

Department of Social Sciences

**Negotiating power: a case study of Indonesian foreign domestic
workers (FDWs) in Singapore**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the complex power structures that underscore the migration and employment of Indonesian women as foreign domestic workers (FDWs) in Singapore. The main objective is to highlight the power of individual Indonesian FDWs and the collective power of these women in negotiating these structures of power in the context of a migration study as well as a 'resistance' study. I argue that Indonesian FDWs are active agents who exercise individual agency and collective 'resistance' in the migration system. As labour migrants they exert power in shaping the nature of the migrant institution. One of the means in which they do so is by perpetuating the informal networks of migration. Individual Indonesian FDWs are also capable of exerting power in circumventing elements of exploitation and domination they encounter during their migration process and employment in Singapore. Crucial to this capability is the ability to have access to a network of agents within the migrant institution. Some Indonesian FDWs are also active in exerting power as a group to present a collective resistance against negative stereotyping of their identities as the immigrant other in Singapore. They do so via a formal religious based social group. This group encourages other Indonesian FDWs to portray the image of the disciplined worker couched within the moralising discourse of Islam by participating in productive activities on rest days. The aim of this is so that Indonesian FDWs can be treated with respect and dignity in Singapore.

In general, my data show that Indonesian FDWs as active agents of the migration system do not attempt to challenge the overall structures that underscore their subordination and domination as overseas contract workers (OCWs) in Singapore. The power exerted by individual Indonesian FDWs is focused at ensuring their continued employment as FDWs under more desirable employment conditions. Their individual agency aimed at improving their work conditions is at a personal level and is based on personal goals that are thus too fragmented to challenge the institutionalised structures of employment. Moreover, my case studies reveal that some Indonesian FDWs endure more restrictive work conditions in order to achieve desirable aspects of working in Singapore. Their collective 'resistance' against condescending treatment by the host society project an image of the disciplined FDWs

desired by employers, maid agents and Singaporeans. Their subjective ambivalence and the ambivalence in their individual and collective acts of 'resistance' in challenging aspects of subordination and domination show the complexity of the power relationships in which they are caught.

I draw upon two bodies of theory to provide a framework for my analysis and argument. First, I draw upon the 'migrant institution' framework espoused by Goss and Lindquist (1995) that is based on Giddens' structuration theory to illustrate the power exerted by individual Indonesian FDWs within the field of migration studies. I also draw upon Foucault's notion of power as a framework to examine collective 'resistance' displayed by Indonesian FDWs in Singapore. The data presented in the thesis are drawn from two sources, ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Singapore as well as relevant newspaper and other media accounts.

Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

Signature: _____

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ACRONYMS

AKAN	Antar Kerja Antara Negara (Centre for Overseas Employment)
BLK	Balai Latihan Kerja (Training Centres for OCWs)
CASE	Consumer Association of Singapore
DEPNAKER	Department Tenaga Kerja (Department of Manpower)
FDWs	Foreign Domestic Workers
FILODEP	Filipino Ongoing Development Program
KBRI	Kedutaan Besar Republik Indonesia (Indonesian Consulate)
KKH	KK Women's & Children's Hospital
KOPBUMI	Konsertim Pembela Buruh Mingran Indonesia (Consortium for the Defence of Migrant Worker)
MOM	Ministry of Manpower
MP	Member of Parliament
NSC	National Safety Council
OCWs	Overseas Contract Workers
OWWA	Overseas Worker Welfare Administration
PJTKA	Penyalur Jasa Tenaga Kerja Asing (Maid Agency in Singapore)
PJTKI	Penyalur Jasa Tenaga Kerja Indonesia (Labour Recruitment Agency in Indonesia)

Repelita	Rencana Pembangunan Lima Tahun (Indonesia Five-Year Economic Planning Strategy)
SD	Sekolah Dasar (Primary School)
SMA	Sekolah Menengah Atas (Senior High School)
SMEA	Sekolah Menengah Ekonomi Atas (Senior High School – Economics)

CHAPTER 1

OBJECTIVES AND SIGNIFICANCE

Introduction

The twentieth century saw an ever-increasing global flow of people in search of work or of international labour migration (ILM) (for a detailed overview see Stalker 1994; Castles 1998). Whilst ILM takes many forms, one that has become increasingly widespread is the circular migration of women as overseas contract workers (OCWs). The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that half of the population of international labour migrants are women. For some labour exporting countries, women account for 70 to 80 per cent of international labour migrants with a large proportion employed in the unskilled sector (*Gender and migration n.d.*)

This thesis portrays Indonesian foreign domestic workers (FDWs) as active subjects in negotiating the various forces that shape their experiences as temporary labour migrants in Singapore. However, as active subjects, Indonesian FDWs are not necessarily always successful in countering these forces. Thus this thesis has a dual objective firstly to elucidate the complex power structures in which Indonesian FDWs are caught and to consider the effects of this and secondly to evaluate the actions of Indonesian FDWs in countering this power and to consider the impacts of these actions. This introductory chapter outlines the key objectives of this thesis, the significance of the research and the thesis organisation.

1.1 Key objectives of thesis

Women as subjects of migration have generated research interest from various academic disciplines such as geography, anthropology, sociology and economics. These studies often take on a multi-disciplinary approach and capture trends and distinctive characteristics of the migration of women in which issues of migration, labour and gender are integrated (Chant 1992; Karlekar 1995; Battistella and Paganoni 1996; Lim and Oishi 1996; Iredale and Guo 1999). Generally, women migrants are concentrated in jobs associated with patriarchal stereotypes of female characteristics

such as docility, obedience and willingness to render personal services (Lee 1996). Some examples of these jobs include domestic service, commercial cleaning services, sweatshops and home-based garment production, entertainment work and prostitution.

The migration of women as foreign domestic workers (FDWS) has attracted considerable research interest, not only because of its increasing significance but also because of the vulnerability of this group of women migrants to exploitation (Heyzer et al 1994; Romero 1992; Momsen 1999). This research has shown that exploitation is rife, mainly because of the informal status of the migrants and the isolating nature of their occupations. FDWs are also noted for being vulnerable to mistreatment and exploitation in the recruitment and deployment phases, where both public and private institutions play a central role in their organisation (Heyzer et al 1994).

A study of the migration experience of FDWs in this thesis, departs from the existing body of literature that seeks to identify root causes or problems associated with the maid trade and the structural inequalities underlying the phenomenon of FDWs (Heyzer et al 1994; Sukamdi et al 2000). Instead it gives prominence to examining how FDWs as main subjects of the maid trade negotiate some of the problems associated with working in the trade, while at the same time revealing the multiplicity of factors and sets of relations underscoring their mistreatment and exploitation. By placing an emphasis on the migration process and their everyday experiences, the thesis positions Indonesian FDWs as active subjects in shaping and perpetuating the maid trade.

Drawing upon the current theoretical debates in Geography (and the wider social sciences), the thesis has three primary objectives:

- The first objective is to provide qualitative accounts of how Indonesian FDWs in Singapore negotiate issues they confront as labour migrants, paid live-in domestic workers and the immigrant 'other'. In other words it aims to document the individual and collective power of Indonesian FDWs. This is achieved through analysing the narratives of FDWs within the context of

societal structures that influence and shape the experiences of subjects, and drawing attention to the interactions between agency and structures.

- The second objective of the thesis is to reveal the complexity of power structures underscoring the vulnerability of Indonesian FDWs to mistreatment, discrimination and exploitation. In examining these structures of power, the thesis focuses on integrating the dynamics of relations in which FDWs in Singapore are caught with employers, the Singapore state, the maid industry, the host society and global economic structures, to understand how, together, these effect the way Indonesian FDWs experience and engage in the migration process, employment and everyday social-relations in Singapore.
- The third objective of the thesis is to make recommendations on provisions of welfare and protection of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore based on main findings of this thesis.

1.2 The significance of the research

Firstly, this thesis makes a significant contribution to research on international labour migration of women OCWs by focusing on the migration experience of Indonesian FDWs in a host society. There have been numerous studies encompassing a wide range of issues on Filipino FDWs (Aguilar 1996a; Aguilar 1996b; Constable 1997; Gonzales 1998; Hilsdon 2000; Law 2002) but, as an emerging group of OCWs, studies elucidating the experiences of Indonesian FDWs in a host-society are few and far between. With the exception of Robinson (1991; 2000) and Tobing et al (1990) who examined issues of exploitation and abuse of Indonesian FDWs through secondary sources and primary data collected from returned and potential migrants, emphasising the role of gender, culture and inequalities in the global economy, studies on Indonesian FDWs involving ethnographic fieldwork in a host society are often integrated with studies on Filipino FDWs (Chin 1997; Chin 1998; Huang and Yeoh 1998; Yeoh and Huang 1999; Yeoh and Huang 2000). On the other hand, ethnographic studies on Indonesian FDWs in particular tend to focus on examining

motivation to become FDWs and socio-economic impacts of their overseas employment on sending communities (Sukamdi et al 2001).

Although FDWs of different nationalities are all women engaged in menial occupations and are all the immigrant 'other' in foreign countries, 'the "other" is not monolithic but consists of degrees of "otherness", accentuated by the coming together of different cultural worlds which diverge from and/or resonate with one another in multiple ways' (Momsen 1999: 2). Numerous studies also note the potency of national stereotypes on employers' preferences and treatment of FDWs (Chin 1998; Huang and Yeoh 1998; Cox 1999; Stiell and England 1999). Therefore a focus on Indonesian FDWs in a particular host-society can provide fresh insight into issues specific to this group of women migrants in relation to local factors in the hosting state and thus contributing to the richness of the available literature on FDWs.

In addition, institutional mechanisms involving both private and state institutions in regulating the flow of FDWs and in protecting FDWs vary between countries. For example, the Philippines state, a more experienced exporter of OCWs, has a relatively more comprehensive program overseas catering for the welfare of their women OCWs (Gonzales 1998). On the other hand, the Indonesian state has been criticised for its lackadaisical attitude toward protecting its women OCWs (Robinson 2000). Therefore, an examination of the mechanisms made available by the Indonesian state to protect its FDWs in a host society could provide useful information for developing a policy framework when addressing issues specific to Indonesian FDWs in Singapore.

Secondly, highlighting the complexity of power structures underscoring subordination and domination of FDWs in Singapore by integrating the various relationships in which they are caught provides a more consolidated perspective for understanding problems and issues confronted by FDWs in this country. Whilst issues of marginalisation, employers' control, negotiations of identity and impacts of official policies involving FDWs in Singapore have been featured in publications by Huang and Yeoh (1996; 1998), Yeoh and Huang (1998; 1999a; 1999b; 2000) and Yeoh, Huang and Gonzales (1999), these issues are addressed in different papers and with

varying emphases thus leading to an artificial compartmentalisation in the examination of those relations of power which underscore the subordination and domination of FDWs in Singapore.

Integrating the study of the asymmetrical relations in which FDWs in Singapore are caught with that of employers, the Singapore state, the host-society, the maid industry and global economic structures within the overarching framework of Foucault's notion of power, this thesis conceives of the complexities underscoring the vulnerabilities of FDWs in Singapore in its totality (Chapter 4.9). This provides a more insightful perspective from which to discuss the effectiveness of official responses in rectifying the problems confronted by FDWs or from which to analyse the impacts of the actions of Indonesian FDWs as active subjects negotiating the effects of these asymmetrical relations.

Third, this thesis contributes to the growing literature on population geography, in particular on studies of migration which seek to integrate demographic changes and traditional views of migration with current interests in questions of social research such as gender, identity, nationality and culture (for a detailed review see Halfacree and Boyle 1993; White and Jackson 1995; Ogden 2000). By adopting ethnography as a research methodology, by integrating a post-structural theoretical approach as a framework for data analysis and by focusing on migrants' experiences instead of providing a general overview of a migration phenomenon, this thesis is a valuable contribution to the field of migration studies in its continuing engagement with developments in methodological and theoretical approaches in contemporary social research.

1.3 Thesis organisation

The thesis consists of eight chapters. Following an outline of its objectives and significance in this chapter, Chapter 2 reviews the literature on FDWs and outlines the two theoretical frameworks utilised in this thesis. Chapter 3 describes the types of data used in this thesis and the methods used in collecting them. It also justifies the use of the two bodies of theory discussed in Chapter 2 in this thesis.

Chapter 4 focuses on the Singaporean state and the place of FDWs in it. Its main purpose is to elucidate the complexity of factors underscoring the vulnerabilities of FDWs by contextualising the relationships in which FDWs are caught with agents and institutions within Foucault's notion of power. The chapter describes the complex workings of power and a general overview of its effects on subordination and domination of FDWs in Singapore.

Chapter 5 focuses on Indonesian FDWs in Singapore providing a socio-economic background of their origin and a detailed description of the effects of the complex power discussed in Chapter 4 on their migration process, their employment and their conducting as the immigrant other in Singapore. The chapter thus highlights the main issues confronting Indonesian FDWs in Singapore in these three areas. It also discusses the official responses to these issues and assesses their effectiveness.

Chapter 6 presents narratives of seven Indonesian FDWs elucidating how they negotiate aspects of domination and control as produced by the complex power relationships described in Chapter 5. These narratives are based on in-depth interviews that traced their employment histories in Singapore, their motivation and their future plans. Using Goss and Lindquists' concept of the 'migrant institution' framework and the key concepts of Giddens' structuration theory that underpin this framework, this chapter describes how individual Indonesian FDWs capitalise on interactions and on networking with other agents within the institution to achieve their personal objectives with regard to securing further employment and charting their migration paths. It also elaborates how the relations of dependence within which Indonesian FDWs are caught could provide them with resources to achieve these objectives. In addition, the chapter provides an insight into how individual Indonesian FDWs, as active subjects, shape and perpetuate the system of migration of women OCWs from Indonesia to become FDWs in Singapore and other developed countries in the region.

Chapter 7 focuses on An-Nisa, the first formal association of Indonesian FDWs to be established in Singapore. It traces its development and its appropriation as a platform

to 'resist' hegemonic representations of identities of Indonesian FDWs as vulnerable, simple-minded, backward and unsophisticated women from an impoverished country and their subjectification as cheap domestic servants in Singapore. It thus builds on the discussion of the discursive effects of complex power described in Chapters 4 and 5. It concludes that the complex power in which Indonesian FDWs are caught lead them to subscribe to a discourse of accommodation and self-discipline in order to earn respect and to be treated with dignity in Singapore. It also discusses the dubiousness of such discourse in achieving its intended objectives and highlights the practical benefits of formal social associations in enabling individual Indonesian FDWs to access resources to achieve their personal objectives, as described in Chapter 6, and to enhance their experience overseas as temporary labour migrants.

Chapter 8 outlines the main findings of the thesis and discusses their implications for policy frameworks that are being developed to protect the welfare and interests of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Introduction

In this chapter I will provide a literature review of the research to date on FDWs and outline Foucault's notion of power and Goss and Lindquist's 'migrant institution' approach since I will draw upon these for theoretical frameworks in the case of this thesis. First, I will provide a review of research on relations of FDWs with their employers, with the maid industry, with sending and hosting states and with global economic structures. I then contextualise these relations within Foucault's notion of power in order to elucidate the complexity of the factors that underscore the subordination and domination of FDWs. Subsequently, I describe the development of 'resistance study' and highlight its usefulness and significance as a background for the analysis and argument of 'collective resistance' provided in Chapter 7.

After noting the 'absence' of work on the addressing of power (in the Foucauldian sense) by FDWs within the field of migration studies, I then describe functionalist and structuralist explanations of migration and assess the merits of the 'migrant institution' approach espoused by Goss and Linquist. I note how key aspects of Giddens's structuration theory form the basis for a conceptualisation of the 'migrant institution' and are useful for examining how Indonesian FDWs exert 'power' in negotiating relations of domination-subordination in Singapore. I will draw on these to provide a theoretical framework for a consideration of the power of individual Indonesian FDWs in Chapter 6.

2.1 Migration and paid domestic work

Wong (1996: 87) asserts that where 'female migration has been significant it has been more often associated with domestic service'. She supports this claim by citing examples of Western European household survival strategies during the pre-industrial and industrial eras, rural-urban migration in Latin America and Africa, and contemporary patterns of female migration in the Asia Pacific Region (Wong 1996: 88). Demand for paid domestic service is often an outcome of shortages in the local

labour supply. Unlike manufacturing work which can be spatially relocated to tap available labour and other factors of production at other locations, 'service work involved in the reproduction of the worker cannot be moved to other parts of the world and perform in isolation from the worker' (Arat-Koc and Giles 1994: 9). Thus immigrant labour is sought to fulfil this demand which explains the high representation of women migrants in paid domestic service.

Paid domestic service persists in advanced capitalist economies for reasons that may differ from the reasons for their ubiquity a century ago. The ever increasing numbers of dual-income households in modern economies and state incapacity or unwillingness to meet demands for social services such as child care, aged care and care for the sick underpin the high demand for paid domestic workers in countries like Canada, the United States, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and various European states (Bakan and Stasiulis 1995; Constable 1997; Anderson 1999; Momsen 1999; Ehrenreich 2000; Cox and Watt 2002). Moreover, parts of the Middle East and in Malaysia, where the financial ability to hire paid domestic servants has become a symbol of prosperity, the burgeoning middle-class has created an escalating demand for this type of labour (Sherbiny 1984 cited in Robinson 2000; Chin 1998).

As a result of shortages in the local supply of workers who are attracted to perform this type of work, the countries cited above resort to women migrants to fulfil the demand for paid domestic service. Despite official programs facilitating and regulating flows of legal labour migrants between sending and receiving countries, the highly bureaucratic processes in these programs have led many migrants to resort to the services of unlicensed labour recruiters/agents and informal networks to secure work overseas. Thus, apart from legal women migrants, undocumented¹ women migrants are also hired as domestic workers in these countries. In California in the United States, most paid domestic servants constitute mainly Mexican women migrants (Mattingly 1999) while in Canada they are mainly women from the Philippines, England and the Afro-Caribbean (Stiell and England 1999; Macklin

¹ Undocumented labour migration can take a number of forms. Some examples are when: migrants clandestinely enter a country and do not pass through official border checkpoints; migrants enter a country legally but overstay their visa and; migrants enter a country under a non-working visa but instead work in the destination country (Hugo 2000: 5).

1994). On the other hand, women from the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, India and Bangladesh meet the burgeoning demand for live-in domestic workers in households in the Middle East and prosperous Asian nations such as Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia (Heyzer and Wee 1994).

2.2 Relations in paid domestic work

Feminist scholars engaged in the 'domestic work debate' in the 60s and 70s highlighted domestic work as a significant symbol of women's oppression (Romero 1992; Arat-Koc and Giles 1994). They argued that domestic work was devalued and not recognised as 'real' work in capitalist economic relations because it was deemed a labour of love stemming from women's innate nature and was tied to the roles of wife and mother. Since it was unpaid and hence did not produce values that could be exchanged in the capitalist marketplace, it fell outside the definition of productive work (Romero 1992: 21). A controversial outcome of this debate was the launching of a campaign to demand wages for wives and mothers. Proponents of this campaign argued that granting wages to wives and mothers would improve the economic status of women and would free them from the inequalities brought about by the gendered division of labour (Arat-Koc and Giles 1994: 4).

The 'debate' was criticised for focusing solely on the relation of domestic work to capitalism and for overlooking the other types of power relationships involved (Armstrong 1985 cited in Arat-Koc and Giles 1994). It also tended to universalise the experience of women's oppression and to disregard other social relations of difference such as race and ethnicity (Romero 1992; Arat-Koc 1994). The narrow focus of this debate limited its contribution to the understanding of the complexity of the relations of domination and subordination which underscore contemporary paid domestic service (Arat-Koc 1994). As highlighted in the previous section, the high representation of women of colour from less developed countries in paid domestic service suggests that employer-domestic worker relationships are not only negotiated along gender and class lines, but also along lines of race/ethnicity and nationality. Despite its shortcomings, the debate had some value in contributing to our understanding of the stigma attached to household workers and to paid domestic work

by illuminating aspects of the devaluation of domestic work. These aspects are based on sexist and capitalist perspectives which are underpinned by the private/public divide and which reinforce patriarchal dominance. This devaluation also explains the exclusion of paid domestic work from the sphere of formal work.

Scholarly contributions on paid domestic work show that it plays a significant role in reproducing and reconstructing the inequalities inherent in social hierarchies and their associated identities (Dickey and Adams 2000: 3). Indeed, research has shown that the home space is not neutral but is a contested arena, in which various social relations of difference such as gender, race/ethnicity and class are constantly sedimented, negotiated and challenged. The insertion of women migrants, often from less developed economies, as paid domestic workers in middle-class households of advanced capitalist economies adds to the complexity of the relationships negotiated within the home space.

FDWs are not just subjects within employers' households. They are also the subjects of the sending and hosting states, of the maid industry and of global economic structures. In the next section, I will review the existing literature on relations between FDWs and employers, sending and hosting states, the maid industry and the global economy. My main objective is to elucidate the factors and processes which underlie the domination and subordination of FDWs. I will also cite examples of research on paid domestic service that do not necessarily involve FDWs as such, but domestic workers in general. Such examples include studies on paid domestic service in America involving African-American domestics. This is because such studies also illustrate issues of power that I wish to address in this thesis.

2.3 Relations of power and their effects on FDWs

Employer-FDW relations

The literature on the dialectics of employer-domestic worker relationships highlights firstly the disciplinary techniques adopted by employers and secondly the negotiations of identities between employers and domestic workers. This work, respectively, focuses on the various methods adopted by employers in disciplining and controlling

their domestic workers and on negotiations of identity around social relations of difference such as class, race/ethnicity and nationality. Overall, the research addressing these issues emphasises the asymmetrical relations of power between employers and domestic workers suggesting the domination and subordination of the latter. Techniques of discipline and negotiations of identities around social relations of difference are seen to reproduce and reinforce inequalities inherent in class, race/ethnicity, gender and nationality.

Yeoh and Huang describe the employer-FDW relationship in Singapore as ranging from the 'archetypal-Cinderella-type relations to businesslike arrangements and to warm familial ties' (1999: 1157). These categories imply various degrees of closeness between employers and FDWs. However, their survey on FDWs and employers in Singapore indicates that, in all these types of relationships, employers view control and surveillance as essential for ensuring that employees are always within a disciplining gaze (Huang and Yeoh 1996). Similar observations were made by Chin in Malaysia, where she described employers as 'domestic spies' highlighting the strict surveillance which they impose on FDWs (Chin 1998: 143). In these countries, the state enforces pecuniary penalties on employers whose FDWs are found to commit criminal acts, test positive for venereal diseases, fall pregnant, run away from employers or terminate their contracts prematurely (Huang and Yeoh 1996; Chin 1998).

Employers invoke state policies to justify extreme control and surveillance of FDWs. Nevertheless, the bases of control and surveillance are based on biased stereotypes of FDWs constructed along the axes of class, race/ethnicity, gender and nationality (Yeoh and Huang 1999; Chin 1998). In these countries, the popular perception of FDWs who hail mostly from less developed countries in Asia such as the Philippines, Indonesia, Burma and Sri Lanka, as young, poor, vulnerable, promiscuous and untrustworthy are deeply ingrained in society and are used to justify the paternalistic authority of employers (Chin 1998; Yeoh and Huang 1998). Chin noted that the media plays an important role in reinforcing these stereotypes by sensationalising press reports of public arrests of FDWs who moonlight as prostitutes on rest days (1998: 143). Noting the importance of story-telling and sharing of information among

employers, these researchers also revealed a strong climate of fear and suspicion in these countries of the wrongdoings to which FDWs are susceptible. For example, Chin noted that employers are prone to relating stories of the 'sexploits' of FDWs experienced by a friend or a friend's friend (1998: 144), while Yeoh and Huang noted that employers' fears are based on 'stories and rumours of the transgressions to which foreign maids are liable' (Yeoh and Huang 1998: 591).

Yeoh and Huang and Chin argue that, in most cases, employers are oblivious to the racism and discrimination underlying their actions. Employers rationalise their control and surveillance of FDWs as being for the good of their FDWs, for example, to ensure that they remain safe and protected while serving their employment contracts (Chin 1998; Yeoh and Huang 1998). Yeoh and Huang described this rationality as being akin to what Foucault defines as 'pastoral power' in which power is exercised with an emphasis on salvation in terms of improving people's health and habits (Yeoh and Huang 1998: 590).

Constable, in her work on Filipino FDWs in Hong Kong, argues that the techniques of discipline recommended by maid agents and practiced by employers include the control of bodily aspects of the way a FDW conducts and carries herself and are not just 'directed at the product of a domestic worker's labor' (Constable 1997: 83). Some examples of bodily discipline are specifying: dress code; length of hair; wearing of make-up; 'proper' conduct when encountering other FDWs while carrying out duties beyond the sphere of the employer's house; hygiene standards; and areas within the employer's house that are out of bounds (Constable 1997: 87-88). Chin (1998) has also noted detailed accounts of such bodily disciplines that employers in Malaysia have imposed on FDWs. Bodily disciplines are a form of power exerted by employers to ensure that FDWs defer to employers all the time as such discipline is meant to establish 'uninterrupted, constant coercion, supervising the processes of the activity rather than its results' (Foucault 1979 cited in Constable 1997: 83). These bodily disciplines also serve to distinguish and to reinforce the superior status of employers *vis-à-vis* a plain looking and docile domestic worker.

Research reveals that it is common for employers and FDWs to describe their relationships as 'being like family' (Romero 1992; Huang and Yeoh 1996; Constable 1997; Chin 1998; Stiell and England 1999; Anderson 2000). Within this paradigm, FDWs are referred to by employers, or identify themselves, as sisters, daughters or mothers. Based on data obtained from ethnographic fieldwork, researchers criticised fictive kinship as distorting the real basis of relationships between employers and domestic workers because they are imbued with inequalities inherent in social relations of difference such as class, status, race/ethnicity, gender and nationality (Romero 1992). Anderson asserts that 'being like family' suggests a 'special relationship beyond the simple bond of employment, in which the worker will be loved and cared for entering into a network of rights and obligations' (2000: 122-123). However, domestic workers are disadvantaged by this 'special relationship' because it weakens their position to negotiate for wages and other rights and thus attempts to do so are viewed as an insult to the 'family' and to reflect the worker's materialistic attitude (Chin 1998; Anderson 2000). Thus researchers posit that the personalisation and distortion of the real basis of relationships between employers and domestic workers further legitimises the extraction of unpaid emotional and physical labour (Romero 1992; Constable 1997; Stiell and England 1999; Chin 1998; Anderson 2000).

Data from ethnographic fieldwork among domestic workers also show that FDWs have different perceptions to those of their employers in 'being treated like family'. For example, some domestic workers report that being treated like 'one of the family' means not being treated as 'furniture' or a non-person (Romero 1992: 125), while others note that it means being acknowledged and made to feel included in family activities (Constable 1997: 104), or that their employers were 'good' relative to those being described by other workers (Anderson 2000: 123). Nevertheless, this research also reveals that distinctions in terms of status and class imbued by race/ethnicity and gender are still inherent in these fictive kinship relationships because domestic workers are not accorded the same privileges, benefits and respect granted to actual family members (Romero 1992; Constable 1997; Stiell and England 1999). Moreover, whilst domestic workers are expected to have 'familial interest' in employers and family, this is seldom reciprocated (Anderson 2000: 123).

Gift giving and promises of gifts and kind favours are also common in employer-domestic worker relationships. Romero has argued, from a Marxist perspective, that gift giving in lieu of an increase in wages or bonuses is exploitative under market arrangements where domestic service is undertaken in exchange for wages. This is because it not commensurate with the 'obligation a master had to care for his servants' in feudalistic arrangements (Romero 1992: 122). In addition, gift giving and promises of gifts and favours also buy deference and coercion because they bond domestic workers to relationships of indebtedness and obligation (Romero 1992: 109, 120; Chin 1997: 135). Rollins has also noted that the types of gifts and the manner in which the exchange of gifts takes place reinforce the inferior qualities of domestic workers as 'needy, unable to provide for themselves and willing to accept others' devalued goods' (Rollins 1985 cited in Romero 1992: 110). On the other hand, Chin noted that some Malaysian employers resorted to gift-giving as a means to keep domestic workers at arm's length in order to maintain privacy and a domain over their house. For example, some Filipina FDWs view expatriate employers' gestures of providing televisions and VCRs in domestic workers' bedrooms as having an underlying agenda of confining them to their rooms so that they would make themselves scarce when their services are not needed (Chin 1998: 135).

In summary, asymmetrical relations characterise employer-domestic worker relationships. As observed by Chin (1997 and 1998), Romero (1992) and Anderson (2000), employers do not merely purchase domestic workers' labour in exchange for wages but also the personhood of domestic workers. Employers reproduce and reinforce subordination and domination of domestic workers through varying techniques, such as bodily discipline, pastoral power and the masking of inequalities inherent between them and their domestic workers by adopting a discourse of familial arrangements in defining relationships and by employing gift-giving to mediate relationships. Apart from directly buying deference and compliance, these techniques of control and discipline also define, enhance and distinguish the middle-class identities of employers *vis-à-vis* domestic workers (Romero 1992; Chin 1997; Constable 1997; Anderson 2000). Asymmetrical relations in employer-FDW relationships also reproduce inequalities inherent in social relations of difference such

as class, gender, race/ethnicity and nationality. Poor women of colour from particular ethnic backgrounds and nationalities, such as Mexicans or Chicanas, African-Americans, Filipinos, Indonesians and Afro-Caribbeans dominate contemporary paid domestic service. The stigma attached to paid domestic work contributes to the creation of inequalities based on race/ethnicity, class, nationality and gender since it suggests that these categories of women are indeed inferior by virtue of their job characteristics thus justifying and legitimising the social structure that put them at a disadvantage (Rollins 1990 cited in Dickey and Adams 2000).

State – FDW relations

As subjects of both their countries of origin and destination, FDWs are controlled and regulated through policies, rules and regulations. Research shows that state policies directly and indirectly reinforce the subordination and domination of FDWs. The literature reviewing the role of sending states on women OCWs, focuses on state initiatives in dealing with specific problems of women OCWs especially those working as FDWs. Such initiatives include regulating the maid industry, setting up welfare programs in countries of destination, establishing government agencies to look after the welfare of migrants, to mediate migration processes and to push for bilateral agreements on standards of work practices with hosting states (Torrea and Habana 1994; Joson 1995; Brillantes 1995; Gonzales 1998; Sukamdi et al 2000).

Research has demonstrated that economic imperatives and gender and class biases underlie the sending states' lack of initiative in institutionalising the protection of female OCWs, particularly FDWs. For instance, Dias (1994) drew attention to the different concerns that the Sri Lankan state shows towards women OCWs and male professional migrants, and suggested the presence of gender and class bias in state policies. Robinson has also argued that gender bias and capitalist imperatives underlie the lack of initiative of the Indonesian state in pushing the Saudi Arabian government for a bilateral agreement on minimum standards of work practices to protect Indonesian FDWs (Robinson 2000). She argued that the Indonesian state believes that Indonesian women working in the Middle East are safe. This view is based on the assumption that their security is guaranteed because of a shared religious identity with

their employers and the 'devoutly Muslim atmosphere of Saudi Arabia' (Robinson 2000: 255). This assumption that personal notions of obligations based on shared religious identities as opposed to formalised contractual agreements would define employer-employee relationships reflects the official view of the informality of paid domestic work.

The literature on the policies of host states, on the other hand, focuses on the repercussions of specific rules in contributing to the vulnerability of FDWs to exploitation. In most countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, Canada and the Middle-East, living-in with employers is compulsory for FDWs (Pratt 1999; Chin 1998; Wong 1996; Robinson 2000). Anderson (2000) noted that, although living-in with employers can be beneficial for new migrants in Europe who lack capital for shelter and food, in the long-term, living-in can be more disadvantageous to FDWs. Living-in allows employers to exercise personalistic idioms of power (power that is exercised through relations of dependence on individuals) because FDWs become dependent on employers not only for salaries but also for basic needs such as food, shelter and decent accommodation (Patterson cited in Anderson 2000: 6). Anderson argues that living-in arrangements enable employers to control every aspect of the domestic worker's life including the most basic of human requirements, such as food, baths, sleeping arrangements, receiving letters from home and clothes worn (Anderson 2000: 39-44). As shown in the previous section, employers manipulate access to these basic needs to control and subjugate FDWs. In addition, living-in contributes to the personalistic and privatised nature of paid domestic work thus masking on-going exploitative practices such as stretching of the workday despite institutionalised regulation on maximum hours per day. Pratt observed that this is commonly practised in Canada (Pratt 1999: 35).

Apart from criticisms on specific rules pertaining to the employment of FDWs, state programmes that facilitate the supply of FDWs have also come under criticism. For example, the Live-In Caregiver Program in Canada has been criticised for exploiting the underprivileged situation of Filipino and West Indian women who enter Canada with the aim of seeking 'landed status' for its racist and sexist overtones and for de-skilling them in the process (Pratt 1999; Arat-Koc 1992; Bakan and Stasiulis 1994).

The compulsory condition of completing two full years of live-in domestic service within the first three years of entering Canada before they are eligible to apply for landed status was criticised as ensuring a flow of cheap labour for domestic service. In addition, the programme exacerbates inequalities in access to citizenship rights between predominantly white and professional women employers and coloured immigrant women (Bakan and Stasiulis 1995). The compulsory two-year domestic employment is known to expose these women to mistreatment by employers because they feel compelled to put up with employers who purposefully flaunt provincial regulations that serve to protect their rights as workers, in order not to jeopardise their chances of attaining landed status (Pratt 1999: 41).

Moreover, federal law prohibits FDWs from pursuing educational courses while fulfilling the two-year requirement. Researchers have noted that this led many Filipino women to become trapped in domestic employment even after attaining landed status because they were deprived of an opportunity to acquire the qualifications they required for skilled employment in the Canadian labour market (Pratt 1999). Bakan and Stasiulis also noted that racial and gender biases against immigrant women seeking landed status via the LCP restrict their opportunities to seek alternative employment even when formal citizenship is obtained (Bakan and Stasiulis 1995: 315). This contributes to a process of de-skilling because most of these women are qualified as nurses, teachers, administrators, etc., in the Philippines prior to their arrival in Canada.

Researchers have also drawn attention to the insidious power of state policies that obligate employers to undertake paternalistic responsibilities for their FDWs. An example of such a policy is the compulsory security bond employers in Malaysia and Singapore have to lodge with state authorities for every FDW employed. In Malaysia, additional pecuniary penalties are imposed on employers whose FDWs terminate their employment contract prematurely, thereby restricting FDWs' abilities to escape abusive employers (Chin 1998). By deploying employers to become 'domestic spies' (see section above) these policies have proved to be an effective tool of state surveillance over FDWs to achieve the state's wider economic, social and political objectives. Employers cite the fear of losing this bond as the primary reason for

controlling their FDWs' freedom of movement and socialisation patterns (Yeoh and Huang 1996; Chin 1998; Dulce and Amba 1995).

Private recruitment agencies – FDWs relations

Private recruitment agencies are a significant feature of contemporary international labour migration. With links across international boundaries, they are a significant component of a complex group of intermediaries which also includes immigration officials, government bureaucrats, lawyers and travel operators. These intermediaries initiate and facilitate the temporary movements of labour across international borders (Hugo 1997; Castles and Miller 1998; Leitner 2000). Hugo has noted that in the Asia Pacific in particular, intermediaries are especially pervasive in facilitating ILM within and beyond Asia (Hugo 1997: 278).

Geographers have studied impacts of networks of linkages established between and within states on perpetuating labour migration. With the exceptions of Raghuram (1999), who examined roles of social networks in facilitating migration of rural women for paid domestic work in Delhi, India, and Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994), (she examined how undocumented Mexican immigrant women negotiate atomised labour relations by informally collectivising and sharing information through informal social networks), most research on networks and migration are in the context of ILM in general and not specifically of the migration of women as FDWs (Singhanetra-Renard 1992; Lindquist 1993; Spaan 1994; Goss and Lindquist 1995). In summary, researchers highlight the pervasiveness of informal networks, such as kinship and friendship and illegal networks of recruiters, in facilitating contemporary labour migration. Thus, despite the establishment of official government agencies to facilitate the recruitment and deployment of labour migrants, the process of contemporary ILM, including the migration of women for paid domestic work, is still dominated by informal networks of 'agents' (broadly defined). The relationships between migrants and these informal networks of agents are complex since patron-client and fictive kinship relations are frequently imbued with exploitative and profit seeking motives.

In the case of FDWs, private recruitment agencies play a pivotal role in facilitating the migration of women for overseas paid domestic work. Their primary functions in sending countries are to recruit and train FDWs whilst private recruitment agencies in destination countries market and place FDWs with prospective employers. Besides rendering administrative services and 'tailor-made' training, maid agencies are also expected to serve as intermediaries in cases of disputes between employers and FDWs (Alcid 1994; Medel-Anonueva et al 1994; Dias 1994; Bakan and Stasiulis 1995; Wong 1996; Chin 1997; Constable 1997). From this, it can be deduced that relationships between FDWs and private recruitment agencies are mediated by access to resources and to knowledge. With their extensive links within and across national boundaries and their knowledge of the bureaucratic procedures required in recruitment and deployment, maid agencies have considerable power.

Descriptive accounts of private recruitment agencies often highlight exploitative elements, such as over-charging, fraud and mistreatment of FDWs at training centres. These exploitative acts are attributed to the pervasiveness of unlicensed agencies, to high levels of corruption and to inefficiencies in the existing regulatory frameworks for monitoring and setting standards of practice for these agencies (Alcid 1994; Dias 1994; Chin 1997; Pratt 1999). Maid agencies are also noted for their role in creating, propagating and perpetuating national stereotypes of FDWs (Momsen 1999). These stereotypes are constructed for the purposes of marketing and promotions and are underpinned by employers' perception of perceived suitability for domestic work. These nationalised stereotypes are imbued with race/ethnicity, immigration/citizenship status, education, religious affiliation, culture and language ability and then create subordinated groups of women ascribed with inferior values (Macklin 1992; Bakan and Stasiulis 1995; Chin 1997; Stiell and England 1997; Stiell and England 1999; Huang and Yeoh 1998). The construction and effects of national stereotypes of FDWs in Singapore are discussed in Chapters 4.7 and 5.3.

These stereotypes and representations dominate popular consciousness and have potent impact on how FDWs are socially and spatially inscribed in their host nations. The different work conditions accorded FDWs of different nationalities are testimony to the potency of these constructed national stereotypes. In Canada, employers expect

or demand their Filipina caregivers to perform domestic work in addition to child caring and minding. British nannies, on the other hand, are not generally expected to do so reflecting entrenched values based on 'histories of neo-colonial and racist relations' that are perpetuated by practices of maid agencies when constructing national stereotypes (Pratt 1999: 39). In Singapore, it is general practice for Indonesian FDWs to work without rest days and to be paid lower wages than their Filipino counterparts who are on average given a fortnightly rest day and higher wages despite being employed to do the same job. This is because maid agents market Indonesians as cheap and docile, while they promote Filipinos as being superior because of their command of the English language and higher educational qualifications. They are thereby more expensive to hire (Huang and Yeoh 1998). National stereotypes of FDWs also reflect upon the material status of employers (Chin 1998; Huang and Yeoh 1998). This again reflect the potency of stereotypes propagated by maid agencies

Global economic structures – FDW relations

NGOs and migrant activists invoke structuralist explanations of international labour migration and argue that OCWs in general and FDWs in particular are exploited victims of the global capitalist economy. Within this paradigm, they argue that exploitation surrounding the recruitment, deployment and employment of FDWs is a heavy price to pay to serve the objectives of a national economy that is dictated by a foreign agenda. Unequal global capitalist development has led some countries to be continually dependent on the export of cheap labour to obtain foreign exchange earnings through remittances (Gibson et al 2001). In this argument, Filipino women as 'exploited victims' of a global capitalist economy, have no choice but to take on menial occupations overseas as FDWs because the domestic economic climate does not provide for adequate employment opportunities because of the 'position of the Philippines within the international global economic system as a source of raw materials and cheap labour' (Alcid 1994: 25). Gonzales' work in the Philippines also shows that the remittances of unskilled labour migrants are 'an integral part of sustaining the country's current growth' (Gonzales 1998: 78).

Free trade and export-oriented growth strategies are argued to contribute to the 'process of underdevelopment' in countries such as the Philippines, Mexico and Indonesia among others. This is because these countries have been overly reliant on the export of primary materials in the global market. However, commodity prices fluctuate and the terms of trade for them have declined through time, thus making it difficult for commodity exporting countries to sustain economic growth and facilitate long term planning. As a result, they become dependent on foreign aid from global institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) (Chin 1998; Gonzales 1998). These countries are also unable to make a successful shift to more skill-intensive and capital-intensive manufacturing because of their lack of local capital and technical know-how and their largely unskilled workforce (Ananta et al 1998; Chin 1998, Gonzales 1998). By exporting labour, they capitalise on the demand for unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled labour in countries with accelerated growth, such as, those in the Middle East during the Oil Boom and the Newly Industrialised Countries (NICs) like South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan and near NICs such as Malaysia and Thailand. They resort to exporting labour to service foreign debt, to sustain a reasonable economic growth and level of prosperity and to prevent social crises arising from high rates of unemployment, underemployment and poverty (Hugo 1997).

Apart from the significant economic contribution to their home country's macro-economic performance, migrant remittances are also an important source of income within the local economy. Regions with a high outflow of migrants enjoy a vibrant economy, especially in the areas of housing construction and small town and municipality businesses. At the household level, migrant remittances are an important source of income to fund childrens' education, small businesses, household expenditures, purchase of assets and consumer goods (Hugo 1995; Gonzalez 1998: 70–71; Sukamdi et al 2001). In Sri Lanka, import liberalisation policies introduced in the 1970s encouraged an increase in conspicuous consumption of consumer goods across class lines, inducing many of the poorly educated and unemployed, especially women, to capitalise on employment opportunities in menial occupations overseas to earn cash income to purchase consumer goods (Dias 1994).

In conclusion, overseas migration of women to work as FDWs has become a widely perceived necessity for underdeveloped countries not only for the country's macro-economic performance but also for its population to attain a reasonable quality of life at the household level. Inequalities in global economic structures have led to less developed economies which have traditionally been reliant on the export of primary commodities to increase their dependency on the export of unskilled and semi-skilled labour as OCWs to generate foreign exchange earnings. This economic necessity and the vulnerability of OCWs, especially women OCWs, to exploitation underscore the discourse of FDWs as 'exploited victims' of the global economy.

2.4 Contextualising relations – Foucault's notion of power.

The literature reviewed above elucidates various relations in which FDWs are entangled. Here, I contextualise these relations within Foucault's notion of power to illustrate their complexity and their effects. First, Foucault defines power as constituting a set of relations or a complex flow between different groups and areas in society that changes over time (Grosz 1990; Hindess 1996; Danaher et al 2000). Thus all the relations in which FDWs are entangled as described in section 2.2 can then be contextualised as power. Moreover, Foucault also argues that power runs through a 'large number of localities which are not homogeneously linked...' (Grosz 1990: 88). Research on FDWs and paid domestic servants in general indicates that FDWs are indeed engaged in power at various localities: employers' households; sending and hosting states; the maid industry and global economic structures.

A consideration of power in these 'localities' shows that it has multiple functions and may or may not be representative of one another. This conforms with Foucault's notion of power (Grosz 1990: 88). For example, the disciplinary techniques used by employers on FDWs do not necessarily only reflect the interests of state power over the control of population and the movement of FDWs. As the research reviewed above revealed, employers also control and discipline FDWs to ensure continued coercion and deference in order to establish and reinforce their superior status within the domestic realm. On the other hand, in countries such as Malaysia and Singapore,

employers also exert paternalistic authority on FDWs because they are obligated to do so by the state which imposes pecuniary penalties on employers who fail to ensure that FDWs observe the conditions of stay stipulated in their temporary work visas. Thus, employers' control and surveillance in these instances may also serve the state's wider economic, social and political objectives. However, their basis of control is based on the subjectification of FDWs as poor, vulnerable, backward and uncultured. These subjectivities are the simultaneous effects on the one hand of the production of discourses on FDWs by the maid industry in their marketing and promotion and also employers' and host society's framing of FDWs as the alien 'other' which, in turn, serve their own purposes.

A scrutiny of power in the various 'localities' also reveals that the exercise of power is not simply equated with one universal category, such as patriarchy or global capitalism. The various studies reviewed above show that patriarchy, global capitalism, racism and class discrimination have simultaneous impacts on the exercise of power which contributes to the subordination and subjectification of FDWs. Whilst not denying that social structures, such as patriarchy, for example, contribute to the oppression of women, Foucault emphasises the need to study the 'tactical utilisation of bodies and speech' or 'techniques of discipline'² and 'technologies'³ of government⁴ to gain a more comprehensive view of the workings of power and its effects (Grosz 1990: 88; Hindess 1996; Danaher et al 2000). The literature reviewed above shows that power works through discourses, state regulations, social and economic policies and disciplinary techniques employed by employers. The simultaneous effects of these exercises of power are the 'tactical utilisation of bodies and speech' of FDWs as an abundant, cheap and compliant labour supply for household reproduction.

² Discipline is defined by Foucault as a type of power 'exercised over one or more individuals in order to provide them with particular skills and attributes, to develop their capacity for self-control, to promote their ability to act in concert, to render them amenable to instruction, or to mould their characters in other ways' (Hindess 1996: 113).

³ Technologies refer to 'two main functions or mechanisms: first the ways in which societies pacify, dominate and regulate subjects; and second, technologies of the self which allow individuals to shape their own bodies and thought' (Danaher et al, 2000: xv).

⁴ Government refers 'particularly, to the use and invention of technologies for the regulation of conduct' (Hindess 1996: 106).

The role of the media in highlighting the negative social impacts of hosting FDWs, the commodification of FDWs by maid industries and the story-telling and information sharing among employers are all examples of how power works through discourse constructing and reinforcing the demeaning stereotypes of FDWs. Stereotypes constructed by maid agencies along the axes of gender, race/ethnicity, class and nationality for the purpose of promoting an 'ideal domestic worker' who serves the needs of middle-class households also contribute to the subjectification of FDWs as poor, docile and compliant women. As these stereotypes of FDWs are constructed along the axes of social relations of difference, such as class, race/ethnicity, gender and nationality, they also simultaneously (re)produce and reinforce stereotypes of these relations of difference. The employers' use of bodily disciplines and pastoral power on FDWs are examples of how power works through techniques of discipline, producing coercion and deference. However, constant coercion and deference resulting from these techniques also (re)produce and reinforce the low status of FDWs and of paid domestic work within the overall structure of societies. As reviewed in the previous section, state regulations and the social and economic policies of the sending and hosting states not only contribute to a continuous supply of women from less developed countries as a cheap source of domestic labour for labour-short advanced economies, but also to the stigma attached to the occupation and to the vulnerability of FDWs to exploitation. Thus the overall outcome of these 'technologies of government' and 'techniques of discipline' is the subordination and domination⁵ of the FDWs ideal for household reproduction.

Employing Foucault's notion of power, we can conceptualise the workings and effects of the various relationships in which FDWs are caught. From this perspective, we can see that the factors underscoring exploitation and mistreatment of FDWs are indeed complex. This provides a useful insight into the levels of efficiency of the various attempts to combat exploitation of FDWs. As has been argued above, a Foucauldian perspective does not equate power with a particular social structure, such as global capitalism or patriarchy or racism. Nor does it equate power to a specific social

⁵ Domination is defined as 'those asymmetrical relationships of power in which the subordinated persons have little room for manoeuvre because their margin of liberty is extremely limited' (Foucault 1988 cited by Hindess 1996: 102).

institution, such as the state, employer's family, and the maid industry. Rather, it serves to explain power as a 'historical system aligned across structures, institutions, rituals, practices and individual lives' to 'regulate, supervise, train, harness and confine the behaviours and subjectivities' of subjects (Grosz 1988: 88). Thus FDWs are caught in complex power web that may or may not serve a single function or purpose but which works simultaneously to achieve their subjectification as a docile, cheap and an inexhaustible supply of labour suitable for domestic work which culminates in their subordination and domination.

2.5 Resistance an essential insight into power

Foucault argues that resistance is an inevitable aspect of the exercise of power because the 'effective exercise of power need not imply the removal of liberty' (Hindess 1996: 101). Therefore, a comprehensive study of power should include the study of 'total structure of actions brought to bear' on the actions of others in particular cases, and of the resistances and evasions encountered by those actions (Foucault 1982 cited in Hindess 1996: 101). Within this perspective, FDWs and domestic workers as 'subjects of the effects of power' are also capable of engaging in the 'exercise of power on their own account' because they are themselves 'in a position to act on the actions of others' (Hindess 1996: 101).

The study of resistance by subordinated or dominated groups has shifted from a focus on collective violent uprisings and revolutions aimed at overthrowing systems and dominant ideologies to also encompass non-confrontational, fragmented and more ad hoc styles of resistance which are pervasive in everyday relations (Abu-Lughod 1990; Haynes and Prakash 1991; Constable 1997). Some examples of these non-violent forms of resistance identified by Scott, in his work on smallholders and landless labourers in Peninsular Malaysia are foot-dragging, discursive protests, ridicule, petty acts of non-compliance, sarcasm, dissimulation, and perseverance against overwhelming odds (Scott 1985).

Individual and collective strategies and styles by which FDWs in particular and domestic workers in general resist or cope with domination have been documented

before (for good reviews of studies in this area see Romero 1992; Constable 1997; Chin 1998; Yeoh and Huang 1998; Law 2002). Romero reviewed research which looked at 'reactive strategies to minimise subjugation and familiarity' (Romero 1992: 136). These works documented various strategies, such as attempts at maintaining the moral high ground *vis-à-vis* employers, participating in non-stigmatised roles in community activities, inculcating collective consciousness of the social inequalities that perpetuate the dominance of women of colour, and associating oneself with community, family, church and other organisations. Overall, these strategies aim to lessen 'the psychological damage of embracing employer's belief system' as well as maintaining 'psychological and material independence from employers in order to resist employers' tactics of using 'feminine characteristics to establish the relationship of benevolent maternalism that preserves racial, class and status difference' (Romero 1992: 138 & 136).

Romero also reviewed instances of strategies such as chicanery, confrontation, tricks, silence and mockery that are utilised by domestic workers to manipulate situations in which they are being degraded by employers (Romero 1992: 138-139). According to Romero, Dill (1979 and 1988) argued that domestics tactically employed deferential acts or 'to play the part expected of them' by white employers in order to 'fool' white employers while she noted that Cock (1980) supposed that domestics put on deferential acts as a 'protective disguise' to maintain their integrity and personalities intact (Romero 1992: 138-139). Thus, these researchers view domestics' displays of deferential acts as conscious strategies to manipulate employers and to lessen subjugation by defining what they would or would not give to employers in terms of time, commitment and personal involvement (all cited in Romero 1992: 138).

Romero criticised the above analyses of domestic workers' struggles for emphasising the dialectics of intimacy and domination and for obscuring the ways in which domestic workers actively resist exploitative work conditions. Inspired by research that documented domestic workers' efforts of re-structuring their work process, Romero cited ways in which Chicana domestic workers in America actively struggled to improve the structural aspects of their occupations. Some of the measures employed were: choosing to work for several employers instead of living-in with one employer;

specifying tasks; negotiating payments and benefits; minimising contacts with employers and, creating a business-like environment (Romero 1992). Moreover, Romero stressed that Chicana women's decisions to choose domestic work over other types of low-paying and low-status jobs is calculated taking into account factors such as the salary, flexibility, and the autonomy that this work would provide which can outweigh the stigma of the occupation (Romero 1992: 145-146). Thus, these strategies enable Chicana women to transform domestic work from just wage labour to an 'occupation involving labour services' (Romero 1992: 147). Romero argues that it is important to view domestic work 'as a specific instance of labour struggle' in order to conceive of a 'possibility for action and change to destigmatise housework and win for domestics the respect and rights due them as workers' (Romero 1992: 139).

In summary, while they are useful, the works above possess some shortcomings consistent with other criticisms of resistance studies. First, these works are based on a narrow perspective of the relations of power which underscore paid domestic work. For example, work that emphasised interpersonal relationships between employers and domestics excluded other types and sources of power and their effects in contributing to workers' domination and subordination. Whilst Romero linked exploitation and the stigma attached to paid domestic work and workers to a broader structural analysis of labour struggles, she tended to under-emphasise the effects of non-institutionalised forms of power such as discourse and the techniques of discipline used by employers in contributing to the stigma of the occupation and in depriving domestic workers of their rights. The less complex notion of power underpinning these works tend to 'romanticise resistance' and 'read all forms of resistance as signs of the ineffectiveness of power' (Abu Lughod 1990: 42).

In addition, the works discussed above are also more focused on reading the effectiveness of resistance and do not examine the subjective ambivalence inherent in resisters, the ambiguity of resistive acts, or why some domestic workers at times do not seem to resist domination. This conforms to Ortner's criticism that researchers do not account for ambivalence in resistance studies despite it being inherent in everyday relations (Ortner 1995: 176). On the other hand, works that recognise deferential acts often simply attribute them to conscious manipulations to 'trick' employers and to

lessen subjugation. This view of domestic workers simply being ‘cynical manipulators’ when resorting to deferential acts is consistent with Haynes and Prakash’s criticism of Scott’s assumption that landless labourers in Peninsular Malaysia display social deference to landlords as a deliberate and calculative act. Haynes and Prakash emphasise that Scott failed to ignore ‘how such acts are necessarily conditioned by hegemony’ thus subscribing to ‘the concept of the self-determining subject’ by assuming autonomous consciousness (Haynes and Prakash 1991: 11). They find this problematic because ‘contradictory consciousness’ is inherent in any given hegemony and ‘may coexist in the outlooks both of single individuals and of groups’ (Haynes and Prakash 1991: 11).

Later works documenting the ways in which domestic workers resist certain aspects and effects of power take a broader view of power and of the means in which it underscores paid domestic work. For example, Yeoh and Huang, in viewing the negotiations between FDWs and the host society in relation to the use of public space in Singapore, posit that FDWs display certain styles and have certain strategies that challenge the dominant discourse of the ‘fixity of their identities as workers, domestics and aliens that (sic) have no place in public space’ (Yeoh and Huang 1998: 599). Yeoh and Huang noted that the cumulative effects of the actions of individual FDWs in ‘re-immersing themselves in their native culture’ and individual strategies that may not necessarily be deliberate acts of defiance but more an outcome of habitual practice led to ‘routinised colonisation’ of public space such as parks and shopping malls on Sundays showing that the ‘place of the “other” need not always be a position of weakness’ (Yeoh and Huang 1998: 598-599). However, they also emphasised that these strategies and styles do not always ‘invert, invade or annihilate the self-other boundary’ and acknowledged the more complex social relations that underpin the construction of this boundary (Yeoh and Huang 1998: 599).

Similarly, Chin documented ‘infrapolitical activities’⁶ by FDWs in Malaysia such as foot dragging, feigning illness, smearing employers’ possessions with blood, and

⁶ Chin defines ‘infrapolitical activities’ as the politics of the marginalised or subordinate groups such as peasants, slaves and servants. She notes that infrapolitical activities are not openly expressed mainly because of the existing power imbalances that inhere in the dyadic relationships of the master-slave, landowner-peasant, and employer-domestic worker.

dressing and acting differently on rest days as means of challenging the conditions under which their labour is extracted by the dominant party (Chin 1998). In addition, she emphasised that these activities were also employed to contest processes of identity construction 'of which the symbolic and material dimensions of class are intertwined with gender, race/ethnicity, religion and nationality' (Chin 1998: 126). However, she questioned the overall effectiveness of these activities in contesting employer-constructed identities since they could backfire and further strengthen negative representations of foreign domestic workers in and through the dominant discourse of paid domestic work as narrated by the dominant party (Chin 1998: 126).

Whilst these works acknowledge the more complex workings of power and its effects (e.g., power exercised through discourse as illustrated in Chin's research and the effect of contestation over the use and 'colonisation' of public space in challenging the 'self other boundary' in Yeoh and Huang's work), they focus on the effects of acts of non-compliance and overlook deference/compliance or deliberate attempts by FDWs to conform to idealised images and identities of FDWs in the host states.

Constable (1997) noted in her work on Filipino FDWs in Hong Kong that the issue of social and psychological accommodation in paid domestic service is seldom pursued beyond reducing it to an illustration of the relative powerlessness of the workers and the inherent inequalities underlying paid domestic service. She criticised earlier works that focused on deferential behaviour for reading it as either a 'successful' style of resistance or a cultural adaptation to resist domination. For example, citing the works of Rollins (1985) and Cock (1980) on African American domestics, Constable noted that deference is read as a coping mechanism or a cultural adaptation to a powerless position *vis-à-vis* employers in order to decrease the performer's sense of exploitation (Constable 1997: 204). On the other hand, she noted that Scott reads deferential behavior as conscious resistance to domination and as something that is tactically employed to manipulate the dominant party.

Drawing on data from ethnographic fieldwork in Hong Kong, Constable noted that Filipino FDWs neither simply resist oppression nor accept it, thus they are neither 'simply passive objects of oppression nor are they active subjects who successfully

control themselves and their labour' (Constable 1997: 13). Constable noted various ways in which Filipino FDWs resisted certain types of control, such as seeking legal recourse and actively demonstrating against unfair rules and policies. She also highlighted subtler forms of resistance such as confronting employers personally, overt cultural expressions on rest days, and the use of jokes, humour and languages employed by Filipino FDWs. Whilst noting that, in some instances, these acts do help to set limits to employers' domination and to challenge the host society's derogatory attitude towards them, Constable also highlighted the ambiguity of some of these 'subtler forms of resistance'. For example, she noted that jokes told neither teach domestic workers to resist and disobey employers nor to be submissive and subordinate (Constable 1997: 178). Constable also avoided 'romanticising resistance', noting that the overall success of Filipino FDWs in improving the structure of domestic work and reputation of domestic workers is extremely limited (Constable 1997: 179). Whilst highlighting that FDWs express frustration over the types of control imposed upon them in Hong Kong, such as bodily discipline, Constable noted that jokes also convey the more positive aspects of life in Hong Kong, as involving humour and pleasure (Constable 1997: 179).

Despite active attempts to resist control such as those discussed above, Constable noted that Filipino FDWs also contribute to their own subordination by imposing self-discipline such as professionalising their image at a cost of becoming more obedient and compliant (Constable 1997: 108). However, Constable also pointed out that dismissing these deferential acts as 'cultural struggles'⁷ misses 'an important point that the types of professionalism promoted by Filipinas would generate the ideal domestic worker desired by employers and agencies' (Constable 1997: 197) thus acknowledging the subjective ambivalence of the subordinated and the 'contradictory consciousness' inherent in any given hegemony (see the critique by Haynes and Prakash (1991) above). She noted that, although Filipino FDWs are aware of existing power structures underscoring their employment, they also desire to be treated with greater moral and personal consideration, empathy and fairness. They believe that these cannot be

⁷ Here Constable borrowed the term from Aihwa Ong to describe struggles over cultural meanings, values and goals (Aihwa Ong 1991 cited in Constable 1997: 197).

demanded through loud protest but are something they must earn by complying with rules (Constable 1997: 201).

Whilst not discounting that the discourse of accommodation adopted by Filipino FDWs is underpinned by the economic necessity of Filipino FDWs and/or strengthened by moral encouragement from friends and families and their religious faith, Constable argues that the issue of accommodation, passivity and acquiescence should not be simply dismissed (Constable 1997: 201). By taking into account the accommodation and deference displayed by Filipino FDWs and not simply interpreting their acts as 'cynical manipulation' or 'cultural coercion', Constable was able to provide a more nuanced reading of 'resistance':

domestic workers who accommodate to the demands of their work or "put on" deferential behaviour for their employers are not simply "cynical manipulators". They are both exerting power and simultaneously being dominated by it. This understanding of a domestic worker's behaviour, whether consciously deferential or unconscious but "necessarily conditioned by hegemony," forces us to alter our view of the larger picture of power.

(Constable 1997: 210)

Ortner (1995) posits that resistance is a 'useful category' because 'it highlights the presence and play of power in most forms of relationship and activity' (p 175). I agree with Abu Lughod (1990) and Ortner (1995) that the value of resistance study lies in its acknowledgement of the complexity of the workings of power and its effects. In examining the actions of the subordinate in 'resisting' power and domination, it is important not to 'romanticise resistance' but instead to be sensitive to the ambivalence displayed by 'resistors', as well as the ambivalence inherent in 'resistive acts', in order to have a richer insight into 'forms of power and how people are caught up in them' (Abu Lughod 1990: 42). I will return to this topic in Chapter 7 when discussing the ambivalence evident in collective 'resistance' displayed by Indonesian FDWs in Singapore.

2.6 FDWs as active subjects of migration

As discussed above, employing a more complex perspective of power such as that put forward by Foucault, provides a useful theoretical framework for understanding the complexity of the relations underscoring domination and subordination in paid domestic work as well as for accounting for the actions and voices of the subordinate. Examining 'resistance' provides a framework for the elucidation of the actions and voices of FDWs thus not dismissing them simply as passive victims of global capitalism, patriarchy, racism or class discrimination. However, as argued above, a more nuanced reading of resistance is also necessary in order not to 'romanticise' resistance and thus to oversimplify the dynamics of power underscoring the subordination and domination of FDWs.

Whilst, researchers have explored power relations in the context of FDWs who are caught in various localities, such as employers' houses, the sending and hosting states, the maid industry and the structure of the global economy, these studies are either not contextualised within migration studies or, even if they are, they are often inadequately theorised. Research on FDWs in migration studies has been limited to descriptive accounts of procedures and processes and not located within a particular body of theory. Studies conducted along this vein provide empirical accounts of exploitative practices in migration, of the economic impacts of migration and policy frameworks on labour migration (Heyzer et al 1994; Sukamdi et al 2000; Wickramasekara 2001). In addition, studies focusing on political-economic perspectives of the migration of FDWs and motivation of individual migrants tend to employ functionalist and structuralist explanations (Dias 1994; Chin 1998; Sukamdi et al 2001). These two bodies of theory have various epistemological and empirical shortcomings (next section) and thus would fail to account for more complex factors that initiate, perpetuate and shape migration flows of FDWs. On the other hand,

studies on FDWs that employ a more sophisticated theorising of human behaviour and take into account more complex notions of power are generally located outside the field of migration studies. These studies are, for example, more focused on looking at the issues of identity and power as negotiated between employers and FDWs and between FDWs and the host society in general (Section 2.3).

One of the objectives of this thesis is to look at how individual Indonesian FDWs exert power to negotiate the relations of domination-subordination within the context of a migration study (Chapter 1). Goss and Lindquist (1995) have proposed the 'migrant institution' as a theoretical framework within which to examine migration and to overcome the shortcomings of functionalist and structuralist explanations. Acknowledging the merits of this framework in providing for a more sophisticated perspective of international labour migration, I also note its usefulness in examining relations of domination-subordination and power from the perspective of migrants in the context of migration study. In the next section, I summarise shortcomings of functionalist and structuralist explanations of labour migration highlighting the need for an alternative theoretical framework.

2.7 Functionalist and structuralist explanations – a polarisation in structure and agency.

Functionalist explanations

Neo-classical economics and new economics of migration perspectives fall within functionalist explanations of labour migration. These explanations are based on push-pull theories of migration and emphasise the tendency of people to move from low wage to high wage areas. Neo-classical economics posits that geographic differences in wages brought about by the uneven distribution of returns to factors of production induce people to move with the aim of earning higher incomes. This explains why people move from rural areas to urban areas and from developing countries to developed countries in search of work. Neo-classical economics posits that individuals are economically rational and migrate in the expectation of a positive net return after weighing the costs and benefits of moving. Within this model, social process is seen as

an outcome of the aggregate of individual actions (for a detailed overview see Massey et al 1993: 432-436).

Unlike the neoclassical perspective, with its emphasis on the individual, the new economics of migration model considers a larger group of people as a unit of analysis. It posits that the decision to migrate is not based solely on an individual's decision but rather on a group of related people, like the extended family unit or the household unit. Within this model, a movement is undertaken not only to maximise potential returns in terms of wages but also to diversify household income sources and to minimise risks such as crop failure, a fall in crop prices and an inability to carry out household productive activities due to the deterioration of local economic conditions. Undertaking paid employment away from home may also be a strategy to accumulate savings for future capital investment. This is especially the case for rural households where borrowing through formal channels is difficult because of a scarcity of lending capital and a lack of collateral (for a detailed overview see Massey et al 1993: 437-438).

Structuralist explanations

Structuralist explanations focus on the influences and impacts of the political-economic structures between sending and receiving states in determining labour migration levels. These approaches emphasise the potency of capitalist development for influencing labour migration by drawing upon historical developments of the global penetration of capital and its impacts on relations of production. Structuralist explanations emphasise 'pull' factors as governing the movement of people to fulfil the labour requirements of capitalist development as opposed to rational decisions of individuals, households and extended family groups who are driven by 'push' factors and who move in search of higher wages and/or to minimise economic risks. Structuralist explanations highlight the unequal and exploitative relationship between the capitalist and labouring classes which are brought about by factors inherent in present global economic structures. One merit of structuralist explanations is that they relate population movement to historical transformations of social groups. Thus economic and political barriers are recognised and class relations are highlighted. In

addition, structuralist explanations emphasise and reinforce the dynamics of class tensions and highlight exploitative relationships between capital owners and labour power within capitalist social relations. In summary, structuralist explanations draw upon neo-Marxist dependency theory, dual labour market theory, world systems theory and modes of production theory (for detailed overview see Massey et al 1993 and Goss and Lindquist 1995).

Shortcomings of structuralist and functionalist approaches and alternative frameworks

In summary, both functionalist and structuralist explanations focus on political-economic structures and conditions and on their impacts in initiating migrant flows. Whilst, empirical studies have found these explanations useful for analysing migration (for detailed overview see Massey et al 1994 and Massey et al 1998), critiques have highlighted their epistemological and empirical shortcomings (Halfacree and Boyle 1993; Moon 1995; Goss and Lindquist 1995; Leitner 2000). Here, I summarise a few of the main criticisms. Firstly, these two approaches are underpinned by a simplistic view of human behaviour. Human agents are viewed solely as economically rational subjects in functionalist explanations or as passive subjects whose actions are secondary to political-economic structures in structuralist explanations. Secondly, the larger social and cultural contexts in which migrant decision-making occurs are not accounted for. Thirdly, functionalist explanations tend to focus on human agency while structuralist explanations tend to focus on larger political-economic structures in their analysis thus leading to an artificial polarisation of the two in the theorizing of labour migration.

From the above, it can be deduced that both structuralist and functionalist explanations, whilst having some value for explaining labour migration have a narrow concept of the role of human agency and do not accommodate a more sophisticated articulation of agency and structure in their analysis. Over the years, scholars have identified the potency of migrant networks which span sending and receiving states in shaping and sustaining migration flows (Massey et al 1987; Boyd 1989; Fawcett 1989; Gurak and Caces 1992; Singhanetra-Renard 1992; Lindquist 1993; Spaan 1994; Goss

and Lindquist 1995; Hugo 1998). Scholars have studied the role of migrant networks from various perspectives such as looking at: the ways in which they facilitate migration; their impacts on selectivity of migrants; their influences on facilitating adaptation in destination countries; and also their evolution (for detailed overview see Boyd 1989 and Gurak and Caces 1992).

Studies on migrant networks provide a more integrative perspective of impacts of structures and agency on migration. This is because networks are conceived of as mechanisms that link places through interpersonal and commercial ties which in turn are impacted upon by social, economic and political structures at the local, national and international levels. These studies have also inspired the conceptualisation of migration systems whereby migration is conceived of as the outcome of the interactions and linkages of various systems located in distant places. These systems constitute macro structures that are made up of networks of formal and large scale institutional factors such as global political-economic structures, inter-state relationships, state regulations and laws and micro structures that consist of informal networks and practices such as individual and inter-familial relationships (Fawcett 1989; Kritz and Zlotnik 1992).

However, despite an integration of structure and human agency in their analyses, studies of migrant networks are also plagued with epistemological and empirical shortcomings such as the difficulty of finding a suitable level of empirical analysis and theorising the interconnectedness of micro-level factors and macro-level factors (for a detailed overview see Goss and Lindquist 1995). Thus the main criticism is their failure to conceive of the operation of networks 'as social entities beyond the sum of the individual relationships of which they are constituted', hence their inability 'to coherently articulate structure and agency' (Goss and Lindquist 1995: 331).

2.8 The migrant institution

Acknowledging the shortcomings of the above approaches, Goss and Lindquist proposed the 'migrant institution' as an alternative theoretical framework in place of the concept of migrant networks. Based on Giddens' structuration theory, the purpose

of the 'migrant institution' framework is to 'articulate in a nonfunctionalist way the individual migrant and the global economy' through 'conceptualising social relations that span across time and space bringing together the potential migrant and the overseas employer' (Goss and Lindquist 1995: 335). Drawing on the key ideas contained in Giddens' structuration theory, such as: the notion of institution as 'sedimented' practices; the concepts of agency and structure; the effects of the operation of rules and resources as modes of transformative relations incorporated into the production and reproduction of social practices; the strategic actions of individuals; and time-space distanciation, Goss and Lindquist define the migrant institution as:

a complex articulation of rules and resources which presents constraints and opportunities to individual action. Individuals act strategically within the institution to further their interests, but the capacity for such action is differentially distributed according to knowledge of rules and access to resources, which in turn may be partially determined by their position within other social institutions...[I]ndividuals draw selectively on institutional rules and resources in pursuit of their interests and inevitably reproduce the social system. As potential migrants, returned migrants, patrons, and institutional agents draw upon rules and resources of diverse social institutions, it is thus that their practices become institutionalised, that social networks become migrant networks and ultimately migrant institutions

(Goss and Lindquist 1995: 345).

Goss and Lindquist have effectively employed the migrant institution as a theoretical framework to articulate structure and agency in conceptualising the interactions among networks of agents in the Philippines which bring about international labour migration. Within this framework, Goss and Lindquist conceive potential migrants from the Philippines as knowledgeable agents who 'employ their understanding of rules and exploit their access to allocative and authoritative resources' to secure overseas employment (1995: 335). Using Giddens' key ideas of structuration theory, the migrant institution framework is indeed useful in examining impacts of individual behaviours in the context of their interaction with other human actors without compromising the impacts of institutional structures that operate across time and space in initiating, perpetuating and shaping migration flows. Moreover, this framework also accommodates a more complex perspective of human agency/action, with its

acknowledgement of a practical consciousness which underlies individual behaviours (next section). Its concept of institutional rules also provides a less simplistic account of human actors not as merely economically rational subjects but instead as accommodating local social and cultural factors in influencing behaviours and conduct.

I will utilise this framework in Chapter 6 to examine relations of domination-subordination within the migrant institution in Singapore and how individual migrants exert 'power' in negotiating these relations. In the next section, I outline the key ideas of Giddens' structuration theory that underpins the 'migrant institution' framework and elucidate its concepts of relations of domination-subordination and power.

2.9 Giddens' structuration theory and the concept of power

The main objective of Giddens' structuration theory is to overcome both the emphasis on the influence of structures on human action in functionalism and structuralism and the focus on 'action and meaning' in interpretative sociologies when explaining human conduct (Giddens 1984: 2). Thus Giddens aims to formulate a social theory that coherently articulates structure and agency by specifying the concepts of 'action, meaning and subjectivity' and relating these to 'notions of structure and constraint' (Giddens 1984: 2). The structuration perspective conceives of human social activities as continually being recreated by social actors via the very means whereby they express themselves as actors. It is through these activities that agents reproduce the conditions that make these activities possible (Giddens 1984:2). This concept of the duality of structure is central to Giddens's structuration perspective and underpins his attempt at formulating a theoretical account that 'deals simultaneously with people constituting society and the social formation of human agents' (Archer 1990: 73). By this duality of structure, Giddens posits structures as being both constraining and enabling of social action and as both the medium and the outcome of social practices. Therefore, duality of structure does not view agency and structure as 'two independently given sets of phenomena' (Giddens 1984: 25).

Giddens defines structures not as reified forces that underscore the patterning of social relations and phenomena but as consisting of rules and resources. Rules of social life are defined as 'techniques or generalizable procedures applied in the enactment/reproduction of social practices' (Giddens 1984: 21). These 'techniques' or 'generalisable procedures' include the 'constitution of meaning', whereby individuals draw upon structures of signification and also 'sanctioning of modes of social conduct', in which individuals draw upon structures of legitimation (Giddens 1985: 18; Goss and Lindquist 1995: 331). Giddens argues that 'most of the rules implicated in the production and reproduction of social practices are only tacitly grasped by actors' [thus] 'trivial procedures followed in daily life have a more profound influence upon the generality of social conduct' (Giddens 1984: 22). However, Giddens also acknowledges the significance of both formally codified rules, such as laws, and informally codified rules, such as social sanctions, which individuals apply in daily practices (Giddens 1984: 23). On the other hand, resources consist of allocative resources or material resources, such as property and wealth, and authoritative resources or non-material resources that 'generate command over persons or actors' (Giddens 1984: 33). Both these types of resources are involved in the generation of power. Since rules are never conceptualised separately from resources, institutionalised structures stretching across space and time express forms of relations of domination-subordination and power (Giddens 1984: 18).

Giddens claims that human action occurs as 'duree', or a continuous flow of conduct and asserts that it cannot be discussed in 'separation from the body, its mediations with the surrounding world and the coherence of an acting self' (Giddens 1984: 3). Human actors are agents who are knowledgeable about the social rules of life which they apply in the production and reproduction of day-to-day social encounters (Giddens 1984: 22). However, this knowledge, according to Giddens' stratification model of human action, is distributed at three levels of consciousness: the unconscious where it cannot be articulated, practical consciousness, where it 'can be exploited to provide a rationale for action but cannot be verbalised', and discursive consciousness where it can be expressed by human actors (Giddens 1984: 7; Goss and Lindquist 1995: 332).

Giddens conceives individual actions as purposeful and hence always intentional. However, these actions also produce unintended consequences which, in turn, become the unacknowledged conditions of the actions of others. Social action is 'therefore a complex product composed of the unacknowledged conditions of action and unintended consequences' (Goss and Lindquist 1995: 332). In summary, recursive actions and interactions of agents, in realising their goals, employing their knowledge of social rules and accessing resources, constitute social practices. These practices are sedimented over time and space forming an institution which, in turn, constitutes a social system.

Like Foucault, Giddens conceives of power as something that is not simply possessed by a person, a group or a body of authority but which exists in action. Whilst Foucault views power as constituting a 'complex flow and set of relations between different groups and areas of society which changes with circumstances and time' (Danaher et al 2000: xiv), Giddens views power as inherent in individual action in the context of social interactions. This is because he considers that individual action possesses 'transformative capacity' in the sense of the concept of duality of structure outlined above. Individuals, as knowledgeable agents, not only draw upon resources but also reproduce them in the course of interactions (Giddens 1984: 15). Thus power presumes 'regularised relations of autonomy and dependence between actors and collectivities in contexts of social interaction' (Giddens 1984: 16). 'Knowledge and social contacts are circumscribed accordingly' because individuals are located in time-space, not only in terms of physical location, but also in terms of social positions (Giddens 1984 cited by Goss and Lindquist 1995: 340) thereby producing structures of domination in social institutions and relations of dependence. However, like Foucault, Giddens asserts that the subordinated are not always entirely powerless. While Foucault justifies this through his concept of resistance as inherent in the exercise of power and as an 'ubiquitous feature of human interaction' (Section 2.4), Giddens postulates the 'dialectic of control' in social relations and interactions, whereby he asserts that all forms of dependence offer some resources. Hence the subordinate has the capability to influence the activities of their superior and to have an impact upon the flow of events and affairs (Giddens 1984: 16).

In summary, within Giddens' structuration theory, the concept of power is logically tied to agency (Outhwaite 1990: 65). This is because a human actor ceases to be an agent if he or she loses the capability to 'make a difference' to a pre-existing state of affairs or course of events (Giddens 1984: 14). Thus, 'actions' of human agents provide them with agency since it is through their actions that they exert power. Structuration theory also posits that relations of domination-subordination are tied to the different locations of human actors in time-space which influence and determine their practical knowledge and understanding of rules and access to resources. However, Giddens argues, through his concept of 'dialectic of control' that human actors are able to access and release resources through social interactions and by applying institutionalised rules. In doing so, human actors are exerting 'power' or agency because both their 'reflexive monitoring of action[s]'⁸ and the 'unintended consequences' of their actions form and condition social practices that are (re)produced across space and over time to form an institution. These are the key concepts of Giddens' structuration theory that I will apply in Chapter 6 to examine how individual Indonesian FDWs exert 'power' in negotiating relations of domination-subordination within the migrant institution in Singapore.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the literature on FDWs describing the various relationships in which they are entangled. It then contextualised these relations in terms of Foucault's notion of power to elucidate the complexity of power structures and their effects in underscoring the subordination and domination of FDWs. Because resistance is inherent in Foucault's notion of power, I also critically analysed the development of 'resistance' study and argued that its significance and usefulness lie in its ability to demonstrate the complexity of the power in which subjects are caught. I also highlighted the importance of having a more nuanced reading of 'resistance' in achieving this objective. This forms the theoretical framework for Chapter 7, where I examine collective resistance of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore and discuss it in

⁸ Reflexive monitoring of action is defined as the 'purposive, or intentional, character of human behaviour, considered within the flow of activity of the agent; action is not a string of discrete acts, involving an aggregate of intentions, but a continuous process.' (Giddens 1984: 376).

relation to the complex power that underscores their subordination and domination in Singapore.

Then, I noted that research on FDWs within the context of migration studies is focused on providing descriptive accounts of processes and issues relating to international labour migration. Those that are located within a certain theoretical framework are limited to utilising structuralist and functionalist explanations. I then described the 'migrant institution' espoused by Goss and Lindquist as an alternative theoretical framework for migration research and outlined key aspects of Giddens' structuration theory that have been drawn upon by Goss and Lindquist in formulating this framework. Acknowledging its usefulness and merits in conceptualising a more sophisticated account of interactions between the networks of agents of international labour migration in the Philippines, I also noted that it could be used as a framework to examine how individual Indonesian FDWs exert power in negotiating relations of domination-subordination in the migrant institution in Singapore (Chapter 6). In the following chapter, I describe the methods employed in data collection for this thesis.

CHAPTER 3

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Introduction

The topic of this research was inspired by my personal observation of the ubiquity of Indonesian women working as live-in domestic workers in Singapore. A preliminary literature search indicated that there was a very limited amount of material available on Indonesian FDWs relative to that on Filipino FDWs. When I first embarked on this research, I was interested in examining the role of social networks in shaping the migration patterns of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore and in conditioning their experiences in that country. However, while undertaking fieldwork and data analysis and as a result of further reading, issues of power and resistance became more central to my interest.

I rely on two sources of data, primary and secondary to construct my understanding of the workings of the maid industry, the issues surrounding the employment of FDWs in Singapore and, most importantly, to gain an insight into the individual and collective power of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore. The main part of the fieldwork was conducted over a period of eight months from January 1999 to August 1999 in Singapore. I also went back to Singapore for two short trips to conduct further interviews in order to clarify details and elicit new information. I also used these visits to catch up and maintain ties with some of the women who I had contacted in my initial interview phase and who have regular rest days. In this chapter, I outline sources of data and justify their use in this thesis and the methods used in their collection.

3.1 Multi-methods approach

Mixed methods approach to the study of migration has become essential in response to challenges of contemporary social theory incorporated in migration research (Findlay and Li 1999). There are strong links between theory, conceptualisation of research objectives, data analysis/interpretation, use of data and methods. Graham

(1999) argues that methods 'take significance, and indeed meaning, from the philosophical and theoretical contexts in which they are employed' (p. 86). Multi-method research encompasses the techniques used in data collection, the richness of data sources and the cross-fertilisation of insights in addressing different aspects of the same research question (McKendrick 1999).

This thesis employs 'multi-method' approach in order to examine power, the theme of this thesis, from various perspectives. In addition to adopting a humanistic approach in examining power i.e. documenting both individual and collective power of Indonesian FDWs, this thesis also adopts a realist examination of power i.e. documenting the power structures that dominate Indonesian FDWs as temporary labour migrants in Singapore. Thus the objectives of this thesis require the use of qualitative data drawn from both primary and secondary sources using various methods as will be described in greater detail in the following sections. Moreover, the two bodies of theory, Foucault's notion of power and Giddens' structuration perspective that are used as frameworks for analysing and conceptualising these various aspects of power, entail the use of both primary and secondary data.

Primary data consist of interviews with Indonesian FDWs, maid agents and various others individuals such as an official at the Indonesian Consulate (KBRI), a mosque volunteer and the secretariat of a migrant NGO. Various techniques were employed in the collection of primary data namely in-depth and one-on-one interviews, participant observation of Indonesian FDWs and telephone interviews. The two main sources of primary data utilised in this thesis are derived from ethnographic fieldwork with Indonesian FDWs and in-depth interviews with maid agents. Ethnographic fieldwork has been recognised by many researchers as an effective and essential research method in migration study in order to achieve objectives that depart from the positivist tradition of migration research (Boyle, Halfacree and Robinson 1998; Findlay and Li 1999; McHugh 2000). Ethnographic fieldwork conducted with Indonesian FDWs provides primary data needed for a qualitative analysis of individual and collective power of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore. On the other hand, in-depth interviews with maid agents gleaned useful information in understanding the institutionalised

structures of the maid industry thus providing an insight into aspects of structural powers that dominate Indonesian FDWs.

Secondary data used in this thesis includes reports from newspaper and other media sources and a report published by the KBRI. Newspaper articles from Singapore, in particular those published in *The Straits Times*, the English language daily, were important secondary materials especially for examining development of relevant national policies and keeping up to date with public debates surrounding employment of FDWs and Indonesian FDWs in Singapore. Other Singaporean newspapers cited in this thesis were the *Berita Harian*, the Malay daily, *The Electric New Paper*, an afternoon tabloid. Articles from other newspapers in the region are also cited in this thesis. Newspaper reports enabled me to situate the migrants' experiences within the wider social, political and cultural context of Singapore thus providing an insight into the overall power structures impacting upon their lives. During the course of my fieldwork, I conducted searches for relevant newspaper articles on the databases of the Singapore Press Holdings at Times House, Singapore. Upon my return to Perth, I kept updated on relevant news stories through the Asiaone.com Web Page of Singapore Press Holdings.

The report published by the KBRI was an important document to assess the services provided by the KBRI and its perspective of the main issues confronting Indonesian FDWs in Singapore. It offers a window into the institutional power of the sending state in governing the lives of Indonesian FDWs. In addition, I also use two episodes of current affairs programmes, *Maids in Love* and *Pembantu rumah Indonesia*, which were produced in Singapore as supporting data in this thesis. These episodes discuss contemporary issues and problems confronted by FDWs and Indonesian FDWs as perceived by the host society thus again providing an understanding of the wider social and cultural context of the power structures in which Indonesian FDWs are caught. In the next section, I describe interview sampling and techniques of interview employed during fieldwork.

3.2 Interviewing FDWs – sampling

When I first started fieldwork, my main concern was how to access and to make contact with Indonesian FDWs. This is because their movements are usually very restricted by employers and they are almost always within their controlling gaze. Furthermore, those women who enjoy rest days often only receive them once a fortnight or once a month and as this time is very precious to them, I was therefore very conscious that they may not wish to devote much time to a nosy stranger/researcher like myself who was very keen to know the histories of their migration, their motivations and aspirations. I thought the best way to break into their circle was through personal recommendations.

My interview sample was based on snowballing techniques. I began by utilising my family and social networks to identify possible Indonesian FDWs as respondents. These maids then introduced me to their own social networks. Although snowball sampling has been criticised for its potential of being biased and thus unrepresentative, it has been recognised as a useful means of providing access to respondents who are difficult to reach (Atkinson and Flint 2001). In the case of my research, snowball sampling gave me the opportunity to conduct interviews with Indonesian FDWs who were not granted regular rest days and who hardly ever ventured beyond the confines of their employers' homes.

Personal recommendations also facilitated my ability to get to know women who did enjoy the privilege of rest days. These recommendations made it a lot easier for me to set up appointments to meet these women and made it less awkward for me to spend time with them and their friends on their rest days to conduct participant observation. In total, I interviewed 45 women with eight women being my key informants who were interviewed on several occasions during fieldwork. Although qualitative technique sampling cannot be representative as it is often only based on a small sample, this technique is useful in undertaking humanistic approach in migration research whereby the main research objectives are to valorise human experience by seeking to understand the meaning, value and human significance of events (McKendrick 1999: 45). However, to ensure a broad cross-section of maids and

document information from women with varying experience, I deliberately chose respondents from diverse backgrounds. I chose maids who were employed by employers of other racial backgrounds than my own/my family and those with and without rest days. Length of employment and frequency of rest days were also taken into account when selecting maids.

3.3 Interviewing FDWs – objectives and techniques employed

Developing rapport and trust and participant observation

Developing rapport and trust with respondents are very important when using qualitative techniques and are not necessarily easy in cross-cultural situations. In my case, I found it easy to build a rapport and a relationship of trust with the maids because of our shared religious and ethnic backgrounds. I am Malay/Muslim while almost all the maids in my sample are Javanese/Muslims. In addition, I am also fluent in *Bahasa Indonesia*, the spoken language of all Indonesian FDWs. Shared religious identity with the women also provided me with a level of understanding when they spoke about the problems of living in non-Muslim households and I sometimes found myself playing the role of a sympathetic listener. The relationship in the field was not always one-way because the women were also very interested to know about me. The young migrants were especially interested about my status as an overseas student in a foreign country and this led them to speak about their aspirations to travel and to further their studies or of their failure to further their own studies because of pressing economic conditions at home. Being a foreigner living in a strange country was another shared experience between these women and myself. This facilitated conversations about culture shock and everyday social relations with a host society.

The main topics explored in the interviews were:

- Personal and family backgrounds
- Underlying motive for seeking employment in Singapore
- Means through which maid secures employment contracts in Singapore
- Work experience in Singapore and other overseas destination
- Network of contacts and friends in Singapore

- Aspects of maid's life beyond their work and their employers' homes
- The benefits and disbenefits they had gained from overseas employment
- Maid's future plans and aspirations

The above topics acted as a guide to prompt questions to encourage the respondents to share their migration histories and experience and not as a rigid set of topics which respondents had to answer. Depending on respondents, some interviews covered more topics than others and produced more information in certain areas than others.

I conducted one-on-one interviews at employers' homes or at void decks of employers' homes. I made sure that interviews were conducted in private. For example, in cases where employers' were at home, interviews were conducted in a separate room without the presence of employers. Most times I arranged for interviews when employers were not at home for example during office hours. Interviews often began by asking respondents to describe their migration process, their motivation to seek work in Singapore and family backgrounds before approaching the more sensitive topic such as job satisfaction, level of freedom in Singapore and relationship with employers. The interviews were usually one to three hours in length. I usually did not interview those women to whom I was introduced on rest days at our first meeting unless they were pressed for time. This is because the infrequency of rest days made it very precious to them and I respected their need to relax. In addition, the women were often in the company of friends on rest days thus there was limited opportunity to conduct interviews in private. I usually arranged an alternative time when I could interview them in private. I conducted some interviews during work hours outside employers' houses such as at void decks of flats. For those with very busy work schedules who did not have time to spare during workdays, I arranged to meet them separately on their subsequent rest day so that I could conduct interviews in private.

I was aware of the researcher-respondent gap that existed between the women and myself and that my presence might change group dynamics, attitudes and the opinions proffered by the women. As noted by Evans (1988), the character of field relations is defined by the role adopted by the researcher within a certain research setting. On

those days when I spent time with different groups of women on their rest days, my main objective was to observe how they spend their rest days, the things that they shared and talked about and the things that interested them. Thus my role was more that of an observer than a participant. However, I did not remain anonymous, since the group characteristically knew my status as a researcher. I also participated in their activities to a certain extent because the women invited me along to their social functions, such as a graduation ceremony, celebration feasts, and picnics. I was also included in conversations most of the times. Significant issues arising during those occasions would be followed up in interviews. Like Evans (1988), I found being constantly armed with a pen and notebook was disruptive, because the women felt conscious of being watched and observed all the time.

Despite my identity as a researcher, a member of the host society and a potential employer, I managed to establish a close relationship with a group of four women who enjoyed rest days every week and I met up with them on a total of six occasions. Through spending time with them I managed to gain some interesting insights on the role of a peer network through being able to witness its dynamics personally. This provided an alternative viewpoint to the descriptive accounts by individual woman on the role of peer networks on their lives. By spending more time with them, I also became more of a participant than an observer. Sometimes I found myself being included in discussions because my opinion was sought on certain issues regarding problems that the women faced such as whether or not to change employers. I also met up with four other women on more than one occasion and was able to conduct repeat interviews with them and follow up on issues that I observed in the field.

Telephone interview

During one of my short trips back to Singapore in early 2001, I found out from a friend about An-Nisa, the first formal association for Indonesian FDWs in Singapore, and became very interested (An-Nisa was formed in early 2000, following my first phase of fieldwork). I made contact with a maid involved in the centre and accompanied her to their Islamic New Year Celebration. There, I was introduced to

Sugi, the unofficial leader of An-Nisa at that time. I arranged for an interview with

Sugi a few days later and conducted a two-hour interview at her employer's house. The interview focused on her motivations to participate in An-Nisa, issues surrounding Indonesian FDWs and how An-Nisa as a group could help address these issues. Because of time limitations of fieldwork, I was unable to interview other maids involved with An-Nisa at that stage.

After my return to Perth I further analysed my data and started the writing process. It became apparent that An-Nisa was an important case study to analyse the collective power/resistance of Indonesian FDWs. I followed up on its activities more closely and in greater detail. Through Sugi, I received the contact number of a local volunteer of the mosque, Hajah Omayah, and started to establish ties with her via long distance telephone calls from Perth. By then, Sugi had left Singapore and her position was taken over by another maid, Muna, whom I was introduced to by Hajah Omayah. I conducted a series of telephone interviews (a total of four phone calls over a period of two months) with Muna via long distance telephone calls that lasted about one hour each.

The interviews were mainly on the development of An-Nisa, on Muna's efforts at urging the Indonesian embassy to be more emphatic toward Indonesian FDWs in Singapore, on her perspective on the issues surrounding Indonesian FDWs and on how formal social associations, like An-Nisa, could rectify these issues. The use of telephone interviews in social research has been criticised because it is commonly associated with mass surveying and marketing polls and could be ineffective when used on certain groups who are not articulate (Taylor 2002). However, Taylor (2002), based on her own experience researching adolescent boys who participated in a vocational and training programme in Australia, noted that the telephone is a 'highly appropriate research vehicle which, given certain research design conditions that include an element of prior face-to-face contact, can generate rich and valid data' (p. 19). She argued that the use of telephone itself is not problematic and stressed that what was more important was the association of its use with a particular style of research (Taylor 2002). Taylor noted that in her case the use of telephone is justified

because unlike market researchers, the conversation between interviewers and interviewee occurred to some degree in a 'shared world' (Taylor 2002: 31). For example, the interviewers had genuine interest in the interviewees and the topic of interview, had prior in-depth knowledge of the issue being discussed and share mutual contacts with interviewees in relation to the topic (Taylor 2001: 31).

The long distance interviews conducted with Muna also occurred to a certain degree in a 'shared world'. We were both interested in the issues of the protection and welfare of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore. My prior meetings and interviews with Sugi and Hajah Omayah, also provided adequate proof of my identity for Muna to establish a relationship of trust with me even though we never met in person. In addition, we exchanged materials, I posted a copy of an article I wrote on Indonesian FDWs to Muna and she posted a copy of a letter she wrote in consultation with some of her friends from An-Nisa to the KBRI. In addition, the telephone was the most appropriate technology to use under the circumstance because the distance between the researcher and respondent meant that a face-to-face interview was impossible. Given the circumstances and the rapport and relationship of trust I established with Muna, I agree with Taylor (2002) who argued that 'the telephone potentially offers no more or no less an opportunity than the face-to-face open-ended or semi-structured interview for respondents to clarify their own experiences and feelings, follow a stream of consciousness or for catharsis' (p. 30).

3.5 Interviewing maid agents – sample, techniques and objective

I conducted in-depth interviews with ten maid agents who were mostly specialists in Indonesian FDWs. The interviews were more formal, conducted during business hours and lasted between one and one and a half hours. The interviews were semi-structured and covered the following topics:

- Industrial practices of maid agents.
- Politics within the maid industry.
- Market niche of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore
- Factors underlying rising popularity of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore.

- Problems and issues surrounding the employment of Indonesian FDWs as perceived by maid agents.

Three of these maid agents were also the agents of a few of the women in my interview sample. Therefore, conducting interviews with them provided extra depth and a more well-rounded understanding of these women's migration histories because I was also able to account for the position of their agents. This is shown in some of the case studies in Chapter 6. There was one particular agent whom I interviewed on two occasions in order to clarify further details.

I did not have any intention to interview employers because employer-FDW power relations have been covered extensively in Huang and Yeoh (1998) and Yeoh and Huang (1999). However, conversations with three employers who had several years experience employing Indonesian FDWs yielded interesting information on issues of control and of the stereotypical identities of Indonesian FDWs. I have included these in this thesis.

Conclusion

This chapter has described and justified the multi methods approach employed in this thesis, sources of data used and methods of data collection thus providing a background of the research process. In the next chapter, I describe the host state, Singapore, and its long standing dependency on FDWs.

CHAPTER 4

SINGAPORE: MANAGING SCARCE HUMAN RESOURCES AND ITS DEPENDENCY ON FOREIGN DOMESTIC WORKERS (FDWs)

Introduction

In this chapter I describe how Singapore manages its scarce human resources and its dependency on foreign domestic workers (FDWs). I will also discuss the complex power structures that impact upon the migration, working conditions and treatment of FDWs in the country. Firstly, I will provide a background of Singapore's economy and the underlying reasons for its dependency on foreign workers. Secondly, I will describe Singapore's foreign labour policy and highlight the way in which it officially sanctions the ascription of inferior identities to unskilled foreign workers and their inequitable treatment in Singapore. Thirdly, I will focus on FDWs, who constitute a substantial proportion of unskilled foreign workers in the country, outline the evolution of paid domestic work since the colonial era and examine its economic indispensability to contemporary Singapore. Fourthly, I will provide a detailed discussion of the institutional framework of contemporary paid domestic work in the country and describe the various relationships in which FDWs in Singapore are caught. Contextualising these relations within Foucault's notion of power as outlined in Chapter 2, I argue that FDWs in Singapore are caught in a complex asymmetrical power structure which lead them to being treated and regarded more like *mui tsais* or girl servants from China than the *amahs* of the Pearl River Delta who were given respect and were once servants in the country.

4.1 Foreign workers and the Singapore economy

Singapore, a nation-state of 4 million people, has always depended on immigrant labour for the expansion of its economy. Its present multi-ethnic population is testimony to the influx of migrants from China, India and Indonesia during the colonial era. These migrants helped to transform the island from a tiny Malay fishing village to a centre for entrepot trade, as envisioned by Sir Stamford Raffles of the British East India Company in 1819 (Gaw 1988). Although many migrants intended

their crossing into Singapore to be a temporary sojourn, most stayed and had families, thus making up the island's present population. Singapore's population is now comprised of 77 per cent Chinese, 14 per cent Malay and 8 per cent Indians with the rest of the population made up of Eurasians and other ethnicities (*Singapore census of population 2000 - a quick count 2000*). The Chinese are politically and economically dominant in the nation-state, a status quo that has been preserved through the manipulation of its population and human resource policies (Drakakis-Smith 1997).

Although global economic recession has recently slowed Singapore's economic growth, its economy, which is mainly driven by the manufacturing and services sectors, is plagued with labour shortages especially over the long-term. A study in early 2000 of Singapore's labour market trends, indicated three challenges to its workforce: 'too few older folks especially women in its workforce, too few babies for the future and far too few enlightened pro-family employers' (The Straits Times 2000b). The state has always taken a serious long-term view of this problem and has established, for example, a multi-ministerial steering committee concerned with recruiting overseas workers (Yap 1999).

Singapore began to open its doors to foreign workers in the late 1960s when it first embarked on an industrialisation program. Since then, foreign labour has become an integral part of Singapore's workforce. Data from the 2000 Census revealed that there were approximately 610,000 foreign workers in Singapore constituting 30 per cent of its total work force (*Economic characteristics of Singapore resident population 2000*). Singapore's foreign labour policies recognise two distinct groups of foreign workers: professional and highly skilled workers, also known as 'foreign talents', and unskilled workers such as construction workers, shipyard labourers and domestic workers. The flow of unskilled foreign labour was temporarily controlled in the post-war years and the early years of independence in response to high unemployment rates. Nevertheless, the high demand for unskilled labour in the manufacturing sector in the early 1970s led to a policy reversal.

Despite its relatively liberal attitudes to unskilled foreign workers in the early 1970s and 1980s, the state has recognised that an over-reliance on cheap, unskilled workers

can have severe impacts on Singapore's economic competitiveness in the long run. The state holds the view that uncontrolled recruitment of cheap unskilled foreign workers can retard the process of steering the economy through a transition from low-value added, labour intensive industries to high value added knowledge-based industries, financial institutions, and provider services.

Economic restructuring was mooted in the 1980s after Singapore emerged from its first economic recession. The low-value added, labour intensive industries which propelled Singapore to double digit growth rates in the 1970s and early 1980s, were recognised to be no longer compatible with the increasing costs of local labour and the continuing trend of labour shortages. If the economy were to retain these characteristics, Singapore would have to import ever-increasing numbers of unskilled foreign workers to fill the demand. It would also lose in terms of competitiveness, as multinational companies chose to set up labour-intensive plants in areas offering an abundance of labour and land at cheaper costs, such as in neighbouring Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and China (The Straits Times 1997b).

4.2 Regulating the entry of foreign workers

Consistent with its long-term objectives of attracting 'foreign talents' and of limiting the entry of unskilled foreign workers, the Ministry of Manpower (sic) introduced a new graduated work-pass system in 1998. This six-tier system offers attractive terms and privileges according to the immigrants' skills and income levels (Table 4.1). The main objective of the graduated pass system was to attract 'foreign talent' to Singapore, by giving them the 'red carpet treatment' and by making it easier for local companies to recruit skilled foreign workers (The Straits Times 1998d). This accords with the state's vision of developing Singapore into a 'talent capital' in the twenty first century.

Table 4.1: The six-tier work pass system for foreign workers introduced in 1998

<p>P work passes:</p> <p>P1 - For those earning a monthly income of more than S\$7,000</p> <p>P2 – For those earning a monthly income between S\$3,500 - S\$7,000</p> <p>Privileges:</p> <p>No levy or restrictions on number of P pass holders who can be employed by a company.</p> <p>Spouses and children of P pass holders receive dependent's passes to stay in the country.</p> <p>Parents and parents-in-law will be given long-term social visit passes.</p> <p>Validity:</p> <p>Each pass is valid for up to two years initially and can be renewed for up to three years as requested.</p> <p>Exceptional candidates can obtain passes for up to five years.</p> <p>Q work passes: for skilled workers such as technicians and other workers with specialised skills.</p> <p>Q1 – For those who earn more than S\$2,500 per month and possess acceptable degrees, professional qualifications or specialist skills.</p> <p>Q2 - A Q2 Pass is issued on exceptional grounds to foreigners who do not satisfy any of the above criteria. Such applications will be considered on the merits of each case</p> <p>Privileges:</p> <p>Spouses and children of Q1 work pass holders are entitled to dependent's passes to stay in the country.</p> <p>Their parents and parents-in-law are not entitled to long-term social visit pass.</p> <p>Spouses and children of Q2 work pass holders are not entitled to dependent's passes to stay here. Their parents and parents-in-law are not entitled to long-term social visit passes.</p> <p>Validity:</p> <p>Each pass is valid for up to two years initially and can be renewed for up to three years or shorter as requested.</p> <p>R work passes (work permits): for semi skilled and unskilled workers who earn less than S\$2,500 a month such as construction workers and FDWs.</p> <p>Restrictions:</p> <p>The volume of R work pass holders is controlled by a monthly levy payable by employers and dependency ceiling or ratio of local to foreign workers employable by a company. This ratio varies for different industries. Spouses and children of work permit holders are not entitled to dependent's visas.</p> <p>Validity:</p> <p>Valid for up to a period of two-years and renewable upon request.</p>
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(Source: The Straits Times, 1998d; *Employment pass information n.d.*)

Professionals and skilled overseas workers are encouraged to stay beyond the term of their work passes by a simpler process for approving their applications for permanent residency (Pang 1992). At present, the state targets an annual intake of 35,000 permanent residents from its crop of 'foreign talents' (The Straits Times 1997a). This elite group of workers is also encouraged to apply for citizenship. Nevertheless, priorities are given to those with 'desirable' social and cultural attributes, such as Malaysian Chinese (Pang 1992: 498). This is to enable easy assimilation with the host population and to maintain the current ethnic composition of the population so that the political-economic dominance of the Chinese is maintained.

By contrast, unskilled foreign workers are employed on a 'use and disuse' approach. Restrictions, such as a levy and dependency ceilings are imposed on employers hiring semi-skilled and unskilled foreign workers (especially unskilled construction workers and foreign maids) to limit the volume of these types of migrant flows. Moreover, the conditions imposed on their two-year work permits ensure that they do not become permanent residents in Singapore and that they can be successfully repatriated at the end of their contracts.

4.3 Unskilled foreign workers – 'the necessary evil'

The policies described above show that the state remains firm in controlling the entry of unskilled foreign workers. As pointed out by the Minister for Home Affairs in 1998, the policy of welcoming foreign talents is 'not inconsistent' with the rallying call made to employers in the early 1990s against becoming overly-dependent on cheap unskilled foreign workers. Employers are encouraged to mechanise and automate in order to increase productivity instead of recruiting more unskilled labour (The Straits Times 1997b). The Minister reiterated the need for companies to heed the call to move into higher value-added methods of production because the sources of unskilled labour would be exhausted over time. He pointed out that the countries from which these workers come from will embark on their own industrialisation programmes, opening job opportunities which may lead to a disincentive for workers to move overseas to countries such as Singapore in search of better livelihoods (The Straits Times 1997b).

Despite arguing for the need to control the entry of unskilled foreign workers, the state has also noted that it would be impossible and unrealistic to phase them out completely. This is mainly because these workers are an indispensable source of labour for dirty, dangerous and difficult jobs (3D jobs) that tend to be shunned by Singaporeans (Economic Committee cited in Yap 1999). Data from Census 2000 revealed that a large proportion of the total workforce in low skilled jobs, such as production workers, cleaners and labourers, is comprised of non-resident workers (Economic characteristics of Singapore resident population 2000). The demand for these types of workers has increased in line with the continuing expansion of the middle class and is expected to increase further in the future (The Straits Times 1997a). A substantial proportion of the total non-resident workforce is unskilled. For instance, in 1998, almost 75 per cent of the total foreign workforce was constituted of (R) work permit holders who were mainly unskilled workers (Yap 1999).

Nevertheless, in addition to protecting Singapore's long-term economic competitiveness, the state also cites the inevitable social repercussions from importing large numbers of unskilled workers as another reason for the need to cap this intake. For example, the Deputy Prime Minister in 1995 reminded Singaporeans that policies on foreign workers must consider wider social factors in addition to economic needs (The Straits Times 1995e). He cited as an example, the strain in diplomatic relations between Singapore and the Philippines in 1995 following the hanging of Flor Contemplacion, a Filipino maid found guilty of murdering her friend and her eight year-old charge (The Straits Times 1995e). In this case, the social repercussions also had an impact on political relations between Singapore and the sending state in question (Hilsdon 2000; Law 2002).

The Ministry of Manpower, in rejecting appeals by employers to cut levies on unskilled foreign workers, often cautions of the 'adverse effect[s] [of dependence on unskilled foreign workers] on Singapore as a whole both economically and socially' (The Straits Times 1994a). The state views foreign domestic maids and other unskilled workers hired on two-year work permits as a 'necessary evil'. Although they may be a 'boon' in the short term, unskilled foreign workers may also be a 'bane' producing potentially negative effects in the long-term (The Straits Times 1995e). The

media highlight these 'social repercussions', justifying the state's stand of limiting the volume of unskilled foreign workers. Over the years, the media has chronicled various social impacts, such as competition for the use of public space as a result of unskilled foreign workers gathering at specific locations on Sundays (The Straits Times 1995h), social 'threats' brought about by the conduct of foreign maids outside employers' homes, such as engaging in part-time prostitution and romantic liaisons with male foreign workers (*Pembantu rumah Indonesia* 2001; *Maids in love* 2000), and tensions that arise in households due to the presence of live-in FDWs. These tensions are insinuated in media issues dealing with effective means of disciplining and punishing foreign maids, the impacts of a maid culture on young Singaporeans, the amount of authority that foreign maids should have over children and poor treatment of maids by employers (The Straits Times 1994b; The Straits Times 1994c; The Straits Times 1994d; The Straits Times 1995a; The Straits Times 1995f; Yeoh, Huang and Gonzalez 1999).

In summary, central to Singapore's foreign labour policies is a discriminatory system based on income levels, types of employment sought and education. Aided by the media, the state justifies this discrimination for the nation's long-term economic and social good. This policy officially sanctions the discrimination experienced by unskilled foreign workers, a discrimination reproduced and reinforced in everyday social relations through negative discourses and categorisation transmitted through the media. In addition, this policy also reinforces class distinctions by distinguishing various categories of foreign workers and by granting privileges and imposing limitations which are based on income levels, types of profession and education and skill levels. Moreover, the social stigma and inferior associations which are attached to the 3D jobs in which unskilled foreign workers are concentrated further reinforce the social devaluation and inferior categorisation of these groups of workers thus justifying their poor treatment. As these workers hail mainly from specific countries¹ in the region, national stereotypes which conflate their countries of origin and their economic contribution and their position in Singapore's overall social hierarchy, abound. These stereotypes serve to justify a social structure that accords inequitable

¹ These countries constitute the relatively less developed and poorer nations of this region such as Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Myanmar and the Philippines.

treatment of groups of people who are of certain class, nationality, race/ethnicity, culture, citizenship status and educational backgrounds.

4.4 The history of foreign domestic workers (FDWs) in Singapore

One third, or roughly 140,000, of the group of semi-skilled and unskilled foreign workers in Singapore are FDWs². FDWs are not uncommon in the country and they have been present since the early colonial times. Nevertheless, the countries of origin of FDWs and the structural properties underlying paid domestic work have altered over the years.

Mui tsais

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there was a demand from affluent Chinese and European households for women to work as domestic servants. Due to the scarcity of women in the then British Colony, these households resorted to hiring male servants or *hainanese* cookboys to fill their needs. These male servants were more expensive than female servants and demanded standard conditions of work, which the employers had to meet because they were more formally organised into groups and/or they received protection from secret societies³. Upper middle class Chinese households who were more accustomed to establishing 'fictive kinship' relations with their servants were not familiar with a more formal arrangement such as this and they preferred the dedication of female servants under the system of obligation inherent in 'fictive kinship' relations.

² This figure is based on what is often cited in the media, since it is not the policy of the Singapore state to release such statistics.

³ Secret societies played a dominant role in controlling and organising lives of Chinese migrants in the colonial era. They controlled recreational activities like gambling, opium smoking and brothel visiting. In addition, they also worked closely with brokers, traffickers and employers to organise and control migrant flows and employment (Lai 1986: 13).

Capitalising on the demand for female domestic servants, the secret societies which were already trafficking women for prostitution started to bring in *mui tsais* or young girl servants from China. *Mui tsais* were as young as ten years and were sold by poor families in China in times of hardship and desperation. Local-born *mui tsais* were also acquired from poor families and from single women, including prostitutes. The selling of daughters to cope with poverty was an established and accepted social practice in China. It reflected the low status of women in traditional Chinese societies and was a testimony to the extreme conditions of hardship in China during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Lai 1986; Gaw 1988).

In return for a life of domestic servitude, *mui tsais* were provided with food, shelter and clothing by the families or employers who purchased them. Employers not only dominated the *mui tsais*' lives with respect to domestic servitude but also had exclusive rights to determine their *mui tsais*' futures, for example, in arranging their marriages. *Mui tsais* were eventually married off to men of their employers' choice or betrothed to a family member of the employer. Thus, they could be treated as adopted daughters or prospective daughters-in-law, or be subject to severe abuse within the domestic context of traditional authority and filial piety (Wong 1996: 89)

Due to the isolating nature of their work and their separation from or abandonment by their families, *mui tsais* in colonial Singapore and the rest of the Straits Settlements were more vulnerable to ill treatment than their counterparts in China. Following a commission to study the *mui tsai system* set up in 1933, the findings of a Minority Report, which contradicted the Majority Report of the Commission of Enquiry, revealed that more than half of *mui tsais* at the *Po Leung Kok* (Society for Women and Children) experienced beatings and harsh scoldings and were overworked. The report also revealed that many had either been raped or had suffered other forms of sexual abuse (Wood 1937 cited in Lai 1986: 50).

Although the colonial authorities never formally recognised the *mui tsai* system, they also never made it illegal for households to keep them. Succumbing to pressures from various quarters against cruelty to *mui tsais*, the colonial government passed the *Mui Tsai Act* in 1933, which called for compulsory registration of *mui tsais* brought in

between 1933 and 1935 and for the eventual abolition of this practice. The Act was not very successful in controlling the *mui tsai* trade and merely drove it underground. The Act was later supported by State legislation, introduced in the late 1930s but enforced only after the Second World War, which imposed a minimum age limit of 14 years for domestic service and prohibited child labour below that age (Lai 1986: 53). Although the trade in *mui tsais* continued, Cantonese women from the Pearl River Delta area in Southern China began arriving in the Colony in large numbers in the 1930s and slowly replaced *mui tsais* as a source of domestic help (Lai 1986: 77).

*Amahs*⁴

Amahs were a popular type of adult paid domestic servant in Singapore from the 1930s until the 1950s. They were single Cantonese women who migrated from the silk producing region of the Pearl River Delta area in Southern China. The 1930s marked a major downturn of the global economy with the onset of the Great Depression, which severely affected the British trading empire in the Nanyang⁵. Many men were returned to China on a voluntary repatriation scheme introduced by the colonial government to control unemployment. A quota on men entering the Colony was also imposed. However, no restrictions were imposed on women entering the colony because there was still a severe imbalance in the gender ratio (Lai 1986).

At the same time, the silk industry, which provided employment for many Cantonese women of the Pearl River Delta area was collapsing due to the introduction of nylon and rayon. The women from this area enjoyed far greater freedoms than the average Chinese woman at that time and most of them played a major role in generating household income and were financially independent. As a protest against the demeaning roles of women tied to the institution of marriage in traditional Chinese societies, some of these women became members of anti-marriage movements and

⁴ Amah simply means Cantonese female domestic servant (Gaw1988: 89).

⁵ The land immediately beyond the South China Sea or Southeast Asia in which the British built its trading empire was referred to by the Chinese in that era as the Nanyang.

underwent sworn celibacy⁶. Faced with the threat of unemployment at home and a loss of income from their menfolk due to retrenchment and the imposition of a male immigration quota, these women sailed to the Nanyang in search of work to regain their economic independence and generate an income stream for their families (Gaw 1988: 77-78).

The large population of affluent Chinese merchants and European households in the Straits Settlements made it easier for these women to secure jobs as paid domestic servants. In 1931, the Census revealed that almost 7,000 females were employed as domestic servants. This number swelled to 15,500 in 1947 making domestic service the most popular form of paid employment for women next to hawking and agricultural work during the colonial era (Gaw 1988: 79). Unlike *mui tsais*, *amahs* volunteered to go overseas in search of work and were free women who were paid wages. They usually travelled to the Nanyang with relatives and friends returning to the colony. Some paid a *sui haak*⁷, or someone familiar with travel arrangements and immigration regulations, to arrange the voyage (Gaw 1988: 83).

Upon arrival, *amahs* obtained accommodation in one of the *coolie fongs* (workers' rooms) usually through a friend, a sworn sister or a relative. Those who did not know anyone in Singapore would be sent to the *Po Leung Kok* (Society for the Protection of Women and Children) which would source employment or a sponsor for them. They would only be released from the *Po Leung Kok* after a credible sponsor was found. As part of the regulations to ensure their welfare and safety, *amahs* under the care of the *Po Leung Kok* had to report to the society once a month for a year (Gaw 1988: 84). Some *amahs* continued to live in *coolie fongs* after securing employment while some employers provided *amahs* with live-in accommodation. Nevertheless, live-in *amahs*

⁶ Sworn celibacy became socially acceptable following the invention of a ritual custom known as *sor hei* or comb up. During the simple ceremony, women comb-up their hair to resemble married women and take the vows not to marry and to lead a life of celibacy in front of the altar at home, in a temple or at an ancestral home. The ceremony is usually marked and rendered similar to a wedding by gift-giving and it takes place on an auspicious day following consultation with a fortune teller or of a Chinese almanac (Gaw 1988: 44-45).

⁷ A *sui haak* which means literally 'water guest' is a man who organised the *amahs* travel arrangements and accompanied them abroad from China. *Sui haaks* were usually sailors, ex-sailors or traders (Gaw 1988: 171).

still maintained their space at *coolie fongs* to store their personal goods and as a space to retreat to over the weekend or between jobs.

The most common method of securing employment was through personal recommendations by fellow *amahs* living in the same *coolie fong*. Friends, relatives and sworn sisters constituted these informal networks of contacts. Those without links to these networks used employment agencies that were usually located near *coolie fongs* and were accessible to the expatriate community. Another method of obtaining employment was to advertise oneself on notice boards at *coolie fongs*. An orderly system was maintained, since priority would be given to those who had been unemployed the longest. Occasionally, employers would also make personal enquiries at *coolie fongs* to search for a suitable *amah*. Thus being a member of a *coolie fong* was important both to new and to experienced *amahs* because it provided them with opportunities for employment and future contracts.

Unlike *mui tsais* who were vulnerable to abuse and treated with disrespect, *amahs* earned respectability and were heralded as superior servants. They were amongst the highest paid women workers and commanded salaries that were comparable to English speaking clerks (Lai 1986: 79). *Amahs* were respected because of their ability to organise their economic and social lives as immigrant women. Their involvement in *coolie fongs* went deeper than just a network for sourcing employment. Through *coolie fongs*, *amahs* were active in organising communal activities such as pooling of wages to provide medical help in times of need, money for holidays in China, Chinese New Year celebrations and shelter during old age (Gaw 1988).

Amahs were also very professional in their approach to work and, though there was no formal code of conduct, *amahs* seemed to maintain an orderly and set system. For example, they would never fail to find a replacement if they fell ill or went on holidays. The replacement *amah* (usually a friend, sworn sister or a relative) would never take over the position of the *amah* whom she was replacing even if requested to do so by the employers. This was largely because the *amah's* employment system relied heavily on personal recommendations. Thus honesty was a very important attribute (Gaw 1988: 167). *Amahs* were also appreciated for their loyalty to their

employers. Because most of them had undergone sworn celibacy, they were usually committed to a lifetime of dedication to their employers since they transferred some aspects of their family life, such as bringing up children, to their jobs (Gaw 1988: 167).

Foreign domestic workers (FDWs)

By the 1950s, migration of *amahs* to Singapore had ceased following changes to immigration policies in both Singapore and China after the Second World War. Working class women from Singapore and neighbouring Malaysia partially filled this unmet demand for adult paid domestic servants in the 1950s and 1960s, alongside the existing population of *amahs*. Singapore began to experience a shortage of supply of domestic servants by the late 1970s. By then, the remaining experienced *amahs* were retiring and some had returned to China (Gaw 1988: 165). This decade also saw working class women from Singapore and neighbouring Malaysia, who were the 'traditional sources' of paid domestic workers following the dwindling of the supply of *amahs*, drawn to factory work as a result of the export-oriented industrialisation in Singapore. At the same time, the demand for paid domestic servants for childcare and general household work increased as more local women were drawn into the formal labour market and the middle-class started to expand.

The state introduced the Foreign Domestic Worker Scheme in 1978 to meet the growing demand for domestic labour and to encourage local women to participate in formal employment (Wong 1996). The scheme allows women from 'non-traditional sources' to be employed as domestic servants. Approved 'non-traditional' sources are the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, India and Bangladesh (*Employing foreign domestic workers – a guide for employers* n.d.). Foreign women employed under this scheme are more popularly known as foreign maids or foreign domestic workers (FDWs). Since its introduction, the number of FDWs has increased rapidly, especially through the 1980s and 1990s. In 1978, it was estimated that there was 5,000 FDWs in Singapore. This figure rose rapidly to 40,000 by the late 1980s, doubled to 80,000 in the 1990s and at present is estimated to stand at 140,000. On average one in every eight households employs an FDW (The Straits Times 1995g). Although official figures are unavailable, it is estimated that there are between 60,000

to 70,000 Indonesian and Filipino FDWs in Singapore, forming a majority of the FDW population (Walter, July 1999, personal communication; Woo, July 1999, personal communication; Ahmad, February 2000, personal communication).

4.5 The perceived indispensability of FDWs in contemporary Singapore

A study carried out by the National University of Singapore (NUS) revealed that there is a significant representation of lower income households amongst those employing FDWs. Thus employing an FDW is no longer an exclusive symbol of status and luxury, and Singaporeans' dependency on FDWs seems likely to be a long-term phenomenon (The Straits Times 1996a). Most maid agents that I interviewed stated that families depend on FDWs primarily for child-care, care for the aged and sick and assistance with general domestic chores. Most employers claim that they hire FDWs because they are left with 'no choice', a situation that arises as an increasing proportion of wives are engaged in paid employment and cannot cope with juggling responsibilities between paid work and housework (Walter, July 1999, personal communication; Woo, July 1999, personal communication; Fadilah, August 1999, personal communication; Ahmad, February 2000, personal communication).

The labour force participation rate (LFPR) for females in Singapore has increased tremendously since Singapore embarked on its industrialisation programme in the late 1960s. Although the LFPR for married women has always been lower than the LFPR for single women, the former has been increasing rapidly over the past four decades. In 1981, LFPR for married women was 30 per cent and by 1991 it had increased to 47.4 per cent. The latest figure for the LFPR for married women is 52.3 per cent (*Dual career couples in Singapore* 1994; *Age –sex specific labour force participation rates by marital status* 2002).

Higher standards of education attainment by women and the availability of jobs are the main incentives for women to take up formal employment. Improved standards of living and the consumer lifestyle in Singapore also induce more married women to remain in paid employment even after having children (Huang and Yeoh 1995). As pointed out by Dr Vivienne Wee, a sociologist from the NUS, paid work is no longer

a personal choice for most women in Singapore even after marriage as 'most are left with no choice [but to work]' (The Straits Times 1995g). The number of dual-career households almost doubled between 1980 and 1990, from 112,000 to 215,000 (*Dual career couples in Singapore* 1994).

The state has always identified local women as a valuable labour source which should be tapped to address the country's chronic labour shortages. In the Year 2000 budget debate, the Minister for Manpower (*sic*) announced a plan by the Ministry to develop an upmarket home-management industry by providing professionals to undertake household chores. This was intended to 'enable more [married] women to go out and join the labour force and yet have some of the household chores done properly by a professional group' (The Straits Times March 2000a). The Minister pointed out that housewives could make a significant contribution to the economy, as more of them are now better educated and possess useful skills. According to the Minister, if the state could draw just a mere 3 per cent of unemployed housewives into the formal economy, it would provide a boost of 40,000 workers to the labour market (The Straits Times 2000a).

The current high dependency on live-in FDWs indicates that patriarchal notions of traditional gender roles remain the norm in Singaporean households. Despite identifying and targeting married women as a valuable human resource, the state's family policies reflect and reinforce the view that women are primarily responsible for household duties (Huang and Yeoh 1996) and do not address the real difficulties faced by women in juggling both career and domestic responsibilities (Yeoh and Huang 1999). Although the state has been slow to make the institutional care of children and the elderly an attractive option and instead promotes the harnessing of family networks as an alternative to lighten women's work load in the domestic sphere (Yeoh and Huang 1994: 57), media coverage of issues such as child-care and aged care indicates that Singaporeans are slow to adapt to the western concept of institutional care, and still prefer the assistance of domestic servants (The Straits Times 1995c; The Straits Times April 1995d; Yeoh and Huang 1999b).

4.6 The procedures for employing FDWs

The procedures governing the employment of FDWs were established in 1986 and have largely remained intact since then (Wong 1996). FDWs need to acquire a two-year work permit which is renewable until they reach a maximum age of 60 years (*Employing foreign domestic workers- a guide for employers* n.d.). The law requires FDWs to live with the employers whose names and addresses are stated in their work permits. Employers are obligated to provide decent board and lodging to their FDWs and pay to them a monthly salary⁸. They are also required to pay a monthly levy of S\$345 to the state for every FDW employed. Most employers use the services of a maid agency when recruiting a FDW although there are exceptional cases. The procedures involved in employing an FDW are outlined below.

The first step a potential employer undertakes is to view files containing the bio-data of FDWs which is available from the maid agencies (Figure 4.1). These bio-data consist of the FDW's photo (often a face cut as well as a full photo) followed by a description of their personal details such as name, age, religion, marital status, education, country and area of origin, relevant work experience and dietary requirements (for example, many Muslim Indonesian FDWs will specifically mention that they will not eat pork). In some cases, FDWs declare their willingness to perform tasks that are not classified as housework, such as washing of cars and pets, and indicate their readiness to be employed without rest days. Some agencies may also show a short video-clip in which the FDW introduces herself briefly, usually in broken English, and states her areas of 'specialty', such as child-caring, cooking, caring for the aged and sick or general housework. The employer then makes his/her selection based on their own personal preferences and on recommendations by the maid agent. National stereotypes of FDWs have a significant influence on employers' choices which I illustrate further in Section 4.7 and Chapter 5.3. Some agencies provide more personalised services such as allowing employers to conduct long-

⁸ Salaries for FDWs vary for different nationalities and there is no official floor or ceiling wage. Filipino maids are the highest paid with starting salaries averaging S\$300-S\$320 per month due to their command of the English language and their educational qualifications. On average, Indonesian FDWs start with a monthly salary between S\$200-S\$230, while Sri Lankans are the lowest paid with starting salaries ranging from S\$150-S\$180 per month.

distance telephone interviews with short-listed FDWs and their 'instructors' at the training centres⁹ in the countries of origin (Sani, July 1999, personal communication).

After the selection process, the maid agents in Singapore lodge an application for an in-principle approval (IPA) providing personal details of the employer and the FDW to the Work Permit Department of the Ministry of Manpower in Singapore. An IPA serves as a temporary work permit and is valid for a maximum period of three months. Both the employer and FDW need to satisfy various criteria¹⁰ before an IPA can be issued. When the IPA is issued, the maid agent in Singapore contacts his/her overseas counterpart to arrange for the FDW's passage. The Singaporean agent meets the FDW upon her arrival at the airport or at the ferry terminal in the case of Indonesian FDWs who enter Singapore via Batam.

Upon arrival, the FDW is taken by the maid agent to the agency and usually spends a couple of days at the agent's house or the agency (if there are accommodation facilities) whilst waiting to be picked up or dropped off at the employer's house. The agent then embarks on the process of applying for an official Work Permit for the FDW. With this application, the agent needs to also submit a medical report¹¹ on the FDW by a certified doctor in Singapore. Other documents needed are proof of purchase of Personal Accident Insurance that is valued at least at S\$10,000 for the FDW by the employer and proof that the employer has furnished a security deposit on

⁹ After potential FDWs are recruited from various areas in the countries of origin, they are usually brought to training centres in major cities where they take language lessons, such as basic English (Singapore), Cantonese (Hong Kong) or Arabic (The Middle East), depending on their countries of destination. They are also trained to use the modern electrical appliances commonly used in these countries in mock up settings that resemble a typical household in these countries of destination. Nevertheless, over crowding in most of these training centres, lack of qualified staff and the presence of illegal labour recruiters lead to many FDWs departing their countries of origin untrained or without adequate training to prepare them for life as FDWs. Some Singaporean agencies have resorted to setting up mini-training centres at their premises in Singapore to provide additional training before FDWs are deployed.

¹⁰ A FDW must be female and between the ages of 16 and 50. She must also not be related to the employer and must not be in Singapore before the IPA is issued. Although it is not stated officially, it is estimated that only employers with a minimum annual income of S\$30,000 are successful in their IPA applications (*Employing foreign domestic workers – a guide for employers* n.d.; Yeoh and Huang 1995).

¹¹ The FDW needs to undergo medical examination within 14 days of her arrival. The FDW needs to be certified fit by the doctor and to pass medical screening for venereal diseases, pregnancy and HIV.

the FDW worth S\$5,000 to the state. This deposit can be furnished in cash or by obtaining a banker's or insurance guarantee (*Employing foreign domestic workers – a guide for employers* n.d.). Employers stand to forfeit this deposit if they are unable to repatriate the FDW when she breaches any of the conditions on the work permit (the impacts of work permit conditions of the security bond on their employers' discipline and control over FDWs' are illustrated in Section 4.8). The FDW is then eligible to commence work while waiting for the proper work permit card to be issued.

The complex bureaucratic procedures described above reflect the interventionist nature of the state in regulating entry and exit of foreign workers. Despite establishing an institutionalised framework regulating the entry and exit of FDWs, the state firmly maintains that the working conditions of individual FDWs are best left to the employer and the FDW to negotiate. The state has repeatedly rejected suggestions of drawing up a standard work contract for FDWs in order to protect them from exploitation by their employers. The state argues that it will be difficult to establish a standard framework that would suit all needs because domestic work is too varied and different from one household to another (The Straits Times 1998c).

Maid Name Choirul

Ref. Code SAR42001
Type New
Nationality Indonesia
Date of Birth 21-Jan-1982 (age: 21 years)
Height 151 cm
Weight 44 kg
Religion Muslim
Marital Status Single
Children 0 (from age 0 to 0)
Education High School (10~12 yrs)
Language Skill English (Little)
Bahasa Indonesia/Malaysia (Good)
Preference/Aptitude & Experience Care for Young Children 2 year(s)
Care for Infant 0 year(s)
Care for Elderly/Disabled 0 year(s)
General Housekeeping 2 year(s)
Cooking 2 year(s)

Other Information Able to handle pork?
Able to eat pork?
Able to care dog/cat?
Able to do gardening work?
Able to do simple sewing?
Willing to wash car?
Willing to work on off days?

Working Experience Home Country
2 year(s)

Singapore
0 year(s)

Malaysia
0 year(s)

Other Countries
0 year(s)

Introduction of Maid Choirul is a high school graduate & can speak fair English. She has attend 3 months nursing course in Jakarta & obtained nursing certificate. She has 2 yrs experience in Indonesia(2000-2002)to look after 2 children age 4 & 10. She can take care the bedridden & elderly person. Choirul is polite & patient.

Source: *Netmaid* n.d.

Figure 4.1: Sample of maid bio-data

4.7 The growth of the FDW industry in Singapore

From the above discussion, it is evident that contemporary paid domestic work in Singapore is now a more commodified process with the maid industry playing a central role in facilitating the movement of FDWs across international borders, their training and their placement FDWs with employers. The states at both ends of the flow chain also play a significant role in regulating the international movements, recruitment and employment of domestic workers. The role of labour brokers and agents in sourcing paid domestic help had traditionally been minimal until the introduction of the Foreign Maids Scheme in 1978. At present, there are 1100 licensed employment agencies in Singapore which offer a wide range of services from consultancy to recruitment and placement of both local and foreign workers. Of this total, there are about 700 agencies specifically engaged in the business of recruiting and placing FDWs (The Straits Times 2002e).

The growth of the FDW industry over the past two decades is evident from an examination of the classified section of *The Straits Times* from the early 1980s through to the present. In December 1983, there was only a handful of advertisements offering the services of live-in Filipina maids listed under the 'Situations Wanted' column. These advertisements were small and consisted of only a few lines without any graphics or agency names. In 1986, a 'Domestic Help Available' column first appeared in the classified section. Advertisements published in these columns were larger in size with graphics and maid agency names written in bold, indicating the entry of bigger and more serious players in the industry. It also signified a growing demand for FDWs in Singapore.

In the early 1990s, maid agency advertisements continued to grow both in volume and in size. These advertisements emphasised the services offered by agencies, such as free medical check-ups, guarantee periods, training, work permit renewals and cancellation options etc. By mid 1990s, maid agency advertisements started to intensify, indicating stiffening competition within the industry. It was during this time that personal qualities, such as submissiveness/obedience, loyalty, language ability, intelligence and personal hygiene, started becoming a focus of the advertisements.

On the other hand, Filipinas were described as speaking 'good English', having 'initiative' and as being 'clean', 'pleasant' and 'honest' (Figure 4.3).

FREE HOME SERVICE!

Myanmar, Indonesian, Filipino and Sri Lankan Maids available

- Unlimited replacement
- We have a wide selection of bio-data
- Strict training provided

Please Page

Brando : 95118891 • Sarah : 95787399 • Karen : 93010123

INROADS At your own convenience, We are ready to serve you

SEASON'S SPECIAL **\$SAVE \$400**

INDONESIA	FILIPINA	SRI LANKAN	BURMESE
Hardworking Good attitude No social problem	Good English Initiative Pleasant/Honest	Reasonable Helpful/Pleasing Obedient/Shy	Young/Pretty Clean/Cheerful No Flages

DENRICH 7377-122
#01-07 LUCKY PLAZA

(Source: The Straits Times Classified 1997b)

Figure 4.3: Nationalised stereotypes of FDWs

The personal traits described above reflect qualities that employers look out for when selecting a FDW. A survey carried out by Huang and Yeoh indicated that employers found it easier to base their choices on national stereotypes. They identified the top three qualities that employers look for in a FDW as: the potential of FDWs to be trained and the facilities and reputation of the maid industry in the country of origin, submissiveness and obedience; and the language ability of FDWs (Huang and Yeoh 1998: 36). For the purpose of product differentiation, maid agencies promote FDWs by labelling groups of women from different countries with specific qualities as described above. The labels are based on the assumptions that some qualities are more characteristic of certain nationalities than others, assumptions imbued with prejudices related to race/ethnicity, education and religious affiliation.

The perceived quality of FDWs of different nationalities is also reflected in the differing wages assigned to FDWs from different countries (for a detailed discussion see Chapter 5.3) which reinforces the discrimination based on national stereotypes (Huang and Yeoh 1998: 39). The differing agency fees charged for FDWs of different nationalities also contribute to this discrimination. This differential was exacerbated at the height of the economic crisis in 1997 when maid agents competed to undercut each other by offering Indonesian FDWs for free or for a minimal fee of S\$1 (Figure 4.4) to counter the influx in supply of Indonesian FDWs as more Indonesians looked overseas to flee the poverty in their home country (for a detailed discussion see Chapter 5.3). However, the characteristically low agency fees reinforce the notion of Indonesian FDWs as 'cheap' maids (for a detailed discussion see Chapter 5.3).



(Source: The Straits Times Classified 1998)

Figure 4.3: Indonesian FDWs for sale

In summary, a demand-led growth of the FDW industry and the stiffening competition arising from changing market conditions have contributed to the commodification of FDWs. One of the outcomes of this has been the construction and propagation of national stereotypes of FDWs. Maid agencies actively employ these stereotypes as product differentiation in their marketing and promotional drives. Not only do these stereotypes assign varying qualities and discriminate between FDWs based on their nationalities, but they also reinforce and contribute to FDWs' inferior identity as the immigrant 'other' in Singapore because these stereotypes are constructed on the qualities of a domestic servant as desired by the employers and maid agents. Apart from contributing to the subjectification of FDWs through the propagation of these stereotypes, maid agents also employ harsh disciplinary techniques and recommend employers to treat their FDWs discriminately within their households.

A case in point which illustrates the above contention is a letter written by a member of the public which was published in the Forum page of *The Straits Times* highlighting the practice of some maid agencies to encourage employers 'to not treat their maids too well' (The Straits Times March 2002b). Some of these published recommendations are not allowing FDWs to sit together with their employers during meal times; to make them eat leftovers; and to ask them to pay for their own medical expenses if they complain of being ill and want to see the doctor. This member of the public noted that some of her family members and friends who have hired FDWs before also receive similar advice from their maid agencies. Over the years, there have been maid agencies which were guilty of abusing FDWs for employing harsh disciplinary punishments, like making FDWs stand facing a corner or to do push ups and squats to 'teach FDWs a lesson' and to 'counsel' them to become better domestic servants (The Straits Times 2002g).

Maid agencies therefore exercise power over FDWs both through their rhetorical discourse and by employing and recommending techniques of discipline that include harsh punishments and discriminatory treatment. These techniques simultaneously regulate the bodies and behaviour of FDWs and deem them as inferior, docile and compliant servants, as they are desired to be by their employers. These techniques contribute to and reinforce the subjectification of FDWs as the inferior alien 'other', a practice inherent in the negotiations of identity between employers and FDWs within the domestic realm. Moreover, these subjectivities also permeate popular consciousness and impact upon the everyday social relations of FDWs with the host society as will be discussed in the next section.

4.8 The treatment of FDWs in contemporary Singapore

Working conditions

A typical working day for an FDW stretches to fifteen or sixteen hours. The following is a timetable prepared by an employment agency that serves as a guide for Indonesian FDWs it deploys:

Table 4.2: Maid's schedule prepared by an employment agency specialising in Indonesian FDWs

Daily timetable	
5.30 am:	Wake up and shower Perform morning prayers and boil some water Prepare breakfast Prepare uniforms for school-going children
8.00 am – 12 pm:	Prepare and cook lunch and dinner Clean house and do laundry
1.00 pm:	Serve lunch for children who are back from school
2.00 pm – 7.00pm:	Clean house and do ironing
8.00 pm:	Serve dinner
9.00 pm:	Tidy kitchen and finish off all incomplete chores

(Translated from a sample obtained from a maid agency specialising in Indonesian FDWs)

The working hours and chores described above are very similar to a timetable prepared for a Filipino FDW by the mother of an employer who was charged with maid abuse (The Straits Times 1996b). Interviews conducted by *The Straits Times* with seven maids showed that all but one maid said that the timetable was 'okay' and one even said that she works longer hours on average (The Straits Times 1996b). In addition, to a rigorous timetable and long work hours, FDWs are also expected to observe rules and regulations stipulated by maid agencies and employers. Table 4.3 lists rules an Indonesian FDW is expected to observe while serving her employment contract.

Table 4.3: A set of rules for FDWs prescribed by a maid agency specialising in Indonesian FDWs.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ You are required to work in Singapore for two years with no rest days. ▪ You are not allowed to request a change in employer ▪ You must be willing to be reprimanded by employers ▪ You must always be humble ▪ You must apologise to employers if you make a mistake ▪ You must not talk back to your employers ▪ You must not pull a long face in front of your employers ▪ You must not meddle in your employers' family affairs ▪ You must always be willing to learn ▪ You must not be choosy about chores assigned to you ▪ You must always follow your employers' instructions ▪ You must never damage any property in your employers' house ▪ You must never physically abuse your employers' children ▪ You must not go to sleep ahead of your employers and other family members unless it is exceptionally late ▪ You must discuss with employers or your agent if you have any problem
--

(Translated from a sample obtained from a maid agency specialising in Indonesian FDWs)

The work timetable and list of rules suggest that employers and maid agents have the upper hand in determining FDWs' work conditions. As highlighted in Section 4.6, the working conditions of FDWs remain unregulated despite stringent policies regulating the entry of FDWs. The exclusion of FDWs from the Employment Act¹² means that FDWs are not entitled to legal recourse if they are overworked or denied paid annual leave, medical leave and regular rest days. This is because employers are not obligated under law to grant these basic working conditions. Although the state maintains that it is best to leave working conditions to be negotiated between employers and FDWs, it strongly encourages employers and FDWs to draw a bilateral contract spelling out

¹² The Act spells out the rights and obligations of employers and employees and the basic terms and conditions of employment. The Act covers every employee regardless of nationality including workmen who are in contract of service relationships with an employer. However, any person employed in a managerial, executive or confidential position, any seaman, any domestic worker and any person employed by a Statutory Board or by the Government is excluded from the Act (*Coverage of the employment Act* n.d.).

guidelines for each party's duties and responsibilities in order to avoid misunderstandings and disputes (The Straits Times 1998c; *Employing foreign domestic workers – a guide for employers* n.d.). The state also recommends that maid agencies assist in the drafting of work contracts.

In reality, work contracts serve to protect maid agencies and employers from inconvenience and from incurring pecuniary losses. For example, there is an emphasis on clauses for breaching the two-year employment term in order to protect maid agencies' from incurring losses. Appendix 1 illustrates an extreme example in which the contract wholly serves employers' and agencies' interests, as it does not contain any clause on FDWs' welfare. These cases reflect that maid agencies and employers dominate the power relationships involved in paid domestic work and dictate the terms of employment to which FDWs are subjected.

The Philippines embassy and the Indonesian consulate have taken the initiative for providing protection for their nationals who are working as FDWs by requiring employers and their FDWs to enter into standard employment contracts drawn up by the embassies upon the renewal of the FDWs' passports (The Straits Times 1995i; *Tenaga kerja Indonesia di Singapura* 1999; *Employing foreign domestic workers – a guide for employers* n.d.). Whilst the terms of these contracts are fairer and serve to protect FDWs' interests, effective enforcement is almost impossible due to the absence of any monitoring frameworks. For example, the standard employment practices endorsed by the Indonesian consulate are rarely observed because no penalty is imposed if the parties breach any of the terms of the contract (Chapter 5.4).

On the other hand, tougher enforcement measures may be foiled by industry boycotts. For example, the Philippines embassy's move of imposing additional security bonds on employers, maid agencies and maids to ensure that the standards of employment practices endorsed by the embassy are adhered to led many maid agencies to resort to promoting FDWs from other countries who are willing to accept less favourable conditions of work in order to avoid these additional obligations (Chapter 5.3). Thus the abundance of supply of FDWs from around the region (due to pressing economic conditions in these areas) gives the maid agencies and employers in Singapore the

power to shape FDW working conditions in their own interests. Therefore the weak economic position of FDWs, as subjects of global economic structures, and the economic imperatives of the sending states may also explain why the latter are reluctant to exert diplomatic pressures to formalise work standards through bilateral agreement with host states.

The effectiveness of contractual agreements for ensuring equitable work relations may also be dubious. This is because the employer-FDW relationship may transcend a purely business arrangement as a result of the personal nature of domestic work and live-in arrangements. For instance, a Filipino maid quipped that she does not mind washing her employer's car three times a week, even if it breaches standards imposed by the Philippines embassy, because her employers are 'kind to her' (The Straits Times 1996d). The personal nature of relationships between employers and FDWs have been noted by many previous researchers and this has been criticised as allowing the strategies employed by employers to mask the asymmetrical power relationships in domestic work to a point at which unpaid labour can be extracted (Chapter 2.3).

The relationship between FDWs and their employers

The relationships between employers and FDWs can range from 'archetypal stepmother-Cinderella type relations to business-like arrangements to warm familial ones' in which FDWs are treated as 'one of the family' (Yeoh and Huang 1999: 1157). Nevertheless, Huang and Yeoh also note that control over FDWs' social life and surveillance are generally considered to be essential strategies and are the norm in all types of Singaporean employer-FDW relationships. Control and surveillance are carried out by various means such as prescribing specified use of time through the use of timetables, prohibitions on leaving employers' homes without permission and supervision and control over the use of the telephone. Some employers resort to calling home regularly from work to check that the home-line is not engaged for extended periods and installing electronic gadgets that list telephone numbers called as ways of monitoring telephone calls (Huang and Yeoh 1996: 485).

In addition, the FDWs' freedom over their private time and forays beyond the 'disciplinary gaze' of employers are controlled either through denial of regular rest

days or by drawing up rules over use of rest days. Not all FDWs enjoy regular rest days and the frequency of rest days vary between FDWs of different nationalities. A survey indicated that Filipino FDWs enjoy regular rest days ranging from one a month to one a fortnight, Sri Lankan FDWs have a rest day at least once every month while most Indonesian FDWs do not have any rest days at all (Yeoh and Huang 1998: 588). In cases where rest days are granted, employers employ various tactics to ensure that FDWs are still within their 'disciplinary gaze' and control. These tactics include specifying the places and activities deemed appropriate and safe for FDWs, dictating the specific number of hours that FDWs are entitled to spend outside employers' homes, monitoring the company kept by FDWs by appointing a trusted maid as a 'chaperone' and checking on how FDWs spend their rest days, either through direct interrogation or through more subtle means, such as engaging FDWs in conversations to elicit relevant information (Yeoh and Huang 1998: 591-592).

The control and surveillance of FDWs by the techniques indicated above are a manifestation of their employers' fears and suspicions that FDWs would fall prey to bad company and be led astray. Yeoh and Huang argued that this fear is grounded in the stereotypical image of the FDW as a 'young girl with a different [or often, by inference, inferior] moral and cultural standards who is forced by economic conditions to seek employment overseas' an image which has become a 'stock conversation piece' in Singapore (Yeoh and Huang 1998: 590). This stereotype informs employers' perceptions of FDWs as vulnerable to immoral activities if exposed to the 'wrong crowd', particularly through engaging in romantic courtships with men, adopting undesirable and unhealthy habits, such as frequenting 'inappropriate' places [discotheques, shopping malls and public places which have become popular gathering nodes for foreign workers on Sundays], engaging in illegal moonlighting activities, such as prostitution, and making demands unfavourable to employers after having had opportunities to compare notes with fellow FDWs (The Straits Times, 21 July 1985 and 27 June 1989 cited in Yeoh and Huang 1998: 590).

Employers also have a material interest in resorting to controlling their FDWs' freedom of movement and socialisation. Research indicates that the desire to control their FDWs' freedom is closely tied to employers' fear of losing the S\$5,000 security

bond (Section 4.6) which wholly transfers the task of “policing” FDWs to employers. The bond obligates employers to repatriate their FDWs immediately if they breach any of the conditions attached to the work permits (Dulce and Amba 1995; Arotcarena et al 1986; Huang and Yeoh 1996; Yeoh and Huang 1998). The three conditions of the work permit that induce employers to resort to extreme measures of surveillance are:

- the FDW shall not get involved in any illegal, immoral or undesirable activities in Singapore.
- the FDW shall not cohabit, nor have any children, with a Singapore Citizen or Permanent Resident.
- the FDW is required to undergo a 6-monthly medical screening for venereal diseases, pregnancy and HIV by a registered doctor. Failure of medical will result in immediate repatriation.

(Source: *Employing foreign domestic workers – a guide for employers* n.d.)

Excessive control by employers over FDWs, the norm in Singapore, may be a manifestation of negotiations of identity and of the positions of employers and FDWs. Employers exert control and clear systems of deference by invoking and accentuating social relations of difference such as class, race/ethnicity and nationality to establish their superior position *vis-à-vis* FDWs in the domestic realm (Romero 1992; Chin 1998). In the same vein, Yeoh and Huang (1999b) posit that negotiations of identity also take place along ‘shared’ notions within the domestic realm such as motherhood. They argue that an examination of negotiations of identity between employers and FDWs in the domestic realm may assist our understanding of employers’ anxieties over “difference” and “sameness” as well as explaining employers’ excessive control over their maids and their ‘demand of clear structures of deference as a means of distinguishing “self” and “other”’ (Yeoh and Huang 1999b: 298).

The isolation which FDW experience from having to live-in with employers also makes them vulnerable to harsher forms of discipline and control. For example, in some instances, negotiations of power between employer and FDW translate into the mental and physical abuse of FDWs. Before the Penal Code was amended in 1998 to include tougher sentences for abuse of FDWs, cases of physical abuse on FDWs were on the rise. For example, in 1994 there were 105 reported cases and in 1997, the number of cases reported almost doubled to 192 (The Straits Times 1998a). Physical

abuse inflicted on FDWs included slapping, kicking, biting, hitting, burning and scalding. Although reported cases have decreased markedly since the amendment was made to the Penal Code in 1998, there is still an average of one reported case of physical abuse every nine days as indicated by 2001 statistics (The Straits Times 2002i).

FDWs' relations with the host-society

Insults to FDWs' dignity and verbal abuse are commonly experienced by FDWs in their everyday relations with the host society. This is because the latter 'continuously seek to frame them as the alien other' and FDWs are assigned with inferior stereotypes based on gender, nationality, race/ethnicity and class (Yeoh and Huang 2000: 13). FDWs are stereotypically viewed as poor aliens who are forced to seek a livelihood overseas due to poverty; as unskilled contract workers who are not adept at dealing with the high-technology and fast-paced lifestyle in Singapore; and as promiscuous females or inexperienced young women vulnerable to being duped by predatory male migrants (Huang and Yeoh 1998; Yeoh and Huang 1998; Yeoh, Huang and Gonzales 1999; Yeoh and Huang 2000).

These stereotypes, as well as national stereotypes ascribed to FDWs not only provide a cause and a perceived justification for their employers' excessive control and surveillance of FDWs as described earlier but also culminate in a biased perception and treatment of FDWs by the host society as a whole. This is exemplified by the contestation over use of public spaces by unskilled migrant workers (FDWs included) on Sundays. Media coverage of large gatherings of unskilled foreign workers at certain public nodes, such as shopping malls, public parks and markets, play on the unease that Singaporeans feel about the presence of large numbers of unskilled foreign workers in their midst. Yeoh and Huang (1998) indicated that there are Singaporeans who totally resent these large gatherings and who justify their claims by citing the 'physical' and 'social' pollution that result from these gatherings (Yeoh and Huang 1998: 593).

For example, many Singaporeans find it uncomfortable to shop in Lucky Plaza on Sundays (a popular gathering node for Filipina FDWs) because of the "hordes of maids milling around", the "noise", the "litter" and the "human barricades" (*The*

Straits Times, 13 December 1987 cited in Yeoh and Huang 1998: 593). Anti-social habits, such as littering and urinating in public are also highlighted insinuating the uncultured behaviour of unskilled migrants. Besides the physical pollution, Singaporeans also associate these gathering nodes as breeding grounds for immoral activities, such as part-time prostitution, sexual affairs between FDWs and male foreign workers or between FDWs and local married men, and violence such as fights (Yeoh and Huang 1998: 593-594).

As argued by Yeoh and Huang these perceptions and views indicate an entrenched divide between Singaporeans (self) and the FDWs (other) in everyday social relations. They also posit that the act of boycott by Singaporeans of these spaces (even among those who are prepared to tolerate these gatherings and sanction these migrant enclaves) contributes further to the 'spatial constructions of the foreign maid as 'other' [which thus] further entrench[es] her excluded identity' (Yeoh and Huang 1998: 595).

Avenues of recourse for FDWs

Although employers are not required to abide by standard work practices, FDWs are encouraged to report to their maid agents, embassies or the Foreign Workers Unit at the Ministry of Manpower if they encounter problems with their employers. Dispute settlements involving wages and deprivation of meals are usually resolved through conciliatory negotiations between FDWs and their employers mediated by maid agents, embassy officials or officials from the MOM. In cases where there is physical evidence of abuse, the FDW is now usually advised to lodge a police report after which she is entitled to seek legal recourse and press charges on the employers under the Penal Code (amendment) Act mentioned above. Embassies also provide limited shelter for FDWs who are waiting for their cases to be investigated and resolved, or if they need to appear in court as a witness for trial.

Statistics on reported cases of physical abuse suggest that there is a very low incidence of such cases in Singapore (section above). Nevertheless records of runaway FDWs suggest that less overt types of abuse and ill treatment, such as food deprivation and denial of wages, are quite common. In 1995, it was reported that on average 300

FDWs run away from their employers every month with most turning up at their respective embassies the same day (The Straits Times 1995i).

Records at the office of the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) located at the Philippines embassy in Singapore, show that there were a total of 5470 cases reported by FDWs between 1992-95. This works out to be around 152 cases a month or an average of five cases a day (Yeoh and Huang 1999a). The Sri Lankan High Commission reported an average of four to five Sri Lankan FDWs lodging complaints to the embassy daily (Yeoh and Huang 1999a), while the Indonesian consulate noted that an average of three to four FDWs lodge complaints each day against their employers (*Tenaga Kerja Indonesia di Singapura* 1999). FDWs usually complain of being overworked, denied their salaries, given insufficient or poor quality food, physically abused or ill-treated or are unable to tolerate their employers' nagging (The Straits Times 1995i; *Tenaga kerja Indonesia di Singapura* 1999; Yeoh and Huang 1999a). Although FDWs are advised to turn to their maid agents first if they encounter problems, they complain to embassies out of fear that the maid agents would blame them for their problems.

Religious organisations, mainly Protestant and Catholic churches, have also been active in setting up migrant support groups which offer a space for FDWs to retreat to during rest days. These groups cater mainly to the social and spiritual needs of FDWs, such as offering skill classes, counselling groups, excursions and the celebration of specific occasions such as Christmas, and special church services that cater specifically to a migrant congregation (for detailed overview see Chapter 7.1). In the year 2000, a local mosque has taken the initiative of providing similar services to Indonesian Muslim FDWs and its membership numbers have grown rapidly since then (The Straits Times 2002n). Although these associations organise social activities strictly, participation in these activities may provide collective 'resistance' against the dominant stereotypes of FDWs as poor, stupid, backward and uncultured. This issue will be explored and discussed further in Chapter 7.

4.9 Complex asymmetrical power – contextualising the subordination and domination of FDWs in Singapore

I have pointed to the usefulness of Foucault's notion of power as constituting complex flow and a set of ever-changing relations between different groups and areas of society as a means of contextualising the various relationships in which FDWs are caught (Chapter 2.4). I argued that the factors underscoring the subordination and domination of FDWs are indeed complex because they do not come from one source, such as a particular institution or body, or serve the same function, such as simply to produce an inexhaustible army of labour or equated with one universal category such as global capitalism, patriarchy or racism (Chapter 2.4).

FDWs in Singapore are caught in a complex set of power relations with different groups of society such as employers, sending states and the Singapore state, maid agents/agencies, the host society and global economic structures. That these power structures in which they are entangled may or may not serve the same function will be illustrated further. Foucault posits that power establishes technologies (truths, discourses, institutions and practices) that condition bodies and behaviour of subjects and produce effects such as discourses, knowledges and programmes (Grosz 1988; Hindess 1996; Danaher et al 2000). These key concepts are utilised in the following paragraphs to contextualise the complexity of factors underscoring the subordination and domination of FDWs in Singapore.

While the power structures in which the FDWs are entangled may or may not serve the same functions they produce the simultaneous effects of generating an inexhaustible supply of cheap, compliant and docile bodies for domestic work. Firstly, unequal global economic structures initiate the importation and supply of unskilled workers from poorer countries in the Southeast Asian region to serve Singapore's economic needs. The high standards of living enjoyed by Singaporeans and Singapore's economic superiority in the region have a significant influence on Singaporeans' consciousness in negotiating their perceptions of 'self' and of foreign workers, or FDWs in particular, as the immigrant 'other' in the country. In addition, Singapore's foreign worker policy is primarily aimed at protecting the country's wider economic, social and political interests and therefore officially sanctions

discrimination against unskilled foreign workers by according privileges and imposing limitations on foreign workers based on income levels, education and skill qualifications. These categories also reinforce the class distinctions implied by the nationality and race/ethnicity of the various groups of foreign workers (Sections 4.2 and 4.3).

State discourses on unskilled foreign workers as disseminated through the media also help frame foreign workers as 'social problems' (Section 4.3) inscribing foreign workers, and FDWs in particular, as the inferior 'alien' other whose numbers and behaviour must be controlled for the overall protection of the society. Thus state discourses, Singapore's foreign labour policy and other state policies which aim to enhance Singapore's economic competitiveness consequently inform and reinforce perceptions of the inferiority of foreign workers and of FDWs in particular, through negative discourses disseminated by the media and the categorisation of groups of people based on class. This may explain the patronising attitudes of Singaporeans to foreign workers or FDWs in particular and the discrimination that the latter face in their everyday relations with the former.

Although state discourses and institutional policies condition and influence the power structures in which FDWs are caught up with their maid agents and their employers, they (maid agents and employers) have other motives which influence their relations with their FDWs. For example, maid agencies contribute to the conditioning of FDWs' bodies and behaviour through the construction of national stereotypes which they employ in their marketing and promotion of FDWs (Section 4.7). Maid agencies also practice and promote techniques of discipline which include harsh punishments and discriminatory treatment of FDWs in the domestic realm to create the docile and compliant servants desired by their employers (Section 4.7). Despite being pre-conditioned by the discourses and technologies produced by maid agencies and the state, employers also have their own motives for resorting to techniques of discipline, i.e. to establish their superior position and identity vis-à-vis their FDWs within the domestic realm (Section 4.8). In addition, employers are also motivated to employ 'techniques of discipline' such as imposing control on the behaviours and movements of their FDWs in order to avoid state pecuniary penalties. However, these acts are essentially conditioned by a biased view of FDWs initially based on the

national stereotypes, the recommendation of maid agencies and the wider discourses which contribute to the subjectification of FDWs as the inferior alien other as described in the paragraph above.

The weak economic position of FDWs within the context of the global economy also weakens their sending states' bargaining power to exert diplomatic pressure in pushing for the formalisation of work standards to protect the rights of FDWs as workers (Section 4.8). However, the global economy is not the only factor that contributes to FDWs' subordination and domination. As has been illustrated, the power structures in which FDWs in Singapore are caught are simultaneously influenced by patriarchy, racism and class. The simultaneous results of this complex power structure are the inexhaustible supply of women OCWs from around the region for live-in domestic work in Singapore and their subjectification as compliant and docile servants and as the inferior alien 'other' in the country. Because maid agents, employers, the Singapore state and the host society have the upper hand in determining the migration flow, employment conditions and treatment of FDWs in Singapore, I conclude that FDWs are caught in an asymmetrical power relationship which underscores their subordination and domination in Singapore.

Conclusion

I have shown how Singapore, as a nation-state struggling to manage its scarce human resources, has become dependent on the services of unskilled foreign workers including FDWs to service the growing middle-class. The high standards of living in the country have also led to the services of live-in FDWs becoming more indispensable (at least perceptually) as more women are compelled to remain in the workforce after starting a family. Moreover, Singaporeans' preference for live-in FDWs suggests that they are slow to adapt to western concepts of institutional care. It may also reflect inadequacies in the state's initiatives in making institutional care a more attractive option. This preference for the transfer of household duties from local women through the introduction of the FDW scheme is a strong reflection of the Singaporean government and people's patriarchal notions of traditional gender roles.

I have also provided a detailed description of the institutional framework and relationships of FDWs in Singapore in which both institutional and non-institutional

factors shape and characterise their migration, employment and experience in Singapore. As an outcome, I posit that, in general, the treatment of FDWs in contemporary Singapore more closely resembles that of *mui tsai*, or girl servants from China, who were prevalent in the early colonial days than that accorded to *amahs* of the Pearl River Delta, who were held with respect and were also once a popular choice of domestic servant in the country. In the next chapter, I focus on Indonesian FDWs in Singapore and describe in detail the effects of these asymmetrical power structures on their working conditions, experiences and treatment in the country.

CHAPTER 5

INDONESIAN FDWs: THEIR BACKGROUND, THEIR RISING POPULARITY IN SINGAPORE AND THE NATURE OF THEIR MIGRANT EXPERIENCE

Introduction

The number of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore started to rise significantly in 1995, following the furore over the Flor Contemplacion case. This was an outcome of maid agencies promoting Indonesian and Sri Lankan FDWs in order to evade the interventionist policies of the Philippines embassy in Singapore (Chapter 4.7). This chapter focuses on the effects of the complex, asymmetrical power structures that underscore the working conditions, experiences and treatment of FDWs in Singapore.

I begin by describing Indonesia's economic and labour market characteristics in order to highlight the social and economic importance of migrant workers to that country. Secondly, I outline the gender and skill characteristics of Indonesian migrant workers and highlight the predominance of unskilled female migrant workers in that country's migrant outflow. Thirdly, I describe the underlying reasons for the rising popularity of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore and argue that the promotion of Indonesian FDWs by maid agencies reflects a maid culture that values cheap and compliant maids. Fourthly, I describe the stereotypical identities of Indonesian FDWs and their impacts on working conditions and treatment in Singapore. Fifthly, I document issues and problems specific to Indonesian FDWs in Singapore and the official responses to these problems.

In conclusion, I argue that the official responses to issues surrounding the employment of Indonesian FDWs have not been totally effective. This is in part because of widespread corruption in Indonesia and the misdirected efforts of some of the policies of the Indonesian state. On the other hand, despite having been able to reduce the number of reported cases of maid abuse in the country, the Singaporean state has continued to refuse to enact a standard work contract stipulating a compulsory rest day which officially sanctions isolation, and is a major factor underscoring the

mistreatment of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore. Moreover, the Singaporean state's official responses have been focused at addressing institutional power imbalances but not the discursive inequities that contribute to the subjectification of Indonesian FDWs in the domestic and social spheres.

5.1 Indonesia's economic and labour market characteristics

Indonesia's economic and labour market characteristics have led to the country following in the footsteps of traditional labour exporters, such as the Philippines, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Indonesia's total workforce is estimated to stand at 90 million, with an annual net increase of 2.5 million workers (Hugo 1995; Depnaker 2000 cited in Hugo 2000; Nazara 2001). Despite a robust economy with an average GDP growth rate of 6.5 per cent per annum and a persistent reduction in overall poverty in the past three decades of industrialisation until the economic crisis in 1997, underemployment still remains high (Hugo 2000). The primary factor underlying this paradox is the mismatch between the demand and supply of particular types of labour skills (Ananta *et al* 1998: 316).

The mismatch arose because Indonesia's education system has not been able to keep pace with the demands of its changing economy (Nazara 2001: 214). For example, the average length of schooling for Indonesian workers in 1988 was 5.04 years; ten years on in 1998, it stood at 6.69 years, a mere increase of 1.65 years. This means that the average Indonesian worker has only an elementary education (Nazara 2001: 214). The relatively poor quality of Indonesia's workforce is evident: it is ranked last among the ten ASEAN nations and 102 out of 164 countries worldwide (*Pikiran Rakyat* 2002). On the other hand, state-owned investments are largely capital intensive, and require highly skilled workforces. This abundance of cheap unskilled labour initially attracted foreign investors to establish labour-intensive industries when the country first embarked on economic liberalisation. However, rising incidences of labour protests among unskilled low-wage workers and demands for higher wages induced some foreign companies to shift their labour-intensive operations elsewhere and to focus on capital and skill-intensive industries (Amjad 1996: 344). Local entrepreneurs have

similarly been deterred from establishing labour-intensive plants (Ananta *et al* 1998: 315).

In addition, the rural sector underwent changes with large-scale commercial agricultural developments and increasing mechanisation taking over more traditional labour-intensive methods of farming. This has resulted in large volumes of displaced rural labour. As noted by Hugo (1995: 276) in the 1990s, for the first time, the proportion of the workforce involved in agriculture was less than half of the total workforce, reflecting a significant labour displacement from the agricultural sector. Displaced rural workers, with a majority being lowly educated, thus make up a substantial proportion of the underemployed.

The economic crisis in 1997 and the social and political instability that followed saw millions of Indonesians retrenched from their jobs. In June 1998, the state estimated that the number of unemployed persons would reach 15.4 million by the end of that year, which is 17.1 per cent of the workforce (Ananta *et al* 1998). The years following the crisis also saw 39.1 per cent of the population, or 79.4 million people, a record proportion, living below the poverty line¹. This was an outcome of the massive retrenchments and spiralling inflation brought about by the plummeting value of the Rupiah (Ananta *et al* 1998: 319). Because Indonesia is not a welfare state, people were compelled to take whatever jobs they could to feed themselves and their families. Many turned to the informal sector or became unpaid family workers. The crisis certainly had a deep impact with 30.15 million, or one third of the workforce estimated to be underemployed in 2002 (*Pikiran Rakyat* 2002).

Indonesia's labour market and general economic characteristics as described above show categorically that it is a labour surplus nation with an abundance of unskilled labour. This surplus ballooned further after the onset of the 1997 economic crisis. However, Indonesia is surrounded by the labour-short nations of the Asia-Pacific region. The burgeoning economies of the Middle East and East Asia such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, Japan and also Singapore and Malaysia, led these

¹ In 1998, the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) in Indonesia adjusted the poverty line to Rp 52,470 and Rp 41,600 for urban and rural areas respectively (Ananta *et al* 1998: 319).

countries to experience labour shortages in various sectors of their economies. Despite being affected by the Asian economic crisis, these countries face a problem of scarce human resources, especially over the long-term. This is partly because some of these countries have suffered prolonged low total fertility rates (TFR) impacting upon real population growth. For example, Singapore has been registering a TFR that is below replacement level since 1977 despite the state's effort to address the problem by reversing the anti-natalist policy of "two is enough" introduced in 1972 to a selectively pro-natalist policy of "three, or more if you can afford it" in 1986 (Yap 2003). In addition, the expanding middle-class in these countries shun the more laborious and menial 3D jobs, creating huge shortages especially in personal services and in the transport, building and agricultural sectors (Hugo 1997). Many Indonesian workers were drawn to these countries to seek contract employment in the unskilled and semi-skilled sectors. These types of workers are officially known as Overseas Contract Workers (OCWs). Currently, Indonesia is one of the world's largest exporters of OCWs.

5.2: Indonesian OCWs – significance, volume and characteristics

The economic and social benefits of international labour migration

The Indonesian state views overseas work as a lucrative economic enterprise because it brings in much-needed foreign exchange earnings through remittances. Official estimates show that the amount of remittances has been increasing since Indonesia started to incorporate the export of labour into its five-year economic development plans (Hugo 1995: 287). In 1998, the official estimate of remittances by 1.26 million migrant workers was US\$3.5 billion (Asia Pulse 1999), while in the first six months of 2001 remittances were estimated to be worth US\$4 billion (Asian Migrant News cited in Hugo 2002). However, it is widely believed that the amount of remittance is much higher than these official estimates suggest because a substantial amount is not channelled through official means (such as banks and commercial financial services) but through informal networks of relatives and friends. Many individual migrants also bring back accumulated earnings at the end of their contracts (Hugo 1995).

Remittance earnings help to rectify the country's current account deficit which stood at US\$4 billion in the early 1990s. Statistics for 2001 indicate that Indonesia has a current account surplus of US\$6 billion (*Indonesia at a glance* n.d.). In addition, as argued by Hugo, since most migrant flows are in the semi-skilled and unskilled categories, it helps to 'relieve local pressures of a growing population on agricultural resources' (Hugo 1995: 287). Indeed, opportunities to secure employment overseas help relieve the social pressures that might erupt from the large volumes of persistent underemployment and the associated poverty traps (Tirtosudarmo 1999). Thus, the state views the export of unskilled labour as a cheap and rapid method of solving not only economic problems associated with unemployment but also of curbing potential social unrest.

At a micro-economic level, the impact of remittances is readily seen in the material improvements of regions that register high volumes of migrant flows. A study conducted in a village in West Java, one of two regions registering the highest flow of official outmigrants, shows that, on average, households with a family member working overseas have a monthly income of US\$147, which is twice that of a household without one (Adi 1996 cited in Hugo 2002). Studies of the spending patterns of migrant households indicate that major proportions of income are spent on the education of children and siblings, on house building or home improvements and on day-to-day necessities (several authors cited in Hugo 2002: 174).

The improved quality of life is evident, as noted by many researchers who have compared the style of housing and material contents of households with a family member working overseas with those of households without one. A typical family whose main source of income comes from overseas earnings would live in a house made of bricks or stone, with glass windows and tiles, furnished with more pieces of furniture and modern appliances such as a television and a radio. A family wholly dependent on local income would typically live in a house made of *attap* (thatch), with untiled dirt floors, sparsely furnished and with no modern electrical goods (Mantra *et al* 1986 and Adi 1986 cited in Hugo 1995). Another characteristic symbol of the prosperity of households supported by income from overseas is the installation of a *parabola* (a satellite dish) in their houses which enables reception of television

channels from Hong Kong, Malaysia and Australia. Indeed, the installation of a parabola distinguishes the wealth of migrant households because the cost of installation is estimated to be three times the local annual average income (Hugo 2002: 174). The benefits of marked increases in the level of consumption are more widespread than just at the household level. Increases in consumption levels also produce a multiplier effect through the creation of local employment resulting from the boom in the local construction and building industry thus contributing to overall regional development (Hugo 1995: 289).

Recognising the economic and social benefits of overseas work, the Indonesian state embarked on formally incorporating the export of labour into its Five-Year Economic Planning strategies (*Repelita*). The state first set targets on the deployment of overseas workers in *Repelita III* (1979-1984) and, since then, official targets have increased almost thirty fold from 100,000 workers to 2.8 million in *Repelita VII* (Table 5.1). The Centre for Overseas Employment (AKAN) within the Department of Manpower (DEPNAKER) was also established to facilitate deployment of workers overseas.

Table 5.1: Targeted and official number of legal migrants deployed in the five-year economic planning phase.

Five Year Planning Periods	Target	Total Deployed
Repelita VII 1999 - 2003	2,800,000	862, 828*
Repelita VI: 1994 - 1999	1,250,000	1,461,236
Repelita V: 1989-1994	500,000	652,272
Repelita IV: 1984 - 1989	225,000	292,262
Repelita III: 1979 - 1984	100,000	96,410
Repelita II: 1974 - 1979	none set	17,042
Repelita I: 1969 - 1974	none set	5,624

(Source: Hugo 2002: 161)

*Covers 1999 and 2000 only

Origin, major destinations and undocumented migration

Throughout the 1980s, the Middle East² accounted for three-quarters of the official migrants deployed (Table 5.2). By the early 1990s, Malaysia and Singapore emerged as major destinations accounting for half of migrants deployed. The proportion of official migrant flows to the Middle East by then had diminished to roughly around half of total migrants with the exception of 1998/1999 when the number of official migrants to the Middle East was highest and was attributable to the regional economic crisis (Hugo 2000). Indonesian workers also find employment in other affluent countries in the Asia-Pacific region, such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea and Japan.

² The Middle East in this context refers mainly to Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia has always accounted for more than 90 per cent of legal Indonesian workers deployed to this region, with the United Arab Emirates accounting for the rest (Hugo 1995; Hugo 2000; Nazara 2001).

Table 5.2: Number of Indonesian overseas workers processed by the Ministry of Manpower, 1969-2000

Year (Single year)	Middle East		Malaysia/Singapore		Other		Total No	Change Over Previous Year (%)	Sex Ratio (Males/100 Females)
	No	%	No	%	No	%			
2000	128,975	30	217,407	50	88,837	20	435,219	2	46
1999	154,327	36	204,006	40	69,286	16	427,619	6	41
1999-2000	153,890	38	187,643	46	62,990	16	404,523	-2	44
1998-1999	179,521	44	173,995	42	58,153	14	411,609	75	28
1997-1998	131,734	56	71,735	30	31,806	14	235,275	-55	20
1996-1997	135,336	26	328,991	64	52,942	10	517,269	328	79
1995-1996	48,298	40	46,891	39	25,707	21	120,896	-31	48
1994-1995	99,661	57	57,390	33	19,136	1	176,187	10	32
1993-1994	102,357	64	38,453	24	19,185	12	159,995	-7	36
1992-1993	96,772	56	62,535	36	12,850	7	172,157	15	54
1991-1992	88,726	59	51,631	34	9,420	6	149,777	74	48
1990-1991	41,810	48	38,688	45	5,766	7	86,264	3	73
1989-1990	60,456	72	18,488	22	5,130	6	84,074	37	35
1988-1989	50,123	82	6,614	11	4,682	8	61,419	1	29
1987-1988	49,723	81	7,916	13	3,453	6	61,092	11	35
1986-1987	45,405	66	20,349	30	2,606	4	68,360	23	61
1985-1986	45,024	81	6,546	12	4,094	7	54,297		44
1984-1985	35,577	77	6,034	13	4,403	10	46,014		79
1983-1984	18,691	64	5,597	19	5,003	17	29,291		141
1982-1983	9,595	45	7,801	37	3,756	18	21,152		
1981-1982	11,484	65	1,550	9	4,570	26	17,604		
1980-1981	11,231	70	564	4	4,391	27	16,186		
1979-1980	7,651	74	720	7	2,007	19	10,378		

(Source: Hugo 2000: 3; Hugo 2002)

According to Hugo (2000), the significant role of chain migration and informal networks has led to certain regions in Indonesia registering higher levels of OCWs than others. The areas of origin of official and undocumented OCWs also tend to vary. Overall, Java registers the highest numbers of official OCWs, with the provinces of West Java being the source of most official OCWs (Hugo 2000: 8). On the other hand, East Java registers higher numbers of unofficial OCWs (Spaan 1999 cited in Hugo

2000). Records also show that unofficial OCWs in East and West Malaysia also come from East and West Nusa Tenggara, South Sulawesi and Central Java (Hugo 2000: 8).

There are discrepancies in the estimates of total stocks of Indonesian OCWs due to the incidence of undocumented labour migration. For example, the Consortium for the Defence of Migrant Workers (KOPBUMI) estimates that there are 4 million Indonesian OCWs (KOPBUMI, personal communication, July 2001) while Hugo's estimates from various sources indicate that around the Year 2000 there were 2.5 million Indonesian OCWs worldwide (Hugo 2000: 7). As noted in Chapter 2.1, undocumented international labour migration can take a few forms one of which is when a migrant worker enters a destination country without passing through official border checkpoints and without official documentation such as a passport. Hugo has identified that this type of movement is especially common in Malaysia where Indonesians enter the country clandestinely along the coastline of Johor (the southernmost state of Peninsular Malaysia) by crossing the Malacca Straits from the Riau Islands of Indonesia (Hugo 2000). A worker who enters a destination country illegally is thus undocumented in Indonesia's records and in the records of the country of destination.

Undocumented labour migration also occurs when an Indonesian worker enters destination countries through official border checkpoints under the guise of a tourist with a social visit pass. She/he then either applies for a work visa in these countries and works legally, or overstays their visa and works illegally. In fact, most workers entering the country by this means already have work arranged prior to their arrival. For example, maid agents bring large numbers of Indonesian FDWs into Singapore on social visit passes circumventing official channels of migration for migrant workers in Indonesia. These FDWs are not committing an offence in the eyes of the Singaporean authorities because they have already been granted an IPA and would be eligible for an official work permit upon passing a medical examination by a certified Singaporean doctor (Chapter 4.6). Nevertheless, these FDWs are undocumented and are not officially registered as an overseas worker with Indonesia's Ministry of Manpower because they left their own country as tourists.

However, those workers who work illegally while in the host country on social visit passes are undocumented in the official records of both destination countries and Indonesia. Despite crossing borders legally at official checkpoints, they are breaching the conditions of their social visit passes by taking up paid employment. They also become illegals when they overstay their visas. An example would be the thousands of Indonesian workers who work on plantations in Sabah, East Malaysia, by crossing border checkpoints in East Kalimantan on social visit passes (Hugo 2002: 160).

The high volume of clandestine migration occurs because of the tedious and expensive bureaucratic red-tape of official migration channels. As observed by Spaan in Java, passports and other required documents are too expensive for the potential migrants to purchase and take a long time to acquire. Further, Spaan (1994: 8) noted that there are twenty different documents or letters that a migrant must obtain to satisfy the requirements of the official channels of migration. Acquiring these documents is complex because this requires many levels of bureaucracy from the village headmen, through to the district police to national officials of the immigration department. Moreover, the existence of established illegal migration routes made it very attractive for migrants to follow this path.

This large volume of undocumented migration poses a serious problem for the Indonesian state in their attempts to regularise their systems of labour export. It also signals the ineffectiveness of the current system which exposes Indonesian migrant workers to exploitation and mistreatment by illegal recruiters. In addition, it suggests that the socio-economic impacts of migrant workers are far greater than those estimated and planned for by the Indonesian government.

Women OCWs and their occupational niches

Records of official migration reveal that Indonesian OCWs are mainly concentrated in domestic service, and the plantation, manufacturing and transport sectors. The proportion of migrants in domestic service was highest in the 1980s, accounting for 70 per cent of total official migrant flows (Hugo 2002: 162). Most domestic servants during this time worked in the Middle East serving the burgeoning middle class brought about by the Oil Boom (Robinson 2000). Data for the period between 1999

and 2000 show that the largest single category of migrants (41.5%) is still employed in domestic service while 22 per cent are employed in the plantation sector (Hugo 2002: 162). This reflects the dominance of women among Indonesian OCWs. Indeed, the number of female OCWs has been much higher than that of male OCWs since the early 1980s (Table 5.2), when the state first took serious initiatives to promote the export of labour to the Middle East. In the 1990s, women OCWs also dominated flows to Singapore, Hong Kong and Brunei Darussalam with almost all taking up jobs as live-in domestic servants in these countries (Hugo 1995).

The high levels of women OCWs in domestic service is attributable to the expanding demand in host countries. Moreover, Indonesia's relatively late entry into the market for workers in the Middle East and the limited range of skills of its workers led to Indonesia focussing on the supply of workers for the expanding services sector. At that point in time, the Middle East was also facing problems in recruiting women for live-in domestic service as some countries which had been supplying male construction workers had banned the supply of women for live-in domestic work due to perceived problems of worker protection (Cremer 1988 cited in Robinson 2000).

Although the primary motive of the majority of women who undertake such migration is economic, there are also women who are attracted to employment in the Middle East because of the prospect of performing the *hajj* or the pilgrimage (Sukamdi *et al* 2002). In addition, Indonesian women occupy a niche market because Arab employers favour their Islamic background (Suardiman 1987 cited in Robinson 2000). The dominance of women OCWs in countries such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and Brunei Darussalam in the 1990s is also an outcome of demand. Employers in some of these countries employ Indonesians as live-in domestic workers because of their cheaper costs and of a perceived stereotype of Indonesian women as being more compliant than Filipinos as will be illustrated in Section 5.3 for the case of Singapore. In Hong Kong, most Indonesian FDWs are paid a monthly wage of HK 2, 400 which is well below the minimum wage of HK 3,670 (The Jakarta Post 2002).

The high participation of women in international labour migration also reflects the traditional roles of women in many ethnic groups whereby they contribute significantly to household economy through 'productive work both within and outside the household' (Hugo 1992: 177). This is especially so for Javanese women. Women are also more likely to seek outside employment and to work longer hours the more needy the family is (Williams 1990 cited in Hugo 1992). This may explain the record proportion of women in overseas employment between 1997-1999 (the period of the economic crisis) when more families turned to overseas employment to cope with the income loss brought about by unemployment and underemployment and the rising costs of living due to the plummeting value of the *Rupiah* (Hugo 2000).

Surveys³ of female labour migrants (both documented and undocumented) indicate that women migrants tend to be in their 20s and 30s. Whilst all of them have received some form of education, most of them are lowly educated, with most only having received primary education. The majority of women OCWs hailed from Java, with a substantial proportion surveyed in Kuala Lumpur indicating they came from Sumatra (Hugo 2002: 165-167).

5.3 The rising popularity and stereotypical representations of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore.

Cheap and abundant Indonesian FDWs

When the FDW Scheme was first introduced in Singapore in 1978, Filipina FDWs were the most popular choice of live-in domestic workers. Although official figures are unavailable, estimates from various sources indicate that in 1995, Filipina FDWs constituted 65 per cent of the total FDW population while Indonesian FDWs constituted 20 per cent of the total of 100,000 FDWs (Wong 1996: 99). In 1995, *The Straits Times* estimated that only one fifth of the 80,000 FDWs in Singapore were from Indonesia while three quarters were from the Philippines and the rest from Sri Lanka (*The Straits Times* 1995g). However, the population of Indonesian FDWs began to increase gradually after 1995 following the imposition of a ban in March that

³ These surveys were done by: Dorall and Paramasivam (1992) in Kuala Lumpur; Pujiastuti (2000) on returnees arriving at Jakarta Airport; Nasution (1997) among workers registered with Indonesian

year on Filipina FDWs entering Singapore due to the Flor Contemplacion case. It is estimated that Indonesian FDWs constitute some 50 to 60 per cent of the total estimate of 140,000 FDWs in the country (Woo, personal communication, July 1999).

A survey by Wong (1996) of 18 maid agencies indicated that the ban on Filipina FDWs led to medium-sized agencies withdrawing totally from promoting Filipina FDWs. All surveyed agencies that were still offering both Filipina and Indonesian FDWs promoted Indonesian FDWs more vigorously (Wong 1996: 99-100). Indeed, it can be deduced that the ban on Filipina FDWs marked the gradual increase in the volume of Indonesian FDWs due to the more aggressive promotion of the latter by the maid agencies. However, the imposition of the ban is not the only factor that induced maid agencies to promote Indonesian FDWs over Filipina FDWs. My fieldwork data suggest that the stringent policies imposed by the Philippines embassy as part of the process for lifting the ban also led maid agencies to turn to marketing Indonesian FDWs. The availability and the cheaper means of importing Indonesian FDWs also contributed to the agencies turning to the promotion of Indonesian FDWs in the late 1990s.

As a means of paving the way for the lifting of the ban, the Philippines embassy introduced a standard work contract in May 1996 which aimed to provide better protection for Filipina FDWs. The contract spells out the responsibilities of maid agents, FDWs and employers and standards of work practices⁴ for FDWs. The embassy also requires all parties to lodge security bonds to ensure that the terms of the contract are adhered to. An accredited maid agent is required to place a S\$5,000 bond with the embassy for every domestic worker that it recruits, while employers are required to secure S\$2,000. Some maid agents find these more interventionist policies 'problematic' as reflected in the following quotes:

embassy, Kuala Lumpur and Rural Development Foundation (1992) in East Java (all cited in Hugo 2002: 166-167).

⁴ The contract specifies that Filipina FDWs should be paid a minimum salary of S\$300; be granted a paid-day off every Sunday or be paid S\$10 if she agrees or has to work that day; only work a maximum of 16 hours per day; exempted from washing cars and giving body massages. Employers are also required to pay for FDWs trip to Singapore and back home at the end of two year's contract, provide free meals, suitable accommodation, and pay her medical expenses. Upon renewal and extension of contract, the FDW is entitled to 15 days of paid home leave, return air ticket and travel expenses. If the

...but the problem with Filipinas is...their embassy also intervenes too much and on average Filipinas expect a rest day once a month but now the embassy is making it a compulsory day off once a week or you have to pay them extra.

(Mahmood, maid agent/supplier)

Filipinas are less popular now because too many restrictions. They want rest days and now the embassy says they mustn't wash cars.

(Walter, maid agent)

I was promoting Filipinas for a while. But it became increasingly difficult. There's too much interference from their government and embassy here. They keep pressing for higher salary [and] that is not attractive for clients.

(Ahmad, maid agent and adviser to a consortium of Indonesian labour suppliers)

In addition, the Philippine state also proposed that maid agencies which are seeking accreditation endorse a joint-liability clause under which the maid agents would be held jointly responsible with employers for compensating FDWs found to be unfairly dismissed by employers. This liability clause was considered 'ridiculous' by the agencies who were at first supporting the idea of accreditation. This led many to boycott accreditation. Many agencies then focused on marketing and promoting Indonesian FDWs instead (Woo, personal communication, July 1999).

The entry ban on Filipino FDWs also led to increased agency fees being charged for Filipina FDWs because of supply difficulties through illegal recruitment channels (Wong 1996: 101). On the other hand, the abundant supply of Indonesian FDWs following a temporary halt in FDWs departing for Saudi Arabia as a result of a salary dispute (The Straits Times 1995j) and the cheaper means of importing Indonesian FDWs, made it more convenient for maid agents to procure, import and market Indonesian FDWs. A survey of agency fees in the classified section of *The Straits Times* shows that on average, agency fees for Indonesian FDWs have declined

FDW wants to forego this she is entitled S\$750 plus cash value of home leave (The Straits Times 1996c).

significantly while agency fees for Filipino FDWs have gone up. In 1991, maid agents were advertising agency fees ranging from S\$900 to S\$1,200 for Indonesian FDWs and S\$300 – S\$400 for Filipino FDWs. By 1998, maid agents were advertising agency fees ranging from S\$1 – S\$400 for Indonesian FDWs and between S\$600 to S\$900 for Filipina FDWs.

Anecdotal evidence from maid agents specialising in Indonesian FDWs indicates that the entry point into Singapore via Tanjung Pinang and Batam (part of the Riau Islands) for Indonesian FDWs made it easy for maid agents in Singapore to import Indonesian FDWs at lower costs:

There are two routes to import Indonesian FDWs. One is via Jakarta and the other via Batam. If maids are imported via Jakarta they can get here quicker because of regular flights and also cheaper flights than compared to from Surabaya [East Java]. It's also cheaper to make passports in Jakarta. But I also import maids via Batam so that I can offer even cheaper prices. This is because if they exit from Batam, the fiscal tax [exit tax] is not as expensive as they travel by ferries. I diversify my sources so that I can respond to demand and clients' preferences quicker.

(Khalid, maid broker/supplier)

Most of the girls today are travelling on tourist passports [undocumented labour migrants]. This is easier especially when ban⁵ is on. That's why I get those suppliers that divert their girls to Tanjung Pinang because fiscal [exit tax] there is cheaper than when they travel by air from Jakarta. This is so that I can offer cheaper prices.

(Paula, maid agent)

Widespread corruption in Indonesia also allows maid agents to get around state policies that aim to regularise the maid industry or to protect the interests of FDWs. This allows agents much flexibility when conducting business and ensures a continuous supply of Indonesian FDWs even when the Indonesian state imposes temporary bans on the outflow of women OCWs.

⁵ The Indonesian state resorts to temporary banning of outflow of women OCWs through official channels in order to allow time for relevant authorities and parties to assess and establish measures to overcome exploitative practices such as excessive salary deductions, maid abuse and unsafe work practices (The Straits Times 2001a).

You see there are two ways of importing Indonesian FDWs. One is on work passport. That is cheaper but only valid for three years. The other way is on tourist passports which are slightly more expensive but valid for five years. The ban had no effect on the flow of Indons. Agents simply make tourist passports for them. It's easy to do these things in Indonesia. There are always people who offer their services. They want to make money. Sometimes we can also make work passports when there is a ban because of bribery.

(Walter, maid agent)

The onset of the 1997 economic crisis also led maid agents to continue the promotion of Indonesian FDWs over Filipina FDWs. The cheaper costs of procuring Indonesian FDWs gave maid agents the advantage of offering cheaper alternatives to offset a sluggish market. This flexibility is reflected in the quote below:

It's easier to make money on Indonesian FDWs during the economic slowdown. I have been focussing on them since the market got bad. The Indonesian package is also much cheaper. On average you [employers] can get [employ] an Indonesian maid for \$499 [for agency fees] as compared to a Filipino maid for an average of \$888 [for agency fees]. I have various packages for Indonesian FDWs ranging from \$88 to \$250. I offer cheap prices because I want the girls to be able to work especially those who have been in the queue [waiting at holding houses in Indonesia to be selected by employers] for a long time.

(Mahmood, maid agent/supplier)

In 1998 and 1999, at the height of the crisis, an oversupply of Indonesian FDWs led some agencies to offer Indonesian FDWs for a nominal fee of \$1 in an effort to undercut each other to cope with the ballooning supply of Indonesian FDWs in the market (Figure 4.3). Some agencies were even offering Indonesian FDWs for free (The Straits Times 1998e). Although some maid agents openly criticised such promotions as marketing gimmicks since prospective employers would eventually have to pay for administrative expenses, the crisis in general saw the burden of costs transferred to the Indonesian FDWs because the maid agents kept slashing prices in order to remain competitive.

Indonesian FDWs bound for Singapore take up loans from maid agencies in Singapore which they pay back through salary deductions over a period of time. Before the crisis, Indonesian FDWs were paying, on average, recruitment fees equivalent to three or four months salary (S\$600 – S\$800) but at the height of the crisis some maids entered into agreements to have up to eight months salary deducted (The Straits Times 1998f). On average, the post-crisis years saw Indonesian FDWs paying recruitment fees equivalent to five to seven months salary (S\$1,000 – S\$1,400) (Khalid, personal communication, August 1999). Thus, by charging FDWs higher recruitment fees, maid agents are still able to maintain a reasonable profit margin despite offering cheaper agency fees for Indonesian FDWs (The Straits Times 1998f; Ahmad, personal communication, July 1999; Woo, personal communication, July 1999). As pointed out in Chapter 4.6, Indonesian FDWs are paid much less than Filipino FDWs. According to Huang and Yeoh, the hierarchy of wages accorded to FDWs of different nationalities reflects employers' perceptions and agents' promotion of varying levels of intelligence and ability to learn of FDWs of differing nationalities (Huang and Yeoh 1998: 39).

In summary, the rising popularity of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore from the mid 1990s onwards is attributable to their cheapness and their ready supply. The interventionist policies of the Philippines state following the Flor Contemplacion case induced maid agents in Singapore to promote Indonesian FDWs instead. Widespread corruption in Indonesia, the locational advantage of the country and changing forces of demand and supply also contributed to rising numbers of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore. Although more Indonesian FDWs are able to secure employment in Singapore, their promotion and relative popularity does not come without costs. It suggests that the maid culture in Singapore is one that promotes and favours cheap and more compliant FDWs, as the next section discusses.

Indonesian FDWs - compliant and hardworking

National stereotypes, conflated with various social relations of difference such as race/ethnicity, religious affiliation, educational attainment and class have been employed to create a subordinated group of women deemed fit for house work (Stiell and England 1999; Huang and Yeoh 1998; Stiell and England 1997; Bakan and

Stasiulis 1995; Macklin 1992). Huang and Yeoh (1998) have also shown that employers in Singapore rely on these national stereotypes to evaluate the worth of FDWs when selecting a suitable maid (Huang and Yeoh 1998).

Indonesian FDWs are promoted as being 'hardworking', having a 'good attitude' and posing 'no social problem' (Figure 4.2). It has become an industry norm that most Indonesian FDWs work without rest days. For example, almost three quarters of my sample of 45 Indonesian FDWs indicated that they did not have regular rest days whilst a majority of the Indonesian FDWs surveyed by Yeoh and Huang in a sample of 168 FDWs of various nationalities indicated the same (Yeoh and Huang 1998: 588). Agents employ this as a main selling point because they are aware that employers are cautious about allowing FDWs freedom on rest days for fear of having to deal with possible repercussions as quipped by Majid, a maid agent, '*More employers today prefer Indonesian maids because they can work without day off hence less social problems.*' The close association between 'off days' and 'social problems' expressed above is a manifestation of the subjectification of FDWs as young, vulnerable and unspohisticated (Chapter 4.9).

Another selling point for Indonesian FDWs is their 'good attitude' or in other words 'compliance' and 'obedience', as insinuated by Wang, a maid agent, '*Indonesian maids are good because they are not as fussy [more obedient and less likely to make demands on employers such as rest days etc] as Filipino maids.*' Anecdotal evidence suggests that an FDW's level of education and proficiency in English are used to judge if she would be likely to be compliant or otherwise as shown below:

The Filipino maids are liked because of their command of English but the problem with Filipinos is they are too smart [better educated and in general more urbane], always answer back and difficult to handle [not always compliant]

(Mahmood, maid agent/supplier)

In general, Indonesian FDWs have lower educational qualifications relative to Filipino FDWs. For example, the majority (54%) of FDWs in my sample only completed primary education. A survey by Huang and Yeoh also indicated that almost half of

their sample of Indonesian FDWs (n = 45) completed only primary education while 54.7% of their sample of Filipina FDWs (n = 86) graduated were pre-university or high school graduates (Huang and Yeoh 1998: 30). From this it can be deduced that stereotypes based on educational level and language ability convey a perception of Indonesian FDWs as being more compliant relative to the more eloquent and educated Filipinas.

Finally, Indonesian FDWs are marketed as being 'hardworking'. Anecdotal evidence suggests that their rural and poor backgrounds are assumed to underscore this 'quality':

When I give pep talks to new Indonesian FDWs, I emphasise more on discipline such as telling them not to be nosy about employers' affairs. I don't caution them so much on workload because Indonesians are not fazed by hard work as they are used to that in the village.

(Mastura, a maid agent)

Indonesians are willing to work hard because they are used to the hard life so I'm not worried about them coping with the workload. They are also very determined to prove themselves all the way.

(Ramona, an employer who has employed three Indonesian maids)

Factors such as educational level, rural/urban exposure, socialisation and language ability underpin constructed stereotypical labels of Indonesian FDWs as 'compliant' and 'hardworking'. The popularity of Indonesian FDWs rests on these perceived qualities and is promoted *vis-à-vis* stereotypes of Filipino FDWs.

Indonesian FDWs – slow, naïve, ignorant and impressionable.

Although their lack of education, low proficiency in English and rural and poor backgrounds are appropriated by maid agencies as indicators of desirable qualities such as 'compliance' and 'diligence', as illustrated above, these factors also underpin negative stereotyping of Indonesian FDWs. All the maid agents that I interviewed agreed that their rural backgrounds and poor command of English also underlie their

'lack of ability to understand employers' instructions' and 'inefficiency in carrying out household tasks', such as not being able to 'juggle more than one task at a time' and having 'poor memory' or forgetfulness (Ahmad, personal communication, July 1999; Walter, personal communication, July 1999; Woo, personal communication, July 1999; Sani personal communication, August 1999). Their rural upbringing and limited education are also blamed for their slowness in performing domestic chores and in learning and adapting. For example, Fadilah, a maid agent, noted from her experience '*impatient employers cannot last long [put up] with Indonesian FDWs*' because '*they take at least six months to settle in despite being able to do work*'. Apart from affecting their ability to carry out their duties efficiently, these factors are also thought to underlie their naivety and thus their vulnerability to be duped or led astray.

Ramona an employer noted that '*Indonesians can also be too obliging which sometimes can be disadvantageous [cause harm]*' suggesting that their simple-mindedness, whilst being favourable since it underscores compliance, can also be a bane because it might cause problems both for themselves and employers. The following quotes further illustrate the association made between naivety and being simple, with poor education and from a rural background. The quotes also suggest the sorts of trouble to which Indonesian FDWs are seen to be vulnerable as an outcome of these characteristics:

Indonesians [FDWs] are ignorant and naive because of poor education background. Girls being conned off their salary at the airport in Jakarta upon finishing their contract illustrates their ignorance. See ignorance is there even after two years of employment in Singapore - what do you expect of a girl that comes straight from a village?

Just the other day I had to handle an Indonesian FDW that fell pregnant by a Bangladeshi worker. I asked her why you let him touch you. She said, he promised that he won't get me pregnant. See how "simple minded" they are.

(Woo, maid agent)

Indonesian FDWs as a group are labelled positively as being 'hardworking', 'compliant' and posing 'no social problems'. Nevertheless, they are also labelled as

'naïve', 'slow', and 'simple'. These labels are constructed on stereotypes of class, race/ethnicity, language ability, educational qualification, and rural/urban socialisation. These national stereotypes reflect many qualities of domestic servants that are desired by Singaporean employers but also general perceptions of FDWs as inferior beings.

5.4 Issues of concern surrounding the employment of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore

Isolation

Isolation is a common experience among Indonesian FDWs. Of the 45 maids interviewed, slightly more than half (52%) did not have rest days while 33% said they enjoy regular rest days. Of the proportion who enjoy regular rest days, slightly less than two thirds have a weekly rest day while almost one third enjoy a rest day every fortnight. Half of the interviewees claimed that they only catch up with friends irregularly and only when they have opportunities on rest days. Next to employers and employers' family members, most of the interviewees (65%) also form acquaintances with other Indonesian maids who work in the same neighbourhood. However, a very high proportion of interviewees (71%) noted that they are only able to do so through chance meetings while running errands outside the employers' house, such as going to the shops and taking their employers' children to school. One third of the interviewees claimed that they sometimes organised their work schedule, such as taking employers' children to the playground or going to shops, so that they could meet up with friends in the neighbourhood. Another common method is to steal telephone calls when employers are not at home, with slightly more than half (55%) of interviewees having admitted to doing so at times. A very low proportion of the interviewees (24%) socialised with maids of other nationalities who worked in the same neighbourhood or had the opportunity to socialise with maids who work outside their neighbourhood (24%). Therefore, the social circle of a large proportion of the interviewees is very limited and is limited to incidental meetings in the neighbourhood.

Moreover, 37 per cent had absolutely no knowledge of The Indonesian Consulate (KBRI) in Singapore, i.e., they did not know how to contact KBRI or do not know of its existence and its role as a protector of Indonesian nationals (FDWs included) in

Singapore. Of the remaining 63 per cent who did know about the KBRI, almost half (44 per cent) learnt about *Hari Raya* and National Day gatherings at the embassy through word of mouth but had not attended any of these events. The rest, who had been to the KBRI, came to know of its existence through friends. Very few (three) were actually advised by maid agents to contact the KBRI if employers mistreated them. Although my sample is small, feelings of isolation were, indeed, not uncommon. This was largely attributable to the excessive surveillance and control over FDWs some of which was described in Chapter 4.8. Thirteen per cent of my sample openly admitted that they did not have peers as friends because their employers had warned them strictly against making friends. The quote below provides an insight into the extent of restrictions and of the underlying reasons why some employers impose these restrictions on Indonesian FDWs.

These Indonesian maids you cannot give face [be too lenient on them]. They may seem quiet but they are also smart [scheming]. Once they start having friends they start giving us problems. Even without a day off they can make friends [by] shouting to each other from the window or across the corridor or when sending the children to school. My policy when handling them is that ignorance is bliss [should keep them in the dark]. The fewer friends they have the better. The less they know [the] fewer problems for me.

(Rusmala, employer)

Employers' suspicion and lack of trust, such as that indicated, are not the only reasons for the employers to deprive Indonesian FDWs of regular rest days and limiting their social circle. As the following quote reflects, stereotypical views of Indonesian FDWs as vulnerable and naïve young females also underscore maid agents' practices of not encouraging employers' to grant them the freedom of rest days, despite acknowledging the fairness of doing so:

Off days of course fair. Who can work without off days? But problem with Indons is how you channel them [ensure that they won't get into trouble] and what kind of lot [characters of maids] you have.

(Ahmad, maid agent and adviser to a consortium of Indonesian labour suppliers)

There will be problems if you let Indonesians rest days. There are lots of Bangladeshi migrant workers. The Indonesian embassy has not activities for them on Sundays so they will end up on the streets and likely to get into trouble.

(Woo, maid agent)

However, employers' and maid agents' control are not the only reasons for the limited social circle of Indonesian FDWs. Thirty five per cent of the FDWs in my sample cited their busy daily schedules (especially for those who are caring for babies/toddlers and aged and sick) as reasons for not being granted rest days and for having very limited time to socialise regularly, even with peers working in the same neighbourhood. In addition, twenty two per cent of my sample said that they felt no need to socialise with peers because they were totally dependent on their employers. In such cases, FDWs would have opportunities to enjoy recreational and social activities only if their employers took them along for outings on the weekends. The impacts of isolation are many, one of which is vulnerability to mistreatment and abuse. As noted by the sociologist, Vivienne Wee:

There is a lot of abuse, harassment and exploitation going on, but it's just not visible. If this Indonesian woman [referring to the case of Muawanatul who was beaten and starved to death by her employer] had not died she would still be suffering abuse from her employer and probably nothing would have happened.

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Isolation means that Indonesian FDWs are not able to tap into informal networks of support when they have trouble with their employers. As mentioned above, a substantial proportion of my sample did not know of the existence of the KBRI, one of three official avenues (the other two being maid agents and the police) for FDWs to seek help if mistreated by employers. Although the majority knew about the KBRI, almost all gained this information through the grapevine and not through official channels, such as maid agents or pre-departure seminars. This suggests the importance of access to informal networks to make up for the lack of official preparation and training, since these are a major source of valuable information (see below). One third

of my interviewees who had the opportunity to interact with their peers noted that this made them more aware of what to do should they be mistreated.

Of late there have been several high profile cases of extreme violence and abuse against FDWs in Singapore mostly involving Indonesian FDWs (The Straits Times 2000c; The Straits Times 2002c; The Straits Times 2002h). Between January 1999 and April 2002, 65 Indonesian FDWs fell to their deaths from employers' flats, with 18 cases suspected to be suicides (*Kompas* 2002). Although there is no concrete evidence to suggest a direct association between incidences of suicide and social isolation, information from my interviewees suggests that those Indonesian FDWs who have been able to access informal networks of peers tap into them for mutual support, to overcome homesickness, to strengthen their resolve to honour contracts, despite not being totally satisfied with their placement, to seek help to escape from abusive employers and to share experiences in order to deal with culture shock and aggressive and demanding employers (Chapter 6). Moreover, two Indonesian FDWs who jumped out of the window of their employers' flats in 2001 and 2002 were confirmed to have been abused by their employers prior to jumping (The Straits Times 2003). Thus abuse, exacerbated by isolation, may indeed be one of the underlying causal factors that drove 16 maids to take their own lives.

Living-in with employers and dealing with the host-society

Most Indonesian FDWs are from Java and approximately 90 per cent of them are Muslims (Woo, personal communication, July 1999). On the other hand, the majority (85%) of Singapore's population is Chinese and non-Muslim. Thus in addition to adapting to differences in culture, language and the fast-paced urban lifestyle, Indonesian FDWs working in Singapore also have to adapt to living in non-Muslim households and working for non-Muslim employers.

My interviews with maid agents and FDWs indicate that many non-Muslim employers expect Indonesian FDWs to forego two duties that constitute the pillars of faith of a practising Muslim: performing prayers five times a day and fasting from dawn till dusk every day during the month of *Ramadan* in the Islamic calendar. In addition, they

also expect Indonesian FDWs to be able to handle/cook pork and wash pet dogs, and some would not be aware of Muslims' dietary requirement of eating only *halal* food. The quotes below reflect the conflict between the expectations of non-Muslim employers and the religious obligations of Muslim Indonesian FDWs:

My business is small because I prefer not to place large volume of Indons with non-Muslim employers. When a non-Muslim client walks in I tell them up-front that if they employ Indons they must be prepared to let them pray, fast and provide *halal* food. I also tell them that they should provide gloves for handling pork and that Indons should not be made to wash pet dogs. Some of the clients change their minds after hearing this. I also advise maids who have been selected by non-Muslim employers of the reality of living in non-Muslim households to make them mentally prepared for the differences and what they are expected to give up. Some are prepared, some are not. There are lots of agencies out there who make Indonesians sign declarations that they are prepared to forego fasting and praying and have no problems with handling pork. These girls just sign them because they want to work. But some would not be able to handle [the situation] and then there would be problems.

(Ahmad, maid agent and adviser to a consortium of Indonesian labour suppliers)

I find Chinese employers less fussy when selecting maids than Malay employers. For Chinese employers as long as the girl can work and can speak reasonable English its okay. Malay employers want to know everything about the girl like family background everything. But problem is when Chinese employers employ Indonesians they can't pray and fast. A lot of the Chinese employers stress this. If Malays employ Indonesians they [Indonesian FDWs] won't have problems with practising their Muslim duties.

(Paula, maid agent)

The contents of advertisements in the classified section of *The Straits Times* also suggest these preferences of non-Muslim employers. Some maid agencies openly advertise in maid's bio-data that Indonesian FDWs can handle pork to gain a market advantage. Indeed, information from my sample of FDWs suggests that some FDWs do find it difficult to adapt to living in non-Muslim households because of religious differences:

Maam [my employer] is nice to me. She knows that I am homesick because I left my child whom I was still breastfeeding. I am here for my children's future. I find it really tough living in a non-Muslim household. I haven't prayed since I got here because I don't know the prayer time. I am also unsure if it is clean enough for me to pray because the dogs enter my room and [are] sometimes on my bed. I don't know, I seek strength to keep going when I think of my children. But when I think about my responsibilities as a Muslim...I don't know. I am not 100% comfortable yet, because of this problem with the dogs.

(Ida, a maid, translated from *Bahasa Indonesia*)

Although there are Indonesian FDWs who cannot cope with the conflict and tensions that arise from living in and working for non-Muslim households, which induces them to search for alternative employers (Chapter 6), there are others who are more prepared because of their prior exposure to working for non-Muslim employers, as shown below:

I don't mind working for Chinese employers. I had experience working for Chinese employers when I was baby-sitting in Jakarta. No problems when cooking pork - can wear gloves.

(Suyami, a maid, translated from *Bahasa Indonesia*)

Apart from conflicts that arise from religious differences, Indonesian FDWs also have to negotiate issues of power as do FDWs of other nationalities. These negotiations of power are even made more complex by the live-in arrangement and by the personal nature of domestic service. For the Indonesian FDWs who are employed by Malay/Muslim employers, their similar racial/ethnic backgrounds can also be a bane as noted by the following maid agent:

Most of my clients are Malay/Muslims and I notice that, if Indonesian FDWs are employed for far too long by Malay families, the familiarity can also create problem. There have been quite a few cases where husbands or other male family members end up being together with the maids. This causes anxiety especially among female employers and [can lead to] conflict in the family.

(Sani, maid agent)

An employer of Malay/Muslim descent quoted below, acknowledged this potential 'problem' and thus, cautiously, maintains a 'barrier' between her and her Indonesian FDW. This was to assert her authority and to ensure that her husband and the maid did not get too 'familiar' with each other. Nevertheless, the caring aspect of domestic work means that, in order to perform her duties well, a FDW is also expected to blur the employer-employee boundary at appropriate times (such as when caring for children). This exemplifies the ambiguous nature of domestic work and is an aspect of the complex negotiations of power in which a FDW is involved in her everyday relations with her employers and their families.

With my maid I always remind her that I am the employer and that she is the employee. But when she takes care of my kids I tell her to treat them like sisters. This is because if she treats them like strangers, I am afraid she would feel detached and won't care for them like humans. There should be at least an artificial bonding when you take care of children. But there should be a line drawn between an employer and an employee. If there isn't a line I wouldn't feel comfortable, as I wouldn't know how to treat her. If the relationship sometimes oversteps the employer-employee boundary with me its okay but what I'm concerned about is my husband.

(Ramona, 30, experienced employer of Indonesian maids)

Whilst, in the above case, the Indonesian FDW involved was able to juggle these various expectations of her employer and was able to honour her contract, there are also cases where the complexity of the relationship results in conflicts and tensions as employers resort to excessive control and 'clear structures of deference' in order to distinguish between 'self' and 'other' (Yeoh and Huang 1999: 298). The anecdote below illustrates how a national stereotype imbued with class and gender underlies the lack of trust and patronising attitude of an employer towards her Indonesian FDW.

My experience taught me that there are many Singaporeans who look down on us Indonesians because we are maids. They think we are worthless and stupid. One of my ex-employers is an example. She thinks I'm stupid and always find mistakes in whatever I do. She follows me around and nags at me all the time. I kept quiet for a long time. One day I cannot stand her nagging and answered back how do you expect me to work? She was upset that I talked back at

her and called me a bad name in Chinese. She thinks I don't know but I can understand a little bit of Chinese.

(Sugi, a maid, translated from *Bahasa Indonesia*)

These complexities underscoring employer-FDW relationships can escalate into conflicts and, in some cases, can cause FDWs to run away from their employers, as pointed out in Chapter 4.8. Whilst there are serious cases of abuse, such as non-payment of salary, deprivation of adequate meals and physical and sexual harassment, the majority of FDWs complain most of employers' excessive nagging (Official of KBRI, personal communication, August 1999).

The following anecdote reflects some aspects of the degrading perceptions held by a member of the host-society. In this case, it is evident that Indonesian FDWs are typecast as vulnerable to falling prey to Bangladeshi male migrants, or as morally corrupt women who engage freely in sexual liaisons with male migrant workers. Moreover, the local man puts the FDW in her place by reminding her of the restrictions attached to her work permit, thus emphasising her under-privileged position as the immigrant other *vis-à-vis* his superior position as the citizen of the host country and by stressing the divide between them.

There was a Malay man who made friends with me while I was washing my boss's car. He seemed like a pious [someone who knows a lot about Islam] man so I thought it's good to have a friend like that. Maybe I can learn to be a better Muslim from him. I exchange letters with him and one day he asked if I would like to meet him on my rest day. I asked him if he is not embarrassed to be seen with me because I'm only a maid as Malay Singaporeans can be snobbish. I didn't mean to offend him and I said it in a nice manner as I was just wondering if he would be embarrassed by me. In reply, he wrote many bad things about Indonesian maids in a letter. He wrote how Indonesian maids have made Marina [a popular gathering spot for Indonesian FDWs on Sundays] a sinful place on Sundays by having free sex with Bangladeshi workers and that he would never go there anymore because of this. He also wrote that I should not hope to marry a Singaporean because the conditions in my work permit would not allow me to do so. I was really hurt and angered by his remarks. So I wrote back that only if Singaporeans learn to treat Indonesians well and give them respect we deserve as human beings maybe us Indonesians could treat

them with the same respect too. See this is what Singaporeans think of Indonesian maids like myself.

(Sugi, a maid, translated from *Bahasa Indonesia*)

The potency of such subjectification is reflected in the following quote where the Indonesian maid makes a conscious effort to avoid being implicated with such a typecasting. The anecdote below also implies the kinds of behaviour by FDWs that are not approved of and are viewed negatively by the host-society.

I prefer to go home straight from class [beauty and hairdressing class offered by FILODEP⁶]. I don't like to waste time. Some of my friends sometimes ask if I want to go to Lucky Plaza with them but I prefer to go home. I don't like to go to such places and spend time chatting and walking around at shopping centres like the rest of the girls. It is not good to do so as people [the public] would think bad things about you.

(Tutik, a maid, translated from *Bahasa Indonesia*)

The data presented in the three sub-sections above provide some examples and glimpses of experiences of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore. Complex power in which FDWs are caught led to isolation, cases of abuse and maltreatment by employers, tensions in employers' households, deprivation of practising religious expression and their patronising treatment in everyday social relations. Thus complex power produced Indonesian FDWs as docile and compliant bodies who accommodate employers' and host society's expectations of their behaviour in everyday social relations.

Malpractices in the maid industry

There are various issues concerning malpractice in the maid industry. One is the excessive salary deductions which led the Indonesian state to impose a three-month ban on the entry of Indonesian FDWs in late 1998 (The Straits Times 2001a). The ballooning supply of Indonesian FDWs during the economic crisis and a sluggish market led maid agents to resort to 'bargain basement tactics', i.e., offering Indonesian

⁶ The Philippines Ongoing Development Program.

FDWs to employers at much lower agency fees but charging Indonesian FDWs higher recruitment fees to maintain reasonable profit margins (Section 5.3).

In response to media publicity on the excessive deductions and to an appeal by a member of the public for the government to curb such practices, MOM Singapore emphasised that it was not unlawful for maid agents to make deductions from maids' salaries since this provides payment for air tickets and for recruitment and training. In return, maid agents in Singapore make deductions from FDW's salaries for their counterparts in Indonesia. Thus the Singapore state has no control over the amount of these deductions because they are determined by agents in Indonesia (The Straits Times 1998f). The Singapore state thus disclaims any direct responsibility for such practices and insinuates that Singapore agents are not to be blamed for making excessive deductions because the amounts are actually determined by recruitment fees payable to other agents in Indonesia.

My interviews with maid agents suggest that the practice of excessive salary deductions is attributed to both Singaporean agents and Indonesian suppliers. In general, Indonesian suppliers and Singaporean agents agree on the amount of money to be deducted from FDWs salaries for recruitment fees. Upon procuring an FDW from an Indonesian supplier, Singaporean agents pay them a fee that is intended to be inclusive of the recruitment fee of the FDW agreed upon by both parties. Thus the Singapore agent advances the FDW's loan to the Indonesian supplier. The Singapore agent then reclaims this money by asking employers to deduct it from the FDW's salary over a period of a few months. Thus employers are also drafted into paying FDWs' loans in advance.

Overall, maid agents' profit margins on each Indonesian FDW have shrunk over the years and they are compelled to place more FDWs to maintain income levels:

I think last time the quality of maids was better. Now it's more quantity maids. There is an oversupply in Indonesia and suppliers also slash prices to get rid of their supply. As a result they cut corners, no proper training etc. Now I only make a profit of S\$400 on each maid but I only pay S\$800 to the supplier for each maid.

Then [before 1995] I used to pay S\$1200 – S\$1400 for one maid. My agency started offering S\$0 maids since early last year [1998]. Employers still have to pay about S\$100 plus for maid's medical check-up and insurance and bond policies. We don't charge them for our services but we deduct five months salary [equivalent to S\$1150] from the girls. True the financial burden is heavier on the girls because last time when the market was good we could charge higher agency fees and only deduct three months salary from the girls. But if the girls or employers give problems and want to break the contract we have to cover the losses because we already pay the supplier up-front.

(Paula, maid agent)

Excessive salary deductions are largely brought about by the ready supply of maids, by the failure of Indonesian state to monitor and regulate the maid industry in Indonesia and by the laissez-faire attitude of the Singapore state that prefers to let market forces determine agency fees. So far, the Indonesian state, in trying to combat excessive salary deductions, has resorted to imposing a temporary ban on FDWs importation while they looked into the introduction of policy to rectify the situation. Nevertheless, the ban did not disrupt business because widespread corruption enables suppliers to continue exporting FDWs to Singapore (Section 5.3). On the other hand, MOM Singapore has issued new guidelines to maid agencies not to advertise agency fees and salaries in order to protect the dignity of FDWs (Ahmad, personal communication, July 1999; Woo, personal communication, July 1999).

Another malpractice in the industry is the lack of adequate training and mental preparation of FDWs. The KBRI has identified that one of the underlying reasons that led to conflict and tensions between Indonesian FDWs and their employers is a lack of proper training and mental preparation prior to departure (*Tenaga kerja Indonesia di Singapura* 1999: 7). Another reason cited is the language barrier between Indonesians and locals. Not all Indonesian FDWs are fluent in English, Mandarin or other Chinese dialects, while not all non-Malay employers are fluent in Malay or *Bahasa Indonesia*. This often leads to communication problems which often cause misunderstandings between employers and FDWs because the latter sometimes do not understand and thus do not observe orders properly (*Tenaga kerja Indonesia di Singapura* 1999: 7). KBRI also reports that FDWs are made to perform tasks that were not taught during

training, such as baby-sitting, washing pet dogs and cars. In addition, some FDWs are also made to work for several households and are not given adequate rest (*Tenaga kerja Indonesia di Singapura* 1999: 8).

When I was working at the embassy I noticed that most of the conflicts between employers and maids were because of lack of mental preparation of the girls. They were not given a realistic picture of what to expect of being a domestic worker in Singapore. That is why I proposed to MOM Indonesia to introduce a compulsory orientation program for girls as a requirement before they depart for overseas.

(Ahmad, maid agent and adviser to a consortium of Indonesian labour suppliers)

In theory, Indonesian FDWs who secure overseas employment through official channels are required to undergo proper training at training centres or *Balai Latihan Kerja* (BLK) which have been endorsed by the MOM Indonesia. Only upon completing an orientation program would the prospective FDW be able to apply for a special work passport to enable her to take up a placement overseas. Nevertheless, widespread corruption and inefficient monitoring of policies enable labour recruiters and suppliers to cut corners and attain such documentation underground as reflected in the quotes below:

BLKs are authorised training centres for maids destined for foreign employment. These centres carry out a three day orientation program and cost Rp90,000 for each girl. It's compulsory to produce this certificate from BLK if you want to make work passport for the girl. But you can buy the certificate for only Rp 40,000 under the table. The girl doesn't even have to do the training.

(Mahmood, maid agent/supplier)

Not all maids who come here go through this compulsory orientation program. See, if the maids come from Batam or Tanjung Pinang, BLK doesn't apply. That's also why they are slightly cheaper.

(Ahmad, maid agent and adviser to a consortium of Indonesian labour suppliers)

The presence of unlicensed labour recruiters (*mafia* or *calor*) who scour villages for potential FDWs and later “sell” them to both licensed and unlicensed agencies in the cities also pose a problem (Sukamdi *et al* 2002). Apart from recruiting girls, *mafias* also handle all the paper work required at the provincial level to make an identity card (IC), which is a compulsory document for obtaining a passport. The *mafia* can earn Rp600,000 to Rp800,000 per girl depending on the services they offer. The more expensive their fee the more of the required documentation they handle such as arranging for girls to go through medical examinations (another requirement prior to overseas departure). The duties of the agent/supplier include obtaining passports and providing accommodation, food and some training while the girls wait to be selected by employers overseas (Ahmad, personal communication, July 1999). The *mafia* also sometimes resort to unscrupulous methods in order to lure as many girls as possible into overseas employment. An example of such unscrupulous methods are the false promises the unrealistic pictures of life overseas offered to the girls as reflected in the following quote:

The sponsor was a sweet talker. He made everything sound so simple. He said that if we do not like our employers it would be easy to change to another one. In reality, it was not true. My cousin who left with me was not so lucky and ended up with employers who abused her. They burnt her with hot water. She left after six months and was too traumatised to continue working. I was lucky because my employers are very nice.

(Seri, a maid, translated from *Bahasa Indonesia*)

Anecdotal evidence from my sample also shows that malpractices occur at other stages of the recruitment chain and not simply at the village level through the *mafia*. The quotes below illustrate the dismal conditions that some FDWs have to put up with at ‘training centres’ (temporary accommodation in major cities provided by maid suppliers) in Indonesia while waiting to be deployed to Singapore. The second quote reveals aspects of the degrading treatment of FDWs by a Singaporean maid agent:

The time I spent at the training centre in Jakarta was quite stressful. There were hundreds of us all crammed into a building and we were not allowed to go out at all. The place was overcrowded and we had to queue up for everything. Everything was difficult even

washing ourselves. We were made to take turns to cook in groups for the whole centre and we slept on mats on the cold cement floors. Our meals were pretty basic mainly rice and a raw vegetable salad. We only had a cooked dish twice a week or sometimes when we were lucky three times a week. We were also taught a few English lessons. I was there for three months. After I was informed that an employer had selected me I was moved to a house with about 15 other girls where I stayed for eleven days. I think it belongs to the Singapore agent. There we were shown how to use electrical appliances, wash and clean the house and taught how to speak and greet our employers. Our trainer was an ex-maid who worked in Singapore.

(Sari, a maid, translated from *Bahasa Indonesia*)

I stayed at a training centre in Semarang [capital of Central Java province] for one month. Maid agents from Singapore would visit and interview us to put in their files [include us in their bio-data to market to Singapore employers]. When I first met Denny [the maid agent] he was very nice. He promised that I could change employers if I had problems and said that he was an open and understanding person and that I could approach him any time if I had problems in Singapore. So I agreed to let him be my agent in Singapore. But when I arrived in Singapore with a few other friends he was a totally different person. We had to stay at his house for four days before being sent to our employers' house. He was very fierce and spoke to us harshly. He went through all our bags and threw out what he didn't like. He threw out my "sarong". His wife also treated us badly and we were given very little to eat at that time. He even slapped my friend who stammered and couldn't answer his questions because she was too scared of him. I felt like I wanted to run away and a few of my friends asked to go home which made him more angry. I was very upset but not scared and I blurted out 'Sir you told me in Semarang that you would not force us if we change our minds?' He said that that was Semarang and this is Singapore. Things are different and he can do whatever he likes here. He also warned us not to tell any of our friends who are still back there because he would find out if we write letters to them. Thank god my employers are nice and not like him!

(Sugiati, a maid, translated from *Bahasa Indonesia*)

It is important to note that not all FDWs in my sample noted being exploited or abused. This conforms to a random survey conducted by *The Straits Times* on a sample of 100 FDWs, half of whom were Indonesians and the rest Filipinos. The

survey revealed that, in general, FDWs were satisfied with their working conditions. Data from the sample also revealed that Filipinos are also treated better than Indonesians and are more aware of avenues to seek help while more Indonesians do not know what to do if they are abused by employers (The Straits Times 2002m).

The data presented in this section show that the weak position of Indonesian FDWs as subjects of local and global economic structures and of widespread corruption in Indonesia, contribute to malpractices in the maid industry. These malpractices include excessive salary deductions, improper or non-existent training, bullying and poor treatment of FDWs during the recruitment and training phases of the migration process and blatant disregard for the dignity of FDWs as workers and, at times as human beings. In the next section, I describe some of the official responses to the issues surrounding the migration and employment of Indonesian FDWs which have been described in this section and discuss the effectiveness of these responses.

5.5 Official responses to issues of concern surrounding employment of Indonesian FDWs

The KBRI

The Indonesian state has introduced various ministerial decrees and regulations over the years to police the maid industry and to combat exploitation. For example, in March 1995, in a drive to set tougher standards for maid agencies in Indonesia, the state revoked the licences of almost 400 agencies. Agencies wanting their licences back had to comply with government inspections of their business and were required to lodge higher security bonds with the government for *Rupiah* 75 million (S\$48,000). Moreover, licenced agencies were also expected to set up their own government approved training centres by 1996 (The Straits Times 1995b). In a statement to the press, Mr Suprijanto, the First Secretary to the Indonesian embassy in Singapore was quoted as saying:

Our government is now making it more difficult for agents to get their licences because we want to establish more professional standards among them. This will help us reach our goal to export 100 per cent skilled labour to foreign markets by the year 1999.

(The Straits Times 1995b)

Nevertheless, the above move was viewed by Ahmad, maid agent and labour adviser to a consortium of Indonesian labour suppliers, as being motivated more by profit-seeking by top officials:

When all the agencies' licences were terminated in 1995 what's the use? What's so good about that? They [MOM Indonesia] issue a ministerial decree to nullify your licence because they want people to re-apply. So they appointed about 12 then 24 and then now back to 200, back to square one. They [MOM Indonesia] said they are trying to revamp the industry, but agencies that had their licences taken away then still had to operate businesses so they 'attach' themselves to those agencies with licence [use the name of licenced agencies]. When you 'attach' yourself you need to pay a royalty to the licenced agencies. This royalty finally goes to the top. See this was the problem. Very serious setback during this period. And until now you still have lots of agencies operating in a way they call "*tumpang proses*" [use name of licenced agencies for bureaucratic procedures].

(Ahmad, maid agent and adviser to a consortium of Indonesian labour suppliers)

Another approach of trying to offer better protection to FDWs and regulate the industry is by encouraging agencies to gain accreditation. In August 1996, the Indonesian state announced a new rule that Singapore agencies wishing to import Indonesian FDWs needed to gain accreditation from the KBRI. The rule was made effective in September of that year. The objective was to provide better protection to Indonesian FDWs and to ensure that they were given proper training prior to their arrival to cut down on the number of FDWs who run away to the embassy and file complaints against employers (The Strait Times 1996f). The procedures involved under the new system of accreditation in importing and placing Indonesian FDWs are outlined in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3: KBRI's system of accreditation for maid agencies introduced in 1996

- **Step 1:** The Singapore agency submits an application for accreditation, costing S\$30, to the KBRI together with copies of documents such as the operating licence.
- **Step 2:** Those who have completed stage one must work with, and reach an agreement, with a recruiter in Indonesia. A copy of their agreement must be submitted to the KBRI.
- **Step 3:** An Indonesian recruiter, who selects a prospective maid, must send her particulars and photocopies of her passport to his counter-part here. The latter will enter into an agreement with the maid's employer and apply to MOM Singapore for a work permit. Once the application is approved, the agency here will submit an application to the KBRI to bring in the maid. It is to be submitted together with documents that must be verified by the KBRI. These include the contracts between the employer and the agency, and between the employer and the maid showing the monthly deductions in the maid's salary to pay off debts. This will ensure that the maids do not have to work for months without any salary to pay off huge debts. After verification, the KBRI will issue a letter of approval. The agency here must pay a fee of S\$80 for each maid approved for recruitment. The Indonesian recruiter must have a faxed copy of the embassy's letter of approval to deploy the maid.
- **Step 4:** For cases of extension of contract, the employer – or his authorised agent or representative – and the maid must go to the KBRI to renew or extend the maid's contract after her work permit has been renewed. An employer using an agent or representative must sign the prescribed working agreement form with the maid and authorise the employer's representative to finalise the details. The fee for the renewal or extension is S\$180.

.(Source: The Straits Times 1996f)

Under the new system, FDWs would be trained in Indonesia for a minimum period of one and a half months instead of just one month, at a government or other approved centre run by maid agencies prior to arrival. FDWs bound for Singapore would also be taught English and would be advised on how to maintain good work relationships with employers (The Straits Times 1996g). When the system was introduced in September 1996, the KBRI announced that 120 maid agencies in Singapore had already gained accreditation and advised employers to hire FDWs only from accredited agencies. This is to encourage the 700 maid agencies or so in Singapore to seek accreditation and provide services in accordance with the new system. The KBRI also advised employers to agree to hire maids only if their applications had been endorsed by both the KBRI and MOM Singapore (The Straits Times 1996g).

Information gained from my fieldwork in 1999 suggests that the system introduced in 1996 had a very limited impact on policing the activities of the maid industry and

protecting the rights of FDWs. KBRI's significant under-estimation of the number of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore reveals that there is still a large proportion of undocumented Indonesian FDWs brought into Singapore by non-accredited agencies. The hiring of these FDWs is not endorsed by the KBRI. Thus they are not protected by the standard work contract issued and endorsed by the embassy. For example, in its 1999 report, the KBRI estimated that there were approximately 30,000 Indonesian FDWs in Singapore whilst industry and media sources estimated that there were 50,000 to 60,000. The KBRI admitted that actual numbers are difficult to ascertain because many agencies in Singapore do not report the arrival of FDWs to the embassy. Moreover, the Singapore state also refuses to release the official breakdown of the total population of FDWs by nationality (*Tenaga kerja Indonesia di Singapura* 1999: 6). The report also stated that the number of accredited maid agencies in 1999 stood at 58 which is less than half the number when the system was first introduced in 1996 (The Straits Times 1996g; *Tenaga kerja Indonesia di Singapura* 1999: 2).

As shown in Table 5.4, the terms of the contract endorsed by the KBRI include clauses on rest days, paid annual leave and repatriation fees. However, some maid agents view the contents of the contract as being repetitive of conditions attached to the FDWs' work permits. Moreover, the clause on weekly rest days is also viewed as 'unrealistic' and is thus a disincentive for many maid agencies to seek accreditation:

The contract is not much. If you study properly most of the terms are already enforced by MOM Singapore through the conditions attached to the work permit. The contract also states that an FDW should be entitled to a rest day once a week. Is that realistic? Which employer wants to give FDWs rest day every week? So agencies also think why do I need to pay extra to get accreditation if this is the case. What is the incentive?

(Ahmad, maid agent and adviser to a consortium of Indonesian labour suppliers)

Table 5.4: Terms of employment contract endorsed by the KBRI

<p>Term of employment - two years</p> <p>Wage - one that is agreed upon between employer and employee</p> <p>Costs of employment - employer shall bear all costs of a return air ticket to Indonesia for his/her maid and other administrative fees involved.</p> <p>Rest day - One rest day a week and paid annual leave of 14 days for each year. If leave is not utilised, a cash payment equivalent of 14 days salary should be made.</p> <p>Daily provisions - employers should provide board and lodging with three nutritious meals a day.</p> <p>Accident insurance - In accordance with the requirements of the Singapore Government.</p> <p>Repatriation - employers should repatriate employees when either party wishes to terminate the contract. If termination takes place after the probationary period of six months, all expenses shall be borne by the employer.</p> <p>Employment restrictions - domestic helper shall only work as domestic help for the employer and may not engage in other businesses or occupations. Employers should treat employees in a just and humane manner and in no case should physical violence be used upon the employee. Any disputes should be settled amicably.</p>
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(Source: Extract of contract obtained from the KBRI)

The absence of a monitoring framework to ensure effective enforcement is also one of the reasons why the work standards stipulated in the standard work contract are hardly honoured by the parties involved, as reflected in the following quote:

Yes, the KBRI has a standard work contract. They also make it a rule that we [maid agents] can only deduct three months of the maid's pay. Maids and employers are also required to enter into a standard work agreement endorsed by them [the KBRI] especially for those seeking extension on contracts and go to the embassy to extend FDWs' passports. The contract has clauses on compulsory weekly rest days and other things but there's no enforcement. The KBRI does not monitor, so maids continue working based on personal terms agreed with employers. So there is no standardisation.

(Mahmood, maid agent/supplier)

Moreover, of the 28 cases of abuse committed by maid agencies reported by FDWs to the KBRI in the first six months of 2002, eight cases were committed by agencies accredited with the KBRI (The Straits Times 2002g). This further suggests inefficiencies in monitoring by the KBRI since even accredited agencies could flout the required standards of practice.

In 1996, the KBRI appointed King Fook Consultancy Services, a private consultancy and maid agency, to act as a notary in overseeing the signing of work contracts endorsed by the embassy. Under the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) made between King Fook and the KBRI, both parties agreed to work together in protecting the welfare of FDWs who file complaints at the KBRI. King Fook Consultancy is also obligated to bear all costs involved in investigating and solving cases of breach of contract reported to the embassy. To cover these expected costs, King Fook charges each employer a fee of S\$230. The standard work agreement is made compulsory to those who extend FDWs' passports at the embassy (*Tenaga Kerja Indonesia di Singapura* 1999: 11-12).

KBRI asserted that it prefers to resolve conflicts peacefully by negotiating with FDWs, employers and maid agents first and that it would not be too quick to alert the police unless this is necessary, because their involvement would only lead to delays and the FDW might risk losing her job and being deported (*Tenaga Kerja Indonesia di Singapura* 1999: 9). In general, the KBRI claimed that employers and maid agents would respond instantly when contacted by the KBRI out of fear that it would lead to further losses if the case were brought to the attention of MOM Singapore. Nevertheless the KBRI noted that FDWs who file "petty" complaints, such as employer's excessive nagging or requests for transfers to new employers, would be turned over to maid agents who would then resolve the situation with their respective employers (*Tenaga Kerja Indonesia di Singapura* 1999: 9). Thus, in dispute deemed 'petty', maid agencies are the only avenue of counselling for Indonesian FDWs experiencing conflict with their employers.

As noted in Chapter 4.7, many maid agencies have a reputation for maid abuse and for adopting techniques of discipline that include harsh punishments as a means of 'counselling' FDWs. Reported cases of maid abuse reveal that employers are not the only guilty party. The KBRI noted 28 cases of abuse involving maid agencies in the first half of 2002 alone (The Straits Times 2002g). Physical abuse is not the only method of 'punishment'. Maid agencies also resort to threats such as telling FDWs that they would be made to work as prostitutes or that they would be liable to pay the agency millions of *Rupiah* if they fail to honour their contracts with employers (The

Straits Times 2002g). The worst reported case of maid abuse by a maid agency was committed by three staff of an employment agency who made an Indonesian FDW do squats repeatedly in the nude for two hours with a highlighter stuck in her mouth to stop her from crying. The FDW was humiliated and tortured by the staff after her employer took her in for 'counselling' complaining that she could not perform her duties efficiently (The Straits Times 2002p).

In view of the above instances, reliance on maid agencies to offer 'counselling' to FDWs is an issue which the KBRI needs to reconsider. Moreover, an official of the KBRI noted that a majority of the complaints filed by FDWs at the embassy are regarding employers' 'excessive nagging' (Section 5.4, p.27), implying that a high proportion of them would be redirected to their respective maid agencies for 'counselling'.

The KBRI also noted that it has established a good relationship with the police and would report cases to the police where there was evidence of physical or sexual abuse. In general, most cases would be resolved at the police station, but in severe cases the police would recommend that the FDW press charges and the case would be taken to court where the KBRI would assist in all investigations. The KBRI would also ensure that the FDW would be fairly represented and be given a fair trial. The guilty party would then be sentenced under Singapore's penal code (*Tenaga Kerja Indonesia di Singapura* 1999: 10). The KBRI also has a shelter that can accommodate up to 30 FDWs whose cases are undergoing investigation or trial. However, the KBRI emphasised that it is the responsibility of the maid agent in Singapore to provide board and lodging under such circumstances (*Tenaga Kerja Indonesia di Singapura* 1999: 9).

In the 1999 report, the KBRI also noted that malpractices such as excessive salary deductions, undocumented migration and cases of physical and sexual abuse of FDWs by employers are still occurring (*Tenaga Kerja Indonesia di Singapura* 1999: 12). However, it asserts that these problems are more because of the poor mentality and attitude of individuals and of misunderstandings between the parties involved rather than because of inadequacies in the system that has been established to protect the

welfare of FDWs. It also noted that one of the biggest impediments to ensuring that Indonesian FDWs are not exploited and employed under unfair conditions, is the large number of undocumented Indonesian FDWs in Singapore. These FDWs are not protected under the conditions of the work contract endorsed by the embassy. Hence, both FDWs and employers would be unclear of their rights and responsibilities resulting in conflicts between them (*Tenaga Kerja Indonesia di Singapura* 1999: 12).

Moreover, the KBRI claimed that its efforts in publicising the improved system by working closely with relevant government and private agencies in Singapore have paid off. They cite the increasing numbers of employers who come to the embassy to extend the contracts of Indonesian FDWs. The KBRI also cited the low numbers of runaway maids relative to the estimated volume of 30,000 as further evidence that the system promoted by the KBRI is effective (*Tenaga Kerja Indonesia di Singapura* 1999: 13).

In conclusion, the KBRI identifies the poor quality of Indonesian FDWs as the main reason for their vulnerability to abuse and exploitation by labour suppliers, maid agents and employers. It supports stricter selection criteria for future FDWs with an emphasis on age, health, mental stability, skills, background and educational qualifications to ensure a better quality of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore (*Tenaga Kerja Indonesia di Singapura* 1999: 14). The KBRI also suggests that the Indonesian state increases its monitoring efforts for more effective enforcement of the legislation that it has now introduced. It also advocates regular assessment of the problems that arise through regular meetings with institutional agencies such as the Manpower Department (DEPNAKER), the labour recruitment agencies in Singapore (PJTKA), the labour recruitment agencies in Indonesia (PJTKI), the KBRI and MOM Singapore.

The effectiveness of the KBRI's system?

Despite the KBRI's claims that its system of protection and assistance for FDWs is comprehensive, there is widespread dissatisfaction with the KBRI in looking after the welfare of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore. For example, maid agents view King Fook's role as redundant, and as just a moneymaking scheme. Some feel that the level

of service it renders is not compatible with the service fee charged to employers, as reflected in the following quotes:

King Fook is useless. All they do is take from employer S\$230 [fee has been increased from S\$180] when we bring our maids in to extend passports and they never do anything besides seeing that we sign the contract. When maids run to the embassy, they still call us [maid agents] and in most cases they hand the maids back to us to resolve the case. So what's that S\$230 for? Nothing.

(Paula, maid agent)

King Fook...I'm sorry to say but to me King Fook is in it purely for the sake of business. It's a sad story, they are at the embassy for three four years already, collect money when employers come in to renew their maid's passports but do not render any service in return.

(Ahmad, maid agent and adviser to a consortium of Indonesian labour suppliers)

Moreover, evidence from the field suggests a wide perceptual divide between the KBRI and the FDWs. As highlighted in the previous section, a substantial proportion (37%) of my sample claimed not to know anything at all about the KBRI and its role concerning their welfare. Of those who knew about the KBRI, this was more from information gained through the grapevine about social activities, such as gatherings during Indonesia's National Day but not on the KBRI's role as protector of Indonesian nationals (Section 5.3). A report published in *The Straits Times* on the death of Muawanatul Chasanah, an Indonesian FDW who was starved and tortured to death by her employers, indicated that all Indonesian FDWs interviewed said they would not know where to turn for help if they were abused by their employers (The Straits Times 2002j). This further suggests a high level of ignorance among Indonesian FDWs of the function of the KBRI as protector of Indonesian nationals in the country.

The following quotes reflect that the tensions between the KBRI and Indonesian FDWs involve class divides, lack of trust, dissatisfaction over the way KBRI handles complaints filed by FDWs, alleged corruption and the Indonesian state's lack of interest in the welfare of Indonesian FDWs. The quotes also suggest that the KBRI

needs to extend its role beyond providing social activities for FDWs as a means to improve its reputation and image in Singapore and to enhance the FDWs experience in the country.

Those people at KBRI treat us like we are rats. When Indonesian FDWs get into trouble and run to them, they refer us back to the maid agents. Of course the maid agents will side with employers. That is why when I once came across a maid who was physically abused by her employer, I called the police straight away. The police are better able to help in such cases.

(Ibu Saadiyah, a maid, translated from *Bahasa Indonesia*)

I have had friends who had run away to the embassy. Usually they would get in touch with employers and maid agents. Some of my friends complained that they were accused of being in the wrong even though they have done nothing wrong. I don't know but from what I hear, the embassy does not really help.

(Atin, a maid, translated from *Bahasa Indonesia*)

The Indonesian embassy here just sleeps. They do nothing for us. At least with the Philippines they have activities for their maids.

(Tutik, a maid, translated from *Bahasa Indonesia*)

I called the Indonesian embassy to see if they have any activity for domestic workers on Sundays but nothing. So I joined classes and activities for Filipina maids organised by their embassy and the local churches here instead.

(Sumi, a maid, translated from *Bahasa Indonesia*)

I myself have not had many direct interactions with the KBRI but I hear a lot of stories from friends. There are rumours that the KBRI charges different fees when FDWs renew their passports at the embassy. Some of my friends said that they have to pay \$80 while others have complained they have to pay \$300. I would like to know which is the right fee. I also have a friend who ran away from her employers because her employer's youngest son was harassing her. From her experience I feel the KBRI do not really protect Indonesian maids. In her case, the agent wanted to settle it by instructing her employers to pay my friend a total of two year's

pay as compensation but the KBRI only asked for one year's pay. There are also rumours that KBRI or maid agents sometimes pocket a proportion of the compensation in cases like these but I have never experienced it myself. See, it is us [Indonesian FDWs] whom they [KBRI] should protect but they sometimes are not on our [Indonesian FDWs] side. That can make things difficult. We feel we have made a lot of contributions to our country and economy so in return we need their help too. All these years our government never really paid attention to our welfare so we ask them to do so now.

(Sugi, a maid, translated from *Bahasa Indonesia*)

When An-Nisa⁷ celebrated its first Islamic New Year, Bapak Johan [Indonesia's ambassador to Singapore] promised in his speech for future cooperation between the KBRI and An-Nisa to organise activities on a larger scale. But two years have passed and nothing has happened. It's all lip service. Whenever we play back his speech we feel disappointed. They are the people with the power to protect us but they show a lack of concern to improve our welfare and reputation in Singapore. Even after knowing of a group like An-Nisa, they [the KBRI] have not offered any support to expand its activities so as to benefit more Indonesian FDWs.

(Muna, a maid/representative of An-Nisa, translated from *Bahasa Indonesia*)

The Indonesian state and the KBRI have indeed attempted to overcome malpractices by introducing stringent policies. However, these efforts have been hampered by widespread corruption and ineffective monitoring of introduced mechanisms and policies. Furthermore, some of the official measures are also misdirected and reflect ignorance of the reality of the situation. For example, the imposition of temporary bans in order to allow for time to enact policies, to control excessive salary deductions and to investigate the alarming volume of deaths from falls (The Straits Times 2001a). Banning would only drive the industry further underground increasing the volume of undocumented FDWs. Although I argue in Chapter 6 that informal channels of recruitment enable some FDWs to exercise power and circumvent the exploitative elements of formal channels of recruitment, some undocumented FDWs may also run

⁷ An-Nisa is the first official social/educational group established for Indonesian FDWs in Singapore. An-Nisa is based at the Sultan Mosque and was established on the initiative of local mosque officials with the help of an Indonesian FDW.

the risk of being exploited and mistreated. This is because the recruitment and migration processes in which they go through would not accord with the guidelines that are meant to protect their rights making them more vulnerable to unscrupulous middlemen and labour agents. Undocumented migrants would also not be able to seek recourse through official channels. Moreover, the KBRI has also failed to recognise the more subtle effects of the complex power structures in which FDWs are caught. They have also failed to address other social needs of Indonesian FDWs such as the provision of regular skill courses, professional impartial counselling services and social activities. Anecdotal evidence shows that these services are in demand and could enhance the experience of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore as well as provide a platform for collective 'resistance' against hegemonic representations of their identities in Singapore. This issue will be taken up in detail in Chapter 7.

Ministry of Manpower (MOM) Singapore

The MOM Singapore and the Singaporean state have also introduced various measures over the years to reduce the vulnerability of FDWs to abuse and exploitation. Their efforts have been focused largely on improving the structures of the maid industry through the introduction of stricter regulations and policies. In its effort to stamp out the rise in cases of maid abuse, the Singaporean state amended the Penal Code in 1998. Employers who abuse their maids now stand to suffer one-and-a-half times harsher sentences than ordinary offenders (The Straits Times 1998a). Moreover, the High Court has also ruled that a combination of physical and mental abuse warrant a more severe punishment, and that the latter would be taken into account in sentencing. For example, the Chief Justice who presided over a case of maid abuse involving an Indonesian FDW who lived under constant threat from her employer and was beaten repeatedly, noted that he had meted out a harsher sentence (a jail term instead of just a fine) on the employer because he took into account the mental torture the maid had to live under. The employer subjected the maid to constant threats, such as threatening to kill her parents and punishing her for every trivial mistake she made. The Chief Justice noted that this was a form of mental abuse because the maid was living under overwhelming fear from the time she first started working for her employer (The Straits Times 2002a).

As pointed out earlier (p. 38), the number of reported cases of maid abuse has decreased markedly since the Penal Code was amended. To prevent repeat offences, MOM Singapore maintains a list of employers black listed from hiring FDWs. The rising number of employers banned from employing FDWs, from four in 1997 to 39 in the year 2000 and 49 in 2001, suggests a tougher stand is being taken by MOM Singapore against employers with bad histories (The Straits Times 2002k). Despite a drop in the volume of abuse, the severity of cases of maid abuse appears to have increased. A case in point is Muawanatol Chasanah who was starved and tortured to death by her employer, Ng Ah Chye, in December 2001. As pointed out earlier, real cases of abuse may have not necessarily decreased as a result of the tougher penalties because the isolation inherent in the nature of the job may hamper detection (Section 5.4).

Apart from introducing tougher laws against maid abusers, MOM Singapore recognises that education is an important preventative measure against cases of maid abuse. MOM has published a cultural guidebook for employers that provides a brief overview of the cultural and religious backgrounds of FDWs from different nationalities. The guidebook briefly outlines information on the ethnic composition, religious background, customs and dietary preferences of FDWs of various nationalities. It also has a simple guide to the everyday vocabulary of the different main native languages of FDWs of all nationalities. In August 2002, the Singapore state announced that it would make it compulsory for first time employers to attend orientation courses in order to educate them about FDWs from different cultural and religious backgrounds and to provide useful advice on maintaining cordial relationships with their FDWs (The Straits Times 2002m).

At the same time, MOM had also taken initiatives to provide educational and informational materials for FDWs. It has produced a multilingual educational video to introduce them to and advise them of things they should know about Singapore such as how to: get around in the country; make remittances; establish a working relationship with employers; contact relevant embassies, emergency departments and the Foreign Worker Unit at MOM Singapore if they need to; and to observe safety

measures at their workplaces. The video also advises FDWs of the conditions attached to their work permits and the rules and regulations which they have to observe while working in the country. MOM Singapore encourages maid agents to screen the video for new FDWs in order to ensure that they are equipped with basic knowledge and useful information about living and working in Singapore. In addition, MOM Singapore has produced a pocket size information booklet that contains important contact numbers and other useful information so that FDWs would know who to get in touch with in times of trouble (The Straits Times 1999b).

The rise in cases of FDWs falling to their death from employers' flats also became an issue of concern. As pointed out earlier, the Indonesian state imposed a temporary ban on the flow of Indonesian FDWs until relevant authorities introduced measures to ensure better safety levels for FDWs. In response to this ban and appeals by concerned public and maid agencies, the National Safety Council (NSC) introduced one-day courses, designed especially for FDWs on home and personal safety in their native languages (The Straits Times, 21 July, 2001). A year later, the NCS expanded its safety courses for FDWs to include child safety talks. These talks were organised in collaboration with the KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH) and focus on methods of preventing childhood injuries at home, on the road and in play areas (The Straits Times 2002f).

MOM Singapore has also announced that it would be compulsory for all maid agencies to gain accreditation from MOM by 2004 (The Straits Times 2002d). This accreditation scheme is in collaboration with the Consumer Association of Singapore (CASE) and aims to ensure that consumers (employers) are rendered fair and quality service by maid agencies. MOM Singapore has noted that the number of complaints filed against maid agencies by employers has risen by 50 per cent since 1998 and stood at 262 in 2001 (The Straits Times 2001d; The Electric New Paper 2002). Although MOM Singapore claims that the scheme is another measure for controlling maid abuse (The Straits Times 2002m), CASE has noted that checking for signs of abuse of FDWs and on standards of accommodation provided to FDWs are not within the purview of the scheme (The Straits Times 2002l). To gain accreditation, maid agencies need to satisfy CASEs' requirements on fair trading practices, staff training

programmes, maid induction courses and accuracy of information on services provided by the agencies to employers (The Electric New Paper 2002).

Despite these efforts by the Singapore state and MOM to regulate the maid industry and to educate both employers and FDWs, two areas that have attracted criticism from the public and from members of parliament are the maid levy and the absence of an Act to safeguard minimum standards of employment for FDWs. Some members of Parliament (MPs) have repeatedly proposed the introduction of an Act that specifies minimum salaries, frequency of rest days and medical costs and paid leave for FDWs (The Straits Times 1998b). In reply, the state argues that it is not practical to introduce standard work contracts because the work performed by FDWs varies from household to household. The state instead encourages employers to draw up bilateral contracts with FDWs spelling out guidelines for each party's duties and liabilities. Guidelines for such a contract are included in the advisory handbook on hiring FDWs published by MOM (The Straits Times 1998c).

Members of the public have also written to the *Forum* section of *The Straits Times* proposing that part of the maid levy collected by the state could be channelled to benefit FDWs. The maid levy, which is paid monthly by employers for each FDW employed, generates estimated annual revenue amounting to S\$400 million (The Age 2002). Amongst some of the suggestions put by members of the public is the allocation of some of this money to training programmes certified by MOM for FDWs (The Straits Times 1999b) and to grant monetary rewards to 'good' maids who have had their contracts extended by employers (The Straits Times 1994a). In response to these suggestions, the state noted that the levy was never intended to be used as a welfare and training fund for FDWs nor was it meant to be a form of revenue. It functions as a pricing mechanism to dampen the demand and to cap the volume of FDWs in the country (The Straits Times 1999b).

Tough policies and penalties introduced by the Singapore state since 1998 have indeed led to a marked reduction of reported cases of maid abuse. Nevertheless, the refusal of the state to enact legislation stipulating standards of work practices for FDWs, such as a minimum wage and compulsory rest days, remains a serious

impediment to the freeing of Indonesian FDWs from isolation, a major problem confronting Indonesian FDWs in Singapore. This refusal also legitimises and officially sanctions employers' excessive control and surveillance over Indonesian FDWs.

Conclusion

This chapter has described the economic background of Indonesia and its position as one of the world's leading exporters of unskilled labour. Women OCWs dominate labour exports from Indonesia and are mainly engaged in domestic service. The popularity of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore suggests the existence of a maid culture that prefers cheap and compliant FDWs. The complex asymmetrical power structures in which Indonesian FDWs in Singapore are caught create a number of concerns surrounding their migration, employment and treatment in Singapore. These concerns relate to isolation, the patronising attitudes of employers and the host society, mistreatment and bullying by maid agents and deprivation of personal religious expression.

Official responses to these issues have not been totally effective so far in rectifying all of these problems. Widespread corruption and ignorance of the reality of the workings of the maid industry and of migration flow have made the effectiveness of efforts by the Indonesian state dubious. Moreover, the Indonesian state fails to recognise demeaning stereotyping of Indonesian FDWs that are potent in shaping their working conditions and everyday experience in Singapore. In addition, the KBRI also has ignored the importance of fulfilling the other social needs of Indonesian FDWs, such as providing for social activities, welfare protection and skill enhancement activities.

On the other hand, despite being able to reduce the incidence of cases of criminal abuse against maids and stepping up education programmes and awareness of the problems leading to these abuses, the Singaporean state's continued refusal to enact legislation to standardise working conditions has left the problems associated with isolation unrectified, thus officially sanctioning and perpetuating employers' control. In the following chapter, I describe the 'power' of individual Indonesian FDWs in

negotiating the relations of subordination-domination inherent in their migration, employment and treatment in Singapore.

CHAPTER 6

'POWER' OF INDIVIDUAL INDONESIAN FDWS

Introduction

In this chapter I will illustrate the 'power' of individual Indonesian FDWs in negotiating their relations of subordination-domination in the context of their location within the migrant institution in Singapore. With the use of seven case studies, drawing on key concepts of Giddens' structuration theory and utilising the migrant institution as a theoretical framework (Chapters 2.7 and 2.8), I illustrate how individual Indonesian FDWs circumvent some aspects of domination and ameliorate their vulnerabilities as described in Chapter 5.

According to Giddens, individuals are capable of exerting power because their 'actions' essentially change the course of events or make a difference to an existing state of affairs (Chapter 2.8). Thus, the 'actions' of human agents provide them with agency, because it is through their actions that they exert power. The notion of actions having 'transformative capacity' is understood within Giddens' concept of 'duality of structure' where individuals not only draw upon resources and apply institutional rules but also reproduce these as resources and rules in the course of their interactions (Chapter 2.8). Within Giddens' structuration theory, relations of domination-subordination are tied to the situatedness of individuals in time-space which determines the practical knowledge of those individuals, their knowledge of institutional rules and their access to resources (Chapter 2.8). However, he stresses the notion of 'dialectic of control' where even the subordinated, caught in a relation of dependence or domination can release resources through this dependence thus maintaining 'some sense of autonomy and capacity for strategic action' (Goss and Lindquist 1995: 333).

These are the key concepts that I will draw on in this chapter to elucidate, analyse and argue for the 'power' of individual Indonesian FDWs in the migrant institution in Singapore. Although their actions are geared to the achievement of personal objectives,

the unintended consequences of their actions condition further social practices which are (re)produced and 'sedimented' over time thus re-constituting the migrant institution in Singapore. In analysing the case studies, I illustrate how the actions or agency of individual Indonesian FDWs shape the structure of the migrant institution. The case studies describe the experiences of individual migrants in Singapore specifically highlighting their interactions with other agents within the migrant institution and integrate the impacts of both institutional and non-institutional factors on these interactions. Primarily, these interactions produce various outcomes, such as securing more desirable employment contracts, changing motivations and thus charting different migration paths.

I conclude that these case studies suggest that the experiences of Indonesian FDWs are filled with ambiguity and that they are not always powerless victims, but are also active subjects of migration. Indeed, the possession of access to networks of interaction with other agents across time and space helps them to mobilise rules and release resources in order to achieve their personal goals. However, I conclude that the 'power' of individual Indonesian FDWs largely do not alter the structural principles of the migration system. Although their individual actions, such as capitalising on informal networks of contacts, are geared towards and are sometimes successful in attaining more desirable employment conditions, their actions are too fragmented to challenge the overall institutional factors that form part of the unequal power structures that underscore their experiences as FDWs in Singapore described in Chapters 4 and 5.

Case study 6.1

Circumventing formal channels of recruitment and migration

Background

Karni is a 43-year-old widow and the mother of three children from Central Java. She has had 10 years of work experience in Singapore with three different employers of different ethnic and religious backgrounds. Her main motivation in taking up overseas employment was to help her family escape from poverty and to provide her children with a better future. Her husband worked as a policeman and did not draw a regular salary. Instead the family was given a plot of land for paddy from which they could earn income by renting it to other people. Karni also used to make and sell cakes from home. According to her, this was hardly enough to feed her family let alone pay the children's school fees.

First employment

Karni secured a job in Singapore purely by accident. She was traveling to work as a domestic worker in Malaysia but was stranded at Singapore airport because she missed her connecting flight. An airport staff member helped her to contact the labour agency in Jakarta which had arranged for her passage and employment in Malaysia. According to Karni, the labour recruitment agency had an 'agent' in Singapore who later fetched her from the airport. She was then put up at someone's house, a 'friend' of the agent, for a few days and from there she learnt that the 'agent' had secured her employment with a Chinese family. However, she had to return to Jakarta to satisfy immigration requirements before flying back to Singapore to be legally employed as a FDW in that country.

Karni said that she had never been outside her village prior to leaving for Jakarta in search of overseas work. She was inspired to look for work overseas after seeing the benefits gained by other women who had worked in the Middle East. She saw the material changes in their families' lives in the village and became motivated. After inquiring among friends in her village, she met a few women who had the same objective. They left together for a labour recruitment agency in Purwokoerto, a nearby town, to

register their interest in working overseas. The labour agent known locally as a 'sponsor' asked her to acquire all the necessary documents, such as her identity card, her household card and a letter of permission from the village headman. He later arranged for her passport to be made in Cilacap, a larger town not far away from Purwokoerto. Karni and her friends were then sent to Jakarta. She stayed at a training centre for three months before being selected by an employer in Malaysia.

That was the first time I had been to Jakarta. I was scared but because my friends were there I was more brave. I just followed them and did what the sponsor told us to do.

Karni (translated from Bahasa Indonesia)

While serving her first contract in Singapore, Karni kept in touch with friends from the same training centre on her rest days. She was able to meet some of them at Marina Centre, a popular gathering spot for FDWs in Singapore, on her rest days.

Second employment

After completing her two-year contract with her first employer, Karni went back to the village for a holiday and to oversee her son's circumcision ceremony. After a month of resting, Karni decided to leave for Singapore again. Her husband had died while she was in Jakarta waiting for her first overseas deployment. Her family only informed her about it just as she was about to leave for Malaysia because they did not want her to worry and to return to the village. Thus, Karni became the sole provider for her family.

In securing her second employment, Karni was more savvy. Instead of going through a local 'sponsor' in Purwokoerto, she went direct to the labour agency in Jakarta to register her interest. She said it was a lot simpler because it cut time and expenses. She waited for four months and spent a total of *Rupiah* 100,000 before a Malay/Muslim employer in Singapore engaged her.

While serving her second contract, Karni kept in touch with the maids she got to know at the training centre in Jakarta. She met some of them on her monthly rest day and chatted on the phone with them about twice a week.

Third employment

By her third employment contract, Karni had decided to circumvent all the labour agents and recruitment agencies. By then she had established strong friendships with fellow Indonesian maids who were either from the same training centre and with whom she had kept in contact, or other maids whom she had met while spending her rest days at popular meeting spots for FDWs in Singapore.

During her second contract, she met Yayu, a senior Indonesian maid, while casting their votes for the national election at the KBRI. Karni and Yayu are both from the same area in Central Java. Yayu became a close friend and helped her secure her third employment without going through labour agents and recruitment agencies. After completing her second contract, Karni went back to her village for a holiday. She intended to return to Singapore to work but rather than going through a labour agent, she took Yayu's advice and decided to secure employment through personal recommendations from friends.

According to Karni, during her first and second employment contracts, salary deductions were not imposed on maids. At that time employers paid most of the expenses, such as the training of maids and airfares to Singapore. After completing her second employment contract, she had heard that maid agents were starting to deduct from maids' salaries to cover recruitment expenses, such as board and lodging while being trained, airfares and other administrative expenses. Karni decided to try out a less formal method of securing employment in order to avoid being charged what she considered to be exorbitant recruitment fees.

After residing in the village for four months, she received a letter from Yayu instructing her to go to Batam, an island in Riau province, only a one-hour ferry ride from Singapore. It is common practice for Indonesians in Batam to enter Singapore as tourists and secure short-term work illegally in the informal economy. Many end up in jobs, such as cleaning work or helping out at food stalls of their 'relatives'. To travel to Singapore, Karni needed a new passport. In order to obtain a passport in Batam, she also needed a new identity card with a Batam address.

Karni was told by Yuyu to make her way to Batam with Yuyu's sister. The plan was for Karni and Yuyu's sister to seek temporary shelter in Batam with one of Yuyu's 'relatives' who came from Flores. In return for that favour, Karni and Yuyu's sister cleaned, cooked and helped look after the children. Soon, Karni found a Muslim family from Palembang who were willing to take her in. She told them of her intention to eventually secure work in Singapore but that she needed a Batam address to obtain an identity card and subsequently apply for a passport. In exchange for cleaning, washing, cooking and taking care of the children, the family from Palembang helped Karni to obtain the necessary documents. After securing the documents, Karni began shuttling between Batam and Singapore in search of work. Sometimes, her patron/employer supplemented her traveling expenses. Yuyu also contributed some money for travel and food.

Karni would stay with Yuyu while in Singapore. Yuyu's employer is a Malay/Muslim lady who got along very well with Yuyu and, later, Karni. She treated them more like sisters and allowed Karni to stay in Yuyu's room. In return, Karni would do unpaid housework for her. Karni usually stayed for two days and the longest she stayed in Singapore was for a week before returning to Batam. Eventually, Yuyu had some family problems in the village and had to return to Indonesia. At that point, Yuyu's employer who still needed a maid, offered Karni the job. Karni was very happy to accept the position as she knew the family well.

In total, Karni spent almost a year in Batam, sorting out the necessary documents and shuttling back and forth to Singapore on numerous occasions in search of work. Whilst in Batam, she was propositioned by a labour recruiter to take up domestic employment in Malaysia. Upon Yuyu's advice she declined for fear of being sold as a prostitute. According to Karni, there were many stories circulating about women being duped by illegal labour agents who were actually involved in smuggling women for prostitution especially to Malaysia. Karni spent around Rp700,000 on travel from her village to Batam and on expenses incurred paying an 'agent' to get her a Batam identity card and an Indonesian passport. The rest of the time she tried to spend as little money as possible and instead obtained food, shelter and, on occasion a small token cash allowance in exchange for doing housework.

Karni has now served Ibu Yati, Yuyu's ex-employer, for five and a half years:

If Ibu Yati still wants me, I want to work until I'm 50. I have one son who is still in SMP [secondary school]. I would also like to save some money to start a small business when I retire from Singapore. Praise to Allah, I have achieved much success in Singapore. Two of my children have completed school and have jobs. I have also built a decent house for the family on a plot of land I bought from my grandfather through installments.

Karni (translated from Bahasa Indonesia)

Synthesis

The case of Karni illustrates the roles and impacts of peer networking on the 'power' of an individual Indonesian FDW. In this case peer networking enabled an Indonesian FDW to circumvent the formal network of recruitment and migration in order to protect herself from the exploitative practices that are rife in the formal maid industry. Karni also benefited from practical knowledge, the knowledge of institutional rules and contacts with institutional agents which she gained during her first and second migration experiences. For example, when embarking on her second overseas employment, Karni went direct to the recruitment agency in Jakarta instead of employing the services of a local sponsor (as she had done for her first position) in order to cut down cost and time. She was also aware of the necessary documents such as an identity card, household card and a letter of permission from the household head which she needed to satisfy the bureaucratic requirements for a passage overseas. Evidence from other informants in the field indicates that, although Indonesian FDWs who migrated to Singapore in the late 80s were not required to pay recruitment fees to recruitment agencies in Indonesia, they still had to pay the local sponsor a small fee for arranging the necessary documents required at provincial level and for making travel arrangements to recruitment centres in Jakarta

(Ahmad, personal communication, July 1999). Thus, with the practical knowledge gained from her experience, Karni was able to save on costs by circumventing the local sponsor.

The relative freedom that Karni enjoyed, such as regular rest days, freedom to run personal errands and use of the telephone while serving her second employment contract enabled her to maintain relationships with her peers. These routinised interactions (regular meetings during rest days and telephone calls) developed into social networks, especially with Yuyu who played a primary role in securing Karni's third employment contract. The relationship between Karni and Yuyu transcended peer contact and they became like 'sisters' to each other. Since they were from the same locale in the home country the everyday interactions between Karni and Yuyu could develop into fictive kinship. Their shared backgrounds enabled them to relate better to each other and to 'formalise' the relationship further by involving their families. For example, Yuyu instructed Karni to make the trip to Batam with her sister and then stayed with her 'relative' from Flores. This reflected the level of trust and closeness that had developed between them.

Karni was able to draw on the resources of Yuyu, a much more experienced migrant. Yuyu's practical knowledge of an alternative migration route (i.e. via Batam independently instead of through the formal maid industry), her knowledge of the institutional rules and procedures involved in this alternative route and her social contact with an agent (a 'relative' residing in Batam) who had access to allocative resources (shelter and food) in Batam enabled Karni to acquire temporary shelter before building her network to secure a patron (the Muslim family from Palembang who helped her to make the documents, provided shelter, food and a token cash allowance in exchange for her labour). Karni's regular presence at Ibu Yati's home (also through Yuyu) enabled her to secure employment with Ibu Yati.

Karni's experience in Batam suggests the importance of the patron-client dyad in the 'dialectic of control'. Despite being an outsider (a migrant from Java with no relations in

Batam) and one who lacked both authoritative resources (contacts with knowledgeable agents that are able to release resources in Batam for Karni to obtain necessary documents for her migration to Singapore) and allocative resources (such as accommodation and cash), she was able to invoke conventional rules of a patron-client dyad by exchanging labour power (doing housework and providing childcare) to release resources via her patron to achieve her aims of obtaining a Batam identity card and an Indonesian passport to enable her to shuttle between Singapore and Batam in search of work. The intended consequence of Karni's actions was to secure further employment in Singapore but her employment of an alternative way of doing so had an unintended consequence, i.e., the perpetuation of networks of informal agents as a strong force connecting locales and perpetuating temporary labour migration within the migrant institution. However, Karni's experience shows that a FDW needs time, up-front capital and contacts with knowledgeable agents to circumvent exploitative elements that largely arose because of ineffective implementation of policies targeted at protecting the rights and welfare of labour migrants such as Karni and loopholes in the existing system of recruitment, migration and employment of foreign domestic workers.

Case study 6.2

Easing conscience: living out religious identity

Background

Sukinah, a 22 year old from Central Java, has been working in Singapore for three years. Her primary motivation for working as a domestic maid overseas was to lead an independent life as well as to avoid her boyfriend who married her sister in an arranged marriage. Sukinah worked in Jakarta since she was seventeen helping her uncle at his small coffee shop. In return, he provided her with board and lodging and a token allowance.

First employment

Sukinah learnt of opportunities to work overseas through her uncle's friends who managed a labour recruiting agency above the coffee shop in Jakarta. The agency recruited women to work in the Middle East. She was not interested in going to the Middle East because she did not have the required up-front payment. However, through them she learned that she could work in Singapore without having to make an initial outlay. Nevertheless, they could not help her to secure employment in Singapore because the agency specialised in recruiting labour for the Middle East. She asked her uncle for help to find a reliable labour recruiter who recruited women workers to Singapore. He eventually found someone after inquiring among his contacts.

The first information that Sukinah obtained about working conditions in Singapore was from the labour recruiter. He told her that she could expect a salary of S\$250 per month. He also cautioned her that she might face problems practising Islam if engaged by a Chinese employer. At the training centre in Batam, Sukinah went through the normal training of cooking, cleaning and learning basic English. After about two weeks at the training centre, the agent told her that a Chinese family has selected her to work for them with a starting salary of \$230. She was apprehensive to leave at first because she was worried about not being able to pray and fast as well as having to eat non-*halal* food. She accepted the position after being told that she might have to wait a long time for a Muslim employer:

I was nervous and unsure when I first heard that a Chinese family had chosen me. But my agent told me that I would have to wait for a long time for a Muslim employer. So I braced myself to take up the offer. My Chinese employers were very nice to me. They gave me rest days on public holidays and allowed me to use the phone to call my good friend, Mbak Yati [a friend working as a maid for a Muslim employer in the neighbourhood]. After one year, they gave me a rise and my salary was \$250. But I was not totally comfortable because I lived in a non-Muslim household. My employers allowed me to pray in my room but not fast during the fasting month of

Ramadan. I am also not comfortable because I have to handle pork as they eat pork quite often.

Sukinah (translated from Bahasa Indonesia)

According to Sukinah her life in Singapore while serving her first contract was not bad in general. She appreciated her employer's kindness and understanding as she enjoyed relative freedom compared to other maids she met and talked with while running errands outside the house. This freedom gave her the opportunity to establish a good friendship with Yati, a fellow Indonesian FDW who worked for a Muslim family in the same neighbourhood. They met at a grocery shop in the neighbourhood while buying supplies for their employers. After having met Yati, Sukinah's employer allowed her to use the house telephone to keep in regular contact with her.

In total she had six days leave that coincided with public holidays and was allowed to take time off to run personal errands, such as posting letters or remitting money. She also had the opportunity to attend a National Day gathering at the Indonesia embassy where she met fellow Indonesians, mostly domestic workers like her, of all ages. Sukinah felt that the relative freedom she enjoyed made her more independent and enabled her to learn about new places and things beyond the confines of her employer's house. Being able to meet up with fellow Indonesian workers also helped her to overcome her homesickness. Her close relationship with her good friend, Yati, and Yati's Muslim employers enabled her to be in touch with her Muslim identity and opened doors to achieve her desired objective of continuing to work in Singapore but with a Muslim employer.

Second employment

Sukinah was keen to continue working in Singapore after the completion of her two-year contract but was determined to work for a Muslim family. She told Mbak Yati of her dilemma and she later introduced Sukinah to her Singaporean agent, a Malay/Muslim woman. Near the end of her contract, Sukinah requested a few hours leave from her Chinese employers to meet with the agent to seek a Muslim employer. Although her Chinese employers were keen for her to sign on for another term, she told them she was

homesick and wanted to return to her village. She did not want to offend them with the truth.

Sukinah returned to her village for a month-long holiday. She then contacted the agent she had met in Singapore, Mastura, and told her that she was ready to go back to work. The agent gave her specific instructions to meet her counterpart in Jakarta to renew her passport and to finalise the necessary paperwork. This time round, Sukinah did not have to wait at the training centre but was instead free to work for her uncle while waiting to be deployed. Five months later, the agent rang her and said that she had engaged a Muslim employer for her. She then flew back to Singapore to start her second assignment.

At the time of my interview with her, Sukinah was already half way through her contract with the Muslim family. She was relatively happy at being able to live in a Muslim household. She did not know yet if she would extend her contract if given the offer. According to Sukinah, her workload was heavier compared with her first assignment because there were more people in the household. She was also not given as much freedom. For example, her employers would accompany her if she needed to make remittances at the bank. Nevertheless, she emphasised that she was quite content being able to live out her Muslim identity and her conscience was more at ease.

Synthesis

The story of Sukinah illustrates the significance of religious obligations in enabling the subordinated to release resources and to have capacity for strategic action. In this case, the intended outcome was that Sukinah was able to secure work with a Muslim family and continue working in Singapore. The unintended consequence of Sukinah's action was the extension of a niche market within the migrant institution in the country. Sukinah's case again shows that peer networks provide access to facilitators. In this case the gatekeeper was Mastura, a maid agent in Singapore specialising in placing Muslim Indonesian FDWs with Muslim employers. Mastura occupied a more privileged social position relative to Sukinah and was capable of releasing institutional resources at both locales, i.e., direct contact with Muslim families in Singapore who are looking for maids and an Indonesian

recruitment agent who helped to arrange Sukinah's second passage to Singapore. Thus Sukinah's routinised interactions with Yati grew into a friendship through which Sukinah was able to benefit from Yati's practical knowledge and from the social contacts gained from through Yati's migration experience.

I interviewed Mastura, Yati's maid agent, on one occasion. Mastura claimed that she keeps her business on a small scale because she caters only to a niche market placing Muslim Indonesian FDWs with Muslim employers. According to Mastura this is because she does not want to deprive fellow Muslims of their obligation to perform Islamic duties (Chapter 5.4) as might be expected of them if they were employed by non-Muslim employers. She also views her business as partly fulfilling a religious duty of caring for the welfare of underprivileged Muslims. In her case, she believes she is doing a good deed by providing them with employment opportunities as well as by ensuring that they can practice their religious duties (Mastura, personal communication, August 1999).

If Sukinah were to have returned to Indonesia and joined the queue in a recruitment agency, her chances of securing a Muslim employer would have been much lower. Due to her low social position within the migrant institution, i.e., her limited access to allocative and authoritative resources within the institution, Sukinah would be dependent on facilitators with whom she had not had personal contact. These facilitators, recruitment agents in Indonesia and maid agents in Singapore, connect the two locales (Singapore and Indonesia) together via placing FDWs with employers through their business networking. Because an oversupply of maids relative to demand characterises the maid industry in Indonesia, Sukinah would have been unlikely to have had her preference for a Muslim employer met and would have been compelled to accept the first employment offer that came along regardless of the employer's religious background (the experience of her first employment contract).

Her close relationship with Yati also gave her an added advantage when she met with Mastura, the maid agent in Singapore. In a separate interview, Mastura told me that she

would only place FDWs who approached her personally only if they were recommended by a trustworthy source. In this case, Sukinah's friendship with Yati who had a good employment record, and Sukinah's interactions with Yati's employer, who was Mastura's client contributed to Sukinah being able to persuade Mastura to help her find Muslim employers in Singapore. The relationship between Sukinah, Yati and Yati's employer was partly underpinned by principles of Muslim fraternity/sorority; Yati's employer also took pity on Sukinah for not being able to live out her Muslim identity fully as a result of having to live in a non-Muslim household. Sukinah's peer networking with Yati and her shared Muslim identity with Yati's employer and with Mastura, the maid agent, contributed to Sukinah being able to exert 'power' and thus further her work in Singapore, through ensuring that she would be employed by a Muslim employer.

However, despite being able to practice freely the two pillars of faith (prayers and fasting) of being a Muslim, Sukinah had to be content with the stricter work environment and the heavier workload that came with the second employment contract. Moreover, the absence of legally binding standard employment terms for all foreign domestic workers in Singapore leaves Sukinah 'powerless' to resort to adjudication to demand her employers to grant her regular rest days. If she wanted an employer who could let her have a regular rest day, she would have to seek alternative employment. However, that might jeopardise her liberty of practicing the requirements of her Islamic faith. Thus Sukinah is largely powerless to secure an ideal employment contract that ensures her basic rights because the existing system of employment of foreign domestic workers in Singapore is one that privileges the employers and the state over the foreign domestic worker.

Case study 6.3

Charting future migration paths

Background

Suyami is a 25-year-old migrant from East Java. At the time of interview, she had been working in Singapore for just over three years. She had successfully completed her first two-year contract and had decided to sign on for another term when this was offered by her employer.

Suyami's primary motivation for seeking overseas work was to help her family out financially. She was also motivated to secure a better future than the hand-to-mouth existence of her family and the majority of families in her village. She left school after completing secondary school education and since then had been working as a baby-sitter in Jakarta for mostly Chinese families.

I don't want to be poor forever. I see many friends who return to the village after working for a short time in Jakarta following the footsteps of their parents. They get married so young, start having children and are stuck in the village for the rest of their lives. While working in Jakarta, I see people who live in the city get married later in life. They work first and save money. It's much easier to support a family when you have money.

Suyami (translated from Bahasa Indonesia)

In addition to wanting to help out her parents who were both small-time vegetable traders, Suyami also aimed to accumulate Rp30 million for her future. She also intends to build a decent house which she could share with her parents because she knows her parents would never be able to afford to do so.

First employment

Suyami had village friends, women who had gone to the Middle East, for work. Whilst she was working in Jakarta, a few of her acquaintances had left to work in Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan. These examples gave her the idea of planning a brighter future for herself and so she became very attracted to the idea of

working overseas. The Chinese family for whom she was working in Jakarta, once offered her work in the United States but she declined because of the distance.

She sought the help of her uncle to introduce her to a 'sponsor' who could be trusted. After an initial meeting arranged by her uncle with a sponsor in Kediri, another town not far from her village, she left for Surabaya to stay at a training centre. According to Suyami life in the training centre was tough. It was a dormitory style accommodation with around 1,000 women. Conditions were cramped and daily activities like having meals and bathing were really unpleasant. At the centre, the women were divided into groups and trained by 'teachers' who were very stern. They were often scolded and shouted at and were not allowed to leave the centre. Suyami's family sent her a package of food once a week through a relative residing in Surabaya.

I was not scared of them [the 'teachers']. I have a lot of experience in Jakarta so I'm used to it.

Suyami (translated from Bahasa)

The women at the centre were destined for either Malaysia or Singapore. Suyami wanted to work in Singapore because she preferred to work for a Chinese family. She has had a lot of experience working for Chinese families in Jakarta and was used to them.

After only one week at the training centre, an employer selected Suyami. Nevertheless, she had to wait for one and a half months for her passport before being deployed in Singapore.

Social circle

Suyami was not granted any rest days during her first year of employment in Singapore. Her isolation did not faze her. She wrote to the families of friends she had met at the training centre whom she knew were bound for Singapore so that she could obtain addresses in Singapore. After about four months she managed to contact a few of them. They kept in touch through letters and sometimes by telephone.

Suyami was finally granted her first rest day after one year of service. The first time was to join in the festivities at the KBRI to celebrate the end of the fasting month of *Ramadan*. Later her employers granted her a regular rest day, once every two months. Through her friends she learned to be more assertive and to negotiate for one rest day every month. At the time of interview, Suyami had negotiated one rest day every fortnight.

If I don't have regular rest days I think I will be really stressed. I need to communicate with my friends and have a change in environment. Who can work and work all the time?

Suyami (translated from Bahasa)

She had also managed to form close friendships with six maids working in the same neighbourhood. They met regularly even outside their rest days by arranging their work schedules. For example, some of them would agree to meet while running errands such as shopping or escorting their employers' children to school bus stops. Her six friends consisted of both Indonesian and Filipino FDWs. According to Sumi, she likes to befriend Filipino FDWs because it gave her a chance to practice conversing in English.

Not only did she learn from her friends to communicate and negotiate her working conditions with her employers, but she also learned more about the prospects of securing domestic employment in other destinations. When she meets with friends on her rest days they always compare notes on their working experiences and future possibilities.

I am very close with some of my friends. We are like sisters to each other. We do not only keep each other company but also help each other out in times of need like lending money and giving advice. When we have problems with our employers we always advise each other to talk it out with them directly. We learn from each other's experience. The maid agents say if we have problems we can come to them. It's really no point [because] they will take the employer's side. I prefer to learn from my friends' experience and solve the problem myself by talking with my employer.

Suyami (translated from Bahasa Indonesia)

Suyami was attracted to work in Hong Kong after hearing from friends what Hong Kong could offer. Towards the completion of her first contract, Suyami looked into the possibility of working in Hong Kong and registered her name at a labour recruitment agency. However it did not work out and she abandoned the idea (she never explained why). Then she was attracted to Taiwan. She was advised that she had to sit for a test and pay S\$300 to place her name on a waiting list. In addition, she would have to pay S\$4,400 in agency fees if employed. The payment would be made by deducting half her expected salary of S\$800 over a period of 11 months.

Suyami was enticed by the prospect of earning more money. At that point in time, she was drawing a salary of S\$230 per month in Singapore. Nevertheless, she was in two minds because her employers had been really good to her and she got along well with them. Eventually she changed her mind and decided to put her plans off and instead signed a new contract with her employer when they offered her one. Her close friends also advised her to put Taiwan on hold so that they all can go together at a later stage.

At the same time, Suyami was also made aware of working conditions with employers of different ethnic backgrounds. Through her diverse network of friends, she heard about some of the advantages of working for Caucasian expatriates in Singapore. She was informed by friends who had worked for Caucasian expatriates that she could earn higher pay, and have a lighter and more systematic work environment with more open lines of communication. She was also considering looking for a Caucasian employer for future employment.

I know of all these other options through friends but I don't have a reason yet to leave my employers. They are still good to me so I don't want to be ungrateful to them.

Suyami (translated from Bahasa Indonesia)

In the meantime, Suyami continued to upgrade her skills. She improved her English and can speak and understand Hokkien

fluently through daily interactions with her employers. Her employer has also taught her to cook a variety of Chinese dishes.

Synthesis

Suyami's story illustrates the role of peer networks as a source from which to gain practical knowledge of job opportunities, of employment conditions and on how to negotiate better working conditions. Through routinised interactions with her peers, Suyami was able to gain practical knowledge on further opportunities in domestic employment that offered better salaries. In addition, peer interactions also provided the awareness for Suyami to apply institutional rules in negotiating for more frequent and regular rest days. Peer interactions and networking are also ways to upgrade one's skills such as conversing in English and swapping recipes. Finally, peer interactions provide her with a valuable source of emotional support and counseling.

Suyami overcame the isolation she experienced when she first arrived in Singapore by tracing the addresses of friends whom she had met at the training centre in Jakarta. Her main mode of maintaining interactions with her peers at that time was through writing letters and occasional telephone calls. As time progressed, Suyami started to get to know peers working in the same neighbourhood. She used her work time to maintain routinised interactions with these peers through clever scheduling of errands and duties. These routinised interactions grew into a network of support with six peers in the neighbourhood who relied on each other for advice, tips, emotional counseling and company. Moreover, peer networking also opened the way for her to be introduced to other agents and facilitators within the migrant institution such as labour recruitment agents placing domestic workers in overseas countries like Taiwan, Hong Kong, Canada and Cyprus.

It is common practice for some Filipino FDWs and Indonesian FDWs to use Singapore as a jumping point to employment opportunities in other countries after finishing their contracts in Singapore. It is cheaper for them to move to a second overseas country rather than to return to their home countries and join the queue in the recruitment agencies there.

Using the business networks of recruitment agents in Singapore also opens up opportunities for FDWs to secure work in countries in which recruitment agents in their home countries have yet to establish business networks. For example, in the case of Indonesian FDWs, the opportunity of working in more faraway and exotic places like Canada and the Mediterranean becomes a possibility. By making contacts with these agents, Suyami was able to equip herself with useful knowledge of the procedures that she needed to undertake in order to secure employment in these countries and of what she could expect in terms of salary and work conditions. Thus Suyami was able to gain knowledge and information and make a more informed choice in charting her subsequent migration path.

Despite gaining new practical knowledge, knowledge of institutional rules and valuable social contacts through peer networking, Suyami remained loyal to her employer. She valued her employer's good and kind treatment over the opportunity of making more money in Taiwan or working for an expatriate employer in Singapore. She also noted that the good relationship with her employer had given her an opportunity to upgrade her skills such as developing her fluency in the Hokkien dialect and learning to cook more Chinese dishes. She views these skills as being valuable for her future employment prospects. On the other hand, her employer benefited from her loyalty and the quality of the service that she provides, which is partly an outcome from Suyami's enthusiasm to learn and to upgrade her skills. Thus the patron-client dyad between Suyami and her employer is imbued with reciprocated loyalty, kindness and knowledge exchange. It also shows that loyalty and kindness have a significant influence on the FDW-employer relationship, and that the relationship is not just subject to an economic rationale.

Suyami's story shows the impact of peer interactions on the 'power' of individual Indonesian FDWs in shaping the migrant institution. The practical knowledge and social contacts gained by Suyami through her peer networking would have an unintended consequence of extending the temporary migration of unskilled women workers to work as FDWs in the richer countries of the world. For example, if Suyami should eventually

embark on one of her plans, such as working in Taiwan as a domestic worker to earn more money, the unintended consequence would be the further integration of the migrant institutions in Singapore, Taiwan and Indonesia and the consolidation of a migration system of women OCWs in the region.

Case study 6.4

Escaping an abusive employer

Background

Nuryanti, a 44 year-old widow with eight children from East Java, has been working in Singapore for six years. She has a complex employment history having worked for four employers over this period. Nuryanti has very limited opportunities to socialise with anyone outside her employers' families and circle of friends due to the restrictive nature of her job. She has had few rest days in her six years of employment and is rarely exposed to life beyond the confines of her employers' homes.

Nuryanti was living in Surabaya with her husband and their eight children. When her husband left her she moved back to her village with all her children. The village was one hour away by road. She tried to support her children by selling food from home, and by maintaining a small food garden and a small plot of paddy land. Her widowed mother assisted the family by providing a roof over their heads and using her late husband's pension to pay the schooling expenses of the elder children. After a year of struggling in the village, Nuryanti realised that she would never have enough cash income to put all her children through school unless she found other forms of paid employment. She decided to leave for Surabaya in search of paid work leaving her children with her mother.

First employment

Nuryanti secured her first contract in Singapore through a personal contact instead of through a labour agent. When she arrived in Surabaya, she met a wealthy Chinese neighbour whom her husband once helped in a robbery. She asked him if he had any work for her at his shop. He instead offered her work as a baby-sitter for his family in Singapore. After consulting her family, she accepted the offer and was subsequently trained for two months at his home in

Surabaya. During her training Nuryanti was paid a monthly wage of Rp60,000 (approximately S\$12). After arranging her passport in Lampung and taking two weeks break in the village to bid farewell to her family, she left for Singapore via Jakarta. According to Nuryanti, her neighbour turned employer was generous towards her. He lent her Rp150,000 to cover the expenses of her family while she settled in Singapore. He also gave her S\$50 for pocket money and some new clothes for her trip.

In Singapore, she was paid a monthly salary of S\$50 and Rp150,000. The *Rupiah* part of the salary was remitted directly to her children. The arrangement was for her eldest child to travel once a month by bus to Surabaya to collect the pay from a relative of her employers. She worked for the Chinese family for three years until they decided to move to the United States of America. They invited her to accompany them to the US and continue working for them but her children objected saying that it would be too far. Because she was still keen to work in Singapore, her employer secured her employment as a maid with an acquaintance. According to Nuryanti, before her employer left Singapore, he gave her the telephone number and address of the Indonesian embassy and told her to get in touch with the embassy if she was ever abused or in difficulty.

While working for her first employer, Nuryanti established friendships with two Indonesian FDWs from her home province. Both of them worked for the same employer in the same neighbourhood and had been in Singapore for more than ten years. Her two friends had more freedom than her because their boss and his family were seldom at home. Nuryanti was only able to talk to them when cleaning the front garden, taking out the garbage or when opening the gate in the morning and evening to let her employer's car in and out. She admitted making telephone calls to them when her employers were not at home.

Second employment

She only lasted three months working for her second employer:

I was unhappy because I had to clean and bathe their dogs almost every week. The next-door neighbour took pity on me as I complained to them of my situation. They knew another Indonesian Chinese

family who was looking for a maid and recommended me to them. My second employer did not make a big deal and was okay to let me go because the job did not suit me.

Nuryanti (translated from Bahasa Indonesia)

Third employment

Nuryanti was relatively pleased with the verbal agreement she made with her third employer. Her agreement with the Indonesian Chinese employer included an extra allowance of \$1.50 per day to buy food in addition to her monthly wages. This was because Nuryanti did not want to eat from her employer's kitchen where pork was prepared and consumed regularly. She also managed to negotiate a rise of Rp50,000 for the *Rupiah* component of her pay. The component of her pay paid in Singapore dollars remained the same at S\$50 per month.

As time passed, her employers suddenly stopped paying her the daily food allowance. Later they also withheld the component of her pay that was to be in Singapore dollars and only paid her in *Rupiah* (equivalent to S\$40) which was remitted directly to her family. Nuryanti tolerated this treatment for six months before she made a complaint to the Indonesian embassy in Singapore. She did this upon the advice of her two friends as well as that of her first employer who asked her to alert the KBRI if she was ever mistreated. After filing her complaint, she was housed at the embassy for a couple of weeks while they investigated her case. Her employer was summoned and admitted breaching the verbal agreement they had made. Her employer was ordered to provide Nuryanti with an air-ticket to return to Indonesia and compensation of S\$2,500.

Fourth employment

Despite having resolved her dispute with her third employer and been granted monetary compensation, Nuryanti was not satisfied because she still wanted to work in Singapore in order to continue supporting her children. Most of her children were still in school and she needed a regular income to see them through. Incidentally, the officer-in-charge of FDWs at the embassy, who

was handling her case, was also moonlighting as a part-time maid supplier. Knowing her predicament, he tried to place her with a Muslim employer. Eventually he found Nuryanti a Malay/Muslim family who were seeking a maid. After a short break in the village, she renewed her passport, underwent re-training at a small training centre in Cirebon, and returned to Singapore to start a new contract with her fourth employer. At the point of interview, Nuryanti was earning a salary of S\$350 and was very appreciative of her new employment. Despite the problems experienced in her earlier contracts she felt being able to work overseas had certainly improved her children's lives:

I feel that I have almost achieved my objectives in working overseas. Five of my children have finished schooling, three are married and one is engaged to be married. They all completed SMA. One child is still doing a business course in SME and two are studying in secondary school. I am also starting to build my own house on a plot of land that I have purchased. I will only think of retiring when all my children have finished schooling.

Nuryanti (translated from Bahasa Indonesia)

Synthesis

Nuryanti's story reflects the vulnerability of migrants to exploitation as a result of their isolation. Because of her isolation she was ignorant of the fact that she was severely underpaid by her first three employers. She was earning approximately S\$70 –S\$90 at a time when Indonesian FDWs recruited through the formal maid industry were being paid monthly salaries between S\$180 and S\$220. Thus her low social position within the migrant institution in terms of her limited access to practical knowledge and knowledgeable agents made her ignorant of institutional rules and left her vulnerable to exploitation. Nevertheless, social conventions governing patron-client dyads and codified institutional rules such as laws and regulations provided some protection and even justice for Nuryanti.

For example, her first employer made sure that she would have someone to turn to in times of trouble by giving her contact details of the KBRI and by advising her to telephone them if she encountered problems in Singapore. Her first employer also treated her relatively well in making sure that her family would not be denied a regular income stream while he was arranging her passage to Singapore and when she first started her stint in Singapore by giving her an advance on her salary. Moreover, he helped her to secure further employment in Singapore before he and his family left for America. Nuryanti benefited from the patron-client dyad with her first employer by being able to achieve her objective of earning a regular cash income for her family. She was also able to earn a much higher monthly wage (from S\$14 to S\$70 a month) by making the passage overseas with someone she trusted. On the other hand, the first employer benefited from the patron-client dyad in being able to employ a loyal maid at a bargain basement rate.

Nuryanti also benefited from codified rules, i.e. laws and regulations within the migrant institution that seek to protect and compensate exploited migrants and to punish errant employers. She was able to release authoritative resources when she sought help at the KBRI which had the political and legal authority to invoke these codified rules and to command her third employer to compensate her thus ending her exploitation.

Nuryanti's method of securing her fourth employment again reflects the advantages of establishing contact with facilitators who have access to both allocative and authoritative resources within the institution and which could expedite linkages between locales. The embassy official who was moonlighting as a part-time maid supplier, also felt compelled to help Nuryanti because of the religious obligation brought about by their shared identity as Muslims. He thought he was doing a good deed by helping a single-mother who was in a predicament to earn a clean living with a Muslim employer. This was revealed in a separate interview with this official who claimed he rarely placed maids directly with employers (he prefers to refer maids to maid agencies) because he did not like bearing the responsibility when the relationship between employer and maid does not work out. However, he admitted having placed maids with employers (who are usually relatives,

friends or acquaintances) only under special circumstances and if it was for a very good reason (Khalid, personal communication, August 1999).

Case study 6.5

Not just an FDW?

Background

Sri Hartiwi is a 36-year-old single woman from East Java who has been working in Singapore for six years. She has had two employers in Singapore, both Indian families who are related to each other. Sri served her first employer for four and half years before being transferred to her male employer's sister who urgently needed a maid. With her first employer she enjoyed a fortnightly rest day. Sri negotiated to have a weekly rest day with her second employer because she now has a heavier workload with three school-age children to care for.

Sri's main motivation for taking on foreign domestic employment was to travel. After completing SME, she had wanted to pursue further education to become a teacher but had to forego her ambition because she could not afford to do so. She ended up working as a sales assistant in a big department store in Surabaya. Sri admired her ex-boss in the department store who was a Singaporean. She often listened to his stories about Singapore and was inspired to travel to that city one day. However, the only way she could afford to leave Indonesia was to work as a FDW. Sri did not mind becoming a FDW because it would enable her to achieve her ambition of traveling overseas.

Securing employment

Together with her cousin, Sri approached a 'sponsor' in her hometown of Blitar, who was recruiting women to work in Singapore. At the training centre in Jakarta, Sri and her cousin were compelled to pay Rp250,000. The labour agent told them that it was for administrative costs incurred for making passports and other legal documents. Later she found out that other women were charged between Rp300,000 and 350,000. Sri realised they were conned. After arriving in Singapore she found out that salary deductions were supposed to cover all costs and she should not have been charged anything in Jakarta.

Sri stayed at the training centre for three months before an Indian family chose her to work for them. Her monthly starting pay was \$220 and she had to pay an agency fee of S\$550 which was deducted from her pay over a period of three months. At the time of the interview, Sri was earning S\$350.

Experience in Singapore

Sri thoroughly enjoyed working for her first employer. Her household workload was not heavy as she helped her employer mostly with the day-to-day running of his business retailing fabric and other merchandise imported from Bali. Sri's duties were to follow her boss on his daily rounds of distributing products and samples to his clients. She also had to do filing work for him. According to Sri, she found her work arrangement with her first boss more systematic and she enjoyed gaining other experiences beyond household chores.

As an incentive to help him with his business, her employer paid for Sri's English Language course at the British Council. The six-month course cost \$700 and she was required to attend classes three nights a week. With the agreement of her employer, Sri later pursued the advanced component of the course that ran for three months. She paid the expenses herself.

I need time to myself in order to explore other things and experience things other than just doing domestic work. Only in that way I feel I won't be wasting my opportunity being overseas. I like mixing around with the Filipino maids better because they always know and hear of activities that are worthwhile pursuing. I pursued the hairdressing course at Filodep [Filipino ongoing development program] after Filipino friends told me about it. Next, I want to pursue the Mandarin language course. That is why I like hanging out at Lucky Plaza on my rest days so that I can meet up with my Filipino friends. I find the Indonesian maids know very little. Plus I don't like hanging out at Marina because there are too many Bangladeshi male workers and I feel harassed. I also like to use my spare time beneficially. That way, when I go back to

Indonesia I can share with my family and friends all the experiences and knowledge I have gained.

Sri (translated from Bahasa Indonesia)

After four and half years working for her first employer, Sri was asked by her boss to work for his sister who urgently required a maid. Her employer's sister had three school age children and her maid had just left. Although reluctant, Sri felt obliged to accept the employment offer in return for her employer's kind treatment.

I find my current working conditions quite stressful. It's all household work and I do not have any spare time at all during the day for myself. My friends have suggested other employers but I don't think I want to change employers just yet. My current employer and my first employer treat me like I am one of the family and I would not want to be ungrateful to them.

Sri (translated from Bahasa Indonesia)

Sri overcame her more stressful work environment by negotiating for a day off every week. With her first employer, she used to have a day off every fortnight. According to Sri, she hardly had time to pursue courses during the week since she began working for her second employer because of her inflexible work hours. Nevertheless, she stressed that it was very important to her to have time off to herself every week so that she can meet up with friends and 'de-stress.'

Future possibilities

Sri has spent most of her earnings on herself. She has used her salary to pay for courses and entertainment when meeting up with friends. Her family is self-sufficient and earns a regular income through running a small provision stall in their hometown of Blitar. Sri remits money to her family only occasionally. She has bought a block of land for herself in her hometown that was worth Rp6 million. She has accumulated savings of Rp15 million in Indonesia. She once helped support a nephew through school and bought him a bicycle to motivate him. However, she stopped supporting her nephew when she heard that he had been playing truant. When Sri

returned to Blitar for holidays, she treated her family to holidays in other parts of Indonesia.

While Sri had many dreams for the future, she felt pressured by her parents to return to Indonesia.

I want to work either in Canada or Australia so that I can see these countries. I may also take up my first employer's offer of working for him in Bali to help out with his business. My family has been pressurising me to come home though. They want to marry me off because my younger sister just got married. I don't know, I know that I am not ready to return to Indonesia for good.

Sri (translated from Bahasa Indonesia)

Synthesis

Sri's story illustrates how an individual Indonesian FDW uses her overseas employment as a way to travel and to open up options for other types of career opportunities beyond domestic work. In Sri's case, she used her relationship with agents within the migrant institution (mainly her employers and peers) to attain skills that she would otherwise have had limited opportunity to learn on the wage that she was earning in Indonesia. Sri would also have had little chance of being exposed to the opportunities she has gained overseas if she had stayed on with her job as a sales assistant in the department store in Surabaya.

Although Sri took up overseas employment as a FDW to satisfy her dream of travelling, she also capitalised on the good relationship she had established with her employer which she described as being 'like family' to upgrade her skills. Not only was Sri able to gain experience performing simple clerical duties but she was also given the opportunity to upgrade her proficiency in the English language. In addition, Sri capitalised on the flexible work arrangement that she enjoyed with her first employer in order to further her skills in the English language, although at her own expense.

Sri also adopted a strategy of interacting with other agents within the migrant institution to further her objective of maximising her migration experience in Singapore. For example,

she preferred to spend time with the more educated and exposed Filipino FDWs, to gain from their practical knowledge and their more extensive contacts with other agents within the institution. In order to tap into those resources on her rest days, she purposefully maintained a presence at Lucky Plaza, a popular gathering node for Filipino FDWs. So far, she had benefited from her peer networking with Filipino FDWs by completing a Hair and Beauty Course offered by the Filipino Ongoing Development Programme (FILODEP) (Chapter 7.1). I attended Sri's graduation ceremony in June 1999 for the Hair and Beauty Course and observed that there was a handful of Indonesian FDWs amongst the graduates. The six Indonesian graduates had all gained information about FILODEP through the grapevine from their Filipino counterparts. Sri enrolled in the course after gaining information from her Filipino friends about it. One of Sri's future plans of working in Canada also suggests the influence of her peer networking with Filipino FDWs. Going to Canada or Hong Kong is a natural progression for some Filipino FDWs who have gained experience in Singapore.

Sri's story again shows the strength of 'fictive kinship' relationships between employers and FDWs in perpetuating the migrant institution. Although Sri was not very happy with her current work arrangement because she was assigned purely domestic chores and hardly had time to pursue courses at night time, she feels obligated to honour the contract because she feels indebted to her employers (especially the first one). Thus her first employer was able to gain Sri's loyalty to him and other family members from his kind treatment (flexible work arrangement) and investment in Sri (paying for her expensive course). He was also able to benefit economically by making Sri an office assistant cum domestic worker because he was paying her a domestic worker wage. On the other hand, Sri had gained from the good relationship by being able to achieve her real objective of taking up overseas domestic employment, i.e., to gain valuable experience through travelling. If Sri had stayed in Indonesia and continued working as a sales assistant, her chances of travelling would be slim because she would never have earned enough. The relationship she formed with her employer may also have a significant impact on her future migration paths, especially if she takes up his offer of employment in Bali.

Case Study 6.6

Employers as facilitators

Background

Sumi is a 31-year-old migrant from Solo in Central Java. She has been employed as a domestic worker in Singapore for the past nine years. Her primary motivation to work overseas was to earn a much higher income. She is the third child of a family of eight and took on the role as one of the primary breadwinners in the family after her father died. The other main breadwinner then was her eldest sister, and her mother supplemented her sister's income by selling cakes from home. Her five younger brothers were all of school-going age and so Sumi decided to seek work when she completed her senior high school certificate (SMA).

I wanted to study nursing after I completed SMA. But I had five younger brothers who were all in school. I thought it would be better if I didn't further my studies but instead worked to help my mother and sister send my brothers to school. It's important for boys to have a good education because they need to have good jobs to support their families in future. It's quite okay for a girl not to have too high an education.

Sumi (translated from Bahasa Indonesia)

First employment

Sumi was working as a waitress at a Chinese restaurant in Jakarta when a friend introduced her to a Pakistani expatriate family who was relocating to Singapore but wanted an Indonesian maid. Sumi was thrilled to learn that she could expect to draw a monthly salary of S\$200, four times what she was earning as a waitress. She also felt confident taking on the job because the family was fluent in *Bahasa*.

In Singapore, the family treated her very well. She was allowed to have one rest day every week but she only took a rest day every fortnight to avoid going out in order to save money. Her employer also allowed her to take up an English Language course and subsidised half of the fee. When Sumi was more confident with

speaking in English, her employer asked her to help him out with his real estate business in which she was assigned simple clerical and receptionist duties.

She served her first employer for six years with the last year being spent in London. She followed the family to London when they relocated again but she did not like working in London as she felt isolated. She did not know her way round, had no friends and found it really expensive to go out on her rest days. After a year, she requested to be sent home. Knowing that she still needed a job, her employer recommended that she work for a relative of theirs in America. She agreed to give it a try but was denied a visa. She then returned to her village in Indonesia to decide on what she could do for work.

Second employment

After returning to the village from London, Sumi was determined to secure further work in Singapore. She rang up her ex-employer's son who worked and lived in Jakarta to ask him if he knew anyone in Singapore who was in need of an Indonesian maid. Eventually he got back to her and told her that a friend of his, also an expatriate family from Pakistan in Singapore was looking for a maid. He helped her to liaise with his friend to arrange the necessary documents for her passage to Singapore.

Sumi found her workload with her second employer very light. Her main duty was to take care for the needs of the family's teenage son. Her employer and his wife were always overseas on business. She started out with a salary of S\$350 which was later increased to S\$400 after two years. With the permission of her employers, she took on part-time employment on her rest day every week (it is common for FDWs to take on part-time cleaning work on their rest days, but this practice is illegal). She had always kept in touch with her first employer by writing and even met up with them regularly for a meal whenever they were in Singapore. Through the first employer, she secured part-time work with his sister who lived in Singapore. According to Sumi, the family observed a very strict religious practice (she did not specify which religion) and because Sumi had prior training with her first employer about the do's and don'ts around the house because of this religious observation, her former employer's sister trusted Sumi to clean her house. She

employed Sumi once a fortnight and paid her S\$40 for every session.

On occasions when her employers were overseas for a stretch of two or three months, she also took on part-time cleaning work on weekdays with their permission. She earned S\$10 an hour doing part-time cleaning at a few houses. According to Sumi she did not pursue any educational courses at that time despite having plenty of time. This was because she focused on earning as much money as she could because she was supporting one of her brothers through university.

Her employment was discontinued when the family was relocated to America and once again she was denied a visa to follow them.

Third employment

She also secured work with her third employer through previous employers. Her third employer was friend of friends of her second employer. Again she found herself working for a Pakistani expatriate family in Singapore. She had to wait in her village for about two months in between her second and third contracts before her second employer managed to secure her further work. According to Sumi, her second employer paid her a month's salary while she waited in the village because he knew she badly needed the cash.

At the time of interview, Sumi told me that she was not as happy working for her third employer. The workload was heavier and her female employer was very temperamental. She suspected that her employers were having marriage problems. Her female employer always had groups of people over for meals and she regularly conducted cooking lessons at her home. Sumi was not happy because of the much heavier workload and was contemplating on taking up an offer of employment by another expatriate who lived in the same condominium block.

Her friends advised her against taking up the other offer of employment (I had been spending some time with Sumi and her group of friends on Sundays hence was able to note this). They told her that it 'would not be nice' for her to dishonour her contract because she owed her previous employer for the current contract and it would tarnish her reputation if she were to change

employers without completing the two-year term. They advised her that hard work is all part and parcel of being a domestic worker and that it would be better for her to bear it for a while. One of them, Ibu Saadiyah, even reminded Sumi that her decision would also have an impact on what employers think of Indonesian maids in general:

If you are like that [decide to quit because of the hard work] it gives people a chance to say bad things about Indonesians. They [employers] will only say see Indonesians are like this, lazy, give them a little bit of hard work and they quit. So you better think first before you make any decision. It would not reflect very well on you too if you dishonour your contract.

Ibu Saadiyah (translated from Bahasa Indonesia)

After a couple of weeks of deliberating, Sumi decided to stay on with her third employer until at least she completed her two-year contract.

Social networks

Sumi admitted to having a wide network of acquaintances and friends but only remained close to four friends with whom she meets regularly on her weekly rest days. When she first arrived, she contacted a relative who had been working in Singapore who showed her around and taught her how to use public transport.

Over the years her network of friends and acquaintances expanded, especially with FDWs who work in the same neighbourhood. She noted that having opportunities to maintain regular contact with friends and acquaintances was important for gaining information on part-time work, contacts with prospective employers, informal channels of remittance and borrowing money. She had helped a few friends secure further employment by introducing them to employers who approached her to ask if she could recommend them a maid. She had also helped two Indonesian FDWs file a police report against abusive employers and had counselled quite a few who were having problems with their employers.

One way in which Sumi and some of the FDWs in the same condominium complex maintained interactions was by cooking and sharing food when they had spare time during the weekdays.

Synthesis

Sumi's story illustrates the influence of employer networks in impacting on the 'power' of individual Indonesian FDWs within the migrant institution. In Sumi's case, a network of expatriate employers played a significant role as facilitators in perpetuating Sumi's overseas employment. The intended consequence was that Sumi achieve her objective of earning a regular stream of cash income to support her brothers through school, but the unintended consequence was a perpetuation of the flow of women migrants to service the upper middle class community via personal recommendations. Sumi sought to maintain and formalise relations with her first employers by maintaining regular contact through writing and meeting up with them whenever they were in Singapore.

Sumi's case also illustrates the emphasis that Indonesian FDWs place on loyalty to employers who treat them fairly, highlighting the significance of the non-economic rationales which govern patron-client dyads. Recognising that Sumi's previous employers had taken the trouble to secure Sumi work with her third employer, her friends advised Sumi that it would be unwise for her not to honour the contract, because it would tarnish her employment record. In addition, one of her friends also reminded Sumi that her individual work ethic has an impact on the reputation of overseas Indonesian workers in general. This highlights the application of informal institutional rules, such as social norms of obligation and reciprocity in a patron-client dyad and social sanctions on approved behaviours, in individual action. For example, Sumi's decision to stay on with her third employer was imbued with feelings of indebtedness to her previous employers, of maintaining a good employment record (important for subsequent employment contracts especially via personal recommendations) and of upholding a nationalistic spirit invoked by peer pressures.

Case Study 6.7

The superior servant

Background

Ibu Saadiah is a 47 year-old single parent from Central Java. She has been working as a maid since she was 14. She has always worked for western expatriate employers. At the point of the interview, Ibu Saadiah had been working in Singapore for 11 years with the same employer, a German expatriate couple for whom she worked previously in Jakarta. When her employer was relocated to Singapore, they proposed that she continue working for them in Singapore.

Her main motivation to work overseas was to support her four children. She was married and divorced twice. When she was invited to work in Singapore, her eldest son was 11 years old. At the time, Ibu Saadiah was drawing a monthly salary of Rp75,000 but this was becoming increasingly inadequate to meet her children's school fees and other household expenses. Knowing her situation, her employer offered her the opportunity to earn a higher income. She was promised a monthly salary of S\$300 plus food and lodging.

Initially, Ibu Saadiah was apprehensive about going to Singapore because her female employer was a 'tyrant.' Also, she did not have any friends or relatives in Singapore and was worried that she would not have anyone to turn to if her employer gave her problems.

At the time of interview, I had been meeting Ibu Saadiah and her friends on their rest days for a month or so. I had heard Ibu Saadiah complaining to her friends of how her female employer would do a stock count of food in the fridge and pantry before each trip overseas to ensure that Ibu Saadiah would not take any of the food. Once, Ibu Saadiah had an argument with her over a missing potato that her employer had accused her of taking!

Ibu Saadiah was also not allowed to receive or make any calls from the house telephone. She overcame this problem by purchasing a personal pager and eventually a mobile telephone for herself.

My female employer is really strict and can be very unreasonable. Any other maid would not be able to tolerate her behaviour. In Jakarta before I worked for

her, in six months alone she employed a total of four maids who left because they cannot stand her. I was only brave enough to come to Singapore with her and her husband because the company they work for promised to be responsible for my welfare over here. The people there know how terrible she is. They told me not to be scared to confront her if she goes overboard and I am in the right. The company also mediated a written work contract I have signed with them. Initially the verbal agreement was that I would be paid S\$300 plus food and lodging. But because food was overlooked in the written agreement, she told me after I arrived in Singapore that I would have to buy and cook my own food.

Ibu Saadiah (translated from *Bahasa Indonesia*)

Experience in Singapore

In Singapore, Ibu Saadiah enjoys a rest day once a week. At first she did not know anyone and so just wandered the streets on her own. She went to a market in Serangoon Road (also a popular spot for Indian and Bangladeshi workers on Sunday) and met a couple of Indonesian maids who later brought her to Geylang and later Marina (two popular gathering spots for Indonesian FDWs).

Ibu Saadiah did not have problems making new friends because of her friendly persona. She established a wide network of friends very quickly. Her social networks and her relative freedom enabled her to gain extensive knowledge of a variety of things. For example, I learned from mixing with Ibu Saadiah and her friends that she was well-respected, because she has extensive networks and had helped many FDWs who had problems in Singapore. On numerous occasions, she had assisted maids who were abused by their employers by helping them to contact either the police or the KBRI. She had also organised an instant charity drive among Indonesian FDWs who gather informally at Marina on Sundays to help out a maid who had fallen seriously ill and was hospitalised. She had also helped a fellow Indonesian FDW to arrange a passage for her daughter into Singapore to work as an FDW via informal channels (bypassing labour recruitment agencies) in order to avoid paying the exorbitant agency fee. Ibu Saadiah provided the FDW

with contacts in Batam who could help her daughter obtain the necessary documents to enter Singapore.

Her extensive networks and knowledge of the migrant institution meant that Ibu Saadiah could have easily secured another expatriate employer in Singapore if she chose to do so. She was also aware of opportunities overseas and the potential to earn a better income. Nevertheless, she was determined to put up with her stern German employer.

I know that Singapore is an easy jumping off point to find employment overseas or with other expatriate employers if you already have experience. But I don't want to. I mean I don't like to change employers and dishonour my contract. If I were to leave it must be with my good name. I have had a good track record since I first started working as a domestic helper in Jakarta. All my letters show that I complete my contracts successfully before taking on other assignments.

Ibu Saadiah (translated from Bahasa Indonesia)

At the time of interview, Ibu Saadiah was earning S\$500 plus some extras by doing part-time cleaning and ironing on her rest day. Her aim was to retire in 2001 and live in Jakarta in a house that she bought for herself. She felt her purpose for working overseas had almost been achieved. She has only one son who is still in SMA (senior high school) and had managed to buy land for herself and build a house for each of her two married sons. She intends to live in Jakarta so that she can run a food stall outside her home to supplement her savings after retiring from Singapore.

Synthesis

Ibu Saadiah's case illustrates a different type of 'power' displayed by an individual Indonesian FDW. In her case, 'power' is exercised through inaction. Her perseverance against her very calculative and unreasonable female employer and her decision to seek pride in her job enables her to exercise 'power' and shape the migrant institution. By not actively looking for alternative employment, Ibu Saadiah's action has an unintended consequence of perpetuating the institutional subordination of FDWs in Singapore.

Despite being well positioned to seek employment with another employer from the practical knowledge and the knowledge of institutional rules that she had gained through her interactions and networkings with agents and facilitators within the migrant institution, she was firm on seeing through her contract with her stern and calculative employer and to maintain her professionalism in her job by not breaking her contract. However, other migrants tapped her practical knowledge, knowledge of institutional rules and valuable social contacts which she had gained over the years of being an agent within the migrant institution to achieve their personal objectives. Thus Ibu Saadiyah's 'senior' position within the migrant institution enabled her to exert 'power' in the form of impacting upon and influencing the actions of others which are (re)produced over time to become social practices that constitute the migrant institution in Singapore.

6.8 'Power' of individual Indonesian FDWs and the migrant institution.

The seven case studies presented above described the 'actions' of individual Indonesian FDWs in negotiating their employment contracts, experiencing life in Singapore and charting their subsequent migration paths. These actions had unintended consequences beyond the intended outcome of serving the personal objectives of individual migrants. These unintended consequences help shape the practices of other agents and are (re)produced over time and space thus modifying the migrant institution. Individual Indonesian FDWs are capable of exercising agency through their actions and thus exert 'power' in shaping the migrant institution. From the case studies, one aspect of the 'power' of individual Indonesian FDWs is the perpetuation of informal agencies and 'non-official' migration routes in facilitating international labour migration despite the increasing formalisation of the maid industry and the presence of formal agents, such as government labour officials, licenced recruitment agents and maid placement agents, facilitating migrant flows.

All the case studies illustrate the significance of interactions and networking between agents within the institution in mobilising institutional rules and releasing resources to

further individual objectives. In their analysis of international labour migration in the Philippines, Goss and Lindquist noted that 'there is both a vertical and horizontal segmentation of knowledge and interaction' between agents in different locales. Thus brokers or facilitators who maintain co-presence in these locales facilitate articulation between locales and occupants of locales (Goss and Lindquist 1995: 340). The case studies illustrate that there are four types of agents which facilitate articulation between locales (Indonesia and Singapore) and agents occupying a locale (in particular Singapore). These four agents are peers, employers and maid agents/suppliers and officials in authority. Whilst peers occupy the same social position as individual FDWs in terms of their ability to release authoritative and allocative resources, they provide an important source of practical knowledge and knowledge of institutional rules gained from their own experiences and social contacts that pave the way for interactions and networking with other agents (such as maid agents/suppliers, prospective employers or embassy officials) who are in a position to release resources and apply institutional rules to further the migrant's individual objectives.

Thus peer networking provides access to vertical connections between agents within a locale (in this case Singapore) who, in turn, provide horizontal connections between locales (Singapore and Indonesia in particular). This is evident in the case of Sukinah (Case Study 6.2) who was able to secure further employment in Singapore via a social contact (a maid agent who specialises in placement of Indonesian FDWs with Muslim employers) provided by her friend Yati. Another example would be the story of Suyami (Case Study 6.3) whose practical knowledge (overseas employment opportunities) and contacts (maid recruitment agencies in Singapore) gained from networking and interacting with peers has made her a more informed migrant in charting subsequent migration paths. As seen in the story of Karni (Case Study 6.1), peer networking also enables individual FDWs to circumvent excessive salary deductions by unscrupulous maid agents, appalling living conditions at training centres and untrustworthy local sponsors (Chapter 5.3). In the case of Sukinah (Case Study 6.2), peer networking enabled an Indonesian FDW to choose an employer that could offer more desirable living

conditions, a rare opportunity when going through maid agencies because of the weak economic position of FDWs (Chapter 5.3).

Apart from directly facilitating flows of migrants between locales, peer networking also has a significant influence in enhancing the quality of experience of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore. As revealed by the stories of Suyami (Case Study 6.3) and Seri (Case Study 6.5) and as referred to in the stories of Sumi (Case Study 6.6) and Ibu Saadiyah (Case Study 6.7), peer networking is a valuable source of emotional support, counselling, help, camaraderie and information to upgrade one's skills. These suggest that peer networking helps to address problems that emerge because of isolation and enables FDWs to gain some power in negotiating aspects of discipline and control over their behaviours and socialisation notwithstanding the existence of practices that have become a social norm and are officially sanctioned by the state (Chapters 4.8 and 5.3). Moreover, as a provider of emotional support and counseling, peer networking presents an alternative resource for FDWs who are having problems with employers and enable them to avoid the potential harassment and abuse if they turn to maid agencies for support (Chapter 4.8 and 5.3). This was illustrated in Suyami's story (Case Study 6.3), where peer networking played a significant role as a sympathetic avenue for counseling and advice in contrast to maid agents who tend to side with employers. Thus these roles, derived from establishing good networking with peers indirectly perpetuate the institutionalised system of live-in paid FDWs in Singapore because they contribute to a migrant's resolve to honour existing employment contracts (Case Studies 6.3 and 6.6). They also contribute to a migrant's resolve to continue to seek further employment in Singapore (Case Study 6.1) or in other countries, such as Hong Kong, Taiwan and Canada, producing an unintended consequence of integrating the migrant institutions in these locales and extending the global system of international labour migration of women OCWs who become FDWs.

Whilst peers provide information and contacts to agents that can release resources, employers may also act as facilitators who can release resources. This is clearly illustrated in the case of Sumi (Case Study 6.6) who relied on good relationships with her employers

to secure further employment in Singapore and to arrange her a passage into the country. Thus employers are also active subjects of the migrant institution providing contact between agents within and between locales and facilitating migrant flows between locales by invoking their knowledge of institutional rules and by releasing resources.

An economic rationale alone neither underpins relations between agents nor solely influences choices and decision-making. Informal institutional rules, such as moral rules that draw upon structures of legitimation, have a significant influence on the agents' decisions and choices. The case studies illustrate that the dialectic of control in social relations between individual Indonesian FDWs and other agents of the migrant institution is imbued with Muslim fraternity, patron-client and fictive kinship dyads. These factors are illustrated in the cases of Suyami (Case Study 6.3), Seri (Case Study 6.5) and Sumi (Case Study 6.6). In these cases, feelings of obligation and indebtedness, invoked by patron-client and fictive kinship dyads and social sanctions on approved behaviours imbued with nationalistic honour contribute to migrants' resolve to stay and honour existing employment contracts with employers. The role of Muslim fraternity is illustrated in Sukinah's story (Case Study 6.2) whereby Mastura, the Muslim maid agent, deliberately sought to specialise in a niche market of placing Muslim Indonesian FDWs only with Muslim employers to fulfill her religious duty of helping underprivileged Muslims.

These dyads could be viewed as institutionalised exploitation as in the case of Nuryanti (Case Study 6.4) who was grossly underpaid by her patron (first employer), and Sri (Case Study 6.5) who was paid a FDW's wage despite also performing the role of an office assistant. However, the individual FDW in question may view such institutionalised exploitation as providing agency to achieve personal objectives. For example, Nuryanti was very grateful to her first employer for providing her with an opportunity to earn higher wages and a regular income stream so that she could support her eight children, while Sri found the office work assigned to her a valuable learning experience that she would otherwise not have been exposed to if she did not embark on becoming a FDW.

In summary, I have illustrated that individual Indonesian FDWs are not simply passive victims but are also active subjects of migration. As migrants and women workers, they are active in pursuing their individual objectives but the sum of their individual actions also shapes the migrant institution in Singapore impacting upon the nature and characteristics of migrant flows. Although Indonesian FDWs are bound in relations of domination-subordination, as subjects of a migrant institution, they possess a capacity for strategic action by applying institutional rules and releasing resources through interacting and networking with other agents in the institution. The case studies also suggest that patron-client dyads, Muslim fraternity and fictive kinship relations play important roles in enabling Indonesian FDWs to develop a capacity for strategic actions. However, the actions of individual Indonesian FDWs in turn reproduce rules and resources within the migrant institution that are then invoked by their peers and by other agents in furthering their own objectives. These actions therefore become social practices that are (re)produced over time and space thus (re)forming the migrant institution in Singapore.

Conclusion

Although individual FDWs are capable of exerting 'power' in the migrant institution they remain disadvantaged and marginalised as labour migrants, workers and the immigrant 'other' within the social system. The case studies suggest that Indonesian FDWs have very limited choice but to remain as FDWs, a menial occupation that is poorly paid and shunned by locals in order to achieve their personal objectives such as raising their socio-economic status at home, having the chance to travel and escaping personal problems at home. The 'power' of individual Indonesian FDWs whilst, to a certain extent shapes the nature and characteristics of migration of FDWs, does not contribute to a significant change in the structural principles by which paid live-in domestic work performed by foreign women are organised in Singapore nor to the international migration of women OCWs from Indonesia to become FDWs. As highlighted above, the actions of individual Indonesian FDWs are more focused on overcoming their own isolation, mistreatment by employers, inability to practice their religion and maltreatment by the maid industry and

also on achieving their personal ambitions and dreams. Moreover, the actions of individual Indonesian FDWs may also have the unintended consequence of perpetuating the international labour migration of women OCWs from Indonesia to become FDWs in Singapore and other countries in the region within the institutionalised system of subordination and domination of women OCWs. In the next chapter, I describe the objectives and impacts of collective 'resistance' of Indonesian FDWs.

CHAPTER 7

COLLECTIVE 'RESISTANCE' BY INDONESIAN FDWs

Introduction

In the previous chapter I described how individual Indonesian FDWs have circumvented some aspects of exploitation in their migration and employment experiences. However, I also argued that the actions of individual Indonesian FDWs are too fragmented to challenge the overall institutional factors that form part of the power structures underscoring their subordination and domination.

In Chapter 4.9, I described how asymmetrical power structures produced negative representations of FDWs in Singapore and contributed to their subjectification as the inferior alien 'other' in that country. In addition, in Chapters 5.3 and 5.4, I highlighted the hegemonic representations of Indonesian FDWs by the host society. This chapter focuses on collective resistance by Indonesian FDWs. In particular, I examine how a formal association of Indonesian FDWs has brought about 'resistance' to the subjectification of Indonesian FDWs as deserving of patronising treatment by employers and the host society.

In the year 2000 An-Nisa, the first formal association for Indonesian FDWs, was formed. Based at the Sultan Mosque, Singapore's oldest mosque, the primary function of An-Nisa was to provide skill enhancement courses and fortnightly social activities for Indonesian FDWs. An-Nisa holds classes on Islamic religious knowledge, English, sewing and handicraft. It also organises exclusive celebrations for Indonesian FDWs to commemorate special occasions in the Islamic calendar, such as the Islamic New Year (*Muharram* celebration) and *Hari Raya Aidilfitri* (the end of the fasting month of *Ramadan*). However, the association has also been appropriated by some Indonesian FDWs as a platform to promote a more positive image of Indonesian FDWs and to dispel the hegemonic representations of their identities described above. The association has also been utilised as an informal collective voice for Indonesian FDWs in Singapore and it has 'agitated' for the KBRI to be more empathetic to the needs of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore.

Firstly, I will review the range of migrant associations and consider their roles in providing resources, sustenance and a space for resistance by citing examples from Hong Kong and Singapore. Secondly and in order to outline the roles of An-Nisa, I will present the views of two key individuals who played a significant role in An-Nisa's inception and development. Thirdly, I will highlight how An-Nisa has been appropriated as an informal platform for the collective voice of Indonesian FDWs to press the Indonesian embassy (KBRI) to be more sympathetic to the welfare of Indonesian FDWs and to be more scrupulous in how it portrays 'ideal' Indonesian national identities in Singapore. Finally, I conclude that, in contesting negative stereotypes, some Indonesian FDWs as a collective group have advocated an image of themselves as moral, respectable and capable people. The values and the moralising discourse of Islam are seen as central to the inculcation of a form of self-discipline and to an awareness amongst Indonesian FDWs that they should conduct themselves in a socially acceptable manner to the host society in Singapore.

This desire of many Indonesian FDWs to portray an image of a 'good' maid is conflated with their desire to portray an Indonesian national identity that conforms to values which are held as moral and respectable by the host society. Thus, in resisting externally stereotyped hegemonic representations, some Indonesian FDWs advocated accommodation or compliance with the qualities of domestic servants that are desired and promoted by Singaporean maid agents and employers. Nevertheless, the boycotting of organised activities with an Islamic grounding by some FDWs and the sabotage of organised activity at the KBRI suggest that the subjectivities of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore are far more diverse. Given the experiences of Filipino FDWs in this regard, the effectiveness of utilising migrant social and religious groups, as a vehicle to elevate the status of FDWs and domestic work in the host society is questionable. However, I argue that social and religious groups among Indonesian FDWs should be encouraged because they provide a personal respite for individual FDWs as well as access to peer networks. Thus they are a valuable resource for individual FDWs enabling them to exert 'power' in negotiating aspects of their subordination and domination in Singapore (Chapter 6).

7.1 Migrant groups – providing resources, sustenance and a space for resistance.

The role that migrant groups play in providing sustenance, resources and a space for resistance has been noted and documented (Yeoh and Huang 1999a; Constable 1997; Gonzales 1998; Law 2002). Migrant groups are sponsored by either labour-exporting states, non-government organisations (NGOs) or religious institutions, such as churches. Among labour export countries, the Philippine state has been the most active in offering welfare support and skill enhancement services through the Philippines Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA). This is an outcome of the enactment of the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act 1995, following the furore over the Flor Contemplacion case (Chapter 5.3). OWWA is located at embassies in host states and offers crisis intervention services, such as temporary shelter for runaway maids, assistance with conflict resolution and the investigation of complaints as well as skill enhancement courses to facilitate re-integration in the Philippines (Gonzales 1998: 113).

Migrant groups that are run by NGOs tend to be more political and vocal in taking up issues of concern regarding FDWs. Such groups are widespread and popular, especially in Hong Kong. As well as delivering welfare services and publicising the plight of FDWs, some of these groups are active in advocacy work and in organising FDWs to protest against the unfavourable policies and regulations of labour-sending and host states. These migrant groups form national and transnational coalitions launching campaigns and protests against unfavourable policies (Law 2002).

To date, Filipino FDWs in Hong Kong have succeeded in revoking Executive Order 857 which required all Filipino OCWs to remit 50 per cent of their salaries through Filipino banks. They were also successful in having the Memorandum of Understanding No.8 (MOI#8) revoked. This memorandum increased the fees charged by the Philippines Consulate in Hong Kong for the processing of new job contracts for FDWs. The former success was achieved by campaigns and demonstrations organised by the United Filipinos in Hong Kong (UNIFIL), of a coalition of Filipino migrant groups. The latter was achieved through the combined efforts of a group of Filipino

migrant groups which organised themselves as the Coalition Against Government Exactions (CAGE) (Law 2002: 212 -214). A transnational coalition, the Asian Migrant Coordinating Body (AMCB), made up of a coalition of NGO migrant groups of various nationalities including the Filipinos, Indonesians and Nepalese, has also been organising an on-going campaign against the Hong Kong government's proposal for lowering the minimum wage for FDWs. Although it was not entirely successful, the AMCB was able to reduce the proposed cut from 20 per cent to 5 per cent of the floor wage (Law 2002: 216).

In Singapore, Catholic and Protestant churches are at the forefront of sponsoring groups that provide welfare and support services to FDWs. These groups range from informal social groups and small-scale Christian fellowship groups to larger ministries providing services and masses (Yeoh and Huang 1999: 1159). Gonzales (1998) noted that there are some 30 Catholic parishes in Singapore which provide spiritual and psycho-social needs to Filipino FDWs and the Filipino community in Singapore. However, these groups shy away from advocacy work and from being politically involved in championing the rights of FDWs for fear of being accused of spreading subversive ideologies (Yeoh and Huang 1999).

In June 1998, the Catholic Church set up the Archdiocese Commission for Pastoral Care of Migrant and Itinerant People (ACPCMIP) which acts as an umbrella organisation for all migrant groups affiliated to Catholic churches (ACPCMIP 2000). The aim of ACPC MIP is to further consolidate the activities of these groups and to foster migrant-host relations and networking among migrant pastoral workers, to serve non-Catholic groups to foster regional collaboration on migration. In addition, the Commission aims to accomplish religious objectives, such as evangelisation and the development of pastoral and missionary leadership for the migrants' ministry (*About us n.d.*).

Of late, the ACPCMIP has also embarked on subtle approaches in campaigning for better treatment of FDWs by increasing public awareness of the plight of FDWs through educational workshop and seminars and by making regular contributions to the *Forum* section of *The Straits Times* thus projecting the voice of migrant workers (The

Straits Times 1999c: The Straits Times 1999d). These activities, also prompted various agents in the migrant institution, such as FDWs, employers, embassy officials, maid agents, officials from the Ministry of Manpower (Singapore) and the local community to engage in a dialogue on issues surrounding the employment of FDWs in Singapore. Two examples of such activities are, a workshop on '*Improving [the] employer-maid relationship*' organised in 2000 and '*Harmony 2002*', a May Day celebration, in which a campaign on encouraging employers to give maids rest days was launched (*Events n.d.*).

Prior to 2000, there were five centres providing skill and development courses and welfare services for FDWs in Singapore. Three of these, the OWWA Center, Filipino Ongoing Development Program (FILODEP) and Filipino Overseas Workers of Singapore (FOWS) are supported by the Philippines embassy. OWWA is run wholly by the Philippines embassy in Singapore and offers short-term courses in a wide range of areas such as business counselling, international cuisine, nursing aide skills, tailoring and traditional dances. Since the official opening of an OWWA administered school in 1995, OWWA has had 1,300 graduates, consisting mainly of Filipino FDWs (Gonzales 1998: 113). FOWS was established by FDWs for FDWs with the assistance of OWWA and also acts as an umbrella organisation for a number of church-based and regional associations of Filipinos in Singapore (Gonzales 1998: 113).

The FILODEP was established in 1996 as a result of a collaborative effort of a group of Filipino nuns and of the Philippines ambassador to Singapore at that time. FILODEP runs a variety of courses, with two enrolments each year. On average, FILODEP has an enrolment each semester of 900 students, mostly Filipino FDWs (Gonzales 1998: 114). The main objectives of FILODEP are to provide guidance and counselling, recreational and social activities, skill enhancement courses, leadership training for volunteer domestic workers and spiritual support for Christian FDWs (Gonzales 1998: 114). Another skills centre that was established by a Catholic parish and caters mainly for Filipino FDWs is the Madonna Skills Centre. Recently, it expanded its services to offer computer skills courses in collaboration with the Singapore American School. There is also a similar group for Sri Lankan migrant workers called the Sri Lankan Migrant Service (SLMS) which caters for the concerns

of low income Sri Lankan workers (ACPCMIP 2000). Based at a church, SLMS provides counselling services, financial assistance, social activities and skill enhancement courses. The SLMS has also established LAKSATHE an organisation focused on providing these services especially to Sri Lankan FDWs (ACPCMIP 2000).

Despite their being one of the largest groups of FDWs in Singapore (next to the Filipinos), up until the Year 2000, when An-Nisa was formed, there were no organised groups or societies offering services such as those cited above to Indonesian FDWs. Although existing church-based groups or groups supported by the Philippines embassy welcomed FDWs of other nationalities and religious backgrounds to join their activities, only a handful of Indonesian FDWs have done so. In the course of my fieldwork, I met a group of six Indonesian graduates of FILODEP in June 1999 who had joined its activities after gaining information about them through social networks (Case Study 6.5). Among those Indonesian FDWs who enjoy regular rest days, their ignorance of the existence of these groups could be a reason why there are very low numbers of Indonesian FDWs participating in such activities. Furthermore, language barriers and the Christian affiliation of these groups are also probable reasons why the largely Muslim and *Bahasa* speaking population of Indonesian FDWs shy away from these activities.

Employers and FDWs impute different meanings to participation in the activities of migrant groups. Constable's research reveals that Filipino FDWs in Hong Kong attached both symbolic and practical meanings to their participation. Firstly, they viewed it as a form of escapism from the negative aspects of their occupation. Secondly, highly publicised activities such as the glamorous beauty contests, the elegant cultural performances and the sports competitions organised by church and community groups had the intended and unintended consequences of conveying an image that is the anti-thesis of poor, backward, uncultured, promiscuous and immoral maids (Constable 1997: 206). While Filipino FDWs 'do something different', or seek pleasure and excitement, simply to escape the stigma of their occupation for a few hours, they may also intentionally or unintentionally disrupt the flow of meanings imposed upon them as foreign women engaged in low status jobs through such collective displays of alternative identities (Constable 1997).

On the other hand, some employers encourage their FDWs to participate in the activities of migrant groups on rest days both as an extension of their control over maids and to keep them within a disciplinary gaze (Chapter 4.8). Attending church services or participating in the activities of supervised social groups are viewed as 'safe' and 'desirable' by their employers as opposed to spending time at shopping centres and other migrant enclaves with friends (Yeoh and Huang 1998: 591). The latter activities viewed as high-risk because FDWs are perceived to be vulnerable to 'bad' influences when left unsupervised in such context (Chapter 4.8).

Migrant groups provide resources, sustenance and a space for resistance for FDWs. In Singapore, where the political culture does not allow for migrant groups to be politically active in championing the causes of FDWs, migrant groups are more focused on providing for spiritual needs, welfare services and social activities for FDWs. Hitherto, Catholic and Protestant churches and the Philippines state have been the most active in providing these types of services and activities for FDWs in Singapore.

7.2 An-Nisa – the need for it

Sugi's and Muna's view

This section outlines the need for An-Nisa as a vehicle for mobilising collective 'resistance' against negative stereotypes of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore. I focus on the views of Sugi and Muna (their real names), two Indonesian FDWs who between them have 15 years experience of working in Singapore and have played central roles in An-Nisa's inception and development.

An-Nisa, which means young women in Arabic, was conceived in March 2000. Sugi and officials of Sultan Mosque developed the idea of forming An-Nisa. She was made the first unofficial representative of members of An-Nisa, a position that was taken over by Muna when Sugi left for Indonesia in 2001. Sugi had an opportunity to express the need for something like An-Nisa when an official of the mosque approached her one Sunday while she was resting with a group of friends at the World

Trade Center. The official saw that Sugi was wearing the '*hijab*', unlike the majority of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore, and asked her to help the mosque to run religious classes for interested Indonesian FDWs.

After a meeting with the mosque committee on her subsequent rest day, in which she shared her vision of helping Indonesian FDWs in Singapore, they worked together to advertise An-Nisa amongst Indonesian FDWs. Although only eight maids attended An-Nisa's first class, it grew rapidly after a story was published in the Malay national daily, *Berita Harian* (*Berita Harian* 2000a; *Berita Harian* 2000b; *Berita Harian* 2000c). An-Nisa currently has 400 registered members, and on average 200 maids participate in its fortnightly activities.

Sugi left for Indonesia shortly after An-Nisa celebrated its first anniversary. Since then, Muna, a feisty, 28 year-old migrant from East Java, has held the position of its representative. Muna has been very proactive in expanding the scope of An-Nisa and in getting across to the KBRI her compatriots' aspirations and opinions on issues associated with Indonesian FDWs in Singapore. Her main objective was to make the KBRI more sensitive and responsive to the needs of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore. Muna is also active in promoting An-Nisa and attracting Indonesian FDWs to its activities. Of late, she has also been liaising with the KBRI to host organised activities. Her main objective is to attract more Indonesian FDWs to participate in constructive organised activities by holding them at a non-religious venue. Muna views these activities as having both practical and symbolic implications for improving the image of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore.

The following section identifies the factors that contribute to the negative image of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore and their underlying causes, mainly from the perspectives of Sugi and Muna. I also present anecdotal evidence from field observations that support these views. These factors highlight the need for groups such as An-Nisa.

Factors contributing to the negative image of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore

After three years working in Singapore, I was granted a regular rest day once a month. The first time I went out with my friend Qasinah, I was very disturbed looking at other Indonesian FDWs who were enjoying their rest days at shopping malls and on the streets. Some of them wear clothes [dress immodestly] and behave in ways that are not proper for Muslim women [socialising freely with members of the opposite sex]. The more often I go out, I see with my own eyes, even among my own friends, especially the way they dress is not like how we've been thought of as Muslims. Some of the women have a lot of problems from home or over here. When they have freedom on rest days they do whatever they want because they are on their own...

(Sugi, translated from *Bahasa Indonesia*)

Sugi's quotation reveals that she shares with the host society similar objections to the individual styles displayed by some Indonesian FDWs on their rest days. She disapproves of the way they socialise freely with members of the opposite sex at shopping malls and popular migrant enclaves (Chapter 4.8). In addition, she noted that by her standards some Indonesian FDWs are brazen in their dress sense and dress immodestly. Whilst Sugi's judgement is underpinned by Islamic principles, the host society's disapproval or intolerance of such behaviour is driven more by a biased stereotype of FDWs as vulnerable, inexperienced young women with inferior moral and cultural standards (Chapter 4.8). Indonesian FDWs in particular are perceived as vulnerable to manipulation by men because of their naivety and simple-mindedness (Chapter 5.3). Moreover, such behaviour is labelled as deviant because it falls outside employers' control and surveillance, a norm in the employer-FDW relationship in the Singapore context (Chapter 4.8). However, Sugi noted that some Indonesian FDWs succumbed to such behaviour as a way of dealing with the pressures resulting from problems with their families and employers.

Muna also acknowledges the potential risks of a social environment that encourages Indonesian FDWs to mix freely with members of the opposite sex. This is because some Indonesian FDWs are perceived to be prone to being led astray because of their own weaknesses. Whilst noting its riskiness, she noted that media attention

highlighting the negative repercussions of such a free social environment contributes to the biased perception of Indonesian FDWs held by the host society.

Some of us are fortunate to be given rest days. But there are those among us who lack a moral foundation and hence are easily influenced and misled. The presence of a large population of migrant workers from various countries facilitates an environment in which male and female migrant workers can come together and mingle around freely on rest days. This sort of behaviour draws negative attention from the media who like to highlight incidents such as prostitution and love affairs that may lead to maids running away with boyfriends and having babies outside of marriage...

(Muna, translated from *Bahasa Indonesia*)

In summary, both Muna and Sugi view spending time idly at shopping malls and other migrant enclaves negatively. Whilst Sugi's concern is underpinned by its potential to encourage behaviour that contradicts Islamic principles, Muna is concerned that it may lead those who lack the maturity to handle such freedoms into trouble. Nevertheless, both agree that these sorts of behaviours taint the overall reputation of Indonesian FDWs. Overall, despite different underlying reasons both perspectives conform to the biased views held by a majority of employers and the host society that such freedoms can lead FDWs into trouble (Chapter 4.8).

During fieldwork, I have also heard other Indonesian FDWs chiding their compatriots for behaving in ways that are not approved socially in Singapore or in traditional Islamic context in Indonesia. For instance, once when I was spending the day with Ibu Saadiah and her group of friends, we saw an Indonesian FDW hugging her boyfriend outside the Botanic Gardens creating a little bit of a scene in full view of the public. Ibu Saadiah and her friends chided the FDW amongst themselves, made a joke and shook their heads in disapproval. Later during the bus ride, I asked Ibu Saadiah what she thought of such behaviour and why she and her group of friends seemed to disapprove of it. She said:

Sometimes some of us abuse the rest days employers give us. This is especially so for the young ones. They think they can do anything over here because they are away from their families and because of that Indonesian FDWs have a bad name.

(Ibu Saadiyah, translated from *Bahasa Indonesia*)

When I spent time with Tutik, another Indonesian FDW, after her graduation ceremony at FILODEP I noticed that she kept looking at her watch. I had promised to give her a lift home since her employer's house is near my own. I thought that she was running late and had an appointment or a task that she had to complete at home but she said:

I prefer to go home straight from class [beauty and hairdressing class]. I don't like wasting time. Some of my friends [points to the other girls who were still sitting down chatting and enjoying their snacks] sometimes ask if I want to go to Lucky Plaza with them but I prefer to go home. I don't like to go to such places or spend time chatting and walking around at shopping centres like them. It is not good to do so as people [the public] would think bad things about you.

(Tutik, translated from *Bahasa Indonesia*)

The above anecdotes reflect that the control and discipline exercised over Indonesian FDWs condition their subjectivities or conscious and unconscious senses of who they are in Singapore. What are perceived as desirable behaviours are produced and reproduced by these repressive measures of control and discipline and become norms of behaviour. The act of some Indonesian FDWs in chiding their compatriots for not conforming to these norms, Sugi's and Muna's concern over the impropriety of certain behaviours and of the risks of a free social environment, and the self-discipline displayed by Tutik suggest the impacts of control and discipline on subjectivities of Indonesian FDWs and also that Indonesian FDWs like Sugi and Muna adopt the patronising and stereotyping attitudes of Singaporean employers and the wider Singaporean society. Thus types of behaviour otherwise tolerable if displayed by individuals occupying a different subject position or in a different time and space become an aberration for Indonesian FDWs, thereby underscoring their bad reputation in Singapore.

Underlying factors and the need for guidance

The views discussed in the section above suggest that some Indonesian FDWs think that they have only themselves to blame for their tainted reputation. Muna has claimed that some Indonesian FDWs are prone to 'misbehaving' on rest days because of a weak moral foundation. Ibu Saadiyah noted that the lack of maturity of young FDWs leads them to socially unacceptable behaviour. On the other hand, Sugi thinks that such behaviours result from misdirected frustration resulting from the FDWs' problems with their own families and employers. These views imply that some Indonesian FDWs feel that many of their peers need a form of guidance in order to prevent them from misbehaving when given freedom, as reflected in the following quotes:

We do not deny that there are Indonesian FDWs who intentionally and unintentionally portray a bad image of Indonesians and Indonesia. The stark differences in lifestyle and culture is one of many reasons why Indonesian FDWs can be led astray by the lure of freedom and being modern...

Excerpt of a letter by Muna addressed to the KBRI

The training provided by the maid agency covered aspects of how to do household chores such as cooking, cleaning, washing and using electrical equipments. We are also taught some English words so that we can understand general instructions. The agents never teach us issues about the differences in lifestyle and culture or how to deal with relationships with employers and host society. We are merely told to obey our employers and not to be rude to them.

(Muna, translated from *Bahasa Indonesia*)

In addition, Muna and Sugi are also aware that Indonesian FDWs are subjected to a biased perception held by the host society and that this also underscores the prevailing negative reputation of Indonesian FDWs as the following quotes suggest:

...but people here think that ALL Indonesian women are selling themselves to Bangladeshi workers for money.

(Sugi, translated from *Bahasa Indonesia*)

We as foreign workers are perceived [by Singaporeans] to be troublemakers and are prone to creating social problems...

Excerpt of a letter by Muna addressed to the KBRI

Reports on cases of abuse, runaway maids and alleged suicides and deaths from falls involving Indonesian FDWs suggest that we are troublemakers and slow at our work. Although there are some Indonesian FDWs who are like that, not all of us are like that.

(Muna, translated from *Bahasa Indonesia*)

Having identified what they perceived as the factors that underscore the poor reputation of Indonesian FDWs, Sugi and Muna believe that An-Nisa serves both practical and symbolic functions in addressing them:

I was very sad to see them [Indonesian FDWs] like that [dressing immodestly and socialising freely with men] and thought that if they have a place that can provide them with guidance maybe they can behave more respectably and not do such things.

(Sugi, translated from *Bahasa Indonesia*)

Although in general Indonesian FDWs do not enjoy rest days, there are still many who are lucky enough to be able to do so. Those who participate in existing activities organised by churches or mosques are at lesser risk of getting into social problems. Those that spend their time aimlessly on the streets are at greater risk of getting into trouble and creating problems.

(Excerpt of letter by Muna addressed to the KBRI)

I believe in An-Nisa's potential to improve the quality of Indonesian FDWs especially with regards to their moral values. An-Nisa has made it compulsory for its members to attend the religious lesson before they can attend English and handicraft lessons. The religious class could provide Indonesian FDWs with spiritual and mental guidance so that they can strengthen their will to discern between right and wrong and moral and immoral.

(Muna, translated from *Bahasa Indonesia*)

From the above quotes, An-Nisa is seen to be an avenue that could guide FDWs who are at risk of succumbing to misbehaviour and tainting the overall reputation of Indonesian FDWs. An-Nisa provides guidance by inculcating what considers to be

good moral values among Indonesian FDWs through the teachings of Islamic values and principles. Also they believe that, by occupying themselves Indonesian FDWs are able to avoid being in environments that might expose them to social risks.

The skills gained from attending skill enhancement courses also disrupt the dominant view of Indonesian FDWs as slow and unskilled women. This may help them to gain respect from their employers. In addition, participation in such activities may also generate respect from the host society because it helps to portray a more positive image of Indonesian FDWs as progressive people keen on upgrading their skills:

Moreover, the extra skills taught at An-Nisa enable Indonesian FDWs to showcase that they have other skills apart from domestic work. They can show that they are more capable than just domestic servants thus gaining some respectability from employers and the host society. Having Indonesian FDWs engage in these sorts of activities also shows to employers and Singaporeans that Indonesian FDWs do not like to waste time at shopping malls if given rest days but instead like to learn when given the opportunity.

(Muna, translated from *Bahasa Indonesia*)

Acknowledging and in many ways mirroring the biased dominant view that the host society holds of Indonesian FDWs' reputation in Singapore, An-Nisa advocates a form of self-discipline among Indonesian FDWs. However, this self-discipline accommodates or conforms with social norms of desirable behaviours of FDWs in Singapore. Its objective is to improve the image of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore so that they can gain respect from the host society as fellow human beings:

I was emotional the other day [at An-Nisa's first *Muharram* celebration] when giving my speech because I was truly touched that there are some Singaporeans who still care about us and do not look down on us. The Sultan Mosque, by doing this, has recognised that Indonesian FDWs are humans after all. We [Indonesian FDWs] do not ask to be respected but as long as they [Singaporeans] recognise that we are good people too and treat us like humans, i.e., we have feelings and need freedom like them too. We come here to do work and it's unfortunate that we lack education and can't do any other better jobs than being maids so I don't ask them to respect us more but treat us at least like fellow human beings.

(Sugi, translated from *Bahasa Indonesia*)

In summary, by advocating for and establishing for groups like An-Nisa, Sugi and Muna are providing an avenue for Indonesian FDWs to participate in supervised activities on rest days. They believe that the guidance provided by An-Nisa, based on Islamic values and principles, can help their compatriots to build a strong moral foundation thus saving them from being led astray and thereby contributing to the negative reputation of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore. Enhancing their skills through participation in courses at An-Nisa also has symbolic implications; it may help them to gain some respect from their employers thereby contesting dominant representations of their reputations and identities. However, by advocating for the inception and development of An-Nisa, Sugi and Muna are conforming to employers and maid agents who think that supervision of Indonesian FDWs on rest days is necessary to keep them away from 'immoral activities' as suggested by the following quote:

Of course off days are only fair but for Indonesian FDWs where can they go? The Indonesian embassy does not have any activity. If they end up on the streets they're bound to get into trouble...there are too many Bangladeshi [male] migrants around too.

(Woo, maid agent)

7.3 An-Nisa as a platform for easing the tensions between the KBRI and Indonesian FDWs.

In Chapter 5.5, I established that there is indeed tension between Indonesian FDWs and the KBRI. This tension encompasses class divides and involves mistrust, dissatisfaction over the way the KBRI handles complaints filed by FDWs, alleged corruption and an overall lack of interest by the Indonesian state in the welfare of Indonesian FDWs. Despite producing a discourse of self-discipline accommodating to expectations of employers and the host society, some Indonesian FDWs through the networks provided by the establishment of An-Nisa have also been active in getting their voices heard by the KBRI. Although An-Nisa is primarily a social group, it has provided Indonesian FDWs with access to a more stable/formal platform for establishing networks among themselves in order to exert a presence and to express an informal collective voice on certain issues.

Muna informally consulted her compatriots at An-Nisa on issues surrounding their lives in Singapore and forwarded them in a letter to the KBRI as representing the voice of all Indonesian FDWs in Singapore. The thrust of the letter was to urge the KBRI, as the main institution responsible for overseeing the welfare of Indonesian nationals in Singapore, to introduce and expand its social and educational activities, like those provided by An-Nisa and other existing migrant groups. The aim was to encourage more Indonesian FDWs to participate in useful activities on their rest days as a way to improve the image of Indonesian FDWs (Section 7.2). In addition, the letter urged the KBRI to provide on-going orientation and information sessions to assist Indonesian FDWs to adjust to their lifestyles in Singapore as a preventative measure to protect them from being easily misled in that country.

The letter also advised the KBRI to be more conscientious in organising highly publicised events, such as Indonesia's Independence Day celebration at the KBRI. Their view was that such an event has an impact on the host society's perception of Indonesians. The letter criticised the KBRI's conventional way of celebrating Indonesia's Independence Day in Singapore, which was by hosting a big '*dangdut*' party within the embassy's compound with Indonesian artists flown in to entertain Indonesian nationals working in Singapore, mostly maids, labourers and seamen. Muna and her compatriots believe this type of celebration reinforces negative stereotypical views of Indonesians which are largely underpinned by the subjectification of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore. Thus resistance against stereotypical representations of Indonesian FDWs is conflated with portraying 'ideal' Indonesian national identities. In this case, dancing and singing along to '*dangdut*', an activity that is central to Indonesian popular culture, is deemed as 'immoral' and 'improper'. However, activities that are 'alien' to the culture, such as delivering orations in English are deemed appropriate, as they comply with social and cultural values valued by the host society as the following excerpt suggests:

The embassy has always celebrated Indonesia's independence day by inviting singers from Jakarta and throwing a '*dangdut*' party. We understand that '*dangdut*' is part of Indonesia's culture but we think an important event like this should include activities that inculcate a sense of pride and love for being Indonesians and Indonesia. We suggest that

KBRI consider and encourage Indonesian workers themselves to participate in the celebration. There are many among us who have hidden talents such as singing, playing guitar, dancing and poetry recital. In addition, workers should also be encouraged to deliver oration in English that revolve around religious and patriotic themes. These activities would help to foster a deeper sense of pride and love for our country. More importantly we could be spared the embarrassment in 2001 from occurring again when photos of Indonesian women dancing to '*dangdut*' were publicised in the newspapers [in Singapore]. Going by those images, there's very little to be proud of being Indonesians and of Indonesia.

(Excerpt of letter by Muna addressed to the KBRI)

In response to the letter written by Muna and her compatriots and to Muna's criticism of the KBRI in a speech that she delivered at an An-Nisa event, the KBRI has been more active in heeding the voices of Indonesian FDWs. Since July 2002, the KBRI has begun hosting a monthly gathering for Indonesian FDWs on its premises. Although its current activities are limited to an informal religious class and a question and answer session for Indonesian FDWs with the Consul of the Department of Maid Matters, there are plans for it to expand its activities to include other educational and recreational activities fashioned after those organised by An-Nisa and other existing migrant groups (Muna, personal communication, August 2002). An-Nisa was also granted permission to perform at Indonesia's Independence Day celebration at the KBRI in August 2002 and to operate a stall to showcase their craftwork:

I raised this concern [the lack of attention by the KBRI to the welfare and reputation of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore] when delivering my speech at An-Nisa's second Islamic New Year celebration in the presence of embassy officials. Although I got into trouble with the Sultan Mosque, I got the attention of Pak Ghazali [consul for Indonesian FDWs in Singapore] who gave me his handphone number. Since then I have been in contact with him to discuss possibilities of organising social and educational activities for Indonesian FDWs at the embassy's premises. I have also negotiated for An-Nisa to perform at KBRI's Independence Day celebration in 2002. An-Nisa will also be allocated a stall that showcases the craftwork members made during classes at the Sultan Mosque. I hope this will attract more Indonesian FDWs to join the activities of An-Nisa and also portray a more positive image of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore.

(Muna, translated from *Bahasa Indonesia*)

Thus the establishment of An-Nisa has also enabled Indonesian FDWs to exert a presence and an informal collective voice to air their concerns about the KBRI and their views on various problems confronting Indonesian FDWs in Singapore. As a result, the KBRI has started to be more actively involved in providing for FDWs' needs. Nevertheless, the discussion above reveals a powerful discourse of accommodation. Despite urging the KBRI to be more attentive to their needs, the discourse of labour rights is evidently absent. Indonesian FDWs are more focused on getting the KBRI to help them to project an image to the host society of Indonesian FDWs as respectable and moral persons. Their aims are to dispel negative stereotypes of their identities so that they will be treated with dignity, accorded fairer treatment and remain marketable as maids in Singapore.

7.4 Accommodation

Agreeing with Abu Lughod (1990) and Ortner (1995), I assert that the value of resistance study lies in its illumination of the complexity of power and its effects (Chapter 2.4). Reviews of 'resistance' study show that, to have a richer insight into power structures and how people are caught in them, it is important not to 'romanticise resistance' and to take into account the ambivalence displayed by 'resistors' as well as the ambivalence inherent in 'resistive acts' (Chapter 2.4). I have discussed Constable's seminal work on Filipino FDWs in Hong Kong in which she highlighted the self-

discipline or accommodation displayed by Filipino FDWs (Chapter 2.4). By taking into account the accommodation and deference displayed by Filipino FDWs and not simply interpreting them as 'cynical manipulation' or 'cultural coercion', Constable was able to interpret a more nuanced reading of 'resistance' in which she concluded shows that Filipino FDWs are both 'exerting power and simultaneously being dominated by it' (Constable 1997: 25).

She emphasises that an understanding of the unconscious and consciously accommodating or deferential behaviour of FDWs that are conditioned by hegemony leads us to 'alter our view of the larger picture of power' (Constable 1997: 210). Constable (1997) argues that Filipino FDWs 'both actively resist and willingly participate in their own "oppression" in different ways and to different degrees' (p. 14). This is because of different forms of power with which Filipino FDWs negotiate. They are not simply victims of an imbalanced global economic structure but as the 'alien other' in Hong Kong, they are also subjected to various forms of domination, control and discipline by employers, maid agents and the host society. Constable pointed out that Filipino FDWs also participate in 'more covert and insidious forms of self-discipline' to be treated with 'greater personal or moral consideration and with fairness' (Constable 1997: 14 and 201). She argues that this 'undermines and restricts their ability to create fundamental social change' which is advocated by more 'active' resistance occurrences like demonstrations, campaigns and advocacy work (Constable 1997: 14).

Constable's findings are similar to my own concerning the appropriation of migrant groups, such as An-Nisa, as a vehicle to contest negative stereotypes and biased dominant views of Indonesian FDWs. The voices of Sugi and Muna and anecdotal evidence of other Indonesian FDWs reveal the same sort of ambivalence as that displayed by Filipino FDWs in Hong Kong in negotiating their lives as the 'alien other' (Section 7.3). Like Filipino FDWs in Hong Kong, Indonesian FDWs in Singapore express their frustrations with the way they are treated due to the stigma of their occupation and the stereotypical representations of their identities as constructed along the axes of gender, nationality, race/ethnicity, class, educational qualifications and rural/urban upbringing (Chapter 5.3 and Section 7.3). Nevertheless, they admonish

their compatriots who misbehave, subscribe to self-discipline and promote collective accommodation and a style of conformity which adheres to the expectations of their employers, maid agents and the host-society. This, they hope, can be achieved through the activities of migrant groups such as An-Nisa.

Adopting Foucault's notions of power outlined in Chapter 2, I established in Chapter 4.9 that Indonesian FDWs are caught in complex and asymmetrical power relationships. These relationships work through various means such as discourse, techniques of discipline and institutionlaised laws and policies which may or may not all serve the same function. However, I argued in Chapter 4.9 that these complex asymmetrical power structures culminate in the subordination and domination of FDWs and their subjectification in migration, employment and the conduct of their lives as the alien 'other' in Singapore. In Chapter 5.4 I described in detail some of the outcomes and effects of these complex asymmetrical power structures in which FDWs and in particular Indonesian FDWs in Singapore are caught. One of these outcomes is the subjectification of Indonesian FDWs as a poor, vulnerable, slow, promiscuous, backward and immoral group of people. This has potent impacts on their treatment by maid agents, employers and the host society in general. I also contend that these complex asymmetrical power relationships govern the desired conduct and behaviour of Indonesian women as FDWs in Singapore (Chapter 5.3 and Section 7.2).

The efforts by FDW leads such as Sugi and Muna to attract more Indonesian FDWs to the activities of migrant groups such as An-Nisa is an attempt to resist hegemonic representations of their identities both symbolically as well as through the real impact of providing guidance to those Indonesian FDWs who are in trouble. An-Nisa promotes Indonesian FDWs to subscribe to a style of self-discipline couched within the moral values of Islam. This style of self-discipline (i.e., doing things that are deemed as useful on rest days and avoiding activities that are viewed negatively by the host society) projects an image of FDWs that employers and maid agents view as respectable, moral and proper. This accommodating form of resistance against negative stereotypical representations of Indonesian FDWs is also conflated with portraying 'ideal' Indonesian national identities (Section 7.3).

Thus it could be argued that some Indonesian FDWs (Sugi, Muna and their compatriots who advocate for An-Nisa) choose to accommodate some aspects of the complex asymmetrical power structures that work, simultaneously, to control and dominate their lives in Singapore. Nevertheless, compliance does not indicate that they are passive victims ignorant of the inequalities of power that put them in a disadvantaged or marginalised position. Perversely and paradoxically, compliance or accommodation also presents a form of resistance against hegemonic representations of their identities and status which helps them gain some respect and to be accorded fairer treatment.

7.5 Non-aggressive aggression?

In this section, I analyse the factors that inform and impact upon the discourse of accommodation and self-discipline promoted by An-Nisa. I also evaluate the potential of this discourse for achieving its objectives. Although I conclude that the efficacy of this discourse for changing public perceptions of Indonesian FDWs is doubtful and limited, migrant groups like An-Nisa should still be encouraged and promoted for the practical benefits that they provide for their members.

Constable (1997) maintains that the efficacy of non-aggressive resistance such as personal confrontation, use of jokes, humour and languages, and overt cultural expressions on rest days, in effecting social change is difficult to assess. She concludes that Filipino FDWs in Hong Kong 'may have found voices to validate their experience but their overall success in transforming either the public meanings or conditions associated with their work has not been overwhelming' (1997: 206). The stigma attached to domestic work remains strong in Hong Kong. It remains an occupation shunned by locals and dominated by foreign women from poor countries. The disparity of wealth between Hong Kong and the Philippines underpins negative stereotypes of Filipino women based on their economic status, ethnicity/nationality and gender (Constable 1997: 208). Occupational stigma and stereotypical representations of Filipino FDWs contribute to the discrimination, exploitation and mistreatment that they experience while serving their contracts in Hong Kong. Moreover, she argues that the underlying political and economic structures undermine

more 'active' resistance such as political activism among Filipino FDWs. The need to provide for their families and to achieve various personal objectives that drove Filipino women to choose overseas work in the first place, produce a 'powerful discourse of domestic workers who called for passivity, docility, and a heightened sense of gratitude, personal appreciation, and politeness towards their Hong Kong "hosts"' (1997: p. 208). This discourse became increasingly relevant especially after the greater uncertainty that threatened their continued employment in Hong Kong following the hand over of Hong Kong to China in 1997 and hence the threat of their being replaced by mainland Chinese workers (1997: 208-209).

There are many similarities between Constable's conclusions and my research findings on Indonesian FDWs in Singapore. To date, a discourse of labour rights or a more regulated labour system is absent from the informal but collective voice of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore (Sections 7.3 and 7.4). Instead, a discourse of accommodation and self-discipline through increasing involvement in activities organised by migrant groups and which conform to the idealised images of FDWs valued by the host society is increasingly heard among Indonesian FDWs. The main aim of this discourse is to be accorded greater dignity by the host society but without producing a fundamental change to the existing system.

Frustrations and criticisms over unfair treatment by employers, maid agents, the host society and the Indonesian state were commonly voiced throughout the course of my fieldwork (Chapters 5.4, 5.5 and Section 7.2). However, they are limited to a discursive level, such as exchanging stories and comparing experiences with fellow maids. Some Indonesian FDWs seek to minimize these frustrations and mistreatment by striving through informal networks of contacts to secure employment, with a 'kind' employer who can offer better pay, treat them like one of the family and provide them with a preferred style of living arrangement and work system or to utilise alternative migration process in order to circumvent exploitative elements in the maid industry (Chapter 6). These fragmented but 'active' strategies have been adopted by individual FDWs, as a group. But Indonesian FDWs in Singapore have not resorted to more 'active' resistance, such as political activism, to protest, collectively, against unfair policies and to advocate for a fairer migration and work system.

Strict policies against political activism in Singapore seriously limit the scope for Indonesian and other FDWs to engage actively in campaigning against unfair policies. Moreover, most migrant groups in Singapore are affiliated to differing religious institutions, which further limits the potential for FDWs to appropriate access to these more stable/formal and united networks of FDWs as vehicles for political advocacy and campaigns. The multi-ethnic and religious fabric of Singaporean society is a strong factor underpinning the view of government against the politicising of religion. As observed by Yeoh and Huang (1999), church groups that have taken on active roles in providing 'space' for FDWs to seek refuge and support have ensured they distance themselves from commenting on unfair policies and regulations and from adopting advocacy positions (1999: 1160). Anecdotal evidence from Muna's experience revealed similar cautious behaviour by mosque volunteers and officials over engaging in matters that may have political ramifications. For example, mosque officials rebuked Muna for openly criticising the KBRI when delivering her speech at An-Nisa's second Islamic New Year celebration for fear of being implicated in promoting advocacy work (Hajah Omayah, personal communication, May 2002; Muna, personal communication, July 2002).

The Singaporean state has made it clear that any group wishing to have a political voice by commenting on policies should be prepared to join a political party and thereby make its opinions accountable to the general public/electorate (Chueen 1995: 217). The arrest and detention of 16 members of a Catholic church who ran the Centre for Foreign Workers in 1987 under the Internal Security Act served as reminder to religious institutions to distance themselves from any political agenda. Members of the centre were arrested for alleged subversive Communist activities aimed at overthrowing the government. The arrests also reflect the state's intolerance of groups allegedly engaging in politically subversive activities in the guise of groups other than political parties (Chueen 1995: 217).

In addition, the discourse of accommodation is also driven by economic imperatives. Securing employment in Singapore, despite having to perform menial work, has helped Indonesian FDWs to achieve both their family's and their personal aspirations, especially in terms of material comforts. Eighty nine per cent of the Indonesian FDWs

that I interviewed indicated that their (and their family's) quality of life had improved remarkably since they secured work as a FDW in Singapore; and slightly more than half indicated that they would like to be able to sign further contracts and to continue working in Singapore in order to achieve all of their material goals.

Unlike Filipino FDWs, a majority of Indonesian FDWs possess low educational qualifications. For example, 54 per cent of the women I interviewed had only completed primary education while 31 per cent completed secondary education. Prior to being FDWs, the majority of them were employed as domestic workers, factory workers or unpaid rural labourers. The opportunity to earn at least forty times the annual wage of a domestic worker or factory worker in Indonesia is a strong incentive for these women to choose to go overseas in the first place. As aptly put by Tutik: *'What I have earned in my nine years of employment in Singapore would probably take a degree holder 10 - 15 years to earn in Indonesia.'*

In addition, poor employment prospects in Indonesia and the incentive of earning a stable cash income in Singapore as a FDW are strong factors that underpin the discourse of accommodation and self-discipline. As put by Tok Ira: *'There's really nothing much to do in the village. Instead of wasting time doing nothing I would rather work overseas as a maid. At least I get to earn lots of money.'* Despite labour demands in Indonesia rising in the post crisis years since 1999, the female labour force participation rate in the formal sector still lags well behind that of men (Cameron 2002). Although women's share of wage employment in the urban sector has increased slightly relative to men, rural women are still disproportionately under-represented in the formal sector (Cameron 2002: 156). Moreover, the wage gap between women and men in the post crisis era has widened (Cameron 2002: 156).

Thus the economic imperatives and the political structures in both Indonesia and Singapore are factors that condition the production of a powerful discourse of accommodation and self-discipline. Although pushing for a fairer work system by means of political activism is almost an impossible option for Indonesian FDWs in Singapore, the data and arguments that I have presented in previous sections show that advocating for changes in policies has never been central to the concerns of the

majority of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore. Instead, they are keener to showcase a respectable reputation in order to earn fairer treatment from their employers, to be treated with dignity by the host society and to ensure their marketability as FDWs in Singapore.

The effectiveness of the activities of migrant groups in dispelling negative stereotypes and public perceptions of Indonesian FDWs is dubious. Firstly, it was only in August 2002 that the activities of An-Nisa was publicised in *The Straits Times*, an English language daily; thus it is too soon to tell if such publicity will have any impact on changing public perceptions of Indonesian FDWs (The Straits Times 2002n). Anecdotal evidence among the Singaporean Malay/Muslim community reveals that the aims of appropriating An-Nisa to dispel negative stereotypes has had very limited impact on changing the community's perception of Indonesian FDWs. Although, the publicity received by An-Nisa in *Berita Harian*, the Malay language daily, has led to a remarkable boost in membership numbers, it has had very limited impact on changing the nature of the relationships between Malay/Muslim employers and their Indonesian FDWs and of the former's perception of the latter.

For example, a panel of discussants that consisted of a maid agent, an employer and a social worker, who appeared on a Malay current affairs program on Indonesian FDWs in June 2001, recommended that employers not allow their Indonesian FDWs regular rest days for fear of them getting into trouble despite acknowledging the merits of their participating in groups like An-Nisa (*Akhir Kata*, 'Pembantu rumah Indonesia'). Instead, they recommended that employers include their maids when recreating with their families over the weekend to compensate for the 'no' rest day policy.

This control also shows how Indonesian FDWs in Singapore are implicated within a more complex field of power compared with the Cantonese *amahs* in the early twentieth century who were accorded a special status of 'superior servants' for their loyalty, dedication and their capacity to organise their social and economic lives outside their work sphere (Chapter 4.4). The biased perception against Indonesian FDWs is not merely constructed on the axes of gender and class but also on nationality and immigration status. The need to preserve the economic and political

status quo of Singapore as a nation state means that the enactment of restrictive policies on FDWs is perhaps more necessary than during the time of Cantonese *amahs*. As explained in Chapter 4.8, the security bond policy, has resulted in employers shouldering the responsibility of policing FDWs. This responsibility together with constructed negative representations of FDWs both induce and justify employers' control and child-like treatment of FDWs. Indonesian FDWs' desires to earn respect and fair treatment through subscribing to a style of self-discipline and accommodation which the Cantonese *amahs* were lauded and respected for, may not ultimately be met due to the more complex fields of power in which they are implicated in Singapore.

The moralising discourse of Islam that is deemed by some leaders of Indonesian FDWs as essential for providing Indonesian FDWs with spiritual guidance in order to strengthen their will to subscribe to a style of self-discipline and to portray a respectable image is problematic. Firstly, anecdotal evidence suggests that there are some Indonesian FDWs who are not inclined to join in the activities of An-Nisa because of its emphases on Islamic values. For example, some Indonesian FDWs that Muna encountered openly expressed no interest in participating in An-Nisa because it is located at a mosque. They were quoted as saying '*we are not ready to be dwellers of heaven*' when invited by Muna to join activities at the mosque (Muna, personal communication, July 2002). It also suggests that, nominal Muslims among the population of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore pose an opposition to the fundamental values of this discourse. This suggests that if the activities of organised migrant groups were to reach out to more Indonesian FDWs, it may be necessary to operate from outside mosques or other religious institutions. Muna has also observed that there are some Indonesian FDWs who join An-Nisa only to participate in the skill enhancement activities and not the religious activities (Muna, personal communication, July 2002). Thus in order to attract more Indonesian FDWs to participate in useful activities on their rest days, then it is important to also expand its scope to include more secular activities.

In addition, the nascent efforts of Muna and her compatriots to promote Islam as a way of life to be embraced by the majority Muslim population of Indonesian FDWs in

Singapore may receive some opposition from the general Singaporean public, due to recent events since the September 11th incident. Of late, the Malay/Muslim community in Singapore has come under close scrutiny since the arrest in the country of 21 members of the *Jemaah Islamiyah* group, a suspected Muslim terrorist group operating in the Southeast Asian region with alleged links to the *Al-Qaeda* terrorist group.

These arrests have stimulated heated debates in Singapore and demands for more Muslim moderates to step forward and be more visible in order to placate misconceptions of the Islamic faith as an intolerant and violent religion. This debate has brought into question the definition of a moderate Muslim and signals discomfort among non-Muslim Singaporeans with Muslims who practice their religious identities overtly by observing strict religious principles in their daily lives, such as the wearing of the *hijab* (or head covering) by Muslim women (The Straits Times 2002o; The Straits Times 2002q; The Straits Times 2002r). The resurgence of Islam as a way of life among Indonesian FDWs is likely to be unpalatable to the majority non-Muslim employers in the country. Even before September 11th, it was already common for non-Muslims not to allow their Muslim Indonesian FDWs to practice their daily religious duties, which is one of the major issues of concern for Indonesian FDWs in Singapore (Chapter 5.4). Recent events that have taken place in Singapore linked to the September 11th incident may influence non-Muslim employers to be less understanding and tolerant of their maids' desires to participate in activities with Islamic emphases.

Finally, the lack of freedom and relative isolation of Indonesian FDWs poses a serious impediment to the participation of Indonesian FDWs in the activities of migrant groups (Chapter 5.3). A majority of Indonesian FDWs work continuously and are not allowed regular rest days. Slightly more than half of the women I interviewed did not have rest days; only 33% had regular rest days; and, the rest were only allowed rest days upon request for special occasions. The increasingly competitive climate in the maid industry in Singapore brought about by an increase in supply and sluggish demand show that even Filipino FDWs, who are normally entitled to regular rest days are being marketed as willing to work on rest days. This even more restrictive

condition under which FDWs in general are expected to work in Singapore poses a serious impediment to Indonesian FDWs seeking to dispel negative representations through participation in the social and educational activities of migrant groups.

Despite, the uncertain influence on the host society's perception of working to portray a more positive image of Indonesian FDWs, migrant groups that promote social and educational activities should still be encouraged. Firstly, the practical merits of such activities as described in Section 7.2, are valuable for providing Indonesian FDWs with guidance to make the most of their working experience in Singapore. Religious classes at An-Nisa have provided Indonesian FDWs with practical guidance to handle conflicts and the consequent stresses that arise from having to compromise their Islamic identities while living in non-Muslim households (*Berita Harian* 2000c). Second, participation in such groups provides FDWs with temporary relief from the monotony and drudgery of domestic work and gives them an opportunity to live out different subject positions other than just being somebody's maid. Thirdly, it has provided Indonesian FDWs with access to a stable and more formal network from which to exert a presence and an informal collective voice. So far, Indonesian FDWs have used this voice to urge the KBRI to be more sensitive to their plight and their needs (Section 7.3). Finally, findings from my fieldwork reveal that having freedom to access informal networks of peers is an important resource for individual FDWs assisting them to exert power or exercise agency even if this is limited to achieving their personal objectives (Chapter 6).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined the mode of collective 'resistance' offered by An-Nisa and promoted by a group of Indonesian FDWs who advocated the formation of An-Nisa. An-Nisa promotes a style of self-discipline, couched within the moral values of Islam, to contest the dominant Singaporean stereotypes of Indonesian FDWs. In this case, self-discipline or accommodation is also a form of 'resistance' in challenging hegemonic representations of their identities and their subject position as FDWs in Singapore. Not only does a rigid political culture in Singapore inhibit Indonesian FDWs from engaging in more 'active' resistance but economic

imperatives and their desire to be treated with fairness, respect and dignity also motivate them to portray a collective image of disciplined, moral and compliant maids as desired by their employers and maid agents in Singapore. However, I pointed out that significant proportion of nominal Muslims among Indonesian FDWs, the social and political repercussions of the September 11th incident and the strict working conditions for FDWs in general, all present impediments to the achievement of the objectives of religious based groups such as An-Nisa. Moreover, the more complex fields of power in which Indonesian FDWs are caught in also contribute to the ineffectiveness of attempts to portray this image of moral and respectable Indonesian FDWs through participation in beneficial extra-curricular activities on rest days.

However, migrant groups, such as An-Nisa, should still be encouraged for their practical merits, such as providing a respite from the monotony of work and guidance to those who are confronted with having to compromise their Muslim identities when living in non-Muslim households. Moreover, migrant groups, such as An-Nisa, provide a regular and stable access to a network of peers which as I have shown in Chapter 6, provides an important resource for individual FDWs to exert power or agency to achieve their personal objectives whilst still being dominated by the overall structures of their employment.

In the next chapter I will summarise the major findings of the thesis and assess the impacts and effectiveness of both individual and collective styles and strategies of Indonesian FDWs in challenging aspects of subordination and domination in Singapore.

CHAPTER 8

‘Power’ and its implications for the welfare and protection of Indonesian FDWs

Introduction

In this chapter, I outline the main findings of the thesis and discuss their implications for the welfare and protection of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore. Firstly, I highlight the power of Indonesian FDWs as active subjects in negotiating the relations they are caught in as labour migrants, paid live-in domestic workers and the immigrant ‘other’ in Singapore. Then I discuss the limits of this power. Next, I integrate my main findings on provisions for the welfare and protection of Indonesian FDWs in Singapore. I conclude that facilitating the capacity of individual Indonesian FDWs to exercise power through interactions and networking with their peers and with other agents of the migrant institution in Singapore is one of the very few options available to Indonesian FDWs to negotiate the complex power structures in which they are caught.

8.1 The ‘power’ of Indonesian FDWs?

The individual narratives and the case study of An-Nisa demonstrate that Indonesian FDWs in Singapore are active subjects of international labour migration. The narratives portray individual Indonesian FDWs as capable of strategic action to avoid exploitative elements during the migration process, to overcome mistreatment by employers and to exercise greater choice in subsequent employment contracts and in charting their future migration paths. However, crucial to their development of this capability are their interactions and networking with other agents within the migrant institution who are in a position to release resources which are not available to them personally because of their low social position. Although their peers axiomatically occupy a similar position to themselves in terms of access to resources, they make valuable contacts because of the practical knowledge they have gained from their own migration experiences. Peers also may know agents who have access to resources and who are able to release them or they may have contacts with agents who are in a

position of authority to apply formal institutional rules and thus to help FDWs who are in trouble (Chapter 6).

Dyadic relations characteristically imbued with Muslim fraternity, fictive kinship or patron-client relationships mediate the relations of dependence and subordination between Indonesian FDWs and their employers and with other agents within the institution. Although these relationships can bind Indonesian FDWs further into relations of domination and control, they can also offer protection and resources for them to tap into to realise their personal aspirations. Some examples of these aspirations are living out their Muslim identity in Singapore, gaining skills and knowledge outside domestic work or skills that could be valuable for their future marketability as domestic workers and, most importantly, to ensure continued security of employment as FDWs and thus to improve their socio-economic status. The primary objective of most FDWs, is to work for an employer who can offer employment conditions and work arrangements which they prefer and to which they are suited (Chapter 6). Apart from achieving personal objectives, dreams and aspirations, the power exercised by the individual Indonesian FDWs described above also shapes the nature and characteristics of migration flows, for example through the perpetuation of informal networks for the migration and recruitment of FDWs (Chapter 6).

Whilst networking and interactions with other agents, offer some Indonesian FDWs the means to circumvent aspects of domination and control in the migration process and in employment, some Indonesian FDWs also believe that participation in the activities of social associations like An-Nisa can also be a means to resist the discursive effects of complex power structures (Chapter 7). These Indonesian FDWs have consciously appropriated An-Nisa as a platform for collective 'resistance' against hegemonic representations of the identity of Indonesian FDWs as stupid, vulnerable, backward, simple-minded and culturally unsophisticated. In enabling more Indonesian FDWs to equip themselves with skills outside the grind of domestic work through demonstrating this publicly, it was hoped that Indonesian FDWs could resist negative subjectification of Indonesian FDWs and help showcase to the host society that Indonesian FDWs are productive and competent.

In addition, the Indonesian FDWs active in An-Nisa promote to their peers a discourse of self-discipline couched within Islamic moral values so that Indonesian FDWs will conduct themselves with respect and live up to the expectations of maid agents, employers and the host society as the ideal domestic worker. They also urged the KBRI to portray a more 'respectable' (in both Singaporean and Muslim terms) Indonesian national identity during Indonesia's National Day celebrations by showcasing activities valued by the host society. They criticised the KBRI's hosting of a '*dangdut*' party, a traditional aspect of Indonesian popular culture, to mark the occasion which they saw as promoting a negative image of Indonesian FDWs to the host society (Chapter 7).

I argue that despite being able to 'carve out spaces of control' at an individual level and despite their consciously appropriating available resources to present a collective 'resistance' against hegemonic representations and subjectification, thus exercising power on their own accounts, Indonesian FDWs are still dominated by the complex power structures in which they are caught. Working as a FDW, a low status occupation shunned by locals and not protected under law, still remains virtually the sole option for these women to improve their socio-economic status and achieve other personal aspirations, as highlighted in Chapters 6 and 7. The power exercised by Indonesian FDWs was more focused on ensuring their security of future employment as FDWs and their marketability as FDWs in Singapore.

As highlighted in Chapter 7, the informal collective voice that resulted from the formation of An-Nisa promotes a discourse of accommodating to the ideal domestic worker image desired by employers, maid agencies and the host society and of the diligent and submissive female desired by some traditional variants of Islam. This was deemed essential since this path at least provided a means to contest the discursive exercise of power that accounts for the current disrespectful, unfair and sometimes inhumane treatment accorded to them by maid agents, employers and the host society. I also argue that the potential of a discourse of self-discipline espoused by groups such as An-Nisa to achieve its intended objective of dispelling negative representations and subjectification of Indonesian FDWs is limited because of the current social and political climate in Singapore.

Although individual Indonesian FDWs are able to exert their power to circumvent some of the aspects of exploitation and mistreatment to which they are vulnerable, these efforts are fragmented and based on achieving individual aspirations. In fact, I argued in Chapter 6 that some individual Indonesian FDWs were merely able to exchange one aspect of control over another albeit being able to exercise some power in securing subsequent employment contracts such as for the case of Sukinah (Case Study 6.2) and Karni (Case Study 6.1). On the other hand, the example of Ibu Saadiyah (Case Study 6.7) shows how a conscious choice made by an individual Indonesian FDW driven by self-pride and a sense of professionalism for her work has the unintended consequence of perpetuating the institutionalised system of subordination and domination of paid live-in FDWs.

Although I noted that the power of individual Indonesian FDWs also shapes the nature and characteristics of the migrant institution, for example, the perpetuation of informal networks of migration and employment, these actions have minimal impact in changing the overall structures through which the migration of FDWs from Indonesia is organised. A large majority of potential migrants are still at risk of being exploited and mistreated by unscrupulous labour recruiters, maid agents and employers. This is because the current system of recruitment, migration and employment of Indonesian FDWs favours and privileges employers, labour recruiters, maid agents and both the sending and receiving states over these women migrants. Moreover, the ease of carrying out corruption and ineffective implementation of introduced mechanisms and policies targeted at protecting the rights of these women workers continue to leave them vulnerable to exploitation and mistreatment (Chapter 5).

I conclude that, although Indonesian FDWs are active subjects engaged in their own exercise of power as labour migrants, the power structures in which they are caught are complex and therefore still dominate them in many ways in the course of their migration, employment and in their engagement in everyday social relations as the immigrant 'other' in Singapore. Contesting power that works through state regulations and policies for example, would be almost an impossible option for Indonesian FDWs in Singapore because of the strict political climate in the country (Chapter 7).

Therefore, they still have to be content with working in an occupation that does not offer formalised work standards such as a floor wage and compulsory rest days. The no-rest day policy for Indonesian FDWs, a social norm, and the security bond policy (Chapter 4) are the two main factors that officially sanction employers' excessive control and produce the isolation experienced by many Indonesian FDWs in Singapore. This isolation limits their opportunities to network and interact with peers, a valuable resource that they could access to overcome other aspects of exploitation and mistreatment as shown in Chapter 6.

8. 2 Implications on welfare and protection

The main findings of the thesis outlined above suggest the importance of a reform in institutional policies and of the allocation of resources to establish social associations for Indonesian FDWs in Singapore. A legally binding standard work contract that includes a compulsory clause on rest days is indeed an important and necessary step to enable Indonesian FDWs to overcome the isolating nature of their occupation and of their employers' excessive control. Although I have noted that a standard work contract could sometimes be ineffective due to the personal nature of domestic work (Chapter 4.8), it would still provide recourse for Indonesian FDWs in Singapore to gain freedom from isolation.

The establishment of social associations with a more diverse focus and not just religious based groups could also help encourage the majority non-Muslim employers to be more lenient in allowing their Indonesian FDWs the freedom of rest days. As I have highlighted in Chapter 7.1, some employers view participation in organised activities as 'safe' activities and as preferable for their FDWs to participate in on their rest days. Some maid agents also insinuate that it would be 'safer' to encourage employers to allow their Indonesian FDWs rest days if the KBRI provided activities for Indonesian FDWs on Sundays or if there are 'safe' activities that they could 'channel' them towards on rest days (Chapter 5.4).

Although I have argued that the effectiveness of appropriating activities of social associations to contest hegemonic representations and subjectification may be limited,

participation in the activities of social associations could nevertheless provide Indonesian FDWs with respite from the drudgery of domestic work. Moreover, social associations could provide Indonesian FDWs with regular access to a network of peers, a valuable and essential resource for Indonesian FDWs in order for them to exert individual power. In addition, peer networks also provide an important avenue for counselling to overcome homesickness, culture shock and other personal difficulties while being overseas (Chapter 6). Contrary to stereotypical perceptions that peers are 'evil' influences that can only lead Indonesian FDWs astray, the findings from this thesis show that peer networks are also a source of good influences. For example, in the case of Sumi (Case Study 6.6), peer pressures, imbued with nationalistic honour, encouraged her to honour an existing work contract despite having to endure a heavier workload.

Another area that requires attention is the provision of professional counselling. The current system at the KBRI is more focused on intervening in cases where there is evidence of mistreatment and abuse. The KBRI does not have a facility that provides professional counselling to FDWs who encounter less tangible problems, such as homesickness, culture-shock and personal difficulties while in Singapore. The KBRI considers these cases 'petty' and refers FDWs who complain of such issues to maid agencies. The KBRI views these cases as the responsibility of maid agencies to resolve between FDWs and employers. As I have pointed out in Chapters 4.7 and 5.5, maid agents are more driven by profit and are often not sympathetic to FDWs. Some even resort to harsh methods of discipline, punishment and threats as a means of 'counselling'.

Finally, the KBRI could also be more active in promoting a more harmonious relationship between FDWs, employers and the host society. They could supplement the efforts of MOM Singapore which has published information brochures and pamphlets providing brief backgrounds of the various cultures, religions and languages of FDWs. The KBRI could organise workshops, seminars and exhibitions to increase awareness of Indonesia's cultural practices, especially pertaining to employer-domestic servant relationships and the religious and dietary requirements of Indonesians. As a stepping-stone, the KBRI could co-operate with MOM Singapore

which is already introducing compulsory training workshops for future employers (Chapter 5.5).

Conclusion

The exertion of pressure on states to standardise employment practices to offer minimum protection to FDWs have so far been unsuccessful. The Singaporean state has repeatedly reiterated the impossibility of enacting an Act specifying minimum standards of employment for FDWs due to the diverse nature of domestic work. On the other hand, economic imperatives continue to underpin the Indonesian state's lack of initiative in exerting diplomatic pressure on hosting states for bilateral agreements on its women OCWs. Moreover, the Indonesian state lacks power in negotiating such agreements because of its weak economic position and the low quality of its workforce. In addition, efforts to regulate and police the export of women workers have so far been ineffective due to widespread corruption, an ineffective implementation and monitoring framework and misdirected measures, such as banning, that reflects its ignorance of the reality of the workings of the migrant institution.

I have argued in this thesis that Indonesian FDWs are caught in complex power structures. The discrimination, exploitation and mistreatment they encounter as labour migrants are imbued with a variety of social relations of difference such as class, race/ethnicity, gender, culture, religion and nationality. Therefore, it is pertinent to bear these factors in mind when addressing the issues of the welfare and protection of Indonesian FDWs. Apart from protecting the rights of Indonesian FDWs as workers and introducing an effective institutional mechanism to regulate the maid industry to minimise exploitation and mistreatment in the recruitment and training phases, it is equally important to promote cultural awareness in the host state to narrow the constructed divide that exists between the host society as 'self' and FDWs as 'other'.

While changes to the official system of recruitment, migration and employment of FDWs seem to be complex barriers to overcome, it is important to recognise the limited power of individual Indonesian FDWs. This thesis has shown that some

individual Indonesian FDWs are capable of circumventing some aspects of the exploitative elements and mistreatment in the migration process and in employer-FDW relationships through their networking and interactions with peers and with other agents who shape the migration and recruitment process. Perhaps accessing such networks and interactions is one of the very few avenues left to Indonesian FDWs to overcome undesirable recruitment, migration and employment terms and conditions that official regulating mechanisms and policies have not addressed or have so far failed to overcome.

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APPENDIX 1

TERMS & CONDITIONS FOR DOMESTIC MAID

WORK CONTRACT FOR MAID

I _____ Passport no. _____ agree to be employed by Mr/Mrs/Miss _____ NRIC No. _____ for a period of two years without rest day. I am obliged to pay my employer compensation of Rupiah 2 million if I choose to terminate this contract prematurely. I pledge to be loyal to my employer and to perform daily household chores as specified by my employer. Thank you.

Signature of maid

Signature of employer

Name of maid

Name of employer

Singnature of witness

Name of witness

(Source: Translated from a contract obtained from a maid agency specialising in Indonesian FDWs)