of ‘maids’ as not needing care.

In a different context from Vaittinen’s empirical referent of elderly patients, I find that the (already large, in her view) focus on the “subjective mind of the caregiver” should not be downplayed as also a needy body who represents “the need of care as a political void – the lack of” (Vaittinen, 2015: 17). This is precisely what the women struggle to convey to their host society: recall Sha’s “they don’t care about my feelings” in Chapter Four. More than anything, FDWs hope for ways to politically present themselves as not just workers but as aspirational people with other roles to perform and lives to lead. Sammi, for instance, is a 42-year old mother of two teenage sons in high school and university in Indonesia. In her recollection, care relations with others and oneself change over time as people enter different phases of independent life. When she first left Indonesia more than a decade ago, her husband and herself were “totally devoted to our two sons” and “giving them a better life for the future”. She still harbours a strong sense of commitment to her family but has come to realize that NGO activities give her an intense spiritual satisfaction. Especially as her sons have entered young adulthood, Sammi found herself spending more of her personal time pursuing community-engaged projects: a “new sense of purpose outside of my work here (domestic)...I am a mother but also have sisters (friends) and hobbies”. Embodied in her narrative is the right to grow as a human being by constructing care relations of nurturance beyond traditional gender roles. She recalled one memorable instance five years ago at a supermarket where she witnessed an FDW being publicly berated by her employer.

“This man was shouting at his ‘maid’ all those bad words! You know, like *bodoh* (stupid) and other worse insults. She looked quite new (just arrived) and probably was her first time going to this kind of air-con supermarket. I think she felt very lost, like not used to it yet, didn’t know how the pricing works and all, you know? They were just yelling at her, calling her dumb in front of everybody”.

Sammi, Indonesian FDW in Singapore

For Sammi, this particular instance was emotionally triggering in ways that “I can’t even describe” but “I knew I had to do something”. Like Fajar, Sammi credited her opportunities for “cognitive liberation¹²⁷” to an “understanding employer” who “wanted things to be as flexible as possible for both of us”. Both women have been abroad for as long as Sylvia has but were fortunate enough to become familiar with publicly facing and online sites¹²⁸ of care uprising. At a corporeal level, these long-time FDWs embody an urgent understanding of the political relations of neglect (also an established form of ‘care’, but one that needs unsettling) that FDWs are treated with. The tendency of agency and resistance perspectives that privilege organized action through state institutions risks downplaying the power asymmetries in political mechanisms that prevent FDWs from collective mobilization out in the open. At an interpersonal level, social movements frameworks that favour examples of structural change might also miss the corporeal subjectivity of care relations where FDWs value peer accompaniment (being there for one another) in the short time that they have more than strategizing around policy advocacy. At the same time, their strategies of care uprising reflect a deep realism toward their respective political opportunity structures (seconded by NGO workers below). As Ethel Tungohan’s (2023) multi-sited analysis of FDWs’ activism (in Canada, Hong Kong, the Philippines, and Singapore)

¹²⁷ I borrow this term from Ligaya Lindio-McGovern (2004: 225), referring to processes of exposure to previously curtailed rights (e.g. mobile phones, days off) that enable many migrant workers to experience changes in political consciousness about colonial gender ideologies (Tungohan, 2021) come to recognize paid domestic work as a form of “modern-day slavery” (Fajar in Lin, 2023).

¹²⁸ Fajar and Sammi are personally affiliated with Eni Lestari in Hong Kong who is the most high-profile and vocal representative of Indonesian domestic workers (CUPE, 2017). Eni had felt emboldened by watching Filipino activists on her first day off (Piper and Rother, 2014: 54). She now chairs the International Migrants Alliance.

demonstrates, the national context of state controls over grassroots organization constrains the women's channels of care uprising. Some Taiwanese took an unapologetically militant stance that reflected their democratizing circumstances, in contrast to Singaporeans who took a more defensive approach.

Take, for instance, the unabashedly forceful tone that Taiwanese interviewees (Untha and Grace) take for granted, compared to the dialed back restraint of Singaporeans (Jaya) who push the boundaries of state censorship. Like her Singaporean counterparts, Jaya was cognizant of the need to not stray away from the state's broader narrative of economic viability and human capital. That is, NGO workers are pressured into censoring their critiques of 'gender' and 'race' subjugation in favour of, for instance, labour productivity arguments that support increased family reunification rights. In Jaya's understanding, FDWs' presence reflects an ongoing colonial legacy of transatlantic slave trade and transpacific indentured labour, on top of the "traditionally low status that domestic service has in a lot of Chinese and Indian culture, like you see this in many families" (e.g. AWARE and HOME, 2020; Heyzer and Wee, 1995; Yeoh, 2016). But as she lamented, "You know there are certain things one cannot say about the government. We (have to) go with the labour supply logic: if their family members are allowed to come and stay, there will be even more people working and generating income for our economy...".

"TIWA supports the stance of having no agencies (labor brokers) at all, like what South Korea is doing. And this kind of 24/7 stay-in situation is actually extremely stress-inducing and damaging, psychologically, to the workers' mental health. TIWA thinks that this regimen needs to be abolished."

Untha, Taiwan International Workers' Association (TIWA)

"It turns out the government itself is an obstacle, their cost suppression structure that makes people think of hiring maids first. They are reluctant to admit that the working conditions...is too poor, of subpar standards...with negative impacts on elderly. But for me, as a Taiwanese local

citizen, I feel it is easy to tell them this. For the migrant workers, it is very hard for them to say so.”

Grace Huang, Domestic Caretakers Union (DCU) Taoyuan, Taiwan

“I see and hear many employers tell us that “Oh, she’s like family to me”, which means well and good, but sometimes that’s not what we want! (glances around to make sure no one else is in earshot) It’s hard to navigate the rather restrictive laws (laughs) but if we keep trying to censor yourself, I think we won’t be true to the value of the organization. From what I’ve learnt, as long as...I mean, it will always have to sound very reasonable, right? You know, the conversations that we have. “

Jaya, Humanitarian Organization for Migrant Economics (HOME), Singapore

Scholars of FDWs’ activism concur that “the legal and policy regime regulating civil society activities in particular receiving countries” (Ford and Piper, 2007: 12) is determinative for the transformative potential of micro-resistance on the ground (Tungohan, 2023). As I documented earlier (Ng, 2022), the organized labour rights marches often witnessed on Taipei’s streets are virtually unheard of in Singapore. In that regard, distinguishing between ‘politics’ and ‘the political’ (Hoppania and Vaittinen, 2015: 71) is useful especially in Singapore’s authoritarian context with its official out-of-bounds (OB) markers. For Jaya, HOME’s outreach events are “not so much targeted at the authorities but at the public at large”. Similarly, Lynn Koi at the Migrant Workers’ Centre noted that the majority of community-engaged efforts lie in “social strategies like school outreach that have a better chance of influencing future generations” rather than confronting government actors. Even in high-traffic zones like Lucky Plaza (‘Little Manila’) in the city-state’s Orchard district, the social affect of political censorship is palpable in urban space (Hill and Lian, 1995). Unlike their counterparts in Taipei who gather on the streets to set up assembly protests, FDWs in Singapore often meet outside to simply give and take emotional support; a reprieve from overbearing employers and a chance to mingle carefreely with their ‘sisters’ outside the house (Kantachote, 2023; Yeoh and Huang, 1999).



Photo source: Facebook page¹²⁹ of GANAS Community, Taiwan. Fajar gives an address on 30 July 2023, World Anti-Trafficking in Persons Day, to several NGOs, Taiwanese human rights committee, and the Legislative Assistant.

Care uprising resists divisions of labour in eldercare regimes where “the embodied resources of the caregiver simply run out before the actual needs are met” (Hoppania and Vaittinen, 2015: 78). Sylvia’s circumstances show that digital lifestyles, political education, and visibility in the community does not simply happen for many other FDWs who are overwhelmed by structural isolation. For all that, many scholars of social movements and resistance are optimistic about the latent transformative potential of digital spaces. Below, I consider one of the largest Facebook groups for FDWs where established forms of governance fumble and create lapses for subversive voices to rock the boat. To be sure, this chapter’s account of transformative

¹²⁹https://www.facebook.com/people/Gabungan-Tenaga-Kerja-Bersolidaritas-GANAS/100063877053338/?paipv=0&eav=AfZEC2mxJHx811GA9eUedMZN1y5fexnxAce8AYe8JTLfaVklwOsB9GzT1MdmaNmI3dI&_rd=1

resistance through care does not deny the empirical and structural reality of mobility controls in migrant infrastructure (see Shire, 2020). As anthropologists who build on actor-network perspectives in sociotechnical mechanisms have argued, migrants' embodied agency of networking is part of migration institutions that consist of both human and non-human interactions (Latour in Xiang and Lindquist, 2014: 124). Without dismissing that sending and receiving governments reinforce exploitative relations through "state apparatus and procedures for documentation, licensing, training and other purposes" (Xiang and Lindquist, 2014: 124), care uprising considers how FDWs, as human agents who corporeally resist the 'maid' migration economy, construct care relations that are less neoliberal or even attempt to escape its monetary logics altogether. In that vein, Facebook usage is not to be over-romanticized; the majority of online forums on this platform reflected the shady, underhand means of cross-border labour brokers catering to employers' demands.

Digital communication tools are also constituent properties of global capitalism from a social media user perspective. Google and Facebook, for instance, are technological conglomerates that have the whole world's consumers at their feet, scrolling (working) and servicing corporate purposes for free. The role of for-profit private intermediaries in online recruitment is an empirical area of investigation for market sociologists who call for greater attention on human interactions (Shire, 2020) as well as care anthropologists who unpack the phenomenon of (ex)FDWs who act as broker-carers (Chan, 2023). That being the case, I circle back to care uprising's core agenda of theorizing FDWs' powerfully transformative resistance despite grave structural injustice. My last vignette centres more profoundly on interactions that shake up care relations by unsettling its assumptions of propertied human beings – that one can legitimately own another human being called a 'maid' – in the system.

Running Amok in Cyberspace: When Insurgent Care Eludes Governance

Forum post: “I am okay with being called a helper, a maid, an auntie, a nanny, you can call me anything you want as long as it fits my job. But to ask a helper or a maid “What/Who is your owner?”. That’s always puzzled me: owner? Nobody owns me.

Comment: Same sentiments! I still encounter some people using the term "owner and master" instead of boss or employer.

Particularly for FDWs in Singapore who do not get to organize public protests in urban space, online communication is often one of the few (if not only) avenues to receive and provide emotional care support. It is also in this ungovernable realm of digital activism where some women find the courage to speak candidly (often as anonymous participants) about emotional abuse and harm. Out of more than 15 Facebook groups for FDWs and employers, only one had a clearly identified objective of mutual support; the rest were effectively hiring platforms and online extensions of recruitment agency advertisements. This group, “FDW in Singapore¹³⁰”, hosts 51 000 participants (as of February 2024) who are mostly living in Singapore but also some who are currently located in other East Asian destinations. The main discussion forum provides real-time updates about changes to labor regulations, COVID-19 information, networking events or significant public gatherings, and Q&A forums to seek advice and resource help. The group’s administrators and chief moderators are a team of veteran FDWs who have been abroad for longer than 15 years each. In stark contrast to the other groups run by recruitment agencies or employers looking for ‘quick and cheap’ hires, this group’s news feed focuses squarely on supporting the rejuvenating hobbies that FDWs are interested in.

Among others, this group has a longtime partnership with the Migrant Storytelling Association to conduct weekly literary walking tours around the city. Excursion itineraries are posted beforehand so that FDWs anticipating an off day can sign up in advance. Group members

¹³⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1914915078526399>

also get to participate in essay and poetry writing competitions from time to time and photography workshops hosted by NGOs. Previous and ongoing events have invited the women to contribute photovoice records of their “Unspoken Life” (name of competition), with sub-themes such as: “Reflections within”, “Life around me”, and “Empowering Journeys”. The international non-profit Justice Without Borders works with experienced FDWs at the Filipino and Indonesian Family Network to mentor their peers; Sha, Maylene, Fajar, and Sammi are the most prominent community-engaged FDWs among my interviewees. Apart from an online space to plan get-togethers, though, “FDW in Singapore” is more broadly an open arena for the women to deliberate alongside one another about the unpleasant realities of a live-in condition: “inside the house everything is still between you and your employer” (Maylene).

The above exchange (involving two FDWs I interviewed but anonymize for privacy concerns) is just one among the more than 20 (on average) posts that participants upload to the discussion board daily. FDWs in this group have not lost sight of realist pragmatic concerns, and have a specific “working conditions forum” to keep in touch with the available job postings. But as I scrolled through their real-time user-contributed news feed, what became apparent was the uncontainable nature of emotional care needs that the women’s concerns threw up. Everyday looked and felt different with its own unfolding momentum of virtual care interactions that followed the women who sought advice and gave consolation. FDWs manage to overcome the lack of information transparency by sharing about their circumstances and checking in with one another about what is considered (in)appropriate. Some commonly asked questions are about one’s daily routine and expected chores, for example: “Is it normal to take care of two elderly persons without a raise of salary?” and “Is (my situation described) a good enough reason to break my contract? How have other ladies done this?”

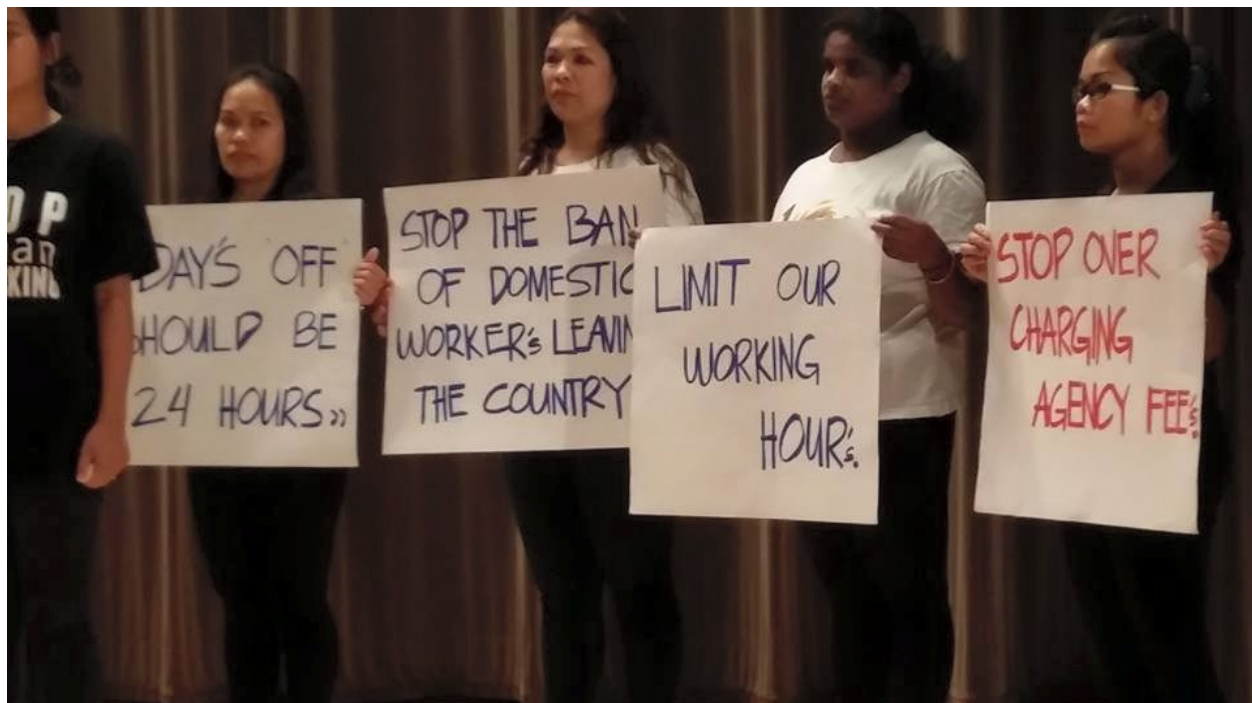


Photo sources: Mong, P. (2016). FDWs at a solidarity event organized by HOME. Participants use placards to ‘voice’ demands for better living conditions and bond over film screenings.

Just over a decade ago, FDWs were rarely able to leverage on digital spaces to ask questions that are seen as creating trouble. As I write elsewhere (Ng, 2023), drawing on studies

of FDWs' ICTs usage (Lin and Sun, 2010; Thompson, 2009), the smartphone's ascent has indeed forced a "renegotiation of social relations in the household" (Platt et al., 2016: 2210) that advance FDWs' agency in positive directions. But scholars have not lost sight of the fact that relaxed smartphone usage is not a given where employers micromanage the extent and scope of FDWs' online communication (Kantachote, 2023; Platt et al., 2016). Hence the need to validate agency in power-attentive definitions of political protest in which most strategies are covert, defensive, and non-confrontational rather than openly hostile to state authorities (Ng, 2023). For example, how might migrant writing communities that bond over expressive poetry (e.g. 'The Voice' in Mintarsih, 2019) be read as a transformative ideological movement in care relations?

Rebellious discursive acts of self-care (e.g. airing their honest views about powerful actors) that provide some psychological solace and emotional rejuvenation, which are otherwise forbidden in public spaces, is an assertion against political relations of neglect. Reactive name calling, in this sense, can be thought of as a form of self-care that does not enjoy social legitimacy but nonetheless is cathartic for many FDWs: "bitch about our employers together to feel better" (anonymous participant). In this sense, cyberspace's unruliness befuddles conventional methods of political censorship because state authorities cannot implement public order acts to restrict the activity of civil society groups. As Fajar and Sammi told me, not all FDWs have regular off days¹³¹ on Sundays, and the women who are able to plan routes and itineraries online before showing up at event spaces "are lucky enough" to have employers who are "not really like many others". Fajar is more familiar with organizing out in the open than Sammi who is aware that Singapore's political environment necessitates "backroom" (out of

¹³¹ From July to August 2023, the most popular hashtags in the "FDW in Singapore" support group were #RestDayAllDay and #favoriteoffdayactivities. Many FDWs uploaded pictures of themselves pursuing various hobbies as a show of support for ongoing grassroots campaigns to lobby for stronger enforcements of FDWs' rights to weekly off days.

earshot) conversations. These efforts still enjoy some public visibility thanks to NGO workers (e.g. Jaya) who pitch ideas to Global Voices¹³²: “an international, multilingual community of writers, translators, and human rights activists” who “leverage the power of the internet”.

With that said, as a “commonly produced” resource of shared knowledge (Trimikliniotis et al., 2015: 1039), the mobile commons such as this Facebook support group is highly susceptible to internal fractures and is differentially empowering for FDWs who are themselves diverse on many counts. Class and race ideologies and age-related (dis)advantages in technological utilization, for instance, complicate the benefits of being connected to a digital family. Also, researchers have found that on their days off, the women tend to congregate with their fellow nationals and sometimes reinforce essentialist stereotypes that disadvantage their peers in the process of protecting one’s own employment security (Paul, 2011). Kayoko Ueno’s interviews found that many Filipinos spoke unfavorably of Indonesians, “typically referring to their poor intelligence, odor, and uncivilized manner” (Ueno, 2010: 91-92). The antagonistic race and relations among FDWs that Chapter One brought up can be observed in online interactions, which reflect a reality of Filipino advantage.

Megha Amrith’s study of Filipino care workers shows that one’s position on the ‘ladder’ of work permits, a convoluted system of separate visa categories gradated by skill levels, employment setting, pay grades, and more, is a potent source of friction (Amrith, 2010: 416). Some who succeed in escaping the domestic sector¹³³ or even make the miraculous jump to permanent residency status, are condescending to ‘maids’ and construct self-superior and other-

¹³² <https://globalvoices.org/about/>

¹³³ It is not impossible for FDWs to eventually obtain work permits for non-domestic sectors, but the chance of doing so is notoriously slim (Amrith, 2010, 2018). They must access certain training programs in clinical occupations such as registered nurses (RNs), enrolled nurses (ENs), nursing aides (NAs), and healthcare attendants (HCAs) to qualify for the Singapore nursing board certificate. Some FDWs attend community workshops but most of these do not count as formal skills upgrading.

inferior identities (Amrith, 2018: 72). For Andrea Soco, this “transcendent boundary work” of complex othering does not draw on normative identity categories, showing forms of relational subjectivity that are more complex than the host society realizes; there is “class, culture, race, and nationality” but FDWs also “combine cultural elements with other imagined boundaries” as they interact with other groups of migrant workers, self-locating in the “experience of interfacing” (Soco, 2011: 84). Where FDWs strategically self-stereotype to ensure continued employment, this agency often reinforces the subordinate status of FDWs as a group vis-à-vis wider society – recall Maylene’s matter-of-fact “we are the maid”.

It is also worth mentioning that the mobile commons, as digital platforms of solidarity, are likely to be biased toward younger generations; members of these social media groups are predominantly below 35. My own contact sourcing through Facebook¹³⁴ reflected the majority presence of this age group, with only a handful above 40 and one in her late 50s. The complementarity of physical and virtual presence is also often not as appealing to older people and hence may not seem all that life-changing to all FDWs. Loretta Baldassar has made novel inroads with a temporal perspective of the role of ICTs in “digital kinning”, which considers the rising presence of “digital care labor” and “kinwork” in the lives of ageing migrants (Baldassar, 2023: 164). Although her focus is on relationship maintenance through “the physical copresence of visits and the virtual copresence of online communication”, her insight that “individual ageing processes” affects one’s capacity to benefit from the best of both worlds (Ibid) is relevant to the unequal participation among age groups in digital solidarities. Such inconsistencies in

¹³⁴ I should add that Facebook, WhatsApp, and LINE, the three major social media and online communication tools in my study, each have different corporate images and functional purposes for smartphone users. Sylvia, for instance, was introduced to me via LINE and was not part of any online support network, although she could be part of group chat(s). In this sense, those who responded to my Facebook post reflected the group’s outward facing power dynamics, which may not be representative of other online support spaces such as private group chats among just a few FDWs.

cyberspace belonging does not detract from the insurgent acts embodied in migrant interactions, but notes their differential capacities to utilize various spaces for projects of uprising.

The Many Faces and Facets of Care Uprising

Taken together, this chapter's stories show that the possible forms of agency, subjectivity, and resistance in collective action, what I call care insurgence and/or uprising in the political realm of care itself, has many shapes and sizes. Scholars in Singapore and Taiwan writing about FDWs' resistance have paid special attention to the spatial dimensions of "counterspaces" (Yeoh and Huang, 1998: 595), as the women insist on marking their equally rightful presence in urban landscapes, showing a spatial dimension to power asymmetry that is replicated and resisted in the sensitive space of households (Yeoh and Huang, 2010), often through complex forms of identity negotiation, boundary work, and relational othering (Amrith, 2018; Lan, 2003; Soco, 2011). Using an affectively corporeal view to reconceptualize care as the political, not just a political pawn for politicking, is a fruitful way to bridge the awkward dissonances between much East Asian takes of FDWs' (c)overt resistance and those in North America (the United States and Canada) that tend to assume publicly visible transformative action (social movements) as an end goal, if not a key element, of the women's insurgent worlds. This is not to deny that material changes to care and labour migration are sorely needed, and should remain a core objective of social movement theorizing in migrant agency, subjectivity, and resistance (Piper and Rother, 2014). Instead, it is a way of re-evaluating the meaning of care work that moves a society closer to recognizing FDWs as feminist political activists, at home with patients and amongst themselves outside, who leave behind legacies of "new forms of cooperation and resistance" in care chains (Federici, 2016: 19).

As a mode of insurgence, care uprisings are not so much about whose bodies necessitate care labor and in what direction these transfers flow in (from caregiver to recipient, and vice versa) but about a form of political relatedness, hence sequences of action, that take care itself to be the center of human life. Taking this view helps foreground contestations over the meaning and deservedness of care in insurgent politics, rather than implying that resistance is necessarily directed at the legal yet unjust practices in labor migration policy (Constable, 2009; Ford and Piper, 2007; Piper and Rother, 2014). This analytical tendency of political activists in social movements literature, although noting that FDWs desire large-scale structural reform, if not abolition, of global labor export policy, could experiment with interpreting resistance through a notion of care that is not (or less) bound to reproductive labor or work. My reading of FDWs' agency and resistance follows the 'hegemony is never complete' perspective of migrant labor subjectivity in AoM thinking: the view that "Embodied capitalism does not actually exploit the totality of the worker's experience; it dissects the subject and the entirety of his/her life and appropriates only certain parts of it." (Trimikliniotis et. al., 2015: 1046).

In this chapter, the "primacy of migrants' mobility" as protagonists, neither victims nor heroes (Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2013: 184), the "subjectivity of living labor as a constitutive and antagonistic element of the capital relation" (Mezzadra in Ng, 2023), and a corporeal theory of care as the political (Hoppania and Vaittinen, 2015; Vaittinen, 2015) lends an autonomist lens to FDWs' agency and strategies of resistance, hence the socially transformative nature of care uprisings. Together, these frameworks allow the above stories of care itself at its rawest (Sylvia), in social circles of mutual aid (Fajar and Sammi), or through never offline channels of virtual solidarity in the mobile commons (Facebook groups), to be understood as an embodied agentic

movement that shakes up the status quo: versions and visions of care that are in principle foreclosed are forged into existence.

To be sure, feminist scholar activists are careful not to romanticize digital activism, and caution against associating it with concrete forms of empowerment, especially for live-in migrant care workers (Platt et al., 2016; Schumann and Paul, 2020). Women of the Global South, in particular, are expected to shoulder more and complain less. Care uprising, after all, needs the “structurally oriented responses from state” (Lindio-McGovern, 2004: 231) and influential NGO actors to enact nation-wide policy reforms for any hope at altering the status quo of care chains that “leave women’s sacrifices and resilience unrecognized and unrewarded” (Yeoh, 2016: 79). Social movement analysts point out that although the digital sphere’s unreachable (by the state) zones offer emotional solace to marginalized individuals, these relations rarely escape the sedimented silos, creeping into relations of solidarity, of our time. In *Take Back the Fight*, Nora Loreto says that feminist social movement activists “exist at a moment of incredible paradox: despite our deep and integrated interconnectedness, we have never been so isolated from one another” (Loreto, 2020: 69). In her view, the digital era’s double bind of information spread and activist segregation (e.g. into ‘cliques’) cause us to “struggle in isolated units”, not an innocent reality but an attack on “the act of being together – collectivity, whether in our communities or on the job” by structures of “pure market capitalism” (Loreto, 2020: 70). An awkwardly delicate and unspoken issue in encounters between analysts and the analyzed, so to speak, is the observation that many migrant care workers personify gendered ideologies of “*bagong bayanis* (new heroes)”, sometimes glorifying “experiences of suffering” (Tungohan, 2021: 39).

FPE scholars have long grappled with such dilemmas of women’s own apparent complicity and cooperation with resilient gender norms: moral discourses of “dutiful daughter”,

“womanly responsibility”, “modern girls”, and the ‘rightful’ place of women’s bodies (Yeoh, 2016: 81) complicate what can(not) be recognized as legitimate agency and resistance. For analytical and political reasons, my framework is ambivalent to FDWs’ strategic ‘endorsement’ of themselves as ‘maids’ (e.g. Tungohan, 2021), not unlike how marginalized individuals may reflect internalizations of superior/inferior typologies of human quality: Filipino ‘aristocracy’ among FDWs and rural and urban differentials among Chinese labor migrants are some cases in point (Amrith, 2018; Ueno, 2010; Xiang, 2021). The inconvenient truth is that ‘maids’ are “figures of biopolitical otherness: alien workers who can exist without rights or protection”, effectively “stateless laboring beings” outside their employers’ moral economy (Ong, 2011: 39). But the autonomist slant to care itself embodied in care uprising’s take on agency, subjectivity, and resistance does not rush to assess the ‘quality’ of Global South women’s rights consciousness. As Aihwa Ong (2011) notes, careful and considerate feminist conversations, especially by institutional analysts who have the privilege of talking about, indeed speaking for, other women, would factor in a situated ethic of gender justice. The structurally lived realities of gender and race subjugation may often be more visible to individuals who do not have to suffer through the imposed label of ‘maid’. At the same time, approaching our interlocutors as intellectual partners means contextualizing their actions and words in the conceptual frameworks at our disposal, wherever possible, in ways that attempt to draw out their socially transformative contributions.

Broadly speaking, the majority of Asia’s female agency is historically interpellated with a “web of indigenous norms”; ascribed customary roles¹³⁵ of “age, class, and status rank” often

¹³⁵ Especially in rural regions of sending countries like the Philippines and Indonesia, religious authorities often have a huge say in ethical norms, so expectations of “basic gender rights to education, health, social services, and protection from domestic violence” have not been socialized to a normative degree (Ong, 2011: 29). Female

mean that “contestation over the proper value of gender” is of greater prominence than “the principle of gender difference” so familiar to the Western scholarship’s analytical consciousness (Ong, 2011: 29). As I came to realize in conversation after conversation with FDWs, ‘gender’ can hardly be translated smoothly across diverse sites of ‘feminism’, such as the dissonance between FPE’s social justice values and the terse answers of interlocutors: “This (eldercare) is my responsibility. Because I come here to work and taking care of an elderly person is my responsibility: this is my job and I will put in hard work” (Sylvia). These stories are inspired by those befuddling, sometimes paralyzing moments, from the narratively incoherent to readily observable, where affective relations between analyst and analyzed prevents rational detachment or any willful control of the pieces of the puzzle. My illustration of care uprisings as a mode of insurgence, then, has opted to prioritize affective recognition in care work while working in and against “the imperial gestures of global academic relief” (Gordon, 2008: 37).

Conclusion

The women hope for material changes in care organization that recognize its public and social, not only private, nature. Feminist scholar activists are committed to the need for political education, respecting the strength of female friendships that help one another conquer setbacks, but also hope to spread awareness of sexist and racist imperial legacies in transnational care migration (Tungohan, 2021). Care’s historically intimate ties to colonial governance, prone to double standards of human rights and deservedness, lapsing confusingly between benevolence (care) and malevolence (control), are a condition of the resistances its structures provoke. If these women were characters in a television drama, viewers would feel like rooting for them and indeed, are joyful when they ‘win’ certain battles (e.g. Gorton, 2021). But in real life, as some

participation in the Philippine’s urban economy and overseas migration, however, has historically been high compared to Indonesia, where (in)formal employment in village agriculture dominates.

admit, any sense of empowerment stemming from such momentary victories are constrained by the broader guidelines of neoliberal capitalism. The ambiguity of solidarity continues to haunt the futures of care.

How are we to enact change in a milieu where people are repeatedly made to differentiate themselves vis-à-vis others at large, and in the process denigrate another subordinated group, to make their claims for human rights known? The FDWs who complained to me about having to put down other nationalities to market themselves to prospective employers, for instance, struggle with the reality that they are compelled to assert who or what they are not, rather than what they are and want to be. Not only are relations of solidarity among diverse FDWs hijacked, the scary prospects of responding to care with neglect are not felt; those “concrete bodily needs of nurturing” that every vulnerable and needy body trigger is left to fester with grave consequences (Vaaitinen, 2014: 15). Resistance from less powerful and privileged positions, such as this chapter’s multiple sites of insurgence in care uprising, deserve to be recognized and validated on their own terms, not patronized. This is despite the reality that FDWs, similar to the Chinese rural migrants in Xiang Biao’s interviews, are forced into uncertain migratory futures in affective contexts of suspension, which “first and foremost, is a lived experience where migrants halt important aspects of life to pursue particular goals” (Xiang, 2021: 238).

The women I interviewed are uncertain about their future prospects as they revolve in “precarity chains”: “the transfer of insecure jobs and financial insecurity (low wages, indebtedness) across places and people” (Silvey and Parrenas, 2020: 3461). While they participate in eking out livelihoods amidst a precarious hypermobility “about staying afloat, preserving the status quo, and persevering despite multiple problems” (Xiang, 2021: 244), their actions and words embody convoluted rather than straightforward positionalities. As Xiang Biao

(2021) suggests, analysts can interpret certain words as passivity or even a fatalistic mentality.

But we can also read these as invitations to devise analytical tools that can help make sense of ambivalent and contradictory circumstances, and facilitate the articulation of emotions and needs not yet encountered. Our interlocutors' words, in this regard, must be carefully probed as enigmas to the scholar's analytical mind rather than dissected as knowable codes.

Chapter 6 Care for All is Care that Pulls Us Through

Let us now look back on age relations and mull over the potential of emotions to affect the diverse meanings of care. I have presented this dissertation's numerous frameworks – Porous Races, Coerced Carers, Reproductive Ageism, Punctured Resilience, and Care Uprising – with contradictory and mixed feelings. The analyst, me included, cannot avoid reducing and categorizing in every instance of writing although care to my interviewees was everything, everywhere, all at once¹³⁶ – a sentiment I could feel but not so much see or hear. Originally envisaged in the dialectic between feminist political economy (FPE) on care work and global racial capitalism, this project's ethnographic encounters and theoretical possibilities have gone on to encompass so much more. Its journeys include both the expected and not so surprising (Chapters One and Two); stories chanced upon by accident, perhaps even a moment of analytical impulse (Chapter Three); narratives that endeavor to do justice to complex and messy emotional lives in care work, hence disrupting the neat analytical binaries used to understand labour market subjectivity (Chapter Four); and accounts of striving for better worlds of care that include FDWs' political circumstances and emotional needs (Chapters Four and Five).

In this concluding chapter, I revisit the central thesis as outlined in my Introduction: the need for a transnational relational approach to eldercare (and care relationships more broadly) that prioritizes its affective and emotional dimensions as resources for social transformation. I thread through each chapter's substantive components and reflect back on some interview encounters in the research experience as a whole. In the spirit of viewing intersectional lived

¹³⁶ I borrow the title of the 2022 blockbuster movie *Everything Everywhere All At Once*. As online reviews indicate, although not explicitly stated, this phrase speaks to our eternal struggles to find meaning in what we do and life in general (Lealos et al., 2023). Rather than definite answers about how things (e.g. cooperative care relations) should be, this phrase invokes a never-ending openness to meaning making in care relations, at heart a people-centered affair.

experience as affective resources for social transformation, I contemplate how some of my interviewees point to progressive aspirations for equitable care even in the bleakest circumstances. Before closing, I draw on a personal vignette of a visit to a state-of-the-art nursing home at the height of COVID-19 in Singapore to reflect on the awkward relationship between technology and eldercare. Last but not least, I suggest some future directions for care work research that prioritizes relational agendas of cooperation in care relations. In particular, age relations and embodied experiences of aging that lead up to processes of demise and death are noteworthy avenues to pursue for cooperative relations of eldercare, despite its ethical challenges in research interviews. Throughout this perplexing and rewarding intellectual adventure, I harbour mixed feelings mostly because of the impossibility of fully translating what we feel and see into words – a given in any situation of written communication that would probably not have felt like such a great deal, even troubling at times, if not for the fact that care work scholarship and the people on its frontlines exhibit one of the largest power gaps between who gets to speak and who does the work. Complicating things are my own analytical decisions to follow those emotional instincts during the interviews that could have been brushed aside with a more theoretically ‘rigorous’ script of questions and answers. However, chasing down those rabbit holes have turned out fruitful in its own way as I have come to realize that acting and speaking on impulse can open up unexpected directions for thinking about care.

Much of this dissertation revolves around reading between the lines of supposedly clear definitions and social phenomena; not agreeing or disagreeing with its debates but complicating and nuancing how things appear from the perspective of those in its throes. The enigma of affective dimensions will always continue to confuse and befuddle social analysts (what else could have been made out of those words?), for what our memories retain and decide to utilize

out of a swathe of ethnographic data – such as in this dissertation – seems like the tip of an iceberg in hindsight of raw, sprawling narratives that researchers are entrusted with (see Appendix D). Academia in general and feminist political economy of care work (including intersectionality) in particular values original thinkers and claims of scholarly contribution; this pressure to ‘stake your claim’ over an intellectual province has not eased despite the extent of theoretical saturation and empirical ground being charted.

Trying not to sound competitive or even hostile to the literatures engaged with while proving one’s ‘original contribution’ is a hard sell. But this dissertation, like all others, has had to make certain choices and draw some boundaries. The most notable instance of this framework setting would be Chapter Three’s “Reproductive Ageism” targeted at the FPE care work scholarship, which I pull apart below by considering people’s emotions surrounding the certainty of death. For a novice scholar’s purpose of argument, social reproduction theory and critical social gerontology were conceptually weaved together to make sense of ageist processes in family care. However, a good latter portion of this concluding chapter hovers around the haunting certainty of death as some interviewees commented on offhandedly; emotional dimensions of care that are hardly talked about at all despite its profound impact on age relations. Within the constricting parameters of analytical speaking and living in modernity, I have endeavored to balance the empirical and theoretical, in all cases circling back to what the scholarship can learn from interpretive moments. I hope that readers approach the above frameworks in the spirit of intellectual collegiality and generative conversation between my research findings in Southeast Asia and the relevant works that exist. I see this work as constitutive of diverse sites of feminism coming from different social positions of power.

The core subject matter of my dissertation's undertaking, (migrant) care work and labour migration policy, has for long struggled to balance the conceptual weight of feminist Marxist revisions of social reproduction vocabulary with the simple urgency and raw practicality of, in this case, foreign domestic workers' (FDWs) care practices in Southeast Asia. It is for this reason that many academic social activists, if you will, who work with migrant care worker organizations in diverse locations (have to, by institutional demand) split their research outputs into distinct categories such as 'community', 'public', and 'university', each with their own expectations and genres of presentation. Consider the work of Ethel Tungohan and Mary Jean Hande in Canada; Isabelle Cheng and Wasiq Silan in Taiwan; and Kellynn Wee and myself in Singapore, to name a few. In most if not all circumstances of research dissemination, structural critiques of transnational political economy of care (Williams, 2018) is targeted at fellow consumers and citizen actors who wield at least several more degrees of power than migrant care workers. The women we interview are not exempt from internalized colonial gender ideologies (e.g. Tungohan, 2017), but their structural vulnerability in care and labour migration often means analysts are hesitant to 'call them out' and/or prefer to situate their responsibility in power-attentive approaches. Such efforts are conducted with the knowledge of forms of power that we possess, as relatively privileged agents capable of influencing other educated professionals (especially domestic employers), who are after all the main audience group that FDWs hope to get through to. Before reminding my readers about each chapter's main insights for the literature, a commentary on the central questions posed at the outset will be handy:

1. How is eldercare treated differently from childcare? By what means do Singapore and Taiwan contrast in their eldercare regime management?

2. In what ways do FDWs in Singapore and Taiwan experience and make sense of eldercare? How do their narratives complicate popular economic justifications of care work, and what are some conundrums of 'care' that emerge?
3. What do my interviews indicate about the potential of resisting exploitative care relations through cooperative agendas that centre the emotional aspects of care and vulnerability?

The connecting theme is eldercare's degradation and devaluation. As I elaborate in an interconnected fashion below, the inherently uncontainable nature of care activity makes it difficult to draw conclusive statements about the actually existing realities of care in our midst. Nonetheless, certain chapters address each research question more than others. For the first, Chapters One and Three show that eldercare suffers from a double devaluation in social welfare policy as enacted through the everyday decisions of ordinary citizens. Eldercare sits awkwardly with the theoretical ideals of social reproduction. Most ordinary citizens aching to keep up with the rat race do not slow down to seriously contemplate the ongoing expropriations of care relations; for instance, how child-centric pressures gradually take over an entire household's caring capacities. At the same time, I find several striking differences between Singapore's and Taiwan's eldercare policy trajectory that stem from their colonial institutional legacies and ongoing political circumstances, which Chapters One and Two touch on. In terms of the second question, the FDWs I interviewed experience and make sense of eldercare as full, complicated human beings with aspirations and capacities to care and be cared for. But the women are hyper-aware that their host society's derogatory view of 'maids' expects them to behave as emotionless workers who should not care more than they are told to. Chapters Four and Five tell stories about how a handful of the FDWs I met resist mainstream values of economic efficiency in care organization, instead assert their autonomy to provide and receive care in satisfactory ways.

My initial research questions centered heavily on Singapore's and Taiwan's institutional differences and the setting of care work (e.g. in nursing homes as opposed to in people's homes). Instead of the ones posed above, they included: "How do the Singapore and Taiwan states manage the available support systems for eldercare?" and "In what ways does the care setting (i.e. home, community, and institutions) impact the lived experiences of FDWs?". But as I interviewed more FDWs, I revised my line of inquiry to account for what some of the women seemed keener to explore: care itself as an undeniable human need and hence the foundation of cooperative relations among social creatures. On that note, regarding the third question, I find that FDWs' emotional reactions constitute an ideological resistance against eldercare's devaluation; pushback against ageism, for instance, is an invitation to recalibrate our analytical habits of theorizing social reproduction. The ugly truth is that FDWs turn to (intangible) care relations due to a lack of social and material power to effect structural change. I did not meet FDWs who had elaborate stories of cooperative employers, but speculate with the emotional remnants of their words for care relations. Below, I revisit this dissertation's main threads and offer a word on age relations. Care, by nature, is an emotionally charged topic. There can be no easy answers but only well-intentioned guesses and hopeful speculations of alternate futures.

Relational Care and Power: Everything, Everywhere, All at Once

Starting from the interactive oppressions of race and gender in migrant care work regimes, Chapters One and Two find that the neutrality of development in the international system supports a myriad of racial nationalisms in Southeast Asia; each interpellated with distinct colonial and imperial legacies as well as indigenous caste lineages of status hierarchies. While the global dominance of Euro-American forms of modernity and 'civilizational transference' is a well-established fact in the relational arc of interstate connections, showing up

as an unspoken backdrop of white imperial supremacy in Singapore's and Taiwan's care labour migration policy, these two postcolonial Southeast Asian states have contributed actively to transmutations of (non)white racial hierarchies. Applying relational thought to the analytical bind of race, modernity, and 'the West' requires first reading between the lines of how the Japanese developmental state (and its hybrid races and racisms) are presented – its affective components of anti-colonial trauma, resistance, and uprising tend to vanish in purely economic frames of analysis (Harootunian, 2019). Whether and how these emotions trigger a swathe of path-dependent forms of biological, cultural, and now civilizational forms of racialization (difference making) among diverse Asian populations mobilized in the chase for industrial development (to become successful modernizers) is a topic of investigation for the everyday ethnographer. But at a macro level, the porous implications of 'race' and other identity categories becomes an abstract operationalization of power that my interviewees hardly draw on to make sense of daily life. This realization came within the first few interviews with FDWs; except for the few quoted, the majority responded to 'race' with an awkward silence, as if to say: "What is that you are talking about?". Many FDWs were instead enthusiastic and eloquent about care itself and their patients, which informed the storied approaches in Chapters Three to Five – where care itself is the political space, over and above state institutions.

While I agree with the importance of undoing internalized colonial ideologies that justify unfair divisions of care labour (e.g. Tungohan, 2017), my focus is on the methodological uncertainty of using 'race' for research design where power asymmetries exist. As I reflected on earlier, FDWs' reactions revealed more about "academic work in the scary wider structures of all our social lives" (Bhattacharya, 2013: 84) than what they think about 'race', if even applicable. That said, structural critiques of domestic servitude in liberal market norms of migrant-in-the-

family, especially in modern Southeast Asian states where internal feudal heritage of live-in servanthood is entrenched, is a necessary preamble to understand the social implications of inadequate care in intergenerational households, for elderly persons, and for FDWs themselves. Chapter Two serves this purpose of providing the contextual overview of care and family planning policies that go hand-in-hand with the migration-development nexus as manifest regionally and locally. Here, I find that intersectional frameworks emphasizing global inequalities in class, gender, and race statuses in the uneven geographies of development are as relevant as ever in our pandemic world for explaining the intensified stratifications of migrant care work. But to foreshadow the more ethnographically informed parts of the dissertation, I also suggest complicating intersectionality's major axes of human differentiation with ideas of mutual vulnerability in care ethics and practice that shape FDWs' (un)expected emotional experiences in state policies. That is, differences in political culture and government (authoritarian Singapore and democratic Taiwan) are noteworthy and not often brought to the fore even among East Asian scholars. But often, these differences in political institutions and policy implementation capacity do not lead to significant variations in the quality of life for migrant workers.

In this above regard, Chapters Three and Four dive into some instances of care gaps for elderly citizens and FDWs who complicate the concept of emotional labour by taking its registers beyond the caregiver-patient (work only) dyad. As I reflect in more detail later, embodied experiences of age and the body, as capital's 'original' site of accumulation, is a fruitful avenue to speculate about the construction of human relationships amidst colonized linear time, as well as the possibility of unravelling some of its attendant ideas about 'flaws' (e.g. being 'old') and existential crises. When I first started interviewing FDWs, I (unwittingly) restricted my line of questioning to eldercare (see Appendix B), which was also the primary

criteria for my contact sourcing. From the FPE literature in care work, including feminist Marxist perspectives, I inferred a contradiction between the theoretical construct of social reproduction (across the life course) and its empirical realities of inclusion; only certain types of ‘productive’ care seemed to matter, namely childcare, which people describe with terms such as aspirational, development, rearing, promising, and future (see Chapter Three). I quickly realized that FDWs, because employers often regard them as available 24/7 to do anything and everything necessary in the home, are overstretched in multiple directions, e.g. being tasked with both child and eldercare, and coerced to prioritize (usually) the former. Hence it felt necessary to unpack the very presence of FDWs as a complicated care resource in labour migration, as human beings with emotions and needs torn in a myriad of directions, beyond institutional political economy observations of liberal migrant-in-the-family models of care organization. In what ways do FDWs complicate the reproduction of negative biases surrounding old age and dependency in modern society?

Chapter Three’s framework of “Reproductive Ageism” was inspired by some FDWs who cried about elderly abuse and neglect, but its interview setting is the intergenerational household where ordinary citizens orchestrate their own choices and plans for what and who to prioritize. Many of the women spoke as viscerally about what they perceived as poor parental treatment and absence of filial piety among adult children as they did about labour rights violations. Some older FDWs hinted at their own anxious futures of aging, having been unable to accumulate significant savings, and felt frustrated but helpless about their daughters embarking on the same path as them while they switched to grandparenting. In Singapore and Taiwan, like it is the case in Canada, mostly older women withstand the worst of financial precarity and gendered roles compounded by ageism. But remarkably little exists on the reproduction of ageist processes at

state, community, family, and individual levels that connect the lives of such diverse women, especially where involuntary familial alienation – for FDWs migrating out of need, not want – is a necessary livelihood strategy. Women’s bodies can be understood as gendered capital while non-white (migrant) bodies are racialized capital; processes that fuse together to varying degrees in “primitive accumulation”, which is inherent to each phase of capitalist development (Mies, 2014: 216). The shifting locations of analysis and individuals quoted across the chapters imply my interpretation of the power dynamics between actors, and how inequalities of representation caution against taking certain words too seriously or lightly.

Chapters One and Two have a structural focus on race and gender in care labour migration (the hallmarks of FPE and intersectional analysis of care work) that then flow into the storied perspectives in Chapters Three to Five where emotions unravel and scatter. Like caregivers in almost every other environment, the FDWs I interviewed saw “being able to cope with racism and sexism as part of the emotional skills staff needed to do care work” (Williams, 2018: 552), which in this case is compounded by a distinct ‘foreign other’ status and their social invisibility as ‘maids’. Overall, the sequence of events charted across the chapters, starting with racial effects and coercion in care work, should be taken as an indication that the “power asymmetries (of race, class and gender) that shape female labour migration in Asia” (Yeoh and Soco, 2014: 175) not be glossed over, much less sugarcoated, in any FPE analysis that strives to balance structural critique of FDW policy in transnational care with the women’s creative agency and resistance. As several FDWs were well aware, “all of this, no matter what we do (resistance) is no use if they (government and employers) don’t do anything to change.” (Sha). Below, I draw on open-ended notions of care as an ambiguous and always unsettled terrain of relationship

making to contemplate how the sort of cooperation needed (by more powerful actors) for FDWs' reactive resistance to become transformative change might be achieved.

Unsettling Care and Emotional Labour (and then, where are age relations?)

“Actually I am not inclined to use national identity as an indicator of them because in my experience, individuals really differ a lot when it comes to willingness to protest and things like that...I've met many Filipinos who don't have that kind of power or vibe and also Indonesians who have that confrontational reputation...in any case, when Taiwanese employers and old people come out on their wheelchairs to object and protest (e.g. proposals to increase foreign worker wages), it really does create a lot of pity for them...they are home country citizens so they have natural rights: their concerns receive more attention.”

Untha, Taiwan International Workers Association

“Typically, it is female members of the family who do care work. Even if the elderly has three or four or more children, the one in charge of their care may be their daughter or daughter-in-law, this one person has to handle all their caregiving requirements (*yao qiu*). Internally they need to manage the caregiver, then also need to appease the elderly, to make sure all is okay. They also face a lot of their siblings' comments, because there are more people who only offer talk but no actions. This is what female members in the home have to deal with, and this practice is also reflected in the domestic worker regime. You'll think right, your family has so many people.

Why not involve everyone?”

Grace, Domestic Caretakers Union (DCU) Taoyuan, 15 December 2021

Firstly, those in relative power to FDWs are in a better position to amplify critical voices about racial nationalism and traditional patriarchy, although such sentiments remain in the minority. A good number of Taiwanese NGO workers in particular were cognizant of and vocal in their criticisms of “dictatorial, top-down interventions” of international “globalisation, liberalisation, and privatisation (GLP policy)” that hurt the migrant workers seeking their help (Mies, 2014: 225). Some, such as Untha, recognized their government's complicity in a so-called multicultural civic nationalism (Tierney, 2011) that discriminates against Indonesian live-in caregivers in particular, and located this unfair treatment of ‘foreign others’ in imperial structures of irresponsibility; illegitimate nations with little to no political autonomy such as Taiwan suffer the most. As he elaborated, the majority of Taiwanese society does not comprehend the “very complicated” processes that influence FDWs' actions, instead preferring to fall back on “old

traditional stereotypes of foreign workers (*wailao*) as troublesome for running away” – hence missing out on forms of cooperation between the different social subjects of eldercare regimes who should be jointly confronting the state. Other NGO workers and social activists (Grace and Wei Dong) pointed out the importance of chipping away at gendered ideologies of household labour and unsustainable work-life regimes that disenchant people’s will to socially reproduce. Grace’s words above allude to the enduring persistence of indigenous forms of patriarchy in the traditional Chinese family, which are a key component of Asia’s racial nationalisms not often brought to the fore by domestic employers. Intriguingly, when pondering about care for one’s old aged parents, Wei Dong spoke of an affective state of not just discontent (*bu man yi*), but disillusionment (*jue wang*) bordering on a sense of fatal indifference, that more young people like himself were feeling nowadays about continuing the family line.

“Taiwan has other problems too with the general labour market, not seeing salary increments like elsewhere, labour union movement not strong, it’s our political situation. So if my own wage may not even cover a family, a lot of people (using myself as an example, single in my 40s and with no children) would just choose to not get married and not have children, that whole thing. From here it’s hard to go further into discussions of eldercare versus childcare arrangements because working adults are just (shrugs) supporting yourself and getting your own home is already so difficult... For married couples with young and elderly (*shang you lao xia you xiao*), I don’t think it’s necessarily an investment value decision of who is more worth it, but people are coerced to make those decisions”.

Wei Dong, Hope Workers Centre

Although these interviewees did not explicitly state so, their comments can be read as attempts to unsettle the often taken-for-granted nature of care as a naturalized process (and in Singapore’s and Taiwan’s cultural context, questioning hegemonic social expectations to display filial piety¹³⁷) that occurs among people responsible for reproducing the next generation, by

¹³⁷ None of the NGO workers explicitly stated so, but it was obvious that they approached me, a Mandarin-speaking Singaporean female, as a person who is familiar with the Confucian worldview of the family, including its gendered aspects of male-female hierarchies. Their tongue-in-cheek remarks of Taiwan’s habit of employing ‘maids’, in my view, is not just a critique of the macrostructures of transnational care, but also a challenge to deep-seated local moral ideals and virtues that, far from being a benevolent social force, are actually rife with conflict and inequality.

implication challenging the marketized solutions of care (the availability of FDWs) that families in ‘Asian Tiger’ states have long been habituated to. Among other sedimented cultural and social norms, the ideas being resisted have got to do with gendered-racialized segregations of care work, linear typologies of civilizational continuity in social reproduction (get married, have children, and balance childcare and eldercare by hiring ‘maids’), and most importantly, constructs of human dependency (in a negative light) that sanction the ‘social death’ of elderly persons. I borrow this term from Avery Gordon’s discussion of racist incarceration in the United States: “the process by which a person is socially negated or made a human non-person as the terms of their incorporation into a society: living, they nonetheless appear as if and are treated as if they were dead.” (Gordon, 2011: 10). In Singapore’s and Taiwan’s eldercare regimes, using ‘social death’ to characterize the treatment of elderly persons may be a marked exaggeration from Gordon’s context of writing, but I invoke it as a reminder of the transnational salience of ageism in senior care planning and nursing homes (e.g. Herron et al., 2021).

Social death is an “imposed form of social negation” and “relational idiom” that the general population has toward a certain group (Gordon, 2011: 13); ideas of waste and negative dependency that legitimize elderly institutionalization (often equating to abandonment and neglect) more broadly. Here, it is worth recalling the special status of eldercare that has an antagonistic relationship with the political economy lexicons of (re)production and value on the market (see Chapter Three). Care work’s genesis in Marxist definitions of the economy, market, productivity, work, and (re)production, as scholars who resuscitate Marx to go beyond¹³⁸ his

¹³⁸ By a subsistence-perspective, Maria Mies means the same thing she did four decades ago: “The purpose of subsistence production is life (life itself, not accumulation)” (Mies, 2014: 232). This alternative reality goes against capital’s instincts of ‘catch-up development’, and must be conducted from every corner of the world (as she says of some grassroots collectives) in order to counteract false optimism about “the future prospects of underdeveloped societies” (Mies, 2014: 235).

working definitions show (Mezzadra, 2021; Mies, 2014), continues to constrain concrete feminist inroads into equitable care outcomes. As Silvia Federici aptly observes of the eldercare predicament, “Like all reproductive work, it is not recognized as work, but unlike the reproduction of labour-power, whose product has some recognized value, it is deemed to absorb value but not to produce it”. (Federici, 2014: 237). In light of this conundrum, an unsettled approach to care that views its relational possibilities as changing and uncertain amidst different life experiences – especially with regard to aging and the body – is necessary to complement the otherwise cost-minimizing terms that most people have learned to comprehend care activity with. That is, the structural status quo of care labour migration-for-development that exists in Southeast Asia (see Chapter Two) leave intact care relations that need disturbing; ones that attach this social responsibility to women and racialized minorities, as well as the almost complete absence of age relations when thinking about reproduction.

In Singapore and Taiwan, transnational political economy of care labour migration presumes a set of recipients and givers, also a natural corresponding movement of people and resources to the Global North from the Global South (Williams, 2018). Unsurprisingly, domestic employers address eldercare in the developmental confines of a “paid service” (e.g. Pik Wan and Phyllis), aligning with the state’s endorsement of FDWs as an extra pair of hands that can help ensure both the smooth running of households and the maximum extraction of its members’ productivity. But still, as I found with a handful of domestic employers, there is more to their thoughts than what meets the ears. Care theorists who push the boundaries of global care chain analyses often find that although people experience conflicting moral frameworks of care, “the neoliberal subject is often reinvented through locally meaningful discourses and practices that guide people’s values and actions in deeply gendered ways” (Nguyen et al., 2017: 207).

Secondly and relatedly, my interviewees encounter the structural demand of self-reliance in individuals and families as a constant of social life (see Chapter Two), and predict a future of themselves as consumer-of-care subjects. But it is also in this unfolding moralization of care, with its affective undercurrents, where people do still make sense of old age care in more-than-economic ways, sometimes relating these to their own psychological insecurities, which signal a desire for alternative realities. In this sense, ‘exceptional’ moments in research interviews (e.g. when people deviate from larger narratives of care work as a “paid service”) can be amplified to unsettle conventional understandings of care.

Phyllis: Why people shun this (eldercare), I think it’s...it might be due to the fact that I think eldercare is...a lot more emotions involved. Because if let’s say you are the one providing the care to your elderly family member, do you know, like seeing them deteriorate over the years or the pain, I think it’s something very hard for people to accept. I mean these are people like your parents or grandparents who brought you up and you know they were once so strong and healthy.

Lynn: Yes, a stranger is actually more comfortable

Phyllis: Yes, so I guess like having a third party to take care of the ‘dirty’ work per se, it might be, I guess, just out of sight, out of mind. We don’t have to keep thinking about, you know, the condition of our family members. That’s also my perspective on why people shun it on their own, like why they don’t personally take on eldercare. And as a job, like why people don’t go into this sector, of course the pay is not as high and a lot of hard work.

In the above instance, I find that compared to the concepts of reproduction and domestic labour in FPE, the language of care itself may be more ambiguous in meaning, but is also more generative as an affective and emotional register. Although care, affect, and emotion is increasingly recognized as a fruitful arena to conceive interpersonal relationships of vulnerability (i.e. care is not a private issue or personal matter, following the likes of Butler, Kittay, Tronto, Vaaitinen), the structural conditions of caring almost always condition the ways in which FDWs’ lived experiences are understood. The previous chapters’ frameworks, for instance, face a tension between explaining the power inequalities in transnational political economy of care

(Williams, 2018), where FDWs are ‘agents of Asian development’ (see Chapter Two), and moral debates of care ethics among privileged citizen actors. Singaporean and Taiwanese scholars who interview FDWs often find that the importance of establishing a country’s chase for economic development in post-war modernization overrides the potential to complicate concepts of emotional labour (and emotions *tout court*) in care relations.

Without downplaying the social significance of a ‘maid’ culture where people understand FDWs as more or less a “paid service” (Phyllis), “an extra pair of hands” to some NGO workers (Don, 9 November 2021), researchers can draw on fleeting moments where people become unexplainedly emotional (out of character) to underscore the inherent unsettledness of care. For instance, when describing “my helper’s role in the household”, Phyllis referred to FDWs’ eldercare as part of the “paid service” that migrant-in-the-family model offers. But when surmising about eldercare’s unpopularity as a type of “dirty work”, she became visibly stirred and looked away briefly at the thought of “the condition of our family members”. Phyllis grew up in an intergenerational ‘jumbo’ flat and remains close to her grandmother, in her late 80s and “very fit for her age” but “slowly beginning to deteriorate”, which is “very hard for people to accept”. This was the only time that she connected eldercare with “a lot more emotions involved” but reframing the connections between domestic employers and FDWs, from this perspective as insecure people who struggle to fathom care in aging processes, is one way of entering cooperative relations – what some hopeful FDWs articulated as “I wish many employers can just be more understanding of us: why we’re here” (Desy). In this sense, the political economy lexicons of social reproduction and labour is prone to rehashing “they (‘maids’) are just here to work”, but the transformative potential of changing care relations across the life course as people grow with experience and time allows for creative interruptions of established care

relations. Palliative care advocates such as Gabriel identified the need for alternative vocabularies that challenge the negative “functional” connotations of old age dependency, in contrast to the positive “aspirational” ones of child and youth dependency.

“I think about it in a way as similar to childcare: you are helping someone vulnerable who needs help, there’s a link...you’re looking at somebody who is a recipient. But sometimes I think we need a new language or new lexicons to convey that these folks, that they need others’ help doesn’t mean they have to be (looked at with) a passive nature. For the parent with the child at the childcare centre, the whole thing is about early childhood development, there’s that development component. The eldercare sector can also connote that, but we’ve not fine-tuned that language yet.”

Gabriel, Lien Foundation Singapore

In Gabriel’s view, there is something about the negativity in elderly vis-à-vis youth dependency that feeds into the “depressing environment” of nursing homes. As he said in Chapter Two, it was common to hear of new residents developing symptoms of clinical depression after just a few weeks in (e.g. Basu, 2016). What seemed interesting as an observer was the subtle yet unspoken backdrop of Gabriel’s anxieties about his father’s quality of life (and death) should he be institutionalized. As he lamented, “I’m in this industry myself and I’m not confident that even the best available is good enough”. Embodied in these words were his internal tug-of-war between medical considerations and emotional wellbeing; when we spoke, his father had just run into some health conditions that required medical intervention. Gabriel was certain that hiring an FDW would likely not suffice on this front compared to a nursing home with doctors on call, but ultimately chose to protect his father’s dignity and spirits.

Earlier, Chapter Three ventured briefly into the anxieties of death and mortality in its discussion of “reproductive ageism” in intergenerational interactions. As I noted, age relations is seldom brought to the fore in FPE debates of social reproduction and changing meanings of productivity. Yet there are realms of family care relations and private emotions that are more-than-economic, which trouble FPE frameworks of devaluation. To recall Pik Wan’s family’s

emotional war over their father's decision to not delay death, it becomes apparent that care is an always unsettled imaginative project, without any given disposition, especially when human vulnerabilities are thrown into the mix. The lens of age relations and inconvenient emotions around death, following a life course perspective of inherently unsettled care, is then a fruitful angle from which to contemplate cooperative agendas of bettering care outcomes.

The above said, it is not always the case that family members are comfortable enough with one another such that death¹³⁹ or even the quality of care received in general is a significant topic for conversation. In seeking for those relational moments during research encounters that point to thinking care anew, this section looks back at several interviews where people momentarily ventured off the well-travelled path of migrant-in-the-family (Chapter Two). Despite the dominance of structural conditions in the migrant care work literature (Romero, 2018; Silvey and Parrenas, 2020; Yeates, 2009), pulling apart the emotional lives of FDWs engaging in care practices *tout court* allows for a certain ambiguity and unsettledness in the moral orientations in care relations. Sha's accompaniment of *ah ma*, as I revisit below, shows that care relations transform over time with unforeseen events such as sudden deaths, which in this case inflicted Sha's brother and influenced her decision to delay institutional employment. I now consider how combining self-projections and imaginations of old age futures with the ambivalent and malleable nature of care is one way for domestic employers and FDWs to forge cooperative relations that challenge the asymmetrical power relations that sit between them.

¹³⁹ One qualifier for these rarer moments where emotions around death were alluded to by my interviewees (e.g. Gabriel, Phyllis, and Pik Wan in Singapore and Heidi in Taiwan), seems to be the existence of relatively harmonious family relationships. In that regard, the enigmatic relationship between emotions surrounding death (individual vis-à-vis others' perspectives) and ageism briefly mentioned (in Chapter Three) may be less relevant where estranged family relations exist, since conflicts over "the best way to go" (Pik Wan) are often a function of close-knit households (and siblings' quarrels) where family members are at least in constant contact. During my visit to Kwong Wai Shiu community hospital in Singapore, the nursing team manager and senior head nurse said that majority of the residents are there largely due to strained family relations. "Otherwise in Singapore", as they say, "most people cannot imagine sending their parents to a (nursing) home...they know the mental health will be bad".

Relational Dependence: A Self-Conscious Cooperation Around Eldercare

More than just a few voices in the care work literature have pointed to the individualistic tendency of global care chains analysis, which due to an overriding focus on resource transfers predominantly from the Global South to North, tends to favour economic accounts of paid care work over its dynamic and diverse qualities (Nguyen et al., 2017; Raghuram, 2012; Tungohan, 2019). While care chains analysis does caution against the gendered assumptions of much care work analysis, preferring to take heed of other major identity axes such as class and race, age constructs and its changing dependence offers a gateway into connecting self and other through embodied experiences. That is, unlike intersectional frameworks that usually cohere around gender, race, and class constructs, age-related experiences are neither ‘sticky’ nor easily malleable for all actors implicated in eldercare regimes (Calasanti and King, 2021). Shifting our attention to care’s ethically potent potential, despite the existence of migrant-in-the-family structures that pre-determine how eldercare is approached and practiced (as a negative dependency and social burden requiring minimal expenditure), also means being cognizant of the neoliberal economy’s psychological consequences on an individual’s subconscious.

In principle, age relations can manifest in multiple directions, yet its latent positivity is overshadowed by processes of ageism, a well-recognized development in social welfare: care decisions that target the old and stigmatizes their dependency as burdensome (Bergman, 2017; Calasanti, 2020; Kagan, 2017). How might ordinary citizens come to think otherwise about early and later life dependency (e.g. Gabriel’s above dilemma)? Connecting the common anxieties of old age futures that diverse women, such as childminding grandmothers and aging FDWs returning to now-estranged family relations (e.g. Amrith, 2021; Thang et al., 2011), then becomes a timely research agenda. Looking back on the interview topic list for domestic

employers (see Appendix C), one could imagine including several questions about aging and future insecurities, then asking people to make connections with what they know about FDWs' migratory circumstances. In addition, the body is a relational medium for an awareness of all-too-human vulnerabilities, hence it is also worth asking people to speculate about changing bodily conditions and new forms of dependency in aging that they foresee themselves in.

At one point, Maylene, an FDW in Chapter Four, said that “we don't know what it's like in their (patients') shoes; how and what they are suffering from...”. She remembered an ex-patient who was previously a “very independent” fireman having “an especially hard time dealing with the loss of control” over his own bodily functions, saying that sudden ailments or misfortunes “can happen to anyone”. In any case, she felt that support systems should be in place to recognize and validate the forms of sudden mortal dependency that result. Such perspectives are however not common among ordinary citizens who lack the social incentives to innovate beyond a general reliance on ‘foreign maids’. By and large, there is little curiosity about the dynamic temporality of age as a concept and practical aspect of people's lives. These probes are necessary to pursue but, in any case, are not easy conversations especially in Singapore's and Taiwan's cultural context, since unwanted emotional traumas and negative feelings around death are inevitably dredged up. Such dilemmas of respectful research encounters notwithstanding, my interviews with FDWs find that the women are well-placed to help care work analysts answer a pressing question: “What shift in perspective might be necessary for theorizing life and work beyond capitalism, in a way that builds on what is already happening?” (Morrow and Dombroski, 2015: 84). In the earlier chapters, FDWs' agency and resistance shines through alternative framings of eldercare as everyone's natural responsibility. Many of the women perceive elderly persons as a treasured demographic that society is obligated to reciprocate – all

while being hyper-cognizant of unsupportive care labour migration policies that get in the way of striving for satisfactory outcomes of care. The FDWs I interviewed did not expressly state so, but this view suggests an organization of care that puts everybody, women and men of every social class and status, in some form of institutionalized responsibility to provide not just receive care.

Contemporary approaches to social reproduction have mostly forgotten its early feminist intellectual genealogies of the “value theory of inclusion”, premised on the “centrality of all labour (including life-making)” (Mezzadri, 2021: 1186). There is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ version of care that researchers can expect to find, given the inequitable foundations of care labour migration that incentivize competition among FDWs; nationality (stereotypes), tiered visa and skills regimes, and destination hierarchies are major points of differentiation. The FDWs I interviewed do not all perceive or respond to the numerous ethical dilemmas in the substance of care in the same ways. Some more than others questioned the superiority of technical (‘professional’) over emotional (‘unprofessional’) skills as well as the popular view that Filipino women make the best nurses (e.g. Amrith, 2020). Rather than a dichotomy of authentic and manufactured care, FDWs’ relationship with care is irresolute and uncertain, itself having to do with the women’s unfolding life course and run-ins with moments of self-realization. Some FDWs eventually come to realize, from the “strenuous relational work” involved in recurrent visits back home, a changed sense of existential purpose beyond the “moralizing narratives” (gendered constructions) of good wife, mother, and daughter (Amrith, 2023: 205). Recall Sha in Chapter Three, a Filipino FDW who is now estranged from a cheating husband and remains close to her elderly mother and two teenage daughters in high school back home. While processing her employer’s “hurtful” behaviour, she also referred to one of her brothers who had recently passed away and their lukewarm responses to her emotional needs. His sudden death

coincided with her passport's expiry date, so she was due to renew her travel document with the Philippine embassy. However, having just remitted all of her earnings, she was short of the almost \$200 needed. To her unexpected shock, *ah ma*'s children were unwilling to spare or loan her any money despite the exceptional circumstances.

“Lynn, these are very rich people. Big boss in company, manager of bank, that kind. But they just don't bother about me. My brother just passed away (crying) and I cannot borrow even \$100 from them. They said it's my agent's problem. What's the point of being so stingy? You know what I realized, when people die we cannot bring anything with us, just your own body and your deeds in life...”

Sha, Filipino FDW in Singapore

Sha's offhand comment about people not being able to bring their money and possessions to the afterlife was actually a way of making sense of her employers' behaviour and what she felt was the right course to take instead. In hindsight, I wonder if dealing with her brother's untimely demise while abroad had affected, at least in the short-term, her initial plans to switch to nursing home employment whenever such an opportunity became available. Like many other FDWs, Sha understood the challenges of upskilling out of the domestic sector, and felt “lucky enough” to be exposed to numerous certified training programs in large public hospitals. By her account, she had been mentally prepared to finally bid farewell to *ah ma*'s household as she could not stand their denigrating treatment any longer. But Sha could not possibly have predicted the turn of events, including *ah ma*'s rapidly declining condition that gave her newly intensified pains (in Chapter Three), and her own emotional reactions to these on top of her family circumstances. Events and processes surrounding the death of those closest to her, although unsaid, likely have circumstantial or even profound impacts on her current decision (unchanged at the time of writing) to delay nursing home employment until *ah ma* passes – “to see her off with no regrets”. Sha might not have received anywhere near the sort of cooperation she hoped employers would extend, but still stayed behind to deal with *ah ma*'s care needs, knowing in her heart that her

departure would entail an almost total neglect: “I know for sure that if I leave she’ll be worse off”. Ultimately, the potential of care as the political to disrupt the actual practices of neoliberal care organization (Singapore’s and Taiwan’s eldercare regimes) matters for FDWs hoping for acts of cooperation (primarily from employers and state actors) to close the power gaps that prevent their resistance from becoming structurally transformative. The FDWs I interviewed did not elaborate on their relationship with domestic employers (e.g. Munkejord et al., 2021) but I gather that cooperation from the latter would at least involve some degree of unpaid eldercare.

Analysts cannot deny a certain power imbalance between ourselves and research subjects, but consciously deliberating about positionality and the multiple possible understandings of a given ‘thing’ is our best shot at qualifying knowledge claims (Fujii, 2018). FPE scholars who theorize in privileged circumstances recognize the importance of holding domestic employers to account, i.e. playing devil’s advocate in the “no choice” logic of hiring a ‘maid’. But is this normalized structural critique necessarily a fair starting point (e.g. Maylene’s reaction in Chapter Four)? Sometimes, prioritizing respect and dignity for both parties leads to an alternative view of power relations (e.g. FDWs wield great responsibility over an elderly’s life) from what political scientists may usually probe for (e.g. FDWs lack the political agency to realize and resist their oppression). From unplanned moments to what goes unsaid, the stories constructed do not paint a singular snapshot of care work. Playing up these relational dynamics does not mean denying the inconvenient truths of coerced care (see Chapter One) but rather allowing for all-too-human qualities of ambiguity, contradiction, and irreducible understandings of the world that people navigate to permeate analysis. In that spirit, I consider aspects of intensifying technological intrusion in eldercare that are felt more than seen or heard. Not to mention, FDWs are also implicated in eldercare technologies as surveyors (of the elderly) and surveyed (by employers).

An Interlude into Technology in Care (and inconvenient musings about death)

The feminist economist Nancy Folbre (1994) has observed that the technological path in eldercare is well explored but has not benefitted from artificial intelligence in care robots to the same degree as other automated service occupations. While in Singapore at the peak of the pandemic's social distancing, I was able to visit the historic Kwong Wai Shiu¹⁴⁰ community hospital (KWSH nursing home) in Serangoon district, nationally recognized as the most state-of-the-art facility in its field. What distinguishes KWSH from most other nursing homes, apart from its longer historical legacy, is its strong shareholder investment support. Within the first hour of my visit, the senior nurse who was giving me a walking tour had already introduced at least three applications of 'smart eldercare', part of Singapore's broader efforts to build a technologically sophisticated global city image (Woods and Kong, 2020). For instance, the main kitchen had an industrial stovetop engineered to cater to lower sodium diets and other condiment preferences that simply required pressing some buttons. At the time of my visit in March 2022, the stovetop had just been remodeled to do automatic stir-frying in bulk quantities, so the head chef could divert his energies to improve ingredient preparation. In the medicine prescription room on each floor, a centralized computer system allowed nurses to easily locate and administer medications. New patients had to be enrolled once with their prescription information, and thereafter the nurses receive timely reminders to dispense the appropriate dosages. It was immediately apparent from the number of eldercare gadgets littered across the facility that KWSH does not face financial challenges in automating eldercare delivery. However, compared to patient-free spaces such as the kitchen and medicine cabinet, the facility's most expensive patient-facing care gadgets were instead unutilized, tucked away and collecting dust in the corner.

¹⁴⁰ <https://www.kwsh.org.sg/en/>



Photos: Taken by Author in KWSH nursing home (28 March 2022). A diaper disposal machine that blocks out smells of human waste.

According to senior head nurse Serene, this machine above had cost well above ten grand and was approved in the board of director's budgetary planning five years ago. At first, there was considerable hype over the smell-proof function of its diaper disposal, which was supposedly the highlight of the machine's usage. However, Serene was rather adamant that the lack of foul smells in the hallways is due to "the effort of our caregivers and nurses" instead of automated processes. Because the apparatus is high-maintenance and uses a particular German-imported clingwrap seal for airtightness, many nurses were actually uncomfortable with the expenses incurred after just a few uses, which they felt was "a big waste of precious resources". More importantly, doing one's rounds with the machine in tow seemed to lack the human touch that elderly persons need and want. To utilize this piece of equipment, nurses had to use a specialized type of thong instead of their hands to handle the soiled diaper. Understandably, most of the

residents did not react well to this since it prevented the nurses from giving out affectionate pats across the awkward metal barrier. As Serene recalled, “Everyone has their own style of checking in on them at their bedside. We greet them, clean them up, talk to them and pat them...It’s weird lugging that heavy thing around”. Another memorable instance where technology worsened rather than eased feelings of alienation was what Serene called the “shower haul” machine. This was a large hanger-shaped apparatus with two sturdy pins on each side (clasped onto the patient’s shoulders to haul them upwards), which was attached to a portable metal rod that could be wheeled about. It was meant to assist nurses with handling the heaviest (and usually male) patients to the bathroom by making the lifting and transportation process easier. This device was even more expensive than the diaper disposal machine but more undignified for many residents.

In an illuminating discussion of ageism against older women in science and technology studies (STS), Kelly Joyce and Laura Mamo invoke the intersections of technoscience¹⁴¹ and commercial medicalization (Big Pharma) as constitutive of our banal and everyday definitions of aging. The unquestioned prevalence of “anti-aging”, used synonymously with “positive aging” (Joyce and Mamo, 2013: 110), in the design and marketing of products feeds into constructions of old age as a social problem of negative dependence. In the above instances of a smell-proof diaper disposal and a “shower haul” machine (Serene), unexplored tensions emerge between the technological purposes of overcoming human limitations and an elderly person’s emotional vulnerabilities. Distinct from popular practices of home-based smart eldercare and medication (e.g. Woods and Kong, 2020) or machines such as the “rolling walker” (Joyce and Mamo, 2013: 111), those I came across do not have in mind the agency, mobility, and participation of its users.

¹⁴¹ Following Bruno Latour and Donna Haraway, many STS scholars use technoscience to refer to the misplaced divisions between objectivity and subjectivity, in light of a general problematic of modernity where popular culture and biomedical science are fused together (e.g. Joyce and Mamo, 2013: 117).

In this instance, it is near impossible to investigate how elderly persons go along with and/or resist manufacturers' design implications and imputed meanings (i.e. of passive bodies).

I could sense that nurses, similar to the FDWs and family caregivers interviewed, play a huge role in deciding if and how to cooperate with an elderly's speaking body¹⁴². At KWSH nursing home, some nurses consciously deliberate about whether to use the available eldercare machinery based on their understanding of residents' emotional needs. The uniquely personal touch of human caregivers, as trials with care robots in Japan's public elderly care homes find (e.g. Wright, 2019), is not replaceable by even the most skillfully engineered humanoids. Hug, Paro, and Pepper are some among numerous care robots (*kaigorobotto*) that have been trialed in Japan, at the forefront of Southeast Asia's automated caregiver sector (Wright, 2019: 18).

Ongoing observations, however, mostly find that care robots increase feelings of alienation and loneliness among elderly residents. Although the robots are functionally adequate in carrying out the needed tasks, they decrease the quality of communication especially in the Japanese cultural context, where a high premium is placed on language fluency. Furthermore, care robots often impose an awkward barrier between caregivers and residents when carrying out certain roles such as leading exercise routines. In many cases, automated care may even worsen the already strained caregiver workforce by creating additional demands on certain emotional dimensions (e.g. in accompaniment and communication) of care that artificial intelligence cannot cater for.

The biomedical perspective of technology as a cure for aging allows FPE thinkers to situate ageism within commercial medicine and identify the gaps in social optimism of care gadgets (Folbre, 1994; Joyce and Mamo, 2013). On top of that, considering the complex and

¹⁴² In an affective corporeal approach to care as the political (see Chapter Five), an elderly's care needs is sometimes not articulated or actively expressed in cases of severe disability. Caregivers and nurses nonetheless recognize that the needy body can speak, and may try to infer an elderly's emotional state from facial expressions and body language.

messy emotions in palliative care (end-of-life and death decisions) is an empirical strategy to tease out the extra-economic elements of human agency where the infiltration of market forces still seems relatively weaker. This interlude into technology in eldercare, while questioning the limitations of scientific solutions to old age, is then keen on taking the science-culture debate beyond (un)productivity; into extra-economic realms such as mortal anxieties and undecided meanings of aging. In Euro-American contexts, discussions of Western biomedical models are perhaps more inclined to frame issues of ageism in the rational vectors of technoscience, whereas ethnographic data coming out of other cultural contexts more often considers some competing notions of aging and family-based systems of care in modernity (e.g. Von Poser, 2017). The peculiar social stigma associated with elderly institutionalization in Singapore and Taiwan, shot through with a fatalistic outlook of nursing homes, reflects ambivalent transitions to “neoliberal (care) subjects” (Von Poser, 2017: 206) where certain family interactions still disrupt economic fantasies of self-reliance. If we accept the argument that prolonging life against an elderly’s will is a form of ageism, not love, then what sort of (habituated) care relations are unsettled?

Parting Thoughts: Age Relations in Care and Emotional Lives

In closing, I suggest taking forward the lens of age relations to inquire about the emotional lives of migrant care workers (MCWs) at a global scale – for instance, between FDWs in Singapore and Taiwan with MCWs in the United States and Canada. Such a transnational scope would move beyond meso-level contrasts of eldercare regimes (Chapter Two) to investigate the role of care ethics and morals among diverse groups of women. Long before the pandemic’s onset, care migration scholars have identified the connections between ageism, gendered-racialized discrimination, and the poor treatment of MCWs (Herron et al., 2021; Huang et al., 2012). Some have also underscored the importance of decolonial approaches to

Westphalian borders in the international migration scholarship, given that “internal migration dwarfs international migration in Asia as elsewhere” (Asis et al., 2019: 15). But as I explain in Chapter Three and elsewhere (Ng, 2023), building on several FPE discussions of care work (Federici, 2020; Folbre, 1994), the doubly devalued status of eldercare vis-à-vis other types of socially reproductive labour (e.g. childcare) has not received the attention it deserves.

Striving for a “self-consciously critical comparative frame” (Stoler, 2010: 209) of dynamic care across the life course must then integrate forms of relationality that are less ‘famous’ (e.g. in intersectional approaches) but more apposite to our empirical subjects. For MCWs, this may include non-capitalist elements of care grounded in customs of age relations and social status vis-à-vis elders in the wider community (Bastia, 2015; Raghuram, 2019). Ageism in the retirement and settlement provisions for MCWs and senior care planning also deserve more attention (Ferrer, 2017). On a related note, viewing MCWs’ emotional lives as springboards of critically intersectional analytical agendas aimed at social transformation implies approaching the women as protagonists and political agents in their own right, neither heroes nor victims in a migrant world of care. This narrative frame of analysis and the distinct visions and versions of care that result will still need to be situated in care labour migration where MCWs are both an economic policy and welfare pillar (Bakan and Stasiulis, 1997; Chien, 2018; Choy, 2003; Federici, 2016; Glenn, 1992; Lan, 2006; Peng, 2018; Teo, 2018; Williams, 2018; Yeates, 2012; Yeoh et al., 2021). However, my ultimate hope is for care itself in the emotional lives of frontline caregivers to be leveraged on as an informative resource not just for a more well-rounded appreciation of care’s diversity, but also for cooperating against the broader patterns of expropriation in processes of ageism, racism, and sexism in eldercare decisions.

Epilogue

Digital Futures of Human-Care-Technology Interfaces

The future is digital and the digital is now, our overwhelming present. The digital natives growing up in technologically infused environments are leading their parents and elders in unforeseen ways, teaching us new things about the way the world is being coded through their existential anxieties and sky-high demands for counselling and therapy. On Chinese social media platforms, the term *nei hao* (内耗) has become an immensely popular catchphrase used to describe the younger generation's tendency to overthink and overstress about mundane things. *Nei hao* translates loosely into a (self-induced) process of internal depletion due to excessive agonizing and refers to someone who is too emotionally fragile or sensitive for their own good. A related phenomenon is a growing number among the millennial generation who choose to *tang ping* (躺平), meaning “lying flat” – literally as a show of humour like in graduation photos like those below, but more so as a metaphorical resistance against a bleak economic future.



Photo source: Chiang et al. (2023). Chinese students choosing to take unconventional graduation photos where they do not smile at the camera. Jingying Li (left) sees ‘lying flat’ as a refusal to be trapped by a life of competition while Brenda Lu (right) sees such photos as a show of defiance against China’s rigid education system.

The *tang ping* movement is diverse and at one extreme means a literal inaction of not doing anything but more often encompasses a wide variety of flexible work options. One humorous example is that of the “full-time child” or *quan zhi er nu* (全职儿女), referring to adult children who opt for a drastic alternative to corporate work by devoting themselves to the social reproduction of parents (e.g. simply spending time together) in their family home while obtaining a liveable wage (pocket money) in the process. In Japan, the social reclusion of *hikikomori* parallels the *tang ping* trend: mostly young males in their 20s-30s who withdraw almost completely into their rooms, only stepping out for bathroom breaks and meals while escaping into alternative realities online. A simple search of “slow living” on YouTube produces a dizzying array of ‘vloggers’ (video bloggers) who document their alternative approaches to work-life balance that contradict corporate expectations. As I noted earlier, overzealous parenting and elderly neglect are both legitimate forms of care that are more harmful than those on the receiving end can assert (see p. 125). But while the above trends have gained online publicity and are recognized (even if not accepted) as a youthful pushback against living to serve market society, the reproduction of age-appropriate roles in digitalized care relations that favour youth productivity have not escaped us. To continue my earlier suggestion for research into reproductive ageism, some questions can be asked of age relations in our digital era:

1. To what extent can social processes that reproduce ageism be observed in the conceptualization to implementation processes of ‘smart’ eldercare technologies?
2. How are elderly persons socially positioned to engage with algorithmic innovations in eldercare technologies?
3. In what ways can collective movements among younger generations that redefine work be drawn on to reconfigure the meanings of productivity and value in life?

I raise these broader questions (not exhaustive) as conversation starters for unpacking age relations in our modern reality of the human-care-technology interface. There is no question that algorithmic skills and a digital self has overtaken human norms of engagement that current cohorts of children grow up in. Their elders, though, may feel alienated and left out by intrusions of the device on intergenerational bonding. Recall Pik Wan, the Singaporean caregiver who lives with her 89-year-old mother: “I get mum to go out. She gets lonely if she doesn’t meet people to talk to. We do have family gatherings but let’s not kid ourselves, nowadays the little ones are all glued to their iPhones. No one bothers to talk to grandma anymore” (Pik Wan). Children like Kayden, the teenage boy who I tutored, will be the future workforce of computer scientists and software engineers serving the industrial needs of artificial intelligence. Algorithmic language and coding skills are second nature to this generation of zoom students. Partly because the internet of information explosion is their natural habitat, as Pik Wan said, people increasingly no longer view elders in the family as keepers of wisdom: “less reason for conversation that way”. While smartphones and laptops do offer their share of welcome changes, we do have to wonder how technological interruptions of what used to be ‘only people’ scenarios are changing the way emotions can travel and be felt. In other words, how are emotions altered by the digital revolution? To what extent are emotions the same to elders vis-à-vis younger family members if there seems to be less or even no time for deep feelings to linger? Zoom into platforms of fast emotions where disenchantment is overtaken by apathy is replaced with rationality. But technological infusions of human and care go further and graver still.

Care workers and the elderly know that artificial intelligence does not produce machines that save us. But quite literally, algorithms are being coded into new forms of ‘smart’ eldercare (telehealth) pioneered by nations such as Singapore that consistently rank among the highest on

AI Readiness Indexes (Woods and Kong, 2020). Among ordinary citizens, this sense of techno-optimism for ‘smart’ home-based eldercare technologies is taken for granted. But less often do we ask the elderly what their perceptions are or if they feel comfortable with the privacy implications of subjecting themselves to (albeit a well-intentioned) surveillance. Somewhat humorously, Pik Wan had an unintentional argument with her mother over the installation of one such device. Its system could learn the daily habits and regular movements of seniors through motion sensors. Alerts are sent to caregivers and adult children if irregular signals are detected (e.g. no movement for some time or sudden movements that suggest accidents).



Photo source: Smart Nation Singapore (2024). A promotional image for ‘smart’ home-based eldercare technologies that utilize AI capacities to give family members “greater peace of mind”.

At that time, the old lady was having some trouble with a knee injury. Out of concern for her safety, Pik Wan’s older sister bought “this thing that looked like a baby monitor” when she visited their house and installed it in a corner of the kitchen. This home device could be connected to a smartphone application that allowed Pik Wan and her sisters to monitor their mother at any time. The old lady was not actually informed about this installation but became

aware of it when Pik Wan's sister came rushing over unannounced one day after seeing their mother trip in the living room. "Thankfully it was just a scratch", Pik Wan recalled, "so the real issue was how to explain this to her. As I was saying, mum values her independence". Most technological solutions to eldercare, in this sense, replicate assumptions about the elderly as passive recipients rather than agentic users. The issue is not the use of digital solutions per se but rather the amount of care and attention put into managing interactions between the facets of care, technology, and human decisions. Many elderly persons may struggle to come to terms with the paradoxical coexistence of care and control in 'smart' home-based eldercare technologies, even as they give adult children peace of mind. Neither have we inquired much into how technology's simultaneous responsiveness (proximity) and remoteness (distancing) intersects with pre-existing cultures of care. But while home-based technologies are susceptible to bargaining and negotiation among family members, we are less certain about heavier applications of AI systems.

Throughout the world, people are increasingly aware yet apprehensive of a future of eldercare where variations of humanoids, or human-robot coexistence, is the norm. Germany and Japan (Hsu et al., 2020), now increasingly Singapore (Tan and Taeihagh, 2021), are leading their regional counterparts in automating care provision, which are mirrored by trial experiments of companion robots in Taiwanese LTC homes (e.g. Hwang et al., 2021). Ethnographic anecdotes in such human-care-technology negotiations throw up numerous ethical conundrums about the substantive quality of eldercare (Wright, 2019). Contrary to popular perceptions of Japanese culture's affinity with companion robots (e.g. Parks, 2010: 104), social workers point to some hard truths about still unresolved issues of loneliness and isolation that machines trigger. For instance, despite being Japan's pioneer prefecture of care robots, barely over 3% of Kanagawa's residential homes use them. Its Welfare Service Association states that unlike the automation of

factory work, efficient solutions “are not always welcome in care (which is) not about doing the same tasks in a repetitive and continuous manner, but adjusting care to the changing conditions and preferences of the care recipient” (in Ishiguro, 2018: 260-261).



Photo source: Metteo, R. (2019). Robots Temi (left) and Snow (right) are being trialled in preschools and nursing homes. Industry experts predict that teachers and care workers will gradually be phased out with technological innovations.

In most cases, the issue is not AI’s ability to perfect continuous or repetitive tasks but how it still falls short of replicating the full range of cognitive responses and compassionate treatment that only human care workers can offer. Despite this tension, there is some reason to believe that the Singapore state’s “pragmatic institutional” compared to Taiwan’s “diplomatic filial” characteristics (see p. 26) have led to Singaporeans being more likely to “opine that ends are more important than means” (Tan and Taeihagh, 2021: 223). The equivalent studies conducted in Taiwan seem to indicate a stronger focus on substantive social issues such as the elderly’s comfort with assistive technology and the possible (wider) range of robots that can be manufactured to account for emotional needs in AI-enabled ADLs (e.g. Chou et al., 2019). As I saw during my visit to KWSH nursing home, the ‘human’ or ‘robot’ debate is overdrawn. Rather

than who or what will emerge victorious, it is the interactions between human agents and autonomous systems in the hybrid interfaces of body, flesh, and technology that will determine the quality of care in time to come. In light of ageist views (e.g. paternalistic design norms found by Hsu et al., 2020: 4) that are too often reinforced in the algorithmic engineering of care robots (an overstressed youth-dominated sector), how might we arrive at attentive and mindful applications of technology's potential to enhance already existing care relations?

In contrast to techno-optimistic or pessimistic views, the care workers I passed by struggled the most with negotiating technological intrusions into what many elderly persons understand as human-centred activities of care. For instance, the use of manual lifts and special bathtub technology places users in a helpless and humiliating situation. Although the manual lift would give female nurses in particular a safer work environment, many were reluctant to use the machine because they sensed that technology touching flesh in this interaction felt degrading and humiliating (see p. 269). The use of robots for batch cooking, facility cleaning, and medicine sorting, on the other hand, were much welcome compared to for personal care on the body, which is a lot more resistant to invasions of metal. Do machines truly enhance autonomy for elders and relieve burdens of caregivers? Whose perspectives are consulted in these claims? We should also not forget that human codes of our so-called archaic past are inherited by the patterns of design (in)justice in modern algorithms, including sexism, racism, and ageism. In closing, I note that while my theoretical and empirical discussions have not engaged directly with the themes of technology and care in a digitalizing future, I raise these issues for future research.

It is still up to humans to configure if and when new eldercare technologies enrich society and population as a whole. And ultimately, people's instincts are truly a mystery. The struggle between humans and machines over decision making in the 2020s continues.

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Appendix A
Number of Interviews and Breakdown

Interviewees	Singapore	Taiwan	Total
FDWs (Singapore)/ Live-in caregivers (Taiwan)	14	13	27
Domestic employers	4	3	7
Nursing home/LTC managers	4	1	5
Unpaid family caregivers	3	3	6
Recruitment agency managers	3	1	4
NGO case workers and project managers	8	10	18
Number of interviews	36	31	67

Appendix B

Interview topics and/or questions for FDWs/live-in caregivers (English/Mandarin)

- How did you end up working in Singapore/Taiwan as a domestic worker?
- Daily routine and what elderly care duties involve
- What is your relationship with your elderly ward like? How about the other family members in your employer's household?
- What comes to mind at the mention of "eldercare"? What does eldercare mean to you?
- What do you find challenging and rewarding for care work? What does being a "professional" caregiver mean to you?
- Current working conditions and terms of employment (do you get days off, etc.) - is there anything you'd like to change?
- Aspirations about work and career upskilling, e.g. do you intend to stay on in the domestic work sector, work in a nursing home, or?
- There is a general stereotype about Filipinos having better rights awareness and being dominant. What do you think about this? Why do you think this is the case?
- If appropriate and relevant, discuss your views on the foreign worker issue and racism in the host community, and your own experiences or observations
- What do you think about the word "maid"? How about "helper" and "domestic worker"?
- How do you think caring for the elderly will be different in a nursing home compared to at home?
- Do you think the agencies should make caregiver training compulsory?
- What was your training at the agency like before starting your first job in Singapore? Did you feel like it was enough?
- Do you think the government should make laws to include domestic work in the national labor law, like set minimum pay and off day?
- If I were to write our conversation into my thesis, is there anything you would like to express?
- Do you think people in Singapore treat childcare and eldercare differently?
- Potential for snowball sampling - ask if they will have any contacts for interview

主题/问题 - 半结构化面试风格

- 您是如何在新加坡/台湾成为家政工人的？
- 日常生活及照顾老人的职责
- 你和老人家的关系怎么样？你雇主家里的其他家庭成员呢？
- 提到“照顾老人”，你会想到什么？这份工作对你来说意味着什么？
- 你觉得养老护理工作有什么挑战性和回报？对你来说，一个“专业”的护理人员应该具备什么？
- 当前的工作条件和雇佣条款（您是否有假日等）- 您有什么想要改变的吗？
- 对工作和职业技能提升的抱负，例如你打算留在家政部门，在疗养院工作，还是？
- 很多人认为于菲律宾家政工人具有更好的权利意识和主导地位，你怎么看待这件事？你认为为什么会这样？
- 如果适当和相关，请讨论您对台湾“外劳”问题和种族主义的看法，以及您自己的经历或观察
- 你怎么看待“女仆”这个词？“帮手”和“家政工”呢？你希望别人怎么称呼你？
- 您认为在养老院照顾老人与在家照顾老人会有什么不同？
- 您认为机构应该强制要求护理人员培训吗？在新加坡，我采访过的很多人都说他们在就业前没有接受足够的培训.....
- 来台湾开始第一份工作之前，您在机构接受的培训是怎么样的？你觉得足够吗，有需要改善的地方吗？
- 您认为政府是否应该制定法律将家政工作纳入国家劳动法 (勞動基準法)，例如设定最低工资和休息日？
- 如果我把我们的谈话写进我的论文，你有什么想表达的吗？
- 你认为台湾人对待照顾小孩/托儿和照顾老人/养老的方式有区别吗？
- 你的圈子里有没有认识的人会愿意跟我做采访的，能介绍吗？

Appendix C

Interview topics and/or questions for domestic employers (English/Mandarin)

- Reasons for hiring a domestic worker for caregiving and housework
- What does eldercare mean to you?
- People in Singapore generally do not find eldercare attractive. Why do you think this is the case? Do you think there is a possibility for attitudes to change?
- How did you choose the domestic worker, and from which agency?
- Daily routine of your domestic worker and their eldercare duties (where relevant)
- Are you satisfied with your domestic worker's performance including eldercare; good and bad things
- Was her training level adequate? Do you think the government or agencies should be stricter about enforcing care training requirements?
- When your domestic worker cares for the elderly, how are you as an employer involved and/or participating in it?
- Would you support your domestic worker if she wants to go for caregiver courses for upskilling into a nursing home job?
- Do you think Singaporeans treat childcare and eldercare differently? What about other types of housework? How so, and why?
- Do you have any suggestions for the Singapore government where eldercare management is concerned?
- Can you comment on race politics in Singapore and the 'foreign worker' issue, and your own labor politics as an employer?
- What do you think about the word "maid"? How do you address your domestic worker?

与国内雇主的对话主题和/或问题

- 雇用家庭佣工进行护理和家务劳动的原因
- 养老对您来说意味着什么？
- 新加坡/台湾人普遍认为老年护理没有吸引力。您认为为什么会出现这种情况？您认为态度有可能改变吗？
- 您是如何选择家政工人的？从哪个中介机构选择的？
- 您的家政工人的日常生活及其老年人护理职责（如相关）
- 您对家政工人的表现（包括老年人护理）是否满意；好的和坏的事情
- 她的训练水平足够吗？您认为政府或机构是否应该更严格地执行护理培训要求？
- 当您的家政工人照顾老人时，您作为雇主如何参与和/或参与其中？
- 如果您的家政工人想要参加护理人员课程以提高技能以进入疗养院工作，您会支持她吗？
- 您认为新加坡/台湾人对待儿童保育和老人保育的态度有什么不同吗？那么其他类型的家务呢？怎么会这样，为什么？
- 您对新加坡/台湾政府在养老管理方面有何建议？
- 您能否评论一下新加坡的种族政治和“外籍工人”问题，以及您作为雇主的劳工政治？
- 对于“女仆”这个词，你有什么看法呢？你如何称呼你的家政工人？

Appendix D
Selected transcript of Sha's interview

Sha (FDW) - 2 June 2021, WhatsApp video call

Lynn: and I'd like to know about what it means to the caregiver themselves in terms of the reward, and how it can be seen in a way that is not always associated with, maybe paying, and what kind of, your experiences in caring for the elderly members, for Singaporeans here, and just in general, what comes to mind when we talk about elder-sorry, are you alright?

Sha: Ya, I'm okay (cries and then laughs)...sorry

Lynn: don't worry, don't worry

Sha: I was working here in Singapore I think starting 2013...(description of first employer to current third employer) my first employer I working with them is three months only because they really totally treat me like a-, like really bad. You know? Not enough food and they...treat me like really slave, you know. They ask me to eat, like balanced food you know and some more you know, like they control me everything, and even my own- I call my family I cannot call my family because they don't allow me to use my phone. Until, until everyday everyday I don't have enough food because I need to wait for my amah's friend's house they give me the balance- the food from inside the fridge, the freezer for how many months already, they give then they ask me to heat up. So I really cannot take it anymore until I feel giddy, and I was fell down, and all the- all the, you know, the glass, very expensive glass suddenly broke into my body but I didn't- I did not hurt- a little bit only I injured here, like that then my employer decided to send me to my agent because I really cannot take it already. Then after second employer I was looking after elderly they are bedridden, uh husband and wife but we have a 2-person house helper in the house, we are staying in Whampoa (address)...I'm working with them 2 years and 4 months but I can consider I'm very lucky, I'm very lucky with the elderly because I look-I look after also, I look after them independently, I'm the one showering, because uh how to say ah? Different, different pass. The other one look after the bedridden man and dementia, and I look after the old woman using the wheelchair but I bring her, going here going everywhere but I'm the one bringing her also to see doctor making appointment for her. After that when the husband pass away, I take over to look after the mummy, so I stay with her until 2 years and 4 months because I decided to leave her uh- I, I feel like it's not unqualified to look after her but because she's a leg fracture, so I inform the employer that because it's not easy for me to going here going there because I really quite pity to her because her leg fracture and it's not easy for me to buy ambulance for her but actually we are eating outside everyday but for the situation is a very difficult for me also, to bring her everywhere because she's quite thin, but you know I very- very sad about the situation here in Singapore, I was, you know I really quite pity to the elderly. You know, the family children they doesn't bother about the mother they just like put on the helper everything, especially you know it's not easy look after elderly especially when they are bedridden, bed bound, you know, bring to see doctor, making appointment, and sometimes you get scold from employer also even though you doing your best you know? But it's okay, I'm okay because for me, it's not just, I'm just a helper even though people look down on us, we are helper we are a maid, but they don't know how we are putting ourself just to make sure that

(voice gets teary) you know we are taking care them properly because we, we come to Singapore we have a foremost determination in life because we need to send money everytime to our family, you know? So we live to love, to put care in everything that, how we treat my mother, that's how I treat also the elderly. You know I sayang them so much. So I'm, I'm quite happy with her, because I'm totally manageable everything, I bring her to you know (inaudible), do exercise, when she's admitted to Tan Tock Seng hospital, I'm the one calling ambulance, I'm the one preparing her things, I'm the one make appointment everyday for her. So I just inform the employer hi sis, I just inform you that your mother I bring to A&A, her situation is not feeling well so I decided to bring to see doctor, to bring to the A&A then she say okay la, later I will come over or tomorrow. In 2 days I will come, then when the mother discharge I'm the one doing also to discharge her from the hospital, we just continue everyday our life until one day you know that- because normally I'm staying with her when they start the other helper move to the daughter, stay with the daughter, I with the mother, so we are only stay in the one hall one room, and small kitchen you know there is a very small house right. So the, the son is not really, I'm not good in terms with him because he is uh, he is not really (voice gets slightly teary) good treating me you know, I don't understand why he feel jealous or what, and he did something wrong with me, you know, physically abuse by him, the son. But even though he doing that one for me, until we went to the court, I went to the court, but the authorities say give him the punishment for I think 4-5 years, but now he is come out already, one time two time I meet him in Parkway but it's scary you know, but I never leave the mother I decided to finish my contract with her. But even though the son doing to me like that for us it's- I just want to sharing with you, after that she's, I putting in the home nursing in Pan Pacific, Pan Pacific home nursing, the daughter decided to put her, I still visiting them you know, I still visiting her to make sure that she's fine, you know some here also even though they put in the home nursing not really look-taking care properly you know, then I go there I cut the nail, I wash her body, you know I shower her sometimes I just ask the nurse can I bring her to going down? But they doesn't know that I bring her because she really like drinking the coffee, Kopi-O you know, eat some food you know from outside so I trying my best until become pandemic now, actually I don't have- because when started to give her, I have communication with her daughter but when, because the daughter she like me to look after again her children but I already in other family (current third employer) so I say, I cannot decide now to leave them because I already here, they hired me already so she's angry with me so it's okay, just part of our life. But since they appreciate you even though you did your best sometimes they don't bother about you. Until I don't have communication what happened to her. Then this one, this is my third contract with her. Uh I'm staying in Geylang East..you know she's independent person, she's not used to it if the others in the house, this amah. My employer is her daughter, I stay with her for the first time from six months very very very very stress you know, I starting with her I work, I'm 65 kg? Drop to 49 kg because you know why, she don't allow me to eat, she don't allow me to cook. I cannot cook and hurting me, you know, use the bamboo stick to hurting me, you know, not I upset even she hurting me you know but the worst is she will you know, the words that she's using is very very bad you know, using the bad words you know, everytime. Six months I think until I call my agent, you know here in Singapore one thing is like even though you have a agent, they don't they doesn't bother about your opinion you know, they supposed their the one like protect you you know, but even though you tell them this is your situation, I'm hungry, I don't have enough food, you think even though I don't have so much work but we need to eat proper food right? We are a human being. Maybe we are different culture but you are used to it Maggie Mee, but I'm

not! You no need to give me the, the balance- you don't need to give me bread if you cannot afford but just give me enough the food that I want to eat you know? But they still cannot. So you know what happen? Because you know I'm under also the you know CDE? ... Those who are helping helper here who get abused my employer, you know that one?

Lynn: Yes, it's that NGO helpdesk

Sha: (voice gets teary) you know to be honest, this time I'm feeling depressed. They just don't bother about me, because my brother just pass away, recently (crying) but you know I don't think the employer care about me they ask me how everything...of course they give me some amount, \$100, then they ask me if you need some money but I won't borrow from them you know why? Last time I borrow \$100 huh, they report me to the agent because I borrow money from them \$100 only, but is urgent, so after that I decided not to borrow from them, I really don't borrow anything from them. For me if I'm working, I trying my best to give my full heart, you know? Not just I treat the elderly not just like my mother but I treat them more than my family because I'm staying with them, you know? But the children doesn't bother anything, you don't you don't get anything from them even though (inaudible) they don't bother you know. But I'm okay, it's not about money it's not about their giving me but one thing they must understand my feeling right? (teary) You know? But at the end of the day, they just take my salary, half gone you know? They don't even care about my feelings. The money is supposed to I need to send to my family (crying) that's why, even you you put your love and care sometime you getting hurt from them but for them, it's okay. We pay you, just do your job, that's all. (20: 44) But you know the mother outside in front of people shouting at you like this like that, how do you feel right? You know. Some more call you, Chee Bai (hokkien vulgarity) la you know this amah very, some more she is look down on people. She really really, not good in terms of everything. Only this year maybe she change a lot, become frailer and weaker but you know she report me to police then the police come also I was so shocked you know she say \$50 her money loss, I stealing her money. Ya, they do that one. But for me, I know myself. I tell the police I say, I was working with her for how many years. You know when they are outside when they have the family gathering huh? They don't ask me to follow them they ask me eat your own food, you know, and they buy their own huh, they just buy for you the lousy lousy one, they eat the good good one, that type of people like that. But it's okay, important- thats why I tell people I have my salary. They calculating everything, they cannot feed you with the proper food, everytime they come they count everything, you know? I always have extra money in my account (managing amah's expenses) you know, I always use my money first to make sure the mother not complaining you know what I do? For me I twist another way. I use my money. You know I want to show them that I'm not stingy type of person I'm trying my best to help them, to make sure that you know, they cannot say I'm so stingy...just to show them how I'm not calculating about my money you know? But for them huh, you just borrow like \$15, \$20 they are very difficult for them already. It's not easy look after elderly especially dementia you know... to be honest elderly sometimes is quite liar you know? They tell liar to the children, you know some of them they are believe, they believe the mother you know they are like this like that so for me huh, I already keep telling them can you put the CCTV to your house? They don't want because if CCTV must leave the WiFi, but they don't want you know? But everytime she say...everytime she hurting me I keep everything (collecting evidence and documenting employer behavior) even the people in the shopping center ask me why you don't want to put in the wheelchair? You

know what they say, they say just let her walk never mind, when she fall down she fall down. You know, and time to time when I inform you regarding your mother, you think that I'm I am bossy? But how you feel about me if I say ma'am your mum like this you know, she doesn't want! I'm a reporter. I want you to know her daily life, what's going on, you know? You must be happy right? Before that you know when the mother sick huh, they just ask me to give the panadol panadol, everyday panadol you know. (crying) you cannot look after elderly in Singapore without training, I have the training I have the certification I trained from Tan Tock Seng hospital how to look after elderly how to transfer elderly how to, how to transfer the elderly to the wheelchair, how to transfer elderly to the bed, how to shower, how to use the...so of course I have the knowledge of that. So I want to share with them cause you know? Cause last time my employer my amah huh, ask me to train the home nursing you know one day they pay \$74 because here in Singapore when you are look after elderly and the patient is stay in the hospital you know, they hired me huh, before they hired me they ask the nurse and the doctor they want to see me in the hospital, SGH ah before she admitted there because she fall down and here this one all black color you know, she fell down. Then the doctor want to see me before she hired me then you know not even 20 minutes they make me to they make me train because I know everything! Because I really like it so much to look after elderly I really like it thats why I say hopefully by next year if everything is fine, I really want to work with the home nursing. I want to look after more and more more elderly. I really sayang them a lot.

Lynn: You mentioned that you do love caring for the elderly a lot, could you tell me a bit more about that, what makes you

Sha: Because for me, maybe cause I learnt from my mother, how to love elderly you know. So, for me is like, I don't know even not only this one ah, even different people huh, like my neighbour also, when I saw elderly I feel like I sayang them so much. I really treasure them a lot. I know many people even taxi driver, even some other I don't know they are, they are telling me that it's not easy to look after elderly. This is, yes. Especially, like me huh, I'm looking after elderly is, nobody to help me. Means I'm you know, I'm the one everything doing for her. Even she's in the wheelchair now, she cannot walk, transfer to the taxi, I'm doing my best to make it easy for her. Because she's in pain now, but even the taxi driver say you are very strong and very good to look after her you know, they approach me like that. So it makes me motivated also, and some more, one thing is like why I feel also joy, is more the person how they treat me. Like of course, maybe you treat me bad, of course I will not treat..is not I don't treat them (patient) la, but maybe is I will not put the love too much to the person. But for me I'm already attached with her, you know. For six years only we two person here, nobody around. Only like really really bad it's too much already, and sometimes she can hurting me see. Scratching me here (showing her arm), you know. But for me I don't bother already. She's elderly, I do understand. Sometimes you cannot take it, the way she say to you the bad words, you know, tell you something like that but don't bother about it. Just like, do your job with love, with enjoyment. I really love elderly so much, I really treat them like...especially my mum huh, because we always communicate with mum everyday, so she will always tell me you love them like, treat them like me, you know? Treat her like your mother.