

The London School of Economics and Political Science

Anatomies and Apparatuses of Violence

The Everyday Encounters of Migrant Domestic Workers in Singapore

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Geography & Environment of
the London School of Economics for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

London, February 2020

Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the MPhil/PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

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Antona, Laura (2019). Making hidden spaces visible: Using drawing as a method to illuminate new geographies. *Area*, 51(4), 697–705.

Abstract

This thesis examines the experiences of migrant domestic workers in Singapore, a population who, I argue, are subjected to multi-scalar and multi-sited, anatomies and apparatuses of violence. While academic writing has most often drawn upon the experiences of domestic workers placed in employment, this thesis looks beyond that. It pays particular attention to how domestic workers are situated within Singaporean society more broadly and focusses on what happens when they are no longer willing/able to work for (and therefore reside with) their employers. By doing so, this thesis brings new light to the geographies of security and insecurity that they have to negotiate.

Utilising an intersectional feminist lens of analysis, this research is based on nearly a year's ethnographic fieldwork in Singapore, split across three phases between June 2016 and December 2017. By embedding myself within a shelter run by an NGO, I adopted participant observation, semi-structured interviews and archival research as key methods. I was ultimately able to move beyond the shelter's confines to spend time in the courtroom, the hospital and the Ministry of Manpower, as well as in embassies, public spaces, clinics, agencies, homes and even in corporate events throughout the island nation.

In this thesis, I firstly argue that during their move to Singapore, these labourers become 'foreign', 'domestic' and 'worker', their bodies objectified as they are rendered 'commodity', 'possession' and 'disposable' by the people and infrastructures that facilitate their mobility in processes of dehumanisation. This positioning makes certain workers more vulnerable to interpersonal violence than others and enables different actors to profit from an economy of violence. Secondly, in a nation which enforces an employer-led sponsorship system, I show how the state unpredictably materialised in the urban fabric of Singapore when DWs were rendered sponsorless. In these alternative geographies, I show that conceptualisations of safety/unsafety need rethinking. Rather than being spaces of justice, care and humility, the courtroom and hospital, for example, became spaces where further violence was enacted. Finally, by focussing on the emotional geographies of the shelter, I bring visibility to experiences of migrant detainment and practices of deportation, drawing attention to the violence of these systems. I demonstrate how the shelter became a space of both home/refuge and of confinement.

Acknowledgments

While this thesis bears my name alone, it would not have been possible without the support, encouragement, wisdom and intellect of many others. Although my thanks feel insufficient, and I am not able to name every person, there are some people who I would like to acknowledge.

Firstly, I would like to thank the migrant domestic workers and shelter residents who contributed to my research, agreed to be interviewed and shared some incredibly personal moments and stories with me. Thank you for trusting me and for spending your time with me, particularly those who get so little time off. I hope that this thesis brings visibility to your struggles and that I represented your experiences as you would want.

To the staff and volunteers at HOME, thank you all for welcoming me as part of the team and into your lives. Your generosity in showing me around, inviting me for dinner and providing me with your honest opinions helped me beyond measure. Erica, thank you for your help whenever I needed it, for chatting over lunch most days and showing me a different side to Singapore. Jackie, Stephi, Kanami, Ruchita, Jolovan, Sisi, Sheena, Karien, Nickie, Natalie and Silke, thank you all for your continued friendship and care. The work that you do is inspiring.

I would also like to thank the academic and administrative staff at the Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore. Thank you for hosting me as a Visiting Fellow and providing me with a base while completing my fieldwork. I would also like to thank the members of the HOME Academy and the staff and volunteers at TWC2 and Project X for your willingness to speak to me and share your insights.

This research was made possible by the funding I received from the Economic and Social Research Council. I am immensely grateful for this privilege.

In London, the Urbanisation, Planning and Development Cluster in the Department of Geography & Environment has been an incredible support and a fantastic space to work and learn from. The administration team have always been there to support me, with any request or concern, and sometimes with a crying baby in tow too. Thank you all. The Writing the World group has provided me with an invaluable arena to share my work and to learn from others. Chapter 7 has been greatly improved as a result of your feedback. Thank you to Austin Zeiderman and Megan Ryburn for organising it each year. A special thanks to Claire Mercer and Romola Sanyal, who I have taught with and who have provided me with great emotional support throughout the process. And to Megan, again, for reading my chapters when I was heavily pregnant and feeling overwhelmed and lost. Your intellect and thoughtfulness helped guide me through the writing process and is something I aspire towards.

To the cohort who I started this process with: Kate Dawson, Jeanne Firth, Carwyn Morris and Carl Truedsson, thank you for being there with me through this from the start, for encouraging

me and making it fun along the way. A particular thanks to Jeanne for reading through Chapter 5 and encouraging me in the last weeks before submission.

For being by my side in the PhD room, keeping me sane and making me smile everyday, Paroj Banerjee, Muna Dajani, Jordana Ramalho, Meredith Whitten and Yi Jin, so many thanks go to you all.

To Dalia Gebrial, Didi Han, Yoonai Han, Martina Manara, Ulises Moreno-Tabarez, Billy Ndengeyingoma, Mara Nogueira, Do Young Oh, Harry Pettit, Frida Timan, and Yimin Zhao, thank you all for being there at different stages of this process, for your friendship and sharing your insights and experiences with me. Both I, and this thesis, are better for knowing you all.

My family's support has always been unwavering. My love and thanks go to my Mum, Dad, Michael, Lisa and Sofia. Thank you for being there to remind me what really matters along the way. To Roger, Wendy, Don, Amina, Sam and Caro, thank you for your care and discussing the ins and outs of this thesis with me. The cups of tea and reassurance have meant more than you know.

This thesis would not have been possible if it weren't for the love, care, empathy and compassion of my husband, Gil. Thank you for putting me first, for pushing me to succeed and for your belief in me.

To Ayla, you entered my life only a short while ago but have changed my outlook and heart forever. While the pages of this thesis are centred on violence, you have reminded me each day of your life that love surrounds me too. I hope that the world is a kinder, more accepting and more loving place in the future for you.

Finally, to my supervisors, Hyun Bang Shin and Sylvia Chant, thank you for your support, knowledge and confidence in me. My thesis and outlook would not have been the same if it weren't for your guidance and intellect. These acknowledgments were difficult to write for many reasons, but primarily because of the recent and sad passing of Sylvia. Even while very unwell, Sylvia made me a priority and supported me through my writing, determined to see me hand in. While this wasn't able to happen, I am eternally grateful to her for being such a committed mentor to me. This thesis is dedicated to you, Sylvia.

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Glossary of Vernacular Terms

<i>Ang Moh</i>	While translating literally as 'red haired', the phrase is used to denote any white person, or 'Westener' in Singapore. It is often used as a more pejorative term.
<i>Kafala</i>	A word used for the sponsorship system (generally) adopted in the Middle East (particularly the Gulf Corporation Countries) which legally binds migrant worker's immigration status to an employer (or sponsor).
<i>Kafeel</i>	A word used to denote a person who is a sponsor (or the person who is responsible for another).
<i>Lah</i>	A word placed at the end of sentences to add emphasis in different ways, dependent upon the tone used. It can, for example, be used for reassurance (for instance, 'Its ok <i>lah</i> ' – can mean 'it's alright, don't worry'), to show force in a gentle way, or to show impatience.

List of Abbreviations

AGC	Attorney General's Chambers
AWARE	Association of Women for Action and Research
CNA	Chanel News Asia
DW	Domestic worker
EP	Employment Pass
FDW	Foreign domestic worker
HDB	Housing Development Board
HOME	Humanitarian Organisation for Migration Economics
ILO	International Labour Organization
LKY	Lee Kwan Yew
MBS	Marina Bay Sands
MOM	Ministry of Manpower
MWC	Migrant Workers' Centre
NELM	New Economics of Labour Migration
PAP	People's Action Party
Police IO	Police Investigating Officer
TWC2	Transient Workers Count Too
WHO	World Health Organization
WP	Work Pass

*** Throughout the text I detail the costs in Singaporean Dollars (using the symbol S\$). At the time of submission (February 2020) the exchange rate was 1SGD = 0.56GBP or 0.72USD.*

Introduction

Women's lives are so easily and often trivialized and "disappeared" that a commitment to taking women seriously needs conscious and continuous reassertion (Nelson & Seager, 2005, p.7)

I arrived at the shelter early to meet with two of the other volunteers, Kamala and Charlotte, so that we could travel with Khin Aye to her court hearing. After arriving and seeing Khin Aye standing in front of the mirrors in one of the activity rooms, doing her makeup, I decided to wait in small office, the only room in the shelter with AC on. Despite it being early, around 7.45am, I was already feeling hot in the Singaporean heat so sat with Siti who was in there watching a video.

While I was waiting, Mirasol came in to the office, asking me if she looked OK as she was going to meet a potential employer. Before I could even respond, Siti had intercepted and said "you go take that lipstick off, employer don't like" ... Charlotte and Kamala appeared at the office door, having come down from the dorm rooms. They had been checking on Kartika, a resident that had collapsed the previous day. When she saw me, Kamala said that Kartika was fine, but that some of residents had mentioned feeling the presence of a ghost again. My stomach dropped with dread as I had come to know that whisperings of hauntings could escalate quickly to widespread panic and fear ...

After taking a bus, we arrived at a staircase leading up to a large and imposing white concrete building with "State Courts" written across the entrance. Waiting outside the building, Anya, another volunteer, waved at us as we walked forward; telling us that Khin Aye's former employers had already arrived. We walked together as a group to the entrance and proceeded through the airport style security checks, a process which only added to the atmosphere of intimidation. Anya led us all to an elevator and we proceeded to the third floor, where we followed signs to Court 13.

We approached the courtroom, standing at a distance from the entrance as we could see Khin Aye's former employers and their legal team standing ahead of us. They all looked across as we approached. Khin Aye turned to me and said "sister, that's my interpreter", pointing beyond them, but then quickly turned away from the room, clearly not wanting to look at the faces of the people who had submitted her to so

much pain and violence. It was the first time that I had seen the couple in the flesh. I do not know what I had expected but I felt angry even looking at them. Fortunately, a few minutes later the defence team turned and walked in to the courtroom and another man and woman, who I was informed were Khin Aye's lawyers, appeared too. Khin Aye separated from us and went in to a room beside the main entrance which had a small sign on saying 'Witness Room'. She looked pale and anxious but somehow still confident of her actions. We all wished her luck as she shut the door. The rest of us then walked in to the courtroom, my heart racing slightly with an anxiety I hadn't expected, through the large, wooden double doors (Extract from my fieldnotes, 2017).

For just under a year, spread across three visits in 2016 and 2017, I spent most days in a shelter for migrant domestic workers (hereafter DWs) who were no longer willing/able to work for, or reside with, their employers. Having spent time with residents like Khin Aye, Mirasol and Siti, and with volunteers like Charlotte, Kamala and Anya,¹ I learnt about some of the experiences that DWs had while at work and on their rest days in Singapore. Beyond this, the residents of the shelter showed me how they negotiated everyday life when their working/living arrangements were no longer viable, when they had fled the homes in which they have been working in search of help, or when they had been (re)moved from them. I witnessed how the different actors – NGOs, employment agencies, employers and different factions of Singaporean state, amongst others – intervened in these circumstances, and how processes of deportation and 'justice' were conducted. By spending my time with the shelter residents, I learnt about the ways in which DWs were enmeshed in multi-scalar and multi-sited, anatomies and apparatuses of violence in Singapore, having to negotiate their everyday lives in spaces of security and insecurity. Indeed, bearing witness to this, and the shelter residents' suffering, ultimately transformed my perspectives on violence.

In this introductory chapter, I will initially provide a brief overview of this thesis, its key arguments and contributions, and how it was transformed while conducting fieldwork. I highlight particularly how bearing witness to violence and suffering made me reconceive my aims and motivations. I then go on to state my research questions, before discussing my

¹ All of the names used in this thesis have been anonymised (further details of my reasons for this will be provided in section 1.1, p.14 and in Chapter 3, section 3.3, p.82).

conceptual positioning. I also clarify key terms that I utilise throughout this thesis. Finally, I set out the structure of this thesis.

1.1 Transforming a Research Agenda: Experiencing the Field

I initially went to Singapore imagining that HOME (the Humanitarian Organization for Migration Economics), the NGO that founded and manages the shelter, could act as a space from which I networked in order to meet DWs who were still in employment. At the time, I hoped to focus my research on the home and place-making practices of DWs and so planned to network beyond the shelter and to meet with people still in employment. These desires were, however, entirely shifted after spending so much time in the shelter and eventually realising that it was a significant space in its own right. My witnessing of the shelter residents' suffering and being confronted by so much violence (as I will explain in more detail in Chapter 3), was particularly pertinent. Indeed, my research project was transformed by a personal desire to represent the encounters and interactions I had in the field and to allow the DWs and shelter residents I met to guide me.

The shelter was, and is, a space where the desires and agendas of DWs, activists, NGO staff and volunteers, researchers, the state, employment agencies, employers, and many other actors, collide. It was also a space where I made friends and where I laughed, cried, danced, sang, ate and relaxed. It was a place where I experienced anger, fear, sadness, anxiety, happiness, elation and exhaustion, sometimes all in the same day. Utilising an intersectional feminist lens of analysis and embedding myself within the shelter, I adopted participant observation, semi-structured interviews and archival research as key methods. By becoming a volunteer at HOME, my fieldwork experience gave me an insight into what happens when a DW's relationship with their employer makes their living/working situation untenable, i.e., when they are rendered 'sponsorless'.² This not only allowed me to understand the daily lives of those inhabiting the shelter, but also led me beyond its four walls to the court, the police

² DWs are required to have their employer as their sponsors in Singapore, who, as I will show, are responsible for them in various ways (including providing them with a place to stay within their home). When a DW's living/working relationship becomes untenable, for whatever reason, I refer to them throughout this thesis as 'sponsorless'. In some instances, an employer will revoke a DW's work permit in these circumstances but in others they do not.

station, the Ministry of Manpower (hereafter MOM)³, as well as to embassies, public spaces, hospitals, clinics, employment agencies, home spaces and even to corporate events throughout the island nation.

By allowing the DWs and shelter residents I met to guide my research, I acknowledge their role as co-producers of knowledge and attempt to destabilize traditional power dynamics between researcher and those who are 'researched' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). As stated in the opening quote of this chapter, ensuring that women's lives are made visible is an on-going project (Nelson & Seager, 2005) but one that should not entail forcing a pre-conceived theoretical positioning forward. By taking an active interest and participating in these people's lives, I ended up visiting spaces and experiencing things that are not widely cited in academic literature, including bearing witness to processes of deportation and spirit possessions, to name but a few.

Academic scholarship, particularly that which focuses on Singapore as a context, often draws on DWs' experiences within the home space, public space and nation state (Anderson, 2000; Constable, 1997; Huang & Yeoh, 1996; Parreñas, 2001a; Rollins, 1985; Romero, 1992; Yeoh & Huang, 1998, 2009, 2010). Although these are spaces/scales I have visited and considered, this thesis contributes to academic knowledge by furthering understandings of processes and experiences of violence in alternative sites. While academic literature has also highlighted how domestic labour, especially that performed by live-in DWs, can be considered a form of neo-slavery (Anderson, 1993; Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2002; Ong, 2009), it does not always uncover the contemporary structures of violence which position DWs as subordinate in society. Other writings have challenged these accounts, and the rhetoric of DWs' endemic vulnerability, by prioritising accounts of resistance (Constable, 1997; Pande, 2012; Parreñas & Silvey, 2016; Yeoh & Huang, 1998, 1999). While compelling and important theoretically, such accounts often highlight how DWs enact defiance from within the home space, sites I was not able to visit myself as an ethnographer. In addition, and while recounting tales that could be argued to be resistive, none of the DWs or shelter residents I met framed themselves or their behaviour in this way. Instead of directly reproducing the structure/agency binary, then, I try to show the messiness of the unequal relations of power in which the DWs I met were

³ This is a governmental ministry in Singapore that deals with creating and implementing policies relating to labour and labourers (including all migrant labourers).

enmeshed. In so doing, I demonstrate how women are often the perpetrators of domestic violence in these circumstances, an oft invisibilised narrative. Beyond this, and by centring my research in the HOME shelter, I contribute to understandings of life in refuge/detainment, and as 'sponsorless' and 'disposable', bringing visibility to these experiences and practices of detention and deportation. In order to uncover this, I draw attention to the myriad of actors involved in facilitating and controlling DWs' bodies on their migratory journeys to, within and away from Singapore. These are not only areas that have been less well explored in academic research in general but are particularly absent in academic scholarship on Singapore. Together, this research reframes and foregrounds violence and reconfigures understandings of safety/unsafety.

Despite becoming the centre of my fieldwork experience, I have purposefully chosen to provide limited details about the HOME shelter. While I provide the details of its positioning as an organisation in Singapore (in Chapter 4, section 4.2, p.115), and some description of its management and the experiences of those residing there, I do not detail where it is within the city-state or exactly who resided there. Indeed, HOME has had angry employment agents and employers come to their offices (which are in publicly known spaces) and to the shelter (the location of which is not publicised but which residents, on occasion, have made known unwittingly) causing danger and upset for the other residents. In the same vein, I have chosen to use pseudonyms throughout this thesis as many of the people I met and interviewed have active legal cases. I also do not use exact dates on my interview transcripts or fieldnote extracts, as these could be used to identify shelter residents. Similarly, I have blurred the faces of people in several photographs, particularly those in the shelter. I have, however, chosen not to anonymise HOME itself, for one, because it is a unique organisation within Singapore and so would be immediately identifiable anyway.

It is often considered that Singapore, as a context, is exceptional, and that practices and experiences within it cannot be considered representative or transferable. While no one context is entirely representative of another, I show how DWs' experiences in Singapore are connected to a globalised political economy of violence and the ways in which migrants' experiences need always be considered in relation to the places from which they have moved. While within this thesis, I sometimes refer to the Singaporean state as though it is a monolithic and homogenous entity, and while it can feel/appear to function as one (especially to migrant DWs), it is important to acknowledge the ways in which it is also fractured and heterogenous.

Indeed, by detailing encounters with different ‘agents’ and ‘spaces’ of the state, I show how the state is impacted and (re)produced by civil society and grassroots organisations like HOME. Indeed, while developmental and post-colonial states can be viewed as a “technocratic, centralized machine consisting of elite bureaucrats, insulated from the socio-political pressure or ... embedded in a close working relationship with the private sector” (Shin, 2019a, p.199), as Shin (ibid.) highlights, the tendency to view the state in isolation risks falling into ‘methodological nationalism’. In order to provide a more critical and nuanced perspective, I try to show how the state extends both into the local and urban scale in multifaceted ways (particularly in Chapter 6), and how it is impacted by the wider geopolitical economic context (Shin, 2019b, 2019a), being (re)produced and impacted by these interactions.

1.2 Research Questions & Conceptual Positioning

In this thesis, I will examine the experiences of migrant DWs in Singapore, focusing particularly on how they are situated within the society before, during and after their employment. In a context where employers are positioned as DWs’ sponsors, I focus my attention on understanding their intersectional positioning within society more broadly, and on their experiences when they are rendered sponsorless. As such, my research questions are:

1. How are migrant DWs positioned within the Singaporean society?
2. How and where does the Singaporean state intervene when migrant DWs are no longer willing/able to work-for/live-with their employers?
3. What are the lived experiences of those residing in the HOME shelter (as sponsorless and ‘disposable’)?

In order to answer these questions, and underpinning this thesis, I develop a conceptual framework that draws from different theoretical positionings to show how domesticity, migration and violence position bodies in certain ways. Indeed, the body is centred in this thesis, as the site on which violence is enacted, (re)produced and resisted. As an intersectional feminist project, I take body politics seriously and centrally in this thesis. By body politics, I refer to the means by which the human body is regulated and managed, and the tension over the degree to which this control is individualised or socialised (Coole, 2013). While emerging out of second-wave feminism as a concept, intersectional feminists, post-colonial scholars and critical race theorists also engage with the term to show how body politics are both oppressive

and emancipatory, with attempts to control the body being juxtaposed to forms of bodily resistance (ibid.). For example, while colonialism attempted to make compliant subjects, which in many ways did build and reproduce coloniality, it also created resistance and anticolonial struggle.

Attempts to control the individual and social body are not confined to the colonial eras. Ong and Peletz (1995), for instance, argue that the postcolonial state, while actively creating a national identity, must constantly define the form of its society. They argue that state power is used on bodies, particularly women's, in the process of making and regulating society. Seager (1997, p.1522) furthers this by arguing that women's bodies, and the exchange and control of them, are essential to the functioning of global (dis)order. It is through the discursive practices and disciplinary regimes of states, then, that attempts are made to harness social order and control at every scale. Indeed, the functioning of political, economic and social systems ultimately relies on particular people performing particular kinds of work.

Following Ong and Peletz, and Seagar, I argue that particular forms of state control, in attempt to create a particular kind of society, generate, enable and maintain gendered and racialised labour inequalities. Moreover, I would suggest that it is the construction and formation of particular subjects, associated with specific kinds of labour, which becomes both the rationality for, and the justification of, the exploitation of certain people. Having been denigrated, invisibilised and transnationalised, domestic labour in Singapore, for instance, is now associated with particular people, that is 'domestic bodies', who are at risk of mistreatment, abuse and violence. Indeed, by considering how labour migration is managed and maintained in Singapore, it becomes clear that certain bodies' relative freedom is set in direct opposition to the ways in which other bodies are controlled and rendered both detainable and 'disposable' (De Genova, 2002). In Singapore in particular, I argue that both systems of labour migration and practices of domestic labour are violent, causing bodily suffering. In this thesis I show how these systems of violence produce spaces as sites of insecurity and unsafety for certain people; violence being both relational and manifesting spatially (Tyner, 2012).

Grounding this conceptual framework, I draw on theories of intersectionality and bio-politics, ideas that have distinct histories of their own, and which come together to show the importance and centrality of the body. Firstly, when referring to biopolitics, I draw particularly

on the work of Foucault (1978), who suggests that towards the end of the 17th century, the mode of authoritative control that the sovereign powers of Western Europe exerted, which had primarily been concerned with territory and territorial expansions (Elden, 2013), underwent a dramatic transformation. According to Foucault (1978, p.142-143)

Power would no longer be dealing simply with legal subjects over whom the ultimate dominion was death, but with living beings ... it was the taking charge of life ... that gave power its access even to the body.

He argued that Westphalian sovereign territory was no longer the space of juridical governance, but of the “government of population” (Foucault, 2007 [1977-78], p.107). These new forms of governance necessitate new ‘technologies’ of state power, that is ‘biopower’. Biopower is not directly concerned with the ‘legal subject’ but with “the biological and physical aspects of human beings separately and as a social body” (Castree, Kitchin, & Rogers, 2013, p.34). Foucault (1978) asserted that through this new regime, states sought to manipulate and control the human body, regulating life and processes of birth, health and death. While there is a great deal of scholarship that contests these viewpoints, and other work which utilises and builds on,⁴ this thesis uses it to consider how attempts are made to manage and discipline bodies contemporarily in society. As I will come to show, however, the state is not the only entity which exerts pressures and attempts to ‘take charge’ of DWs’ lives. Indeed, the private interests of employers and employment agencies, who profit from the commodification and sale of bodies, also need to be accounted for.

Secondly, when referring to the differences between bodies, I draw on Crenshaw’s (1989) original creation of the term ‘intersectionality’. Rather than viewing race and gender as mutually exclusive categories, Crenshaw initially utilised the term to demonstrate how it was

⁴ This understanding of biopower is contested by Agamben (1998, p.6), for instance, who challenges this understanding of biopower and builds upon it, suggesting that “the production of a bio-political body is the original activity of sovereign power”. The sovereign power is, according to Agamben, defined by its ability to enforce a state of exception, the moment when the legal system is ceased or suspended, and new systems of governance are created.

Many feminist scholars have also engaged with Foucault’s ideas and expanded them further, but others are much more critical, with some people rejecting its use entirely, believing that it undermines the possibility for progressive and emancipatory politics (McLaren, 2002). Heckman (1996) engages with Foucault’s work suggesting that, although he falsely creates a dichotomy between violence and power, his framework is of use for feminist research that actively considers the subjective experiences and features of power and of resistance.

the intersection of black women's gender and race that meant that they were not protected by anti-discrimination laws in the USA (while white women and black men were). Since this initial conceptualisation, however, the term has been used widely and has been associated with identity politics more broadly. Trinh (1989, p.94), for instance, while highlighting the importance of an intersectional lens of analysis, conceives of 'the self' as being made up of "infinite layers". She, amongst many others, suggests that rather than thinking about identity as static, fixed or singular, we should instead consider it as multiple, contested, ambivalent and as "a process of identification" (Hall, 1991, p.15). As Hall (1990, p.222) writes:

... instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact ... we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.

Competing discourses, representations and interpretations, which are embedded in specific temporal and spatial realities, produce both imagined and real subjects that have real consequences. Through her conceptualisation of performativity, Butler (1990) also destabilizes any notions that identities are hegemonic, fixed or stable. Instead, she argues that gendered identities are a repetitive performance of an ideal, a perceived ideal, and that they can be subverted or resisted. While writing from different perspectives, Trinh, Hall and Butler all disturb the notion of there being any fixed and natural categories of identity that different individuals must fall in to.

1.3 Explanation of Terms

There are some terms that I have chosen to use in this thesis that require an explanation. Some of these are words/names that I would use in Singapore, while others are what I have adopted during the writing process.

There are many names used to describe the 250,000+ people who have migrated under the Foreign Domestic Worker (hereafter FDW) scheme in Singapore,⁵ the most common of which I heard being: helper; maid; servant; domestic; and girl. While used widely by employers and

⁵ Details of the FDW scheme will be provided in Chapter 4 (section 4.1.3, p.105).

employment agencies (locally referred to as maid agencies), as well as being prevalent in the media (and in academia, for example, see Poon, 2003) , these names all felt demeaning, ‘colonial’ and inadequate to me. It also seemed as though there was a hierarchy of these terms, with ‘helper’ actually being viewed as a better name for some DWs and a step-up from ‘maid’. Indeed, while in Singapore, at a pageant run by DWs, I met a lady who told me that she wanted to improve the perception of the population in Singapore, saying: “I want people in Singapore to value our work. We are helpers, we are not maids”. Despite this stated desire, to me, the use of any of these terms reinforces the idea that the labour performed is ‘help’ rather than work, degrading the value of reproductive labour more generally. A volunteer from HOME, Charlotte (herself Filipina-Singaporean), once explained to me in an interview (in October 2017) that:

Most Singaporeans still call them [DWs] maids, so this is what I hear ... when I talk with my friends about what I do for HOME, a lot of them will call them maids. To be honest, I think the people who I know who actually refer to them as DWs, or even helpers, are from HOME. I think it’s like, maid would be the bottom name and helper would be one step above that.

As feminised labour, there is a tendency to believe that it requires no/little skill and is often viewed as just being supportive of ‘productive’ labour (more on this in Chapter 2, section 2.1, p.27). Instead, I utilise the term DW which I feel better encapsulates the nature of this labour. It is important to the state, however, that while I use this term because the people whom I focus on in this thesis are united by their shared employment position, I do not believe this identity defines them individually. Indeed, many of the people I met in Singapore are no longer DWs but work in a variety of fields.

Furthermore, academics, and the state (who, as stated, use FDW officially), precede DW with ‘migrant’, ‘foreign’, ‘international’ or another word to articulate DWs’ non-citizen status. While accurate and used in the title of this thesis to encapsulate this detail, I have chosen not to use this throughout my writing. While the population I am focusing on are, necessarily, migrants, this was done with purpose, as I did not want to keep reinforcing their ‘alien’ status.⁶

⁶ While DWs are necessarily migrants, there were many DWs I met who had lived in Singapore for several decades, and in some cases longer than they had anywhere else. Despite this, there were no routes to permanent residency or citizenship for them.

In addition to the term DW, throughout the thesis, I try to specify when I am speaking specifically about the people that were residing in the shelter by using the term 'resident' or 'shelter resident'. While all of these residents worked as DWs (bar one individual I met at the shelter who had worked in 'entertainment'), they were, by virtue of being there, no longer actually employed. When I was in Singapore, however, I would refer to all of the residents as 'sister', as they would to me (or 'sister Laura'), a term adopted by HOME to help ensure a horizontal relationship between staff, volunteers and the residents.

Throughout this thesis, and in its title, I also refer to both anatomies and apparatuses of violence. While I detail much more thoroughly how violence can be conceived of theoretically in Chapter 2, the use of the terms anatomies and apparatuses require explanation. Rather than the more traditional triad of structural, institutional and interpersonal violence (Tyner, 2012), and while I do utilise this typology in certain ways throughout my thesis, I wanted to emphasise the centrality of bodies and both the techniques and tools of violence.

Indeed, the term anatomy is, perhaps, fairly self-explanatory. I use it to refer both to the bodily enactment of violence and the embodiment of violence. Both the perpetrators of all kinds of violence – whether it be in the form of verbal abuse, physical assault or from within an institution that enacts structural violence (a police officer intimidating someone, for example, or a judge necessitating that a victim of sexual assault recount their testimony in front of their aggressor) – and the victims of such violence are, then, anatomies of violence.

When referring to apparatuses of violence, I am not alluding to tools used in instances of physical violence per se (although I did hear in detail of canes and other household items being used to inflict harm on DWs). Instead, I am referring to the procedures, policy and systems that cause human suffering. These are multiscalar and multi-sited, embedded historically and contemporarily. Patriarchy, the global political economy, colonial law, the FDW scheme and deportation policy, are all examples of this. Rather than being just a direct re-articulation of structural violence (which I define in Chapter 2, section 2.4, p.56), however, I use this term to place emphasis on the 'machinery' and mode of structures and institutions of violence.

Without hierarchising or attempting to 'scale' violence, and rather than interpersonal violence being seen as 'exceptional' and structural more mundane, I use these terms together to show

the relationality of expressions of violence. As I will come to show, DWs are enmeshed in multi-scalar and multi-sited anatomies and apparatuses of violence, neither 'form' being so easily separated from one another.

1.4 Thesis Structure

After this initial introductory chapter, this thesis is divided into seven further chapters. Chapter 2 presents a theoretical framework that provides a foundation that informs the main arguments and debates in this thesis. I draw on the literature around three main themes – domesticity, migration and violence – and centre the body in each of these discussions. I also focus specifically on the literature surrounding practices of migrant detention and deportation to show how some bodies are rendered disposable/detainable. By engaging with theories of violence, I argue that systems of labour migration and domestic labour are embedded in violence, with certain bodies suffering disproportionately. The bodies of literature presented, and the gaps/limitations I identify, will provide a framework for my empirical analysis.

In Chapter 3, I describe the methodology I adopted for data collection and analysis, and articulate how the period of fieldwork I conducted transformed my research. Woven through this chapter is an attentiveness to my own positionality and ethics, as well as the practical steps I took to meet DWs and to become embedded within HOME as a volunteer. I describe the process by which I entered the field, recount the ways in which I realised I was 'doing' ethnography, and present some of the challenges I had when 'exiting' the field (if one can fully 'depart' it at all). I also highlight how witnessing suffering and then, latterly, writing violence, were formative experiences for me, which fundamentally reshaped the ways in which I have theorised and analysed my data.

In Chapter 4, I show how migration and domestic labour in Singapore are managed, presenting a historical and contemporary understanding of the context. I stress how Singapore's narrative of global 'success', with it being said to have 'transformed' from the 'third' to the 'first' world in a matter of decades, is predicated on the oft invisibilised labour of migrant workers who both produce and reproduce the nation state. I demonstrate the ways in which labour migration is, today, bifurcated, with foreign 'professionals' (considered to be highly skilled workers) being given privileges that foreign 'workers' (considered to be lower skilled workers) are not given. I provide specific details of the FDW scheme and the ways in which DWs are

tied to their employers in Singapore within a sponsorship/*kafala* system, before also demonstrating the oppositional politics of certain factions of civil society as well as illustrating how HOME is positioned. More broadly, I show that the post-colonial and developmentalist Singaporean state (re)produces itself by managing its population in draconian and punitive ways.

I build on the aforementioned context in Chapter 5 to reveal how DWs are positioned in the Singaporean society. I argue that different actors – the state, employment agencies and employers particularly – attempt to dehumanise and objectify DWs, rendering them ‘commodified’, ‘possessed’ and ‘disposable’ bodies. Despite these efforts, I argue that DWs’ humanity is ever present, their flesh and personhood unable to be entirely controlled and managed. This, I show, is a point of tension in the home space, as DWs often behave in ways that appear to pose risks to their employers. As a result of these anxieties, and of broader societal structures, I show that it is usually female employers who are the household disciplinarians. Domestic violence in this context occurs between women. As such, I argue that it is DWs’ subordinated and intersectional positioning as ‘foreign’, ‘domestic’ and ‘worker’ – as raced and gendered non-citizens, whose labour is considered menial – which sees them emplaced in multi-scalar and multi-sited apparatuses and anatomies of violence. This positioning, as I go on to show, makes them vulnerable to further violence.

In my second empirical chapter, Chapter 6, I examine how the Singaporean state materialises in the urban fabric of Singapore, when DWs are sponsorless, i.e., when the relationship between a DW and their employer breaks down and their working/living arrangements are untenable. I present some of the alternative geographies of the state that I encountered – in the form of the courtroom, helpdesk (at HOME’s offices), hospital and police station – and show how they become sites of violence. As such, rather than being sites of care and justice, as one might presuppose the hospital or courtroom to be, I argue that they are actually spaces of insecurity for DWs. Beyond reproducing itself in these spaces, I also highlight how the state, in its heterogenous and fractured form, is culpable in the ongoing suffering and violence experienced by DWs. While academic literature has exposed how structural violence can lead to inter-personal violence (Farmer, 2004; Galtung, 1969; Gardner, 2010), this chapter contributes to academic theory by-demonstrates how the reverse is also true, bringing light to the ways in which inter-personal violence led to further structural violence.

I bring the emotional geographies of the shelter residents to light in my final empirical chapter, Chapter 7, highlighting the residents' experiences while living as sponsorless in Singapore. As 'disposable', I show how the residents' feelings of entrapment, safety, fear, illness, boredom and fatigue are all a product of the paradoxical positioning of the shelter as both refuge and detention centre. Indeed, as a site of both security and insecurity, I show how the shelter becomes a space of liminality, where the residents face uncertainty regarding their future.

Finally, Chapter 8 concludes this thesis by summarising the main findings of each chapter and relating them back to the theoretical framework provided in Chapter 2. Here, I demonstrate how this thesis contributes to academic theory on violence, domesticity and migration, and suggest some directions for future research.

1.5 Summary

This introductory chapter has introduced this research and the ways in which it transformed in its focus and ambition. As the centre of my fieldwork experience, witnessing the residents' suffering at the HOME shelter, and latterly writing violence, reshaped my thesis and also opened up opportunities to visit and encounter spaces that have received less academic focus. Having briefly described how DWs are situated as migrants requiring employer sponsorship in Singapore, I have argued that attempts are consistently being made, by different actors, to control and manage their bodies and that a DW's gendered, raced and 'foreign' body is the site that poses risk to the Singaporean household and nation state. I have also presented my research questions and my conceptual and feminist epistemological positioning, demonstrating my commitment to bringing visibility to the women's lives that guided my work. I have argued, and will demonstrate in the coming chapters, that DWs are enmeshed in multi-scalar and multi-sited anatomies and apparatuses of violence which unevenly and unjustly render them susceptible to suffering. As stated in the thesis structure that I have outlined, the following chapter will provide a more detailed theoretical framework which I then use to ground the remainder of this thesis.

Domesticity, Migration & Violence: Managing Bodies

Women's bodies are literally and materially integral to the conduct of state relations, to the global economy, and to the geography of the new (and old) world order; social and global power, and the interconnections between them, are negotiated through women's bodies. Not only symbolically, but really (Seager, 1997, p.1522).

Domesticity and labour migration, and the experiences of migrant DWs more broadly, are certainly not new foci of academic study, with rich accounts of these phenomena and experiences being provided from many contexts. While well documented, within the discipline of human geography and beyond, what is less often explicitly theorised is the centrality of violence in these systems, practices and experiences. Indeed, the subordination of domestic labour, and of certain forms of labour migration, have their roots in patriarchy and colonialism, which are structures of violence that disproportionately impact women, particularly women of colour and non-nationals.

This chapter sets out a theoretical framework for understanding the experiences of DWs on their migratory journeys to, within and away from Singapore. To ground my empirical analysis, I draw on the literature that focuses on domesticity, labour migration, detention and deportation, and violence. I highlight the key debates within these areas of academic scholarship and particularly draw out the centrality of the body in different theoretical approaches. In so doing, I show where there are gaps and limitations in the literature, and where my thesis will make interventions and contribute to knowledge. Ultimately, I show that violence operates throughout experiences and practices of domesticity, regimes of labour migration and detention/deportation (in Singapore and beyond), causing suffering for certain people. Rather than remain in the background, however, I show how responding to the stated need to foreground violence (Tyner & Inwood, 2014) will provide me with a way of working through the limitations of structure/agency and macro/micro dualisms that are inherent in much of this literature. Demonstrating the ways in which violence is relational, spatial and

embodied, as highlighted in the literature, provides a framework from which I answer my research questions.

2.1 Domestic Labour and Domestic Bodies

Attempting to create a universal definition of domestic work is not simple. It can be undertaken by anyone, both paid or unpaid, and completed as either a form of full-time employment or carried out sporadically. While it is labour that relates to a household, a home or a family more broadly, and is most often completed in the home space itself, it does not have to be. It can include various types of caring labour, housework and social/cultural work, involving tasks as varied as: child rearing; educating; cleaning; household maintenance; upholding cultural, social and religious practices; and attending to individuals' medical and psychological well-being. As Anderson (2000, p.11) writes, it is often performed as a "series of processes, of tasks inextricably linked, often operating at the same time", with individuals simultaneously caring for children, while cooking and doing the laundry, for instance. As a form of labour which is considered to be low-skilled – labour associated with the '3 Ds': dangerous; difficult; and dirty (sometimes to include demeaning too) (Martin, 1996) – it is often referred to as a form of social reproduction, which has been defined as "the array of activities and relationships involved in maintaining people both on a daily basis and intergenerationally" (Glenn, 1992, p.1).

Marxists define much domestic labour as 'reproductive', meaning the "generally unremunerated work involved in sustaining individuals fit for the waged labour process and ensuring the supply of future workers by raising and caring for children" (Castree, Kitchin & Rogers, 2013, p.432). It is, as argued by Engels (1884), labour that is necessary for the functioning of capitalism; the work involves both the production of more humans, who are to become workers in the future, and in the maintenance and sustainment of current workers. Domestic work is also a form of labour that has rendered capitalists dependent on families – particularly the heteronormative, nuclear family unit – and often on women specifically, as they are unable to create a future workforce themselves (Castree, Kitchin & Rogers, 2013). Indeed, Federici (2004) argues that capitalism itself only functions because of the appropriation and depreciation of feminised reproductive labour, this being the condition of the devaluation of labour power more broadly (Anderson, 2001). In a similar vein, Rose (1993, p.119) suggests that the primary reason for the existence of the 'private' realm is because

capitalism needs it in order to function, that is, “to support those who cannot work, to prevent their disaffection with the system, and it needs it as a safe haven in which the workers can recover from the alienation of waged labour sufficiently to return to work the next day”. This is also, importantly, something that was fought for by workers (Mackenzie & Rose, 1983; Rose, 1993).

It is important to note, however, as Rose (1993) and others have suggested, that the private/public binary is a falsehood. While the home space is often considered to be entirely ‘private’, it is not. Far from a site that is isolated and shut off from the ‘outside’ world, the home can never exist entirely abstracted from the ‘public’ sphere and is instead established as a central part of it. As Neuhaus (2003) explains with reference to cookery books in the USA, food corporations, advertisers, the government, appliance manufacturers and even health practitioners have all been invested in ensuring the American housewife cooks certain kinds of foods that are deemed beneficial. These ‘experts’, through the means of a book, together reach into the home-space and influence the social practices and habits of the families that inhabit them, bringing the ‘public’ and ‘productive’ sphere straight into the kitchen. Indeed, in this sense, nowhere can truly be considered private in an absolute sense, as even the body is governed by external forces (Butler, 1988, 1990, 1993).

As well as the many ways in which political, social and economic realms reach into the home, blurring what is deemed public and private, the home itself also extends back: as a site where work is carried out (Chant & McIlwaine, 2016; Landau, 1997); where political opinions are nurtured (hooks, 1990); and where people are educated and cared for (Douglas, 1991). Live-in DWs in Singapore and Hong Kong are an exemplar population in this regard, complicating the private/public dualism, as they are employed to work in the home-spaces to perform reproductive responsibilities but do not necessarily spend their relaxation time there. In many places, they spend their leisure time in what could be considered much more public spaces, often in the streets, parks, shopping centres and religious institutions (Constable, 1997; Yeoh & Huang, 1998). The private sphere, then, is clearly not so private after all and, in fact, many spaces that are assumed to be public are actually owned, governed and managed by private organisations or individuals, further complicating the idea that they are really ‘public’ at all (Hou, 2010). Societal aspirations, norms, ideals and trends are all constituent of the home and the relations that are performed within it are in turn constituent of society.

While there are, then, significant overlaps in many of the tasks that would be defined as 'reproductive' and 'domestic', as Anderson (2000) attests, not all reproductive labour is domestic and not all domestic labour is strictly reproductive. Indeed, much labour that was traditionally domestic has been socialised (with the rise of the welfare state and the provision of public education and health care for instance) or commodified (as 'productive', rather than 'reproductive' labour) (Glenn, 1992; Kofman & Raghuram, 2006; McDowell, 2014). As Dunaway (2014, p.6) attests, "[m]any household activities have been incorporated into markets and commodity chains ... 'the market' has broken down the analytic distinction by commodifying traditional reproductive functions." Indeed, the blurring of what is purely reproductive or productive has been widely debated, with the binary itself being shown to be a vast over-simplification (Mies, 1986). As Kofman and Raghuram (2006, p.284) have argued, while "analytically useful, the separation of production and reproduction, based on the definition of production as work which creates exchange value as against reproduction which creates use value, proved to be empirically tedious". Waged DWs, for example, blur the distinctions between what is productive and what is reproductive, as they are paid to perform work that would be executed without remuneration in other circumstances. While these forms of labour are inseparable, the very framing of these forms of work, as reproductive labour being necessary for the functioning of productive labour, implicitly places productive labour as superior and denigrates that which is considered reproductive.⁷ Indeed, viewed in this light, domestic labour is regarded as supportive and feminised labour that requires lower levels of skill. Such a view has, for instance, resulted in treating Singaporean women's labour as more valuable to the 'productive' economy. As will be shown, migrant women, who are viewed as holding lower skills and less worth, are paid (and, I argue, 'purchased') to complete the tasks that female citizens are deemed too superior to carry out.

While much domestic labour has been socialised and commodified – and despite feminist struggles and more women now being employed in waged work – it is still (largely) a feminised

⁷ Given the low-esteem attributed to domestic labour then, Marxist-feminists, amongst others, have argued that domesticity is the central tenet of women's oppression (Glenn, 1992).

form of labour,⁸ both devalued and invisibilised (Varia, 2012).⁹ However, this labour is not just feminised but is also racialised and classed too. Indeed, critical-race theorists and post-colonial scholars have also intervened to show how systems of slavery, racism and coloniality have positioned women of colour distinctly, with white women's experiences often being universalised and misconstrued as representative of all experiences of 'femininity'. Roberts (1997) suggests that there are two types of domestic labour or housework: 'spiritual' and 'menial'. She suggests that housework can be, on the one hand, considered spiritual – work that is highly respected and deemed indispensable for the functioning of the home and family – but also, on the other hand, considered menial – work that is both unpleasant and arduous, thought to be simple labour that necessitates little intellectual or moral skill. Of this distinction, she (ibid., p.51) explains that “the ideological distinction between spiritual and menial housework fosters inequality among women. Spiritual housework is associated with privileged white women; menial housework is associated with minority, immigrant, and working class women”.

As Glenn (1992) and hooks (1990) have explained with specific reference to the US-South, reproductive and caring labour in the homes of wealthy white families was most often performed by black women, both during periods of enslavement and also as paid servants/domestic-workers in the continuum of slavery as racial capitalism (Robinson, 1983). Indeed, as employers, white women were often positioned in opposition to their employees, possessing a degree of freedom from certain forms of reproductive and 'dirty' labour and having the choice of entering waged employment or otherwise. This choice being maintained

⁸ While at large a feminised form of labour, not all domestic work is carried out by women, and some roles are masculinised. Household maintenance, gardening and chauffeuring, for instance, are masculinised forms of domestic labour; performed predominantly by men (whether as waged labour or otherwise). As Kilkey, Perrons and Polmen (2013) explain, despite there being a greater expectation for more 'involved' fathering in the UK and USA today – and, therefore, more active male participation in some forms of domestic work – much household maintenance has now also been commodified; with handymen employed to do small jobs around the house, for example, becoming a way in which wealthy families can cope with their household pressures. More masculinised forms of domestic labour are not new, however. Traditionally in the UK, for example, butlers and waiters would all be duties performed by men. Indeed, under colonial rule and post-colonial independence, both men and women of lower social status – as determined by their race, ethnicity, religion and class positioning – were, and are, expected to perform reproductive labour for those of a higher status. Today, in 'post'-colonial Singapore, wealthy families with gardeners and chauffeurs nearly always employ men for this work. Despite there being some waged household labour that is performed by men, then, this labour tends to be more highly remunerated and revered than feminised forms of domestic work.

⁹ I use the term invisibilised, rather than invisible, because I would argue that much of the labour performed in the home is actually far from hidden. Rather, I argue that it is ignored and devalued and thus obscured in the process.

by the exploitation and confinement of another women. Glenn (1992, p.20) also highlights how reproductive labour in the 'public' sphere comes to mirror that of the 'private':

Racial-ethnic women are employed to do the heavy, dirty, "back-room" chores ... in hotels and office buildings ... In these same settings white women are disproportionately employed as lower-level professionals ... to carry out the more skilled and supervisory tasks.

While writing from a different geographical context, and with its own socio-political specificities, the arguments presented above are still relevant when considering labour in contemporary Singapore. Despite being described as a 'multi-racial' nation, colonial legacies have created racialised hierarchies which still violently subordinate certain segments of the population. While it might not be white families employing black women, the racialised inequalities between women are still profound. Indeed, some women's privilege causes others to experience further oppression. As Kilkey, Perrons and Plomien (2013, p.8) write:

Some women are enabled to pursue careers while others – less well-paid women from elsewhere – do 'their' housework and care for 'their' children. On the one hand, then, some women are empowered, but the way in which they are empowered undermines fundamental feminist concerns regarding equality, resulting in scholars raising the question of whether a feminist can employ a nanny.

While domestic work is feminised, racialised and classed, today (along with its commodification), it has also been transnationalised, with migrant workers increasingly taking on these forms of labour. Parreñas (2001a) discusses this and demonstrates how migrant DWs, with specific reference to migrants from the Philippines, are essential figures in the international division of labour. Denoting these labourers as "servants of globalisation", she shows how they are central to the social and economic functioning of the countries to which they move, but also for the countries which they move from: the export of their labour and the money they remit are essential to its economy. Indeed the importation of feminised workers has also been commented on by Yeoh, Huang and Willis (2000, p.154), who, when describing the Singaporean context, write:

The export and import of wholly female domestic labour rests on gender-stereotyped assumptions about women, such as their suitability for housework and servanthood by virtue of being women, their docility and malleability rendering them amenable to taking instructions from other women from a subordinate position, and

their greater readiness to accept low wages given assumptions about their secondary role in the household economy and the labour market.

The transnationalisation of care, and of domestic labour, has also been commented on widely by scholars who write about 'global care chains'. Defined as "a series of personal links between people across the globe based on the paid or unpaid work of caring" (Hochschild, 2000, p.131), global care chains constitute a phenomenon which demonstrates household internationalisation strategies (Yeates, 2005b). Hochschild (2000, p.131) explains how domestic duties have been 'passed' on from one person to another, enabling poorer women to profit from those that are wealthier: for example "(1) an older daughter from a poor family who cares for her siblings while (2) her mother works as a nanny caring for the children of a migrating nanny who, in turn, (3) cares for the child of a family in a rich country". With this, intersections of gender, age, race, ethnicity, caste, class and nationality all impact a person's positioning within this chain, and, therefore, the remuneration (or lack thereof) they receive for their work (Parreñas, 2001a; Yeates, 2005a).

Domestic labour is, then, carried out disproportionately by particular people; particular bodies that are deemed more appropriate for domesticity than others. Anderson (2000) also affirms this, arguing that DWs across the globe uphold a household's, and particularly their female employer's, status within society, while their own status is denigrated as a result. These domestic bodies and the labour they perform are, significantly, bound to the home or household. Domesticity thus has spatiality, meaning that it is disproportionately women, and particularly migrant women and women of colour, who are confined to the home space.

While humanistic geographers originally discussed the home as a site of rootedness and connection, and a place of belonging and security (Cresswell, 2013; Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1991), feminist scholars critiqued them for their universalising and masculinist tendencies, which excluded the experiences of women and others (Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Rose, 1993). Instead, they suggested that home is experienced differentially and potentially as a site of conflict (Massey, 1994; Meth, 2003), not subscribing to the idea of home as a "homogenously experienced unit of harmony" (Brickell, 2012, p.226). Rather than simply a haven, the home space is also a site of women's invisibilised work and a space of anxiety and isolation (Hayden, 2003), which can be associated with domestic abuse and violence (Meth, 2003; Pain, 1997; Warrington, 2001). Indeed, it is both the confinement to the home, and the invisibilisation of the labour performed within it, that have led some people, mothers and elderly people for

instance, to speak of the home as a site of imprisonment or containment and as a space where societal, familial and personal pressures bind them (Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Brinchmann, 1999; McDowell, 2014). Feelings of containment can quickly become exacerbated when domestic or caring labour is required continuously or when it is performed as waged, full-time and live-in employment (as is the case for DWs in Singapore). For people caring for others who are unable to leave the home – for elderly relatives or disabled children, for example – carers too can feel isolated and trapped. Constable (1997) highlights the isolation and emotional turbulence that live-in migrant DWs in Hong Kong experience, while being under the watchful eye of an employer. She suggests that due to the nature of their work, DWs are particularly prone to abuse and assault – emotional, physical and sexual (also see Varia, 2012). Similarly, DWs in Singapore often live under oppressive conditions with their bodies surveilled and policed by the dominant powers of their employers and the state (Huang & Yeoh, 1996, 2003, 2007; Ueno, 2009; Yeoh, 2006; Yeoh & Huang, 2010): “[A]s “transient aliens”, foreign domestic workers are subjected to a household-based disciplinary regime and to techniques of securitization at the national level” (Ong, 2009, p.161). Rather than a neutral space then, the home, or the domestic, needs to be thought of as a highly political and potentially violent site, a place where some of the most acute experiences of oppression and marginalisation are felt. It is these concerns, which have led international agencies, NGOs and academics to write about domestic labour, and the experiences of migrant DWs particularly, as a form of neo-slavery. Both the International Labour Organization (hereafter ILO) and Human Rights Watch, for instance, have written about the invisibilisation of DWs’ labour and their vulnerable positioning. Of this, Ong (ibid., p.164-165) writes:

The unregulated nature of domestic employment is based on a logic of incarceration. The employer controls every aspect of the foreign maid’s life. It is common practice in Singapore and Malaysia for the employer to hold the maid’s passport and work papers, on the excuse of preventing her from running away, but in effect confining her within the household. The employer thus gains a de facto ownership over the foreign domestic, who is thus entrapped and vulnerable to exploitation of her labor and sexuality. Such incarcerating control over an individual who can be subjected to abuse is a form of neo-slavery.

Conversely (or in some instances, additionally), some academics and activists who are concerned about DWs being framed as lacking any form of agency have highlighted forms of resistance to this oppressive labour (Constable, 1997; Lindio-McGovern, 2012; Parreñas, 2001b; Yeoh & Huang, 1998). Pande (2012, p.384), for instance, describes meso-level resistant

practices (as opposed to organised macro-scaled, unionised forms) performed by DWs in Lebanon, “at the dyad and small group level”. She observed DWs using balconies and other quasi-public spaces to discuss their experiences with others and then using advice to negotiate better working conditions. In Singapore, Yeoh and Huang (1998) highlight the everyday and individualised practices of DWs in order to avoid the surveillance and discipline of their employers. In their research they found that “some maids are prepared to cross the boundaries of what employers have set as ‘permissible’ during the work days” (ibid., p.596), by using their phone or taking rests. Other DWs would co-ordinate their schedules so that they could all wash their employers’ cars at the same time, socialising as they worked.

Whether discussing micro-level and individualised forms of resistance, meso-level or oppositional action at a larger scale, these narratives are juxtaposed against the writing that emphasises the completely inescapable and oppressive conditions of DWs’ labour. Indeed, there is a tension, or false binary, between narratives that highlight structure (and emphasise systems of oppression) and those that focus on demonstrations of agency (and emphasises practices of defiance). This is a tension, which I hope to address more broadly in this thesis. Indeed, instead of relying on one of these approaches, I use both, acknowledging DWs’ structural vulnerability and simultaneously their powers to circumvent this. Bringing together these discourses helps to ground my empirical analysis and articulate the messiness of the unequal relations of power in which DWs are embedded. The academic literature reviewed has also shown how domestic labour, and the bodies that perform it, have been feminised, invisibilised, denigrated, commodified and transnationalised, providing a foundation from which I am able to ground my empirical analysis. In order to further understand the ways in which DWs are positioned within Singaporean society, and their experiences when ‘sponsorless’ and in shelter, this scholarship has shown that the body and its intersectional positioning need centring in any discussion of domesticity.

2.2 Understanding Labour Migration

International migration is a hotly debated topic globally, with nation states attempting to balance a need for immigrant labour with any xenophobic and anti-immigrant attitudes they hold and with the (perceived) sentiments of their citizens. While ‘time-space compression’ (Harvey, 1989; Massey, 1994) has resulted in mobility being lauded, on the one hand, it has

also, on the other, become feared, dependent upon the person who is moving. As Andersson (2014a, p.4) writes:

... while some travellers – whether executives, ‘expats’, or tourists – are celebrated for their powers to shrink distances and connect territories, others are fretted about for the same reasons. The label ‘migrants’ is usually, and paradoxically, reserved for them. These migrants haunt the rich world, but it is rarely clear who they are or why they provoke such fear.

Labour migrants, people who cross international borders for employment, are often perceived to be threatening ‘outsiders’ or ‘foreigners’ by citizens (or ‘insiders’) and often viewed (particularly in the West) as extractive and undeserving (Sassen, 1999). They are, as Walsh (2006, p.125) writes “... understood to live not completely inside or outside one nation state”.

While citizenship is predicated on there being some people who are included, as ‘full members’ of a community, they are placed in opposition to those who do not belong, the ‘other’, often migrants with few protections from deportation or expatriation (Benhabib & Resnik, 2009; Ryburn, 2018). Mouffe (2016) suggests that it is when the ‘other’ is perceived negatively, that relationships can become hostile and challenge political identities; creating ‘us’/‘them’ divisions. As Newman (2006) argues, the lines that demarcate those who are included and excluded within a nation state are institutionalised by the presence of a border (and bordered territory). When in combination with legal and physical infrastructures of immigration control, they determine who is allowed to enter, how they are able to and for how long. As Anderson (2013, p.2) writes, with reference to borders, “sorting out the desirable from the undesirable ... permitting only the deserving to enter ... The exclusion of migrants helps define the privileges and the limitations of citizenship ... citizens and migrants define each other”. Indeed, labour migration has long been a subject of academic debate, with the questions of why and how different individuals and groups move being considered across disciplines.

Neoclassical economic theories would suggest that labour migration is the natural and foreseeable product of wage differentials between sending and receiving nations (or regions/cities), and a result of push and pull factors (Borjas, 1989; Cresswell, 2006; Ravenstein, 1885). Viewing immigrants as rational economic actors, neoclassical economists assume that

individuals will move permanently from their 'home' and assimilate into their 'host' nation. These grand theories assume that individuals will make decisions based purely on maximising their incomes (de Haas, 2014), which, as de Haas (ibid., p.11) explains, portrays migration as "an optimising strategy for the benefit of all". These theoretical propositions had significant implications on policy. Indeed, as Willis (2010, p.iii) writes, "[e]ngagement with migration in development policy in the 1950s-1970s often focused on debates around modernisation, rural-urban migration and spatial patterns of economic development within countries". While wage differentials are clearly of importance and should not be dismissed, these macro-economic theories relied on quantitative and descriptive methods, which provide an overview of migration patterns (de Haas, 2014). They would assume that, if unregulated, labour migration would result in wage equalisation as individuals would always make rational economic choices (Arango, 2004; Willis, 2010). These underlying assumptions are, therefore, critiqued for inadequately addressing human agency (de Haas, 2014), for their one-dimensionality and for lacking to consider the ways in which migration is regulated (Arango, 2004). As Arango (2004) leads to question, if migratory practices were to conform entirely to the model proposed by neoclassical theory, wouldn't the number of international migrants be far more significant? And, why do some countries have significantly higher rates of out-migration than others of a similar economic positioning?

In order to provide a different perspective, and in response to some of the limitations of neoclassical perspectives, the importance of the household unit in decision-making to migratory patterns was considered much more thoroughly in the 1980s by proponents of the 'new economics of labour migration' (hereafter NELM). Established by Stark (1978), in particular, NELM "conceptualised migration occurring in developing countries as a household or family (instead of individual) co-insurance strategy aimed at diversifying (instead of maximising) income through risk spreading" (de Haas, 2014, p.14). Taylor (1999) suggests that NELM perspectives also consider the potential of 'development' in migrant sending countries and consider the role of remittances much more centrally. Rather than viewing migration as being purely individualistic, NELM sees migrants as informed decision makers and accounts for individual agency to some degree (Constant & Massey, 2002; de Haas, 2008; Taylor, 1999). de Haas (2014) and Arango (2004) argue, however, NELM is still, ultimately, situated within neoclassical theory, as it assumes households to be rational actors. Both neoclassical and NELM approaches fail to centre the constraints on individuals' capacities to make independent choices (ibid.). The state, for instance (and as stated), plays a significant role in deciding who

is and is not able to live and work within its territories. As Arango (2004) argues, a major shortcoming of these theories is an inability to account for the politics of migration.

Also emerging in the 1970s and 1980s, and rejecting the notion of anyone acting purely because of economic rationality, Marxist (and some post-colonial) scholars took a structural-historical approach to analysing migration. These theorists' approach to social science research was, Arango (2004, p.19) argues, fundamentally opposed to the proponents of neoclassical economics and NELM, and instead "saw social processes in terms of conflict rather than equilibrium". With these theories and interpretations, migration was understood as being embedded within the uneven and unequal global political economy, and within broader historical structures, impacted by colonialism, imperialism and their contemporary manifestations (Castles, de Haas & Miller, 2014; Massey et al., 1998). These approaches were embedded in dependency theory and understood capitalism to have created "an international order composed of core industrialised countries and peripheral agrarian ones linked by uneven and asymmetrical relations" (Arango, 2004, p.19). As such, they not only considered the role of the state and international relations much more centrally but were able to account for the reasons why migratory patterns would differ in similarly economically positioned nations. With these approaches, the role of migration in the 'sending' countries was also acknowledged, with commentaries emerging on phenomena such as the 'brain drain',¹⁰ as well as the exploitation and xenophobia/racism that many migrants experience in their 'host' nations or regions (Castles, de Haas & Miller, 2014). All of these factors were argued to be significant in individual migrant's decisions on whether or not to migrate and when to move 'home'.¹¹ While holding great import as a theoretical intervention, then, structural-historical

¹⁰ The 'brain drain' refers to a loss of skilled workers, or "human capital" (Castles, 2013; Castles, de Haas & Miller, 2014, p.161), as people move to countries where they can acquire a higher salary, or better opportunities for career progression. Today, countries compete for skilled workers, marketing themselves as attractive destinations to live and work; attempting to profit from this 'brain gain'. As Piper (2010, p.400) suggests, "the positive spin taken ... concerns migration's ability to boost economic development via remittances and 'brain gain' ... This constitutes a new feature of the overall trend towards taking a more optimistic view on the 'migration-development-nexus', as evident from the slogan 'migration for development'. A link is, thus, established between 'managed migration' and 'managing un- or underdevelopment' in current policy making". There has also, subsequently, been commentary on the idea of 'brain circulation' and 'brain exchange' (Vertovec, 2002).

¹¹ I use quotation marks here (and continue to throughout this thesis) because, as has been alluded to previously, interpretations of home are highly subjective. While it is often stated that migrants have a 'home' country (whether that be where they migrated from most recently or where they are citizen) and a 'host' country, this may not be how they personally relate to these spaces. Indeed, an individual may not be citizen in a nation-state but may feel as though it is where they feel most homely.

approaches also have their limitations. Migration is understood, again, from a structural and 'macro' perspective, which on its own cannot account for human agency. It is argued that this results in migrant populations being viewed as passive, and their reasons for moving being homogenised (de Haas, 2014). As de Haas (ibid., p.11) explains:

Historical-structural views tend to depict migrants as passive pawns or victims of capitalism who have no choice but to migrate to survive ... Numerous (predominantly qualitative) studies have highlighted the ability of migrants to defy government restrictions, discrimination and xenophobia by forging networks, new identities, communities and their own economic structures in destination societies. It would therefore be just as unrealistic to depict all migrants as passive victims of capitalism as it would be to depict them as entirely rational and free actors who constantly make cost-benefit calculations.

Despite neo-classical economic theory, NELM and structural-historical approaches all still holding significance with policy makers today, and substantial academic merit, they also have similar shortcomings. Not only do they assume migrants to be labour migrants – unable, for instance, to account for the movement of refugees, asylum seekers or even 'retirement migration' (Walsh & Näre, 2016) – but also place their focus on migration from 'developing' to 'developed' countries and do not thoroughly account for other kinds of migration (South-South migration, for instance, or 'elite' migration). As Fechter and Walsh (2010, pp.1197-1198) write:

While scholarship on migration has been thriving for decades, the bulk of research has focused on migrants who are moving from developing countries to Western industrialised ones; these migrants are often low-skilled and economically disadvantaged ... far less attention has been paid to rather privileged Europeans and Americans who relocate internationally for professional or personal reasons, often for medium- or long-term periods. Consequently, one critique of mainstream Migration Studies literatures might be that they are producing somewhat skewed notions of 'who migrants are', leading to rather particular and limited notions of migration processes as a whole.

Diverging from these theoretical approaches to migration, feminist scholars have taken both the agency of labour migrants and its gendered dimensions much more centrally, considering 'who migrants are' much more as a result (Boyle & Halfacree, 1999; Chant & McIlwaine, 2016; Chant, 1992; Kofman, 2004; Kofman & Raghuram, 2006, 2015; Silvey, 2004; Walsh, 2008;

Willis & Yeoh, 2000; Yeoh, Huang and Willis, 2000). Chant (1991), for instance, explains how decisions to migrate are often centred around the reproductive needs of households. While it is now well understood that migration can be a livelihood strategy used by women to diversify household income opportunities (Chant & McIlwaine, 2016; Chant, 1991, 1992; Izazola, 2010), it can also be a tactic for women to escape poverty and/or abuse and to change their futures. Indeed, Parreñas (2001a) writes about DWs having chosen to migrate because they were fleeing domestic abuse or other familial burdens/responsibilities. While labour markets in general have been feminised, through greater female participation in productive work, the feminisation of migration (and of poverty) cannot be separated from unequal gender relations and the “feminisation of responsibility and/or obligation” (Chant, 2010, p.260, also see Chant, 2006, 2008). Even upon their arrival in their ‘destination’, migrant workers experience life differently because of their gender. In Singapore for instance, as Huang and Yeoh (2003) demonstrate, the state’s legislation and societal attitudes mean that domestic workers’ bodies are subjected to much greater control than their male counterparts. As I will come to argue later in this thesis, these are violent patriarchal norms that render migrant women vulnerable to further abuse and violence. Feminist approaches not only complicate understandings of migration by drawing focus to women but also often take a micro perspective and account for human agency much more centrally.

It has also been argued that there are both cultures and networks of migration. Koh (2017), for example, argues that there is a normalcy and culture to emigration from Malaysia, with pre-existing economic and political connections impacting migratory flows. Indeed, certain migratory pathways, or corridors (IOM, 2018), are more well established than others, with seasonal migration (ibid.) and diaspora formation and policy (Hickey, 2015; Ho, 2011; Mullings, 2011) proving to be significant factors in this. With migrants increasingly maintaining relationships and ties to multiple destinations, there has also been greater academic attention paid to transnationalism (Barber, 1997; Beaverstock, 2011, 2002; Gardner, 2008; Walsh, 2006, 2014, 2018; Willis, Yeoh, & Fakhri, 2004; Yeoh & Willis, 2005) and appeals “against abstract depictions of global flows” (Walsh, 2018 p.13. also see Mitchell, 1997).

Beyond these perspectives, and as highlighted by de Haas (2014), there is much writing that focuses on migrants’ experiences in their ‘destination’ country and also on their role in their ‘home’ nations. Indeed, the role of migration in both urbanisation (Faier, 2013; Klaufus, 2010; McGregor, 2014) and ‘development’ (de Haas, 2010, 2012; de Haas & Vezzoli, 2013;

Raghuram, 2009; van Naerssen, Spaan & Zoomers, 2008) has gained significant attention, with the (potential) role of remittances being viewed strategically by policy makers globally. As has been stated previously, Filipina migrants who move to take on roles as DWs (in Singapore and elsewhere) contribute significantly to their 'home' economy, with 10.2% of the nation's GDP being attributed to remittances in 2018 (World Bank, 2019b). As well as their impact in their 'home' nations, and beyond their essential role in performing reproductive labour, DWs have shaped the urban fabric of Singapore too (as I will come to in greater detail in Chapter 4).

There is, then, a geography to migration, based on multiple intersecting factors, such as the positions and severities of border regimes, climate change, international relations, slave routes, colonial and (neo)colonial ties, and the practices of community building and belonging of immigrants and diasporic populations. Today, migration can be broadly understood as a dynamic and differentiated process, with migrant trajectories having been subject to regulation (Faist, 2013; Spaan & Hillmann, 2013; Spaan & van Naerssen, 2018). As Benhabib and Resnik (2009, p.2, emphasis original) write, migration is:

... related to globalization, involving the increased movement around the world of goods, services, information and capital of all kinds, as well as of legal, political and moral norms ... about people in transit, both as *immigrants* and *emigrants*.

Indeed, more recent academic research has focused on migration as a form of mobility, with Cresswell (2011) discussing the 'mobilities turn' that takes seriously "a fundamental geographical fact of life – moving". As Cresswell and Merriman (2011, p.84) write, "[w]e have reached for new ways of understanding that allow for the 'transient aspects of living,' the embodied, ephemeral, and mobile practices and performances of everyday life". Mobility is, however, an "uneven resource" (ibid., p.85), with feminist, post-colonial and intersectional scholars, for example, identifying not only the ways in which gender (in conjunction with their nationality, race and class) impacts a person's ability to move, but also how they are able to migrate (and what for) and the ways in which they are viewed in their 'host' nation. Walsh (2008, p.63-64), for instance, describes the complex positioning of "[t]he expatriate wife living in Dubai", someone who is able to cross international borders with relative ease (but with their male counterpart) and whose presence in certain areas of the city creates particular stereotypes of them. Additionally, in Singapore, migrant DWs are (and must be) female, whereas migrant bus drivers and construction workers are (and must be) male; an individual's gender becomes the determining factor in their ability to move and to complete particular

types of labour. It has also been suggested that privileging mobility risks idealising a disembodied subject who is able to move freely, a freedom that is not only an impossibility for some but also a privilege others' hold (Cresswell, 2006; McDowell, 2018).

As with every approach to explaining social phenomena, there are theoretical limitations. While all of these theories hold import for understanding contemporary human migration processes and experiences, there are perspectives that are not accounted for. Indeed, the role of the state and immigration industries are largely absent, particularly in earlier migration scholarship, and require further discussions.

2.2.1 The Role of the State and Immigration Industries in Labour Migration

As well as recognising the inequalities inherent in migration, and in mobility more broadly, it is important to acknowledge that migration is inherently geopolitical and biopolitical. Loyd, Mitchell-Eaton and Mountz (2016, p.68) demonstrate the ways in which the 'management' of migration is, and has always been, a geopolitical endeavour, intersecting with "technologies of biopolitical control". With reference to islands, they discuss the ways in which migration is embedded within systems of confinement, detention and militarisation, i.e., systems of discipline and state violence. While more detail will be given in the following sections of this chapter, states adopt practices of securitization to 'protect' their borders and 'sort' who is allowed to remain within their territories.

While nation states create extensive, severe and often violent, legal and physical infrastructures to control human mobility, it is called into question why they allow people to immigrate and emigrate at all. Ruhs and Anderson (2010), in their edited volume *'Who Needs Migrant Workers?'*, centrally question this, with different papers looking at labour and skill 'shortages' in different sectors and contexts. It is important to note that despite the anti-immigrant rhetoric of many states, and beyond the contributions made by remittances, economies have long been transnationalised and require migrant labour to function. As Mavroudi and Nagel (2016) demonstrate, present-day industrialised Europe – which is built on its histories of colonialism, slavery and imperialism – was created on the back of migrant labour of all kinds: rural-to-urban; urban-to-rural; international; permanent; temporary; forced; seasonal. Indeed, migrant labour has been, and still is, imperative to the (re)production of Singapore. As a nation for which all citizens are said to have a relatively

recent history with migration, migrants have been fundamental to nation-building and the state formation (Chok, 2017). Despite their essential role, however, labour migrants are still seen as necessary but not wanted, “subject to the ‘use and discard’ philosophy” (Yeoh, Huang & Willis, 2000, p.151) and maintained as temporary.

In order to ensure a migrant’s temporary status, states often create migratory policy that enforces their removal at a defined future point. Guest-worker programmes and sponsorship/kafala systems have all been adopted in attempts to ensure migrant workers do not try to settle permanently abroad (Pande, 2013). These systems are not new and have been put in place in different global contexts (Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016), but operating differently dependent upon specific policies and bilateral agreements. Framed as being a “win-win-win”, Martin (2007, online) writes that these guest-worker schemes suppose that “[M]igrants win by earning higher wages; recipient countries win with additional workers to expand their own productivity and affluence; and sending countries win through remittances and the return of workers who have gained skills abroad.” He highlights, however, that these systems can lead to increased rates of migrants who are illegally in a nation, as people over-stay after their visas/placements end.

While similar in many ways, kafala/sponsorship schemes have come under much greater criticism.¹² In these systems, workers’ visas are tied to a *kafeel*, or sponsor, leaving them unable to change employers.¹³ These systems are said, therefore, to be more likely to result in exploitation and abuse because of the vast inequalities between the positioning of employer and employee (Ahmad, 2017; Gardner, 2010; ILO, 2019; Pande, 2013; Varia, 2012). Because of this, Gardner (2010) argues that *kafala* systems are embedded in structural violence which create the conditions for further inter-personal violence, which can also lead to higher rates of illegal migration as workers flee abusive conditions (also see Pande, 2013). Ahmad (2017, p.52) suggests that there is a general agreement amongst scholars of the

¹² “The Kafala (Sponsorship) System emerged in the 1950s to regulate the relationship between employers and migrant workers” (ILO, 2019, online) and is common practice in the Middle East particularly. As the ILO (2019, online) explains, “[U]nder the Kafala system a migrant worker’s immigration status is legally bound to an individual employer or sponsor (*kafeel*) for their contract period. The migrant worker cannot enter the country, transfer employment nor leave the country for any reason without first obtaining explicit written permission from the *kafeel*. The worker must be sponsored by a *kafeel* in order to enter the destination country and remains tied to this *kafeel* throughout their stay.”

¹³ There were certain ways that these rules could be circumvented in Singapore, but only with state intervention when an official ‘case’ was launched against their original employer.

Arabian Peninsula that the *kafala* system “is fundamentally related to processes of state making and governance, and the normative assumption that the state should play the primary role in the adjudication and governance of foreign residents and migrants.” She adds, however, that (with reference to Kuwait particularly) this system has also become a state strategy to “buttress and consolidate overlapping systems of rule and privilege”. While not officially named as such, Singapore’s migratory system operates in the same way for many migrants, including DWs (The Online Citizen, 2014; TWC2, 2014). The “use-and-discard” (Bal, 2015, p.267) approach to migrant workers in Singapore, which is centred around “maximising economic benefits while simultaneously minimizing social and economic costs” (Devasahayam, 2010, p.45), is one of violence. Indeed, it sees the state benefit economically from migration while positioning migrant workers ambivalently as they are needed but not wanted (Yea, 2015). While there has been some literature which interrogates the lived experiences of working within a *kafala* system, there is very little written about the experiences of being sponsorless, or of how the state and civil society (often NGOs) support workers in these circumstances, a gap which my thesis addresses centrally.

While the state is often presented as a homogenous and monolithic machine in migration scholarship, and while it can feel as though it is one to migrants themselves, this is not always the case. Despite rules, regulations and processes being in place, individual state officials do not follow these in all circumstances. In Israel, for example, Kemp (2004) explains that “[p]ress reports have exposed serious allegations of corruption in issuing migrant workers employment permits”, the state has not acted as a comprehensive entity in these circumstances. Indeed, when unpacking the workings of different agencies of the Indian state, Gupta (2012) also demonstrates that the state can be fractured and heterogenous, with different agencies and officials interpreting and implementing policy and regulations in different ways. He argues that it is not just state officials that have an interest in representing the state as a unified entity, however, explaining that landless people demanding land reforms in India did so in order to make claims against it.

When discussing developmental Asian states, Shin (2019a) advocates for a more nuanced approach and understanding. He explains that there is a tendency in the literature that focuses on developmental states to fall into ‘methodological nationalism’, by seeing the state as an isolated entity. Instead, and drawing on more critical approaches and understandings, Shin (2019a, p.199) argues that it is:

... important to think of the multifaceted ways in which state formation has interacted with social forces of various geographical scales that extend beyond the national territorial border and deep into local and urban scales. Such an understanding also highlights the importance of seeing the state not free of class conflicts, but embedded in the socio-political relations that shape the parameters within which the state actions are determined.

It is crucial, therefore, to recognise the complexities surrounding states when considering their role in managing migration. Rather than always acting from above, and enforcing policy downwards and flatly, the state can also be understood as heterogenous and embedded within society.

Whether perceived to be functioning as a homogenous entity or not, the state is not the only party invested in labour migration, however, with vast industries now profiting from the movement of people. Companies that facilitate this migration – those who are involved with: international employment and recruitment; the sending of remittances, currency exchange; security; the sale of flights and visas; among others – all benefit from the international movement of labourers and the commodification of migration more broadly (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Sørensen, 2013; Jones & Pardthaisong, 1999). Many actors are now fundamental to facilitating some forms of labour migration, with certain migrant routes having been commercialised (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Sørensen, 2013; Lindquist, Xiang & Yeoh, 2012; Surak, 2012). In their edited volume *'The Migration Industry and the Commercialization of International Migration'*, Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sørensen (2013) divide the chapters into two sections, those that focus on what they call 'facilitating industries' and those that attend to 'controlling industries'. Facilitating industries, which aid the migration of workers, profit from the importation and placement of migrant workers through both legal and 'illegal' means (ibid.). Controlling industries, instead, profit from the management of migrant bodies. These roles vary widely from managing immigration checks at airports, which have been privatised entirely in some cases, to managing migrant detention and deportation procedures (ibid.). The private sector in some circumstances, profits from the enactment of state-endorsed violence.

There are, however, some actors who both facilitate and control migrant workers simultaneously. Employment agencies in Singapore, for instance, facilitate the movement of DWs to Singapore, placing them with employers and filing the necessary paperwork with the

state. They also play a role in controlling DWs bodies when in Singapore. As Wee, Goh and Yeoh (2019) explain, with specific reference to decisions over whether or not a DW will be given a day-off, agents often act as mediators and advisors, determining whether or not an employer will give certain privileges/rights to their employee.

While separate from them, the state itself is often reliant on these industries, having either outsourced roles directly or become dependent on their services over time. The vast scale and extent of these industries has led some scholars to comment on the existence of an 'immigration-industrial-complex' (Douglas & Sáenz, 2013; Golash-Boza, 2009), building on the ideas of the military- and prison- industrial-complexes. Emerging out of scholarship in the USA predominantly, Golash-Boza (2009, p.295) suggests that the immigration-industrial-complex is:

... the confluence of public and private sector interests in the criminalization of undocumented migration, immigration law enforcement, and the promotion of 'anti-illegal' rhetoric ... [which has] three major features: (a) a rhetoric of fear; (b) the convergence of powerful interests; and (c) a discourse of other-ization.

Pointing towards the huge profits that can be made from immigration law enforcement, Golash-Boza (ibid.) contends that with all three 'industrial-complexes' (the military-, prison- and immigration-), large-scale government investment and expenditure have been justified by a culture of fear of an 'other'. In all cases, this has resulted in marginalised groups suffering alongside the enrichment of others (ibid.).

For Doty and Wheatley (2013, p.427, emphasis original), the immigration-industrial-complex is considered to be an aspect of "security privatization", and more broadly the "*privatisation of sovereignty functions*". They are mindful to note that this does not necessarily imply that the state is in any way shrinking, but, instead, transforming. Indeed, they recognise that the state is "increasingly mobile and fluid, often blurring boundaries between public and private sectors and in the process increasing the power of both, especially vis-à-vis the population of persons in detention or potentially subject to detention" (ibid, p.428).

The privatisation of immigration control and facilitating industries serves several interests. It allows private parties to profit from the immigration which is necessary for the socio-economic functioning of the nation state, whether it be by facilitating migrants' entry into the

nation (legally or 'illegally'), managing their stay or ensuring their removal. It also allows the state to outsource some of its responsibilities without relinquishing its power. This not only obscures the workings of the state and decreases democratic accountability (Doty & Wheatley, 2013), but it also ensures that citizens working in these industries are invested in the state's immigration enforcement regimes. This outsourcing can additionally serve to support local economies that are struggling, by providing jobs (Doty & Wheatley, 2013; Gilmore, 2007; Golash-Boza, 2009). The economic security provided by this, and the more generalised fear that is created in these processes, is also argued to result in votes for particular political parties in some circumstances (Gilmore, 2007; Golash-Boza, 2009).

While there has been some academic attention given to the role of immigration industries, then, it is certainly not extensive. Indeed, Lindquist, Xiang and Yeoh (2012, pp.8-9) write that despite much being known about the reasons for migration, and migrants' experiences upon arrival in their destination, much less is known about "the forms of infrastructure that facilitate their mobility". Indeed, in earlier migration theories, these actors were rarely considered, if at all. In order to understand the lived experiences of migrant workers, and to situate my own empirical research, it will be important to take into account the myriad actors involved in DWs' migratory experiences. It is also important to consider the ways in which different migrant bodies interact with different kinds of industries. While some migrants will engage with airport security services, international removal companies and 'elite' recruitment services, others will have contact with loans-companies and detention centres. Furthermore, despite state sponsorship schemes having been theorised, experiences of migrants when 'sponsorless' are also lacking attention in academic scholarship, an important counterpoint to narratives that focus on migrants' experiences when sponsored.

The literature that focuses on the role of the state and immigration industries in labour migration uncovers the centrality of violence and the body, with 'stillness' (Cresswell, 2012), immobility and confinement being enforced in some circumstances. These practices of migrant detention and deportation are, therefore, discussed further in the following section.

2.3 Migrant Detention and Deportation: Detainable and Disposable Bodies

There are many different reasons why people might be detained and today it is seen as an appropriate and normalised way to manage and punish certain people (Coleman & Kocher,

2011). For refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants, detainment can be enforced because they have been accused of, or found to be, violating particular immigration or criminal laws, or because they have crossed the border before having their entry fully granted/accepted. Indeed, individuals (and sometimes whole families) who are accused of breaking laws, either by the state or an agent of the state, are often forced to stay in detention centres while awaiting decisions on their status or their deportation. This system can be seen as a response to bodies deemed “unruly” and are in need of control and categorisation (Mountz et al., 2013; Soldatic & Fiske, 2009), a practice of violence over bodies. While migrant detention is clearly a geographical issue, and despite there being a growth in detainment practices in many countries, there has been a lack of academic writing about the phenomenon in the discipline of human geography (Mountz et al., 2013). There has also been very little, if anything, written about the actual practices of migrant detainment in Singapore, an important gap which my thesis addresses.¹⁴ Both detention centres and camps (refugee camps and other formations), like prisons, allow the state to confine certain bodies, controlling their mobility. As Mountz et al. (2013, p.526, emphasis original) write, “[D]etention functions as part of a rationale to *regulate* mobility through technologies of exclusion, rather than to end mobility altogether”.

Foucault (2007) suggested that sovereign powers not only manage populations and demarcate boundaries, but also seek to control ‘circulations’, in order to manage bodily movement or mobility (also see Coleman & Kocher, 2011). Foucault also writes about the ways in which forced confinement and immobilisation, in different forms, are key control mechanisms. Indeed, he believed that the ‘success’ of carceral spaces was in their ability to discipline the ‘social body’ (Doty & Wheatley, 2013), something which Coleman and Kocher (2011) argue is an aim of contemporary immigration control (particularly in the US) which, through detainment and confinement, invisibilises migrant bodies. Carceral geographers, drawing on Foucault, find commonality between immigration detention centres, camps and prisons, sites where the state manages its population. Gill (2016), for instance, understands these practices as ‘punitive mobility’ and argues that it operates with a logic similar to that applied in prison. The state is not, however, the only vested interest in migrant detention (as

¹⁴ While many scholars highlight the potential of deportation for migrant workers in Singapore, as embedded within the state’s legislation, there has been little written about the actual practices and experiences of detainment and/or deportation. There has been some attention given to the detainment (or imprisonment) of Singaporean citizens who advocated on behalf of migrants, however, with Operation Spectrum having been highlighted particularly (as will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4, section, 4.2, p.113).

with labour migration more broadly). Building on the idea of the 'immigration-industrial-complex', Doty and Wheatley (2013, p.427) argue that, as the "fastest growing population in federal custody", detention centres are a "growth market for prison corporations". It has been argued, therefore, that the privatisation of migrant detention has led to an increase in the number of people being detained (Davis, 2003; Flynn & Cannon, 2009; Mountz et al., 2013), with some detention centres becoming "the primary industry of small towns and surrounding regions" (Mountz et al., 2013, p.526) giving incentives to ensure beds are filled. This reality is a demonstration of the violence embedded within these local economies.

Agamben (1998), drawing on the writing of Foucault, argues that the camp (specifically the concentration camp) was born out of juridical exception, where 'ordinary' law was ceased and people are rendered 'bare life' (*zoe*), "stripped of political life (*bios*), rendering 'humans as animals' ... [and] subjected to various forms of violence without legal consequences" (Sanyal, 2014, p.559-560; also see Owens, 2009). While the medieval city could be interpreted as a site of inclusion, with those who became excluded being forced to reside outside of its walls, the camp paradoxically excludes people through their spatial inclusion (Pratt, 2005). As Boano, and Marten (2013) write, the power to exclude people in this way is both a technique and symbol of control. It is argued that today, there is no clear distinction between what is the norm and what is exceptional, with the camp being "constitutive of today's city" (Alsayyad & Roy, 2006, p.15). In refugee camps, international and national laws are commonly suspended, often violently stripping people of their human rights and allowing for exploitative practices (Butler & Spivak, 2007). As spaces that fall outside of ordinary law, detention centres too, like prisons, are places where exploitation can be pronounced. Indeed, as Anderson (2013, p.78) explains, with reference to UK detention centres:

The logic of job competition that underpins labour migration policy should not be taken at face value ... although asylum seekers are not allowed to work while their claims are being considered, and failed asylum seekers are not allowed any access at all to the labour markets, detained (often failed) asylum seekers can be paid to work in the detention centre that is holding them ... Detainees are exempt from the minimum wage.

Therefore, it seems that labour and immigration laws are both by-passed in the space of the detention centre, as the state has the power to suspend its own legislation and enforce exploitative labour practices. Indeed, Butler and Spivak (2007, p.104) discuss the outsourcing of interrogation, imprisonment and torture in particular detention centres in the USA, and the

ways in which the state's sovereign powers are able to exercise their powers beyond their territory "to evade the restrictions of habeas corpus but, also, to extend the operation of sovereignty so that it becomes synonymous with Empire". Migrant detention is, thus, a biopolitical endeavour, a means by which the state – whether directly or via an outsourced, likely private, intermediary – is able to manage the bodies present within its territory and beyond.

However, migrant detention does not always take place in the space of a detention centre, with entire islands, in some cases, becoming sights of detainment and immigration control. Mountz (2011), for instance, highlights the role of islands in migrant detention, and the ways in which states control bodies by isolating them geographically and spatially. Indeed, it is argued that by controlling detainees' mobility – by enforcing movement to different detention centres, for example – the state is able to further invisibilise and isolate people, making advocacy and oppositional claims even harder (Mountz et al., 2013). As well as extending to geographically isolated spaces, border enforcement and migrant detention extend into the core of nation states and beyond isolated institutions. Today, in the UK, registers in university classrooms and passport checks by employers and landlords are just a few of the ways in which migration management has been outsourced; spread across spaces and scales and making all people potentially culpable.

In addition to considering the role of states, and the ways in which they use their power to confine and detain, mobility scholars also consider migrant detention as a form of 'stillness', with detained bodies being held in stark contrast to the 'hyper'-mobility that other (often more privileged) bodies experience. Cresswell (2012) suggests that there needs to be more attentiveness to enforced, uncomfortable and indefinite forms of stillness – incarceration, for instance – which are often associated with punishment.¹⁵ Stillness (or forced immobility) can, therefore, be used as a form of violence which means that certain people – people who are poorer, or who do not have documentation, for instance – are more likely to be confined than others. Indeed, space and time is, then, experienced differently dependent upon the body.

¹⁵ Freedom is, conversely, most often associated with mobility. This is not the case in all circumstances, however, with some forms of punishment, such as deportation, enforcing mobility and people with little mobility feeling themselves to be 'free'.

Andersson (2014b) also considers the temporality of detainment and the ways in which the state can control time. He suggests, with reference to ‘irregular’ migrants attempting to enter Europe via Ceuta and Melilla (two cities in the Spanish enclaves which are on Morocco’s Mediterranean coast), that people are subjected to “extended periods of waiting” and “an active usurpation of time by state authorities through serial expulsions and retentions” (ibid., p.795). Andersson (ibid., p.214-215) argues that through particular practices, migrants’ time, their present and future, is colonised:

a silent battle was being waged in the enclaves over time withheld and stolen, emptied time, time bought and given, time retrieved for observation, scrutiny, and care ... the waste of migrants’ time was predicated upon their spatial immobility ... a regime of inter-locking time-spaces, unevenly stretched over the enclaves’ tiny territories, seemed to regulate migrants as a population while disciplining them as bodies in the “biopolitical” fashion ... This time-space regime did not simply confine migrants in what activists called the “sweet prison” of the enclaves ... they rather seemed stranded in a topsy-turvy world ... reminiscent not only of the refugee camp existence invoked by migrants but also of the “total institutions” of Western social states.¹⁶

While not in state-run immigration detention centres, migrants attempting to cross into the EU territory typically experience life in camps, their bodies continually being detained and confined. The experience of this detainment is both spatial and temporal, with stillness being a tool against the ‘threat’ of free movement (Gill, 2009). Paradoxically, it is stillness that migrants long for too, just stillness in the place they are seeking to move to (ibid.)

In addition to writing which focuses on the management of bodies, and beyond that which attends to the spatio-temporal characteristics of detainment, there has been some (although fairly limited) writing which considers the emotional geographies and lived experiences of migrant detention. While there is more written about the experiences of people in refugee camps than detention centres, largely because of the issues of accessing these spaces, Ellermann (2010) discusses the despair that people experience while detained, highlighting

¹⁶ A ‘total institution’ was a concept coined by Goffman (1961, p.11), and defined as: “a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time together lead an enclosed formally administered round of life”. While analytically useful in some circumstances, I do not utilise the concept to describe the shelter because it is a space where, as I will show, the residents are not actually “cut off” from wider society at all, this being a critique widely cited while referring to other contexts too (Farrington, 1992; Moran, 2014).

the severity of their anguish and how some people are driven to suicide attempts. When describing the conditions of detention centres in Malaysia, she writes: “[I]n general, conditions ... are dire, marked by extreme overcrowding, insufficient provision of food and water, lack of even emergency medical care, and physical abuse by immigration officials” (ibid., p.423). Similarly, in Italian detention centres, there is a concern over every item that is allowed into the facility because attempts of suicide are feared (Campesi, 2015).

Detainees are not, however, entirely free of agency or powers to resist their captivity. Campesi (2015, p.429) argues that detained migrants had “an extraordinary ability to resist and undermine the deportation regime” by simply withholding any identification papers they might have (and which they often did not have). Without identification, the first step in the deportation process, sending migrants ‘home’ is an impossibility, leading Campesi to suggest that migrants also have an ‘undeportability’, reversing De Genova’s (2002) conceptualisation (which will be detailed in section 2.3.1, p.52). While the structures in place often discipline migrants in violent ways – managing their bodily mobility, detaining them and confining them – they are still actors with some degree of agency, who learn how to exploit the systems where they can.

While experiences of detainment have been documented to some degree, there is very little written about the difference that gender makes. While women account for a much smaller percentage of detained bodies, as Brané and Wang (2013, p.37) explain, with reference to the USA, “[i]n 2012, women’s average length of stay in detention was 10% longer than men’s, and in the first half of 2013, it was 18% longer. Women in detention are five times more likely to be asylum seekers”. Women’s experiences and needs also differ from men’s, as they are more likely to be primary care-givers and isolated from their children (ibid.). Not only does attention need to be given to the practices and spaces of detention, but there should be greater attention given to how identity shapes the experiences of people living as detainable bodies, which are also, invariably, deportable/disposable. Indeed, the layers of violence embedded within these spaces and systems need further exposure (which I provide in this thesis), whether detainment is spatially isolated or practiced in the core of a nation state, and whether managed quickly or across extended periods.

2.3.1 Repatriation & Deportation

As previously stated, citizenship is predicated on there being some people who 'belong' and others who do not. Citizenship is "a legal, an economic, and a cultural event, denoting official recognition of a special relationship between a person and a country" (Benhabib & Resnik, 2009, p.2). International migrants, as 'foreign bodies', are marked by a lack of belonging, often with no legal rights to voting, permanent residency or citizenship, and by their temporary status. This temporariness, and a migrant's transient nature, are maintained by the state which acts as a demographic manager deciding who will and will not be able to permanently settle. As with the infrastructure that is in place to control who enters a nation state, there are also legal, social and physical mechanisms for removing people, whether by choice or not. As I will come to show, the deportation/repatriation of DWs in Singapore is not always conducted by the state, but by citizens/employers in some instances, as the sponsorship system transfers these rights/powers.

Nation states, including the Singaporean state, often use the term 'repatriation', meaning, to "send (someone) back to their own country" (Lexico, 2019, online), when referring to the removal of migrant labourers from their territory. For instance, if a migrant DW is sent 'home' by their employer, the state will refer to this movement as 'repatriation', whether it is desired by the worker or not.¹⁷ There are, however, some important implications within the definition. To send someone 'back to their own country' not only implies that the country they are in is not, and cannot, be their home (even though the person or family may feel that it is), but also assumes that the person has a 'home' country of their own to return to, that they have a national identity and that the country they are in is not their home.¹⁸ This is, of course, not true for all, with some people having always been stateless or having had their national identity removed (whether the state itself ceased to exist or because they had it removed from them). The definition also implies, by using the term 'sending', that the process is straightforward and simple, a term you would also use for posting a parcel. There is a necessary process of dehumanising, then, as repatriation can be a violent process which can

¹⁷ As the 'Employment of Foreign Manpower Act' state, "... the employer shall *repatriate* the foreign employee to the international port of entry that affords reasonable access to the foreign employee's hometown within the foreign employee's home country" (MOM, 2020e, online, emphasis added).

¹⁸ In some cases, children may have been born and raised in a country that they are later 'repatriated' from, even though this is the only 'home' country they can identify with.

be forced upon people who have lived in a country for many years and for whom 'being sent back' is an emotional, legal, social, economic and cultural upheaval.

Similarly, deportation is defined as "ejecting immigrants out of a national territory and ending their migration story" (Hiemstra, 2009). The term 'eject', which is centred around disposal or expulsion, being indicative of a more violent process than 'sending'. Whichever term is chosen/used, both 'ejecting' and 'sending' have been normalised in many respects (Coleman & Kocher, 2011), with some people being seen as being deserving of this expulsion. As De Genova (2018, p.23) suggests, "[d]eportation must be approached precisely as a technique or tactic of domination, a 'positive mechanism' of 'the real functioning of power'." Despite its seemingly ubiquitous nature, however, deportation is a relatively new form of immigration enforcement, beginning in the nineteenth century, with labour mobility and border control being much less well-regulated prior to this (ibid.). As De Genova (2018, p.23) explains, with reference to the USA:

... provisions for the deportation of 'undesirable' migrants were only enacted as a means of enforcing the explicitly racist Page Act of 1875, specifically targeting Chinese migrants ... the purview of deportation was broadened to become a penalty for lacking a certificate of legal residence, and thus a form of interior immigration enforcement rather than just a pragmatic remedy to the inadmissibility of a migrant interdicted at a border. Immigration law itself was virtually nonexistent until this era, which introduced a panoply of racial, religious, moral, criminological, public health and political exclusions, prominently distinguished by the sorts of overtly racist laws ... In this regard, it is instructive that deportation was first enacted not against *all* non-citizens and therefore not primarily as a way to enact a partition between citizenship and non-citizenship, but rather as a technique for the exclusion of a particular, expressly racialised, and racially denigrated category of transnational human mobility. In a sense, the primacy of this racial obsession preceded and importantly prefigured what were still relatively inchoate notions of national identity and even citizenship. The service that deportation thereby did for hardening and clarifying the boundaries of nation-state space and citizenship is evident, but perhaps becomes much more stark only in retrospect.

While emerging from a history of racialised expulsions, in which it is still embedded, today deportation is used to create a divide between those who are allowed within a state's boundary, demarcating an inside and an outside and differentiating between those who are and are not citizens (ibid, also see Anderson, 2013; Bosniak, 2001; Hansen, 1993). The process of removing particular bodies from particular spaces – whether because they are a migrant

who has committed a crime, entered a nation 'illegally', overstayed on a visa or otherwise – is one which sees the state utilise its power over bodies, to control and manage the population; exercising its power over life. While utilising this power, then, it is important to note that the borders demarcating the interior and exterior of nation states have emerged from histories of colonialism and imperialism, meaning that some people have lost legal claims to citizenship in spaces that they may have historically had connections to. There are people, for instance, who would argue that borders actually crossed them, rather than them having crossed a border, by ignoring their presence when nations were being formed (Benhabib & Resnik, 2009). Indeed, borders, citizenship and immigration are not only highly political issues, but also dynamic, embedded in particular geographies and histories and enmeshed in contemporary social, cultural and economic systems and relations.

Whether framed as 'repatriation' or 'deportation', both of these processes ultimately involve the state utilising its power to choose who is removable, or disposable, and who is 'worth' keeping. When discussing undocumented, or 'illegal', migrants in the USA, and the essential labour they perform for the US economy, De Genova (2002, p.438) suggests that it is a worker's 'deportability', rather than deportation itself, that renders "migrant labour a distinctly disposable commodity". He goes on to argue that both the US border patrol and the US Immigration and Naturalization Service, while responsible for ensuring that only those permitted to enter the US legally do so, actually maintains the border as a "revolving door" (also see Cockcroft, 1986), "simultaneously implicated in importation as much as deportation ... sustaining the border's viability for the unequal transfer of value" (De Genova, 2002, p.439) (which migrant labour across the USA's southern border provides).

In Singapore, it has been noted that in cases of workplace dispute/conflict between migrant workers and their employers, the threat of deportation is often used, thus instilling fear in employees (Harrigan, Koh, & Amirrudin, 2017). With DWs unable to transfer employment, they are left vulnerable to deportation by both their employer and the state (and in some cases their employment agency too), resulting in them being fearful to launch complaints (whether officially or otherwise) about mistreatment (Devasahayam, 2010). Their deportability can not only be used against them, then, but can also become internalised so that they feel unable to leave abusive situations.

While maintaining the “outright and abject *disposability of human life*” (De Genova, 2018, p.26, emphasis original), large groups of people are treated as though they are ‘surplus’ (Li, 2010), despite their labour being desirable and often essential. Their labour power is tolerated but their bodies are not:

... their (racialised) bodies, their persons, their lives and wider communities in which they participate are branded as ‘undesirable’ and rendered virtual ‘waste’, human ‘garbage’ to be simply disposed of. It is in this sense, perhaps, that deportation has assumed a paradigmatic quality in our era of neoliberal global capitalism (De Genova, 2018, p.26, emphasis in original).

This paradox, of migrant labourers’ deportability, is also discussed by Wright (2006, p.2), who argues (with specific reference to female factory workers from the global south) that the notion of disposability is something of a myth, as:

the disposable third world woman possesses certain traits that make her labour particularly valuable to global firms that require dexterous, patient, and attentive workers ... these traits make her so desirable that global firms go out of their way to employ her whenever possible because the things that she makes generate value even as she depreciates in value ... this disposable third world woman is, in fact, quite valuable since she, like so many other characters of mythic lore, generates widespread prosperity through her own destruction.

Indeed, while an individual might be seen as disposable, then, the population of workers more broadly are specifically targeted to perform certain kinds of labour, as they are perceived to hold bodily and personal attributes that make them desirable workers. This clearly makes them not so easily disposable after all.

Of course, this notion of disposability does not just have connotations for the ‘receiving’ nations, but also for the sending ones. Tadiar (2013, p.38), for instance, argues that it is the slowness, or stasis, of neoliberal change that has led to the creation of surplus populations and intergenerational stagnation as a continuing “mode of life” in the Philippines, this all leading to ‘lifetimes of disposability’. Drawing on this argument, Pratt, Johnston and Banta (2017, p.170) have suggested that “part of this enduring temporality of disposability has been the respatialisation of family life through the massive expansion of labour migration”. Filipina nationals, who migrate as DWs for example, often leave children in the care of others (as was discussed in section 2.1, p.30) rather than being the primary care-givers themselves. Despite

the uncertainty of this kind of labour migration, and as has been referenced previously, reproductive labour has been transferred and transnationalised, altering family structures across nations.

Despite the continued threat, and in some cases enforcement, of deportation, people do find ways in which to resist this. As stated, Campesi (2015) comments on the tactics detainees used to prevent their deportation and maintain their bodily presence (even if in a detention centre) in the 'host' nation. These migrants' bodies proving not to be so easily disposable.

While bodily disposability and deportability (and undeportability) have, then, been theorised in different contexts, there has been little attention given to the emotional and embodied experiences of those who inhabit these positionings, particularly in Singapore, an intervention this thesis makes. While there is clearly violence embedded within deportation legislation and systems, the actual practices of this form of bodily removal, and the actors involved in it, are less well documented, another place where a contribution of this thesis lies.

2.4 Violence: Suffering Bodies

Violence is most often thought of as "the intentional use of physical force to cause harm or physical injury, either actual or threatened" (Castree, Kitchin, & Rogers, 2013, p.551) and has long been in the purview of academic research. It can be "directed towards oneself (e.g. suicide), towards others (inter-personal violence), or by one collective against another, including in the form of political violence" (ibid., p.551) with the World Health Organization (hereafter WHO) adding that it "results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation" (Krug, et al., 2002, p.5). In their definition of violence, the WHO also includes the word 'power' (in addition to the idea of violence involving the use of 'physical force') to broaden the scope to include coercion, intimidation, threat and neglect as well as other forms of psychological abuse.

Violence can occur at different scales (toward an individual or collective) and can be enacted as a one-off occurrence, at a more regular rate, or even continually for a prolonged period. Indeed, inter-personal violence is often referred to as 'directed' and can include self-harm, domestic violence, child abuse, criminal assault and warfare, with the perpetrator being known (sometimes intimately) to the victim in some instances, but not always. Centrally, it

involves bodies, with one body (or more) acting to cause suffering to others. As Tyner (2012, p.7) writes, “[b]odies commit violent acts (e.g. people yell, punch, kick, shoot, and engage in other ‘harmful’ acts); and violence is commonly enacted on bodies”. As Tyner goes on to explain, however, the particularities of individuals’ bodies, and the ways in which these bodies are related to one another, is significant. An individual’s gender, race, sexual orientation and religion may all be a factor in determining whether or not they experience violence in one instance or another.

The body has remained prominent in feminist scholars’ accounts of violence, with gender-based violence and domestic violence being primary focuses. As Warrington (2001, p.365) argues, domestic violence is a global phenomenon and was/is “the most common violent crime against women in England and Wales”. In Singapore, relatively little is written about domestic violence between citizens, with violence against DWs being more prevalent in academic literature. As Huang and Yeoh (2007, p.212) highlight, “violence within the home is not a phenomenon perpetrated only on family members but also on those incorporated into the household ... under the discourse of family”. As previously mentioned, feminists have long argued that the home space is not a sanctuary for all, as they are not only spaces of confinement and women’s unpaid and underappreciated labour, but can also be spaces of violence (Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Brickell, 2012; Tyner, 2012; Warrington, 2001). Accounts of verbal, physical and sexual violence towards DWs exemplify how unequal power relations can “transform the mundane spaces of the home into covert spaces of abuse” (Huang & Yeoh, 2007, p.197). As such, Pain (2014) suggests that domestic violence can be seen as a form of ‘everyday terrorism’. While it is prevalent globally, and has been discussed in some circumstances, it is argued that domestic violence still receives far less academic attention than other forms of violence because of its private and seemingly mundane nature (Katz, 1996; Pain, 2014).

Aside from accounts by feminist scholars, other geographers have considered wider scale and more ‘extraordinary’ forms of violence. Political violence, war, genocide and terrorism have all been important focuses of geographic research, with Gregory and Pred (2007), in their edited volume *Violent Geographies: Fear, Terror, and Political Violence*, highlighting the importance of situating any discussion of violence in broader geo-political and socio-historical contexts. In this volume, Kearns (2007), for instance, demonstrates how colonial legacies have shaped Ireland’s ‘post-colonial present’, with colonial violence and contemporary political

violence being part of a continuum. Similarly, Gregory (2004, p.13) demonstrates how the “war on terror” is one of the main ways in which the “colonial present is articulated”, with people in the USA, Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq all being subjected to political violence because of it. Indeed, Fanon (2004) argues that all colonialism is a form of violence, as it has domination at its core and presumes the inferiority of the colonised by the coloniser. He suggests that this can only be met with counter- or revolutionary violence.

These forms of ‘direct’ violence do not, however, account for those embedded more broadly in society, hidden forms that impact everyone (if unevenly); known as structural violence. First described by Galtung (1969, p.171), structural violence refers to violence where harm is caused without a distinct perpetrator and that is otherwise avoidable:

... when one husband beats his wife there is a clear case of personal violence, but when one million husbands keep one million wives in ignorance there is structural violence. Correspondingly, in a society where life expectancy is twice as high in the upper as in the lower classes, violence is exercised even if there are no concrete actors one can point to directly attacking others, as when one person kills another.”

Inspired by the Latin American liberation theologians, for whom the term was used to describe social structures that they felt were ‘sinful’ (Farmer, 2004), Galtung (1969) explains that this form of violence is harder to detect as it does not disrupt in the ways that interpersonal or episodic forms of violence does. Instead, Galtung (ibid., p.173) writes that “it is silent ... essentially static ... the tranquil waters ... as natural as the air around us”. Patriarchal norms, racialised inequalities, oppressive political systems, capitalist economies and poverty are all forms of structural violence, so ubiquitous that they have been invisibilised. Indeed, Nixon (2011) refers to the environmental devastation caused by capitalist, extractive industries as ‘slow’ violence, while Watts (1983) highlights the ‘silent’ violence of famine in Nigeria; both authors emphasising the temporality and obscured nature of structural violence.

Structural violence has received a great deal of academic attention, particularly by medical anthropologists who have used ethnographic methods to demonstrate how health, illness and death are connected to broader societal inequalities (Farmer, 2001, 2004; Holmes, 2013; Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois, 2004). Farmer (2001) argues that beyond being connected, inequality should be considered as a cause of illness in its own right. Structural violence, like interpersonal or domestic violence, causes bodily harm, with certain bodies being more likely

to suffer than others. Holmes (2013), while utilising Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence,¹⁹ argues that differences between people are naturalised in a way that also legitimises structural violence. When writing of the systems of violence in which migrant fruit pickers are embedded, Holmes (ibid., p.174) further explains:

Perceptions of bodily difference along ethnoracial lines serve as the lenses through which symbolic violence is enacted such that each category of body is understood to *deserve* its relative social position. Because of what are considered their "natural characteristics" indigenous Oaxacan bodies are understood to *belong* picking berries as opposed to other jobs. On the other hand, other ethnicities have bodies that do not fit well in the picker category and belong doing other forms of work.

These ideas are also echoed, as aforementioned, by Wright (2006), who argues that certain women are deemed appropriate for certain kinds of factory labour. Indeed, in Singapore, there are certain job roles that citizens no longer perform as they have become associated with migrant labourers; domestic and construction work, for instance, having been associated with 'foreign' bodies. In turn, these bodies (as I will come to show in more detail in Chapter's 4 and 5) are seen as being of lower worth, violently dehumanised and viewed as disposable.

There has also been some academic attention given to violence that is embedded within the structures and functioning of institutions, that is, institutional violence. Organisations with structures and systems in place that see some people succeed over others – with institutional racism prevailing in many organisations today, for example – have violence embedded within them. For some, then, the 'institutional' finishes a tripartite of violence – alongside structural and interpersonal/individual forms – that are seen as connected but distinct (Tyner, 2012).

Having considered these different forms of violence separately, Tyner (2012) argues that in reality they shape one another and are not so usefully distinguishable. He also suggests that there is a difference in the kinds of violence that are discussed in popular discourse and those highlighted in the classroom:

¹⁹ Bourdieu (2000, p.2) suggests that symbolic violence is "a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precisely misrecognition), recognition, or even feeling". It is not directed or physical but produced in unequal relations of power. He goes on to explain that the state holds "the monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence" (ibid., p.175). von Holdt (2012, p.115) writes that this form of violence is crucial to the state, as a "... mechanism through which social order, and the hierarchies and structures of domination it sustains, is reproduced over time".

... we too often teach our students about structural and institutional violence, to the neglect of direct violence ... [and] lose site of the most obvious –indeed, graphic– forms of direct, interpersonal violence. And while it is true that interpersonal violence dominates most popular discussions, to the neglect of structural forms, we should not be confronted with an either/or choice, a false dichotomy between ‘structural’ or ‘direct’ violence.

Indeed, both of these forms of violence co-exist and feed into one another. It has been argued that it is structural violence that often produces or at least exacerbates, instances of interpersonal violence. As previously mentioned, Gardner (2010) shows that Indian migrant workers in Bahrain are embedded within the structural violence of a kafala system, which, he argues, encourages interpersonal violence. The context of the migratory system, in this instance, producing, enabling and justifying an employer’s direct violence. Galtung (1969) also suggests that interpersonal violence is often enacted as a result of structural violence, adding that this is justified by cultural violence.²⁰ For Kleinman, Das, and Lock (1997) varying kinds of violence – structural, political, institutional and others – are connected in that they all result in ‘social suffering’, despite materialising in distinctive ways across different spaces and times.

Beyond highlighting the different typologies of violence, and how it unequally causes bodily suffering, geographers have also considered its spatial qualities. Rather than being universal, it has been argued that violence has a geography (Blomley, 2003; Tyner & Inwood, 2014), embedded in place but also producing it (Tyner, 2012). Building on Massey’s conceptualisations of space,²¹ Tyner (2012) argues that violence is relational and, as a form of both spatial and social control, has its own spatiality.

Feminist geographers have also written about perceptions of violence in space, and particularly how women approach space differently to men because of this (Fenster, 2002;

²⁰ For Galtung (1990, p.291) cultural violence refers to “those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence – exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (log, mathematics) – that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence ... Cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even feel right – or at least not wrong”.

²¹ Space and place are, for Massey (1994, 2004, 2005), relational, produced through social connections and both multiscalar and dynamic. Perhaps most importantly, she argues that they are imbued with power and social relations.

Koskela, 1997, 1999; Pain, 1997, 2001; Valentine, 1989). As Koskela (1997, p.315) writes, “[b]eing too afraid to take a path across a dark park is a practical question of everyday life”. The fear of violence shapes the ways people use public spaces and the ways in which they move through the urban. Feelings of safety and security²² cannot, however, be assumed to be tied to traditional notions of home as refuge either (as has been stated); nor are they static (Fluri & Piedalue, 2017). An individual’s identity, instead, will impact the ways in which they perceive safety in space, and the ways in which they are perceived by others. Of course, geographies of safety/unsafety and security/insecurity are related to perceptions of space, as much as they are the real potential for interpersonal, or ‘direct’, forms of violence. As well as unpacking geographies of violence, then, it is also important to try to provide a greater understanding, as this thesis does, of geographies of safety/unsafety and security/insecurity.

It is important, then, to interrogate violence thoroughly, in order to unpack the reasons why it has been enacted and what violent acts/practices do. Rather than separate out and make distinct the different forms of violence, while ‘neater’ analytically, it is important to show how different forms of violence interact with one another, acknowledging the possibility that some instances of violence may not fit into one distinct category. It is also important to consider what it is like to ‘be’ suffering (or to enact violence) – to be an ‘anatomy’ of violence – and to uncover the workings of the systems and infrastructures – or ‘apparatuses’ – of violence. Indeed, as Tyner and Inwood (2014) suggest, academic (and particularly geographic) research often acknowledges that there has been violence, but then does not unpack this further. Foregrounding violence, and demonstrating the ways in which it is spatial, relational and embodied, and the ways in which DWs respond to it, provides a framework from which I ground my empirical analysis.

2.5 Summary

By reviewing literature and tracing the development of academic theory, in this chapter, I have highlighted how domestic labour and labour migration are practices that are enmeshed in systems and histories of violence, which then situate them today. Indeed, while I have shown that domestic labour is often viewed as menial and invisibilised, and labour migrants

²² In this thesis I use safety and security (and unsafety/insecurity) interchangeably to describe a state in which someone is (or perceives themselves to be) free from danger or threat (or the converse for unsafety/insecurity).

are viewed as an undesirable necessity, academic writing does not always adequately theorise the violence that is inherent and embedded. Having theorised violence as a topic of importance in its own right, this thesis centres violence as both spatial and relational; a topic which warrants much greater academic enquiry. As such, the infliction of violence on DWs is analysed in this thesis, taking into consideration the spatio-temporal and historical contexts within which different scales of violence are embedded.

While the literature presented has shown that reproductive labour is often not valued – denigrated, feminised, invisibilised, commodified and transnationalised – it has also demonstrated how vital it is to the upkeep of society. The people who perform this labour – ‘domestic bodies’ who are most often migrant women of colour (particularly in Singapore) – can, then, be viewed as integral but undesirable. As such, and similar to labour migrants more broadly, their bodies are a point of tension. In response to concerns over ‘domestic’ and ‘foreign’ bodies, systems are put into place to manage them. As described sponsorship/kafala systems operate in many contexts, rendering some bodies vulnerable to further mistreatment, abuse and violence. Indeed, practices of deportation and detainment, as enacted on the body, are also systems of violence used to control certain migrant bodies, juxtaposed against the relative freedom other bodies experience.

While there has been a great deal of academic attention given to both domestic labour and labour migration broadly, I have identified gaps within both of these bodies of literature, where this thesis will intervene. Although much is written about the experiences of DWs, these accounts often fall into two categories, either highlighting DWs structural vulnerability and presenting them as passive victims, or demonstrating DWs’ agency and framing them as archetypes of everyday resistance (similar to the actions/populations described by: Ong, 1987 and Scott, 1985). This thesis, instead, builds on this literature to show the messiness of their positioning within unequal and unjust relations of power. While academic writing also tends to focus on DWs’ experiences during their employment, this thesis highlights DWs’ experiences when ‘sponsorless’ and having been rendered ‘disposable’. The embodiment of disposability is thus another area of this thesis’s academic contribution.

While domesticity, migration and violence have been reviewed separately in this chapter, I have demonstrated how they are related and how they position bodies in particular ways. By reviewing the literature on violence, I have shown how (in its own right and as embedded in

systems of migration and domesticity) it works on and over bodies, inflicting human suffering. Indeed, it is the unequal structural and interpersonal relations of power that situate some bodies as 'domestic', 'foreign', 'detainable' and 'disposable', with states, employers and citizens, amongst others, attempting to categorise and control them as such.

Witnessing Suffering & Writing Violence

You have to write about these women's experiences, otherwise you'll have blood on your hands too (Conversation at a social event in Singapore, 19th November 2017).

If ethnographers are meant to live with and like those whom they research (Van Maanen, 2011), then my fieldwork would likely not be counted as a success. I was never able to live with or like the DWs I met. I never became a DW, I never lived in a home with a DW and I never became a HOME shelter resident. I did, however, become embedded within HOME, and within the lifeworld (Castree, Kitchin & Rogers, 2013) of many of the residents, staff and volunteers, participating in their everyday realities and developing intimate connections with different individuals (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Indeed, using participant observation, conversation, semi and un-structured interviews and archival research as methods, I became a volunteer for HOME; running classes, co-ordinating events, accompanying residents to appointments, acting as a 'befriender',²³ completing case-work, supporting the HOME Academy²⁴ and eventually becoming involved in many other aspects of shelter management. As I will demonstrate, these different roles, along with the relationships that I built, led me to places that have received much less academic attention by other scholars who are seeking to understand the experiences of DWs in different global settings, despite their central role in shaping global migratory patterns and the everyday experiences of migrant workers.

During the time I spent in Singapore, my research aims and motivations were altered and re-shaped by the people I met, the things I experienced and the stories I heard. This chapter provides an understanding of this journey; how my PhD research started with an interest in

²³ HOME, like many other NGOs, runs a 'befriender' scheme which sees volunteers connect with residents and help to monitor their wellbeing.

²⁴ HOME runs a shelter for migrant DWs and number of specialised help-desks for migrant workers in need of support. It also provides legal and medical support for both its residents and other migrant workers, not only DWs, who need it. In addition, HOME runs an academy (HOME Academy) which provides educational and vocational classes for nearly 2,000 DWs each year (HOME, 2018).

migrant workers' ability to create spaces of home/belonging and transformed into a concern about experiences of migrant detention, removal and life in shelter, as well as DWs' positioning and framing within Singapore.

This chapter initially provides an insight into how I entered the field, my initial ambitions and my positionality, before reflecting on the uncomfortable positioning of 'the researcher' in relation to 'the researched'. Ultimately, it details the reasons why and how my PhD research was fundamentally altered in the field, reflecting on the process and impact of 'witnessing suffering', and then latterly 'writing violence', all experiences of which were transformative.

3.1 Entering the Field: Uncomfortable Encounters & Unpacking My Positionality

I first set off for Singapore in June 2016, with the intention of spending two months carrying out initial fieldwork and establishing connections with organisations which worked with DWs in Singapore. Considering my own PhD schedule, and visa requirements, I had decided that I would conduct extended ethnographic fieldwork in phases, as opposed to one longer stretch. Ultimately, I ended up visiting Singapore on two more occasions, spending just under a year in total in the country: for a six-month period between January 2017 and June 2017, and another three-month period between October 2017 and December 2017. Given the privatised nature of domestic labour, and the difficulties with 'accessing' research participants in general (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Wolcott, 1999), I had anticipated finding it difficult to meet with DWs and form intimate connections, or to get to the point where I would experience the oft cited 'deep hanging-out' that ethnographic research benefits from (Clifford, 1997; Geertz, 1998). Before arriving for the initial phase of my fieldwork, therefore, I had contacted two organisations to arrange meetings, HOME and Transient Workers Count Too (known locally and hereafter as TWC2), with the hope that I would be able to volunteer with them and to use this as a means of gaining access to the DW population. Initially, I imagined that these organisations could act as spaces from which I networked in order to meet DWs who were still in employment, feeling that my research interests, which at the time were centred more closely on how migrant DWs created spaces of belonging within others' homes, could only be partially explored from the site of a shelter (with HOME) or from within a research/advocacy based organisation (with TWC2). Indeed, while I understood that each of these organisations had different approaches to working with the community, I was also aware that they both allied themselves with DWs and worked to further their rights and freedoms within Singapore.

As such, the positioning of these organisations did give me some concerns, as I felt that my allegiance to them may leave employers and policy makers (who I had initially hoped to interview/interact with) wary of my research motivations; particularly given that so much research with DWs has focussed on employers' abusive practices (Huang & Yeoh, 2003, 2007; Yeoh & Annadurai, 2008; Yeoh & Huang, 1999, 2009, 2010; Yeoh, Huang, & Devasahayam, 2004). Given these apprehensions, I had believed that more informal networking would also be essential and planned to visit religious institutions and spaces where DWs spent time on their days off, to ensure I was also able to form relationships outside of these organisations.

Despite having a plan in place, if somewhat vague, when I arrived in Singapore for the first time I still felt completely overwhelmed and confused as to how I would ever develop meaningful relationships with members of the DW community. While I had been to Singapore before, and had friends who lived there, the feeling of alienation and of being 'out of place' was stark. Even simple daily tasks, like navigating the city and acclimatising to the weather, felt overwhelming:

I woke up feeling disorientated and exhausted, still feeling jetlagged. After getting ready for the day, I decided that I would go to the shelter, hoping that I would feel better if I immersed myself in my work. I decided that I would get the bus, remembering its location from my first visit. I looked briefly online at how I could get there using public transport, as I hadn't yet managed to get a local SIM card, but after leaving I managed to get lost. I became very flustered in the heat, as I walked in what seemed like a circle, looking for a bus stop that would take me in the right direction. I ended up getting on a bus, thinking that I remembered the number as an option for the journey, but I ended up in an area I wasn't familiar with; the bus eventually terminating and everyone on it departing. I tried to remain calm – although I could feel my heart rate raising and tears coming, sheer exhaustion and homesickness getting the better of me – but I walked to a main road to look for more buses and information. I eventually found a large bus stop with a route plan that showed the right destination. Sweaty, thirsty and stressed, I eventually managed to get a bus and after 20 more minutes I started to see familiar sights again (Extract from my field notes, January 2017).

Despite connecting with members of staff (and volunteers) at both TWC2 and HOME in the first few days of my trip, it became clear that volunteering at HOME, in the shelter, would give me greater opportunities to spend time with DWs directly (for details of my first encounter with the HOME shelter, see Chapter 7, section 7.0, p.167). The shelter provided a space where there was always a need for extra volunteers and for tasks to be completed; a space where I

was able to quickly establish both a daily routine and friendships with different members of staff, volunteers, shelter residents and even with DWs still in employment. In addition to the need for volunteers, it also provided a physical space to go each day; a place where I could spend time, talk and see the daily life of the shelter residents. The space of the shelter provided me access to an established community that I was able to interact with quickly and with ease. Indeed, urban ethnographers often have the challenge of locating populations as, unlike traditional village ethnographies, they can be dispersed across great distances (Duneier, Kasinitz & Murphy, 2014). In many ways, my discovery of HOME as a community – with DWs, shelter residents and the volunteers and staff – and in which I was able to become embedded, narrowed the field for me considerably.

During the first few occasions I visited the HOME shelter, after introducing myself to the other volunteers who came to run daily activities and do casework, I was often asked why I had chosen to do research in Singapore, and why I had chosen the topic of migration and domestic labour. While I had written what my ‘motivations’ were prior to my arrival in Singapore and thought I had a clear reason for my research aims, when I was asked the question while in the field, I struggled to provide a simple answer and started to question this further myself.

While being a white British woman, I was born into a Cypriot immigrant family, my father having been raised in a Greek community in London and with Greek as his first language. When my grandparents moved to live near my family in the West Midlands, they formed their own Greek community in the area, connecting with other families through the Orthodox church and extended familial and community networks. Growing up I had awareness of the differences between my family and others – in the food we ate, the language spoken and the practices at different events (such as weddings and funerals) – and the differences in how they connected to the UK as ‘home’. My own familial experiences and insights made me particularly interested in the experiences of migrants, especially female migrants, and how they were/are able to build family, community and spaces of belonging in places that they would not necessarily call their ‘home’. This personal interest led me to write about the experiences of Cypriot women during the process of ‘bordering’ in Cyprus for my MSc thesis, a process which reinforced my desire to continue studying the experiences of migration and mobility more broadly. This personal curiosity – paired with an academic intrigue in reproductive labour – led me to an interest in learning more about domesticity more broadly.

After visits to Southeast and East Asia, where I witnessed domestic workers gathering on their days off in public spaces, my desire to pursue further research was strengthened.

My decision to focus on Singapore, however, came later, during the initial phases of my PhD. Originally, I had hoped to conduct comparative research in order to understand how DWs' experiences varied across different settings and considered many potential field sites, such as Hong Kong, Taipei, Seoul, Dubai, Manama, Muscat, Nicosia, London and Singapore. Given my desire to conduct extended ethnographic fieldwork, the length of time I had to complete my PhD and my own (very limited) capacity to learn different languages, however, I decided quickly that this strategy of comparative research would not be feasible. After conducting research to try to understand the legal status of DWs in these cities and considering where I felt safe to do research as a young woman alone, I decided that being based in an English-speaking country, where I already had connections, made the most sense. Learning more about Singapore's growing DW population and their unique legal status within the island nation, further solidified my decision.

While I had come to the decision that Singapore made sense as a research site and I felt that my interest in unpacking the experiences of DWs was clear, being asked about my motivations when I was actually in the field made me re-question why I was there, and how I would ever write about a group of people to whom I was so clearly an outsider. Indeed, when I first started visiting the shelter with more regularity – and realised that the majority of the volunteers were, like me, white women – I felt even more troubled about my positionality. Familiar with the idea that voluntarism/-tourism, and 'development' more broadly, have been argued to be a neo-colonial endeavour that is often occupied by white women working to 'save' brown women (Abu-Lughod, 2016; Bandyopadhyay & Patil, 2017; Nelson, 2001; Syed & Ali, 2011) (a shift from Spivak's (1988) original observation that colonial domination was justified as white men saving brown women from brown men), my anxieties were exacerbated. These concerns only served to further my feeling of anxiety in the first weeks of my fieldwork, as I was already feeling perturbed with documenting every conversation and interaction I had each evening as field notes.

The extractive nature of ethnography (Siegl, 2019), and the lack of reciprocity that it can entail (Wolf, 1996), felt particularly pronounced in the first weeks I was in Singapore, as I would clumsily try to move the conversations I had with DWs closer to my research interests and

aims. Not only did this feel insincere and uncomfortable but it was also limited in its success; the shelter residents I was speaking to were not interested (unsurprisingly) in trying to explain to me if/how they had created spaces of belonging within home spaces they had (for the most part) just run away from. These attempts made the distance between me, as researcher, and the shelter residents, as the researched, feel very pronounced and was only worsened when I had to explain that I was a PhD student (as well as a volunteer) and that this was why I was asking questions that did not relate to their 'cases' or their stay in the shelter. Indeed, my positioning made me feel even more disquieted when I was asked by two different residents if my research was going to help them. As Klocker (2015, p.41, emphasis original) writes, with reference to participatory action research (which she abbreviates to PAR):

When conducting research on a traumatic issue, there is a great deal of pressure to achieve *something* ... Yet for academics who engage in PAR with the hope of achieving wide-reaching and structural reforms, 'failure' is a realistic prospect ... When a deeply emotional research process is premised upon 'making a difference' apparent failure is hard to accept, and can become a source of great distress in its own right.

Beyond giving me the opportunity to volunteer and support HOME, I felt that my PhD research would, in all likelihood, have little or no impact for anyone at all in Singapore; leaving me feeling guilty and extractive. While I did not start the process believing I would make a difference in this way, or specifically in order to do so, the realisation that I was asking intimate questions to advance nothing but my own career left me feeling anxious.

Aside from my time spent at the HOME shelter, I originally wanted to speak with DWs who were still in employment. While I would volunteer Monday through Saturday, Sunday became a day that felt entirely different to the rest of the week, a day when I felt it necessary to spend as much time as possible in the city centre, largely observing in the various spaces that DWs would regularly congregate (details about these spaces can be found in Chapter 4, section 4.1.3, p.110) or meeting with DWs through the contacts I had. Several volunteers at HOME, for instance, had DWs themselves and would put me in touch with them so that I could meet with them and ask about their experiences. While some of these interactions and experiences were interesting and fruitful, others felt uncomfortable:

Sheetal, [a lady who lived in the flat opposite the one I was staying in] invited me over for tea and roti ... Knowing I was doing a PhD, she asked me about my research but I felt awkward telling her I was specifically interested in the experiences of DWs, as she employed a DW herself; a lady who was, at the time, serving us tea. I simply explained that I was interested in gendered migration in Singapore but, before long, Sheetal was offering for me to interview her, as she had moved from India a decade before. Feeling awkward (and likely going red), I explained that I was focusing more on migration from within Southeast Asia – from the Philippines, Indonesia and Myanmar particularly – not wanting to waste either of our time doing an interview. She seemed content with my answer but then suggested I interview her DW, Mary-Jane, on her day off, saying she was from the Philippines and would be able to tell her all about her experiences in Singapore. She added “her last employer was awful. Mary-Jane can tell you all about her”. I tried to insist it wasn’t necessary but Sheetal called Mary-Jane over and said that she was going to be interviewed by me on Sunday morning, asking if it was OK in a way that really allowed no other response than “yes” (Extract from my field notes, March 2017).

Following this interaction, I did interview Mary-Jane, feeling unhappy that she had been put in the situation and had to spend part of her day off with me, but also somewhat (I am shameful to admit) grateful too, as I was finally interviewing someone who was in employment. To my disappointment and discomfort, however, Sheetal not only sat with us through the interview (which took place in her house) but would also intermittently answer questions for Mary-Jane, saying things like “what you’ve got to understand is ...”, to which Mary-Jane would reply “Ma’am is right actually”. Not only did I have to mediate the questions I asked, ensuring I did not ask anything about Mary-Jane’s current employment, but I also felt that I should keep the interview as short as possible, knowing that Mary-Jane was likely very wary of how she answered questions in front of her employer and likely frustrated that this was how she was spending an hour of her day ‘off’. While it was interesting for me to see this dynamic, I felt that I was not really being told what Mary-Jane thought; instead, I was listening to what Sheetal wanted me to hear. Not knowing Mary-Jane well, however, meant I was completely unable to decipher this, leaving me feeling that the interview had really served no purpose for my research and with a guilty revelation that I had wasted some of Mary-Jane’s time off.²⁵ While I had managed to interview someone without my connections to HOME

²⁵ Geertz (1998) discusses the importance of an ethnographer being able to decipher the deeper meanings in what people say and do. In order to reach the “thick description” necessary for good ethnography, he uses the example of a wink in a classroom to explain this further: “the point is that between ... the ‘thin description’ of what the rehearser ... is doing (‘rapidly contracting his right eyelids’) and the ‘thick description’ of what he is doing

being known, something I initially felt necessary, I did not feel like I had achieved anything productive.

In hindsight, the above experiences – being questioned about my motivations by volunteers in the shelter, observing in public spaces with no real idea of what I was achieving and interacting with people like Sheetal and Mary-Jane – were all informative and helped me move forward in my research. These encounters, while uncomfortable, meant that I thought much more actively about how the relationship I developed (or did not develop, in the case of Mary-Jane) shaped people's responses to my questions. While I had thought about this theoretically before, it made me rethink this in practice, becoming aware early on of just how important these matrices of power – in which I (as 'researcher') and the DWs I met (as the 'researched') were embedded – were to my research. Indeed, Rose's (1993) call for scholars to reject masculinist tendencies of universalising claims and Haraway's (1988) call for a consideration of 'situated knowledges' became particularly pertinent, bringing an overt awareness to the lived, political and subjective nature of my research and field experiences.

3.2 'Doing' Ethnography: Transforming Research Aims & 'Locating' the Field

After several uncomfortable encounters and conversations in the first weeks of my fieldwork – and while feeling uneasy about my positioning, motivations and aims – I started to focus much more broadly on building relationships with the shelter residents and supporting HOME as a volunteer. I stopped trying to direct conversations and became less concerned, for a period at least, with data collection directly. I continued to write field notes each day but tried to allow the field to guide me and to stop forcing awkward conversation and interviews.

Indeed, despite my initial concerns, as the months progressed, I would extend my parameters and comfort zone to attend picnics, birthday celebrations, karaoke, basket-ball games, pageants, church and training centres on Sundays.

('practicing a burlesque of a friend faking a wink to deceive an innocent into thinking a conspiracy is in motion') lies the object of ethnography: a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures in terms of which twitches, winks, fake-winks, parodies, rehearsals of parodies are produced, perceived, and interpreted, and without which they would not ... in fact exist, no matter what anyone did or didn't do with his eyelids" (ibid., p.7).



Figure 1: 'Pageant Contestants on Kartini Day'. Kartini was a Javanese woman who fought for the rights of Indonesian women and girls to get an education. She is a national hero and is celebrated on the 21st April each year for her work on female empowerment. Here, DWs had either bought or made costumes to compete in a pageant in her honour (photo author's own 2017).



Figure 2: 'Learning new skills'. These DWs had chosen to spend their day off in classes, learning how to style hair. Many of these women hoped to move away from Singapore and to work as beauticians or hairdressers nearer their families in the future (photo author's own, 2017).



Figure 3: 'Finding shade to rest'. I spent time with DWs gathering in public spaces where there was shade and space to sit and eat. Here, Indonesian DWs gathered to share food, relax and take selfies (photo author's own, 2017).



Figure 4: 'Karaoke'. Here, a group of DWs celebrate one of their birthdays at a karaoke bar. They all bought food and drink and had a cake to celebrate. They spent the day singing both famous songs from the Philippines and the USA (photo author's own, 2017).



Figure 5: 'Basketball League'. Many DWs spent their day-off participating in sports teams or other leisure pursuits. Here, DWs had formed a basketball league and rented a sports hall at a school where they could compete (photo author's own, 2017).



Figure 6: 'BBQ in the Park'. On their days off, DWs would often cook dishes to take out to the parks, beaches and city centre to eat. Here, a group of DWs and male migrant workers had rented a BBQ pit in the park to celebrate one of their birthdays (photo author's own, 2017).

One of the ways in which I was ultimately able to connect with DWs in employment more easily was by attending the courses/classes that HOME and other organisations ran for DWs on their days off. Here I used the relationship I developed with the organisation to my benefit, rather than worrying about it. Indeed, my relationship with the HOME staff was always positive and reciprocal. Over time, the people I met and got to know more intimately started to invite me to other events they were attending, or just to relax with them. While the informal conversations, interviews and opportunity for participant-observation I had on Sundays were insightful and interesting, similarly to the time I spent in the shelter, I still felt I was 'failing' at ethnography somewhat, as I was always asking the DWs I met about their work/living experiences but could never actually visit them in their 'work' environments.

While feeling some dissatisfaction with how my fieldwork was progressing, it was only after being in Singapore for a few months, during the second phase of my fieldwork, when it occurred to me that I was actually already spending considerable time in spaces which were, in themselves, of both personal and academic significance. As I spent more time with the shelter residents and allowed them to lead conversations, rather than unsuccessfully trying to impose my original interests – and as I learnt more about the reasons for them having left their employment and how their 'cases' were managed – my own research interests shifted. Indeed, by allowing conversations and unstructured interviews to be taken in the direction desired by the people I was speaking to – this being a positive way to find out the issues that they, as a community, faced (Willis, 2006) – I realised that I was already incredibly well and uniquely placed to unpack and question how migration and migrant bodies, were being managed and disciplined at a broader level in Singapore.

My presence in HOME – and within the lifeworld of the residents, staff and volunteers – allowed me to bear witness to the broader struggles that the residents faced as domestic workers, migrant labourers, and individuals who were either unable to leave the country or facing deportation. Recognising this, and the importance of the HOME community to the DWs who were still in employment, I started to ask less about their experiences of belonging within their employers' homes (although details of this did continue to emerge naturally in conversation) and began to ask more about their experiences in the shelter, and about the events, emotions and places I was actually seeing and experiencing with them. Indeed, it was my exposure to these spaces and stories, particularly to experiences of suffering that ultimately reshaped my research, leaving me compelled to write about them. By participating

in the everyday life of the shelter and the HOME community, and developing intimate connections with different individuals (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995), over time, I realised I was already 'doing' ethnography. Indeed, as time went on I not only became much more comfortable with my positioning within the shelter, and with the DWs and residents I met, but also allowed my positioning and experiences to guide my research.

My positioning as an outsider, as an ally/volunteer to HOME (but not a member of staff) and someone who was not an employer, made DWs feel comfortable speaking with me candidly about their experiences in employment, in Singapore more broadly, and in the shelter. It also made conversations with employment agencies feasible in some instances, as they would see me as a white, British, female researcher without knowing my opinions on their recruitment practices. While I remained an outsider in many respects, then – I never became a DW, an employer, a Singaporean citizen, or truly transformed my positioning in any other overt way – over time I did become fully embedded within the shelter and would complete tasks without consideration of whether or not they served my research. While HOME staff welcomed me to the organisation from the outset, with little hesitation about my research aims, my relationship with them grew considerably as I demonstrated my commitment to the organisation as a volunteer. I ended up being involved in supporting the management, being trusted to make decisions about the best way to support the shelter and helping to organise a number of HOME's events. By giving up on my concern over whether or not I was gathering 'good' or 'appropriate' data, and lowering my anxieties about my positionality and status, I became a familiar and trusted face to the staff, volunteers and residents of HOME and did, in many ways, become an 'insider' too.

Indeed, I ultimately was able to more formally interview 45 different DWs (29 of whom were HOME shelter residents, some of these DWs I interviewed multiple times), three members of the HOME staff, five HOME volunteers and six employment agency staff members²⁶. I learnt about many more shelter residents' cases and experiences, however, by spending most days in the shelter helping with activities, accompanying them to meetings or simply 'hanging out'. I also had regular informal conversations with many more HOME staff members/volunteers. In addition, I occasionally interacted with academics and activists, staff at TWC2 and Project X, employers, members of DW networks, police officers and MOM staff. My relationships with

²⁶ For a list of all the people I formally interviewed see Appendix A.

these people varied considerably, with some people becoming close friends (with whom I am still in contact) and others whom I only interacted with on a single occasion. While I was generally very open about my research, when meeting people outside of HOME who were not themselves DWs (such as Sheetal), I felt more unsure about how to explain my presence in Singapore. I would often be much more vague about my research interests, knowing that the experiences of DWs in Singapore were a contentious issue in many respects. While I only detail some of these encounters, they all shaped and informed this thesis and the way I chose to analyse, theorise and write.

In general, I had very few issues with language barriers, despite the DWs I met being from several different countries with even more languages that I was not familiar with. While some of the shelter residents spoke very limited English, there was nearly always another resident or volunteer that was available to translate when details of their cases were required. One of the DWs I grew closest to, Jayna, spoke very little English and struggled to interact with many of the other residents because she spoke an Indian language that few others shared.²⁷ We slowly learnt to interact with one another by using our own sign language, Google translate, pointing to photos and just being in each other's company a lot. By attending volunteer-led classes and being forced to live in a place where English was the shared language, Jayna (like some of the other longer standing residents) did also vastly improve her English language skills across the period she resided in the shelter.²⁸ While I did not formally interview her, I always made sure I knew how Jayna was doing more generally and learnt a lot about her personal struggles in the shelter (see Chapter 7, section 7.1, p.173 for more details).

Aside from utilising ethnographic methods, I also conducted archival research in order to understand the role of migration in Singapore and the development of the Foreign Domestic Worker Scheme. By reading archives housed in the National Archives of Singapore, as well as primary and secondary histories and speeches at the National University of Singapore's Library, I gained a broader and more critical understanding of the positioning of DWs in

²⁷ At some points there were one or two other residents that could communicate with Jayna, but often she did not share a language with anyone who resided in the shelter.

²⁸ One resident, Khin Aye, moved to the shelter with very limited English language abilities but left after three years with a very high fluency. Her changing levels of language skills also, eventually, meant that she knew when her translator (provided by the Singaporean courts as she had a case against her employers) was not interpreting her correctly (for more details see Chapter 6, section 6.1, p.147).

Singaporean society historically and contemporarily. In Singapore, as in other post-colonial contexts, it is important to be mindful that archives are often the product of colonial rule and domination. While utilising these records, therefore, I was mindful that this knowledge (as with any other form) is situated, gendered and partial (Buss & Kadar, 2001; Ruiz, 2018; Stoler, 2002), as well as being “products of state machines ... [and] technologies that bolstered the production of those states themselves” (Stoler, 2002, p.98).

Of course, my positioning continued to make me feel uneasy at different times throughout the period I was in Singapore – for instance, when a new resident would arrive and begin to call me ma’am, or whenever I explained to a stranger that I was really in Singapore to conduct PhD research. I was in fact happy on the first occasion a shelter resident declined an interview with me because it showed that someone, if not representative of anyone else, felt able to say no. Over time, some residents opened up about things they initially did not want to admit to, such as crimes they had committed, their real age or having intimate relations with others (in and out of the shelter). On occasion, I would be so invested in shelter residents’ lives that I would get angry, upset and frustrated when I discovered they had lied to me about something. One of the HOME staff members had told me on my first day in the shelter “not everyone here is an angel”, a statement that came back to me when residents broke shelter rules or opened up about things they had done in their past.

As my research aims and interest transformed, rather than the shelter narrowing my research, spatially or otherwise, it provided me with opportunities to go beyond its physical walls to reach the court, the police station and the MOM, as well as to embassies, public spaces, hospitals, clinics, recruitment agencies, private homes and even to corporate events and festivals throughout the island nation. All of which broadened the scope of my interests. While being a volunteer and researcher brought its own ethical dilemmas,²⁹ and despite not being able to reach out to certain people/institutions for interviews (such as agents of the state), even my initial concerns about my connection to HOME stopped worrying me over time, as my experience with the organisation grew to be so significant.

²⁹ One of the other challenges with my research was the accountability I felt to HOME, and to the other activist/charitable organisations I interacted with. When considering what to share within this thesis, I was conscious that my writing could have negative impacts on people and organisations that I believe are doing invaluable work; so was mindful of this throughout my writing process. In some instances, this meant me choosing not to write, with the potential of harm staying in the forefront of my mind. Where I could, I sought the opinion of the people who might be impacted.



Figure 7: 'Singing Carols at a Corporate Event'. The shelter residents attended a staff Christmas party (of an international retailer that supports HOME) to sing carols. They were then given lunch and gifts from their product range (photo author's own, 2017).



Figure 8: 'Vesak Day Celebrations'. I accompanied some of the HOME residents to a large Buddhist Temple on Vesak Day. At this festival, which marks the celebration of Buddha's birthday, we were given lunch and the residents visited different prayer rooms (photo author's own, 2017).



Figure 9: 'Yoga in the Park'. On occasion, the shelter residents were invited to participate in yoga sessions in a park. A yoga instructor would meet the residents early in the morning while it was still relatively cool and lead them in meditation too (photo author's own, 2017).



Figure 10: 'Visits to Hospital'. Here, another volunteer, shelter resident and I visited a resident, and friend, who was in hospital after an operation. She had pins put in her pelvis and plates in her spine. She was able to send this photo to her concerned family in Myanmar for reassurance (photo author's own, 2017).

Indeed, while the shelter quickly became the centre of my fieldwork, through the conversations and interviews I had with its residents, I ultimately had to re-draw lines around the space I imagined to be the 'field'. Initially, if anyone asked about my research, I would simply state that I was 'doing' fieldwork in Singapore, imagining its national border to be the one that confined me. In reality, however, I spent my time in very specific sites within the island nation, discussing places and journeys through and beyond its borders. While always having the intent to consider the experiences of migrant workers, I had not fully anticipated how fundamental the 'home' countries of the shelter residents (and other DWs) I spoke to were. For instance, when asking one resident about how she had coped with living with an employer with whom she had a particularly troubled relationship, she mentioned feeling grateful just for having a bed. At the time I felt saddened by this comment, but latterly learned that this resident had lived on the street as a child, her parents having been sent to prison as member of a Yakuza syndicate in the Philippines:

When I was a kid my mother was from another place, they moved her when she was a baby and they bring her in Japan... And, at the age of 14 years old, she is a member of Yakuza group ... and she belongs to one of the most famous syndicates in Japan. And then she had a relationship with a Filipino man. It's my father... I grew up with my parents but I always sleep in the street. I grew up in the street, in this place [she said while pointing to a drawing she had just completed]... Last time I always, my life is very hard and, and, because my parents didn't care about me... there is no one taking care of me (Interview with Eve, May 2017).

This encounter, and others, demonstrated one of the difficulties of researching migration more broadly, as experiences in one place (a place which you cannot always visit) shapes the experiences in others. While many of the DWs and shelter residents I met spoke about their experiences prior to Singapore and their reasons for moving, as well as their hopes and migratory plans for the future, I was only there for a small part of their journey. While I was present when residents awaited deportation, albeit sometimes extended periods of waiting, I was unable to bear witness to their experiences beyond this point. Social media (and technology more broadly) did help me to stay in touch with some of the residents but I was not able to keep in contact with other people at all, leaving me unsure of their trajectories beyond the shelter (even when they remained in Singapore). The location in which I gathered data both provided opportunities and also limited my interactions.

Indeed, as many feminist and post-structural researchers have addressed, the location in which knowledge is created, and the ways it is gathered, are important components of its formation. As Cairns (2013, p.324) insists, “feminists have long emphasised the significance of location in their scholarship”, referencing Haraway's (1988) notion that knowledge is “situated” and Alcoff's (1991, p.7) statement that “location is epistemologically salient”. The location in which knowledge is produced is important to any kind of research, whether it be from a desk with a data-set or in the field. Anderson (2004, p.254) argues that the “social constructions of knowledge can be enhanced through harnessing the inherently socio-spatial character of human knowledge”. He discusses the importance of where knowledge is produced, and the potential strengths of conversations he had while travelling through an area. Ethnography can be the exemplar in this regard, as researchers often have access to the spaces in which their research participants live, work, travel through and/or socialise. Interviews and conversations during fieldwork can happen in a multitude of spaces, however, and not necessarily in a place of interest or significance. Indeed, Elwood and Martin (2000, p.649) suggest that researchers pay too little attention to the geography of the interview, writing that “the interview site itself produces “micro-geographies” of spatial relations and meaning, where multiple scales of social relations intersect in the research interview”. They go on to explain that beyond practical concerns, such as where people can access, and beyond the dynamics of power that situate the interviewee and interviewer, researchers need to consider how participants might relate to the space itself. Similarly, Cairns (2013, p.324) suggests that more than just the spatiality of the data collection, the geography of the field needs further reflection: “[W]hile ethnographic knowledge is always produced in context, it also produces that context in ways that warrant closer inspection”. It is important for researchers to consider the significance of how the research process itself produces a new or altered context. In other words, careful consideration is needed before researchers draw lines around a field site, as this is a process by which spatial (and other) boundaries, which were not necessarily there to begin with, become demarcated.

While the majority of the conversations and interviews with the shelter residents took place in the shelter itself, this space, and our relationship within it, would have impacted the information that was shared with me. For many residents, the places that they had lived prior to their arrival in the shelter, their ‘homes’ – whether it be in their ‘home’ countries, with their agencies or at their employers’ – were far from ideal, sometimes regarded as sites of trauma,

abuse and/or violence. Experiences of these different spaces would, then, have impacted their relationship with the shelter, and with me in it.

3.3 Witnessing Suffering: Ethics and Accountability

During my fieldwork, and particularly while in the HOME shelter, I ended up witnessing a great deal of distress. Prior to departing for Singapore, I undertook ethics training at the LSE and followed their ethics review processes. As I anticipated (accurately) that my research would involve me speaking with individuals who had experienced sexual violence and were positioned 'vulnerably', I was required to provide additional information and have my research plans approved by a committee. In addition to producing documents that outlined my research aims and interests, which could be given to the shelter residents and other DWs that I met, I also created a form that I intended to give out at the beginning of each interview and to get signed. Within the first few days of my fieldwork, however, and during a conversation with a shelter resident, I learnt that many DWs end up signing contracts that they do not fully understand. Indeed, the resident with whom I was speaking about this, Jaya, had signed a piece of paper that her employer had given to her, which admitted to having taken items from her employer without her having realised. While I remained committed to gaining the informed consent of the residents and DWs that I interviewed, following conversations with residents like Jaya, I quickly realised that my initial intent of asking for people to sign forms in this context was problematic in itself. Instead, I provided each interviewee with a brief spoken overview of my research before I asked them questions, ensuring that I gained their consent verbally (which I recorded) once I felt comfortable that they understood exactly why I was asking questions and how the information they shared would (or could) be used.

While I was aware before I left for Singapore that I would likely hear about cases of physical and sexual abuse, then, I had not anticipated how much continued suffering I would bear witness to, how it would feel to spend time with people recounting details of their abuse, or how it would feel to try and support people who were in pain, depressed, suicidal and haunted. While the shelter was, at times, a space of fun, solidarity, friendship, strength and rebellion, it was also a site where people felt trapped, scared, sick and tired (for a much more detailed discussion of the shelter as a space, see Chapter 7). The courtroom, helpdesk, hospital, and many other sites that I visited, were also spaces where I continued to witness

fear, anxiety, grief and sorrow. Indeed, there were occasions when I stopped interviews, or changed the questions I was asking entirely, because the person I was interviewing was clearly becoming very upset by the stories they were sharing:

While I hadn't asked about it directly, Rosamie started recounting the events that led up to her employer beating her. She spoke about the event and also about violence she had experienced previously from her husband; tears rolling down her face and her voice trembling. I decided to stop recording at that point. Rosamie was getting very distressed and I felt wrong to be recording her. I knew I wasn't the source of her pain, but I didn't want to be a part of her continued suffering and wasn't sure that sharing was helping her to heal. I hugged her while she cried and then we just sat quietly together (Extract from my field notes, February 2017).

There were also occasions where I struggled to stay with a person while they recounted their experiences to me or other volunteers, as well as times where I sat and cried with residents or in the evening while writing field notes. Some stories stayed with me for weeks, impacting my sleep and shaping the ways in which I related to my research and the people I encountered in the field.

In her book entitled *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks your Heart*, Behar (1996) describes the ways in which her own experiences and positioning shape the ways in which she 'does' research. By placing herself within her research, and making herself 'vulnerable', she shows how her life experiences impact the ways in which she interacts with people and relates to them, ultimately advocating for researchers to demonstrate their emotional involvement with their research participants (Davids, 2014). While Behar's work has been subject to some criticism, with it being suggested that it is self-indulgent and colonises the voice of her 'subjects' with her own (Kirklighter, 2002; Patai, 1994; Socolovsky, 1998), many others, particularly feminist scholars, also advocate for self-reflexive research that acknowledges a researcher's subjective positioning in the process of knowledge production (Duran, 1991; Rose, 2001). Behar also chooses to share very personal details with her audience, including descriptions of traumatic events and her relationship with her family. While this allows her to make connections between her life and the people whom she is researching and provides an insight into how she bonded with her research participants over shared experiences and commonalities, other scholars may feel uncomfortable or unable to do this. By using pseudonyms, altering place names and sometimes inevitably omitting dates, as I have in this thesis, it is often possible to anonymise research participants while sharing

intimate details of their lives, ensuring their safety and/or privacy. As a researcher, however, you cannot be anonymised. While you might have shared personal details with your research participants, it may be preferable or necessary to then omit these from your writing, as some details, for instance, could incriminate you, or impact your family or career.

Whether or not you can directly relate to a story or experience, however, witnessing can itself be a source of trauma for researchers; yet it is rarely acknowledged or prepared for adequately. While there has been some effort to name and acknowledge researcher trauma (in the discipline of human geography particularly, see: Coddington, 2017; Dominey-Howes, 2015; Drozdowski, 2015; Drozdowski & Dominey-Howes, 2015), both Warden (2013) and Markowitz (2019) explain that there is little written about these emotional impacts, “despite the profound effects, including trauma, that working on and amongst violence often has” (ibid., p.2). Theidon (2014, p.1) reflects on the “awkward dinner party question ... How was your trip?” and how she responded to this the first time she left the field:

I was full of war stories, and several sentences came rushing out before I realized my listeners were all silent. Some looked uncomfortable, others a bit stricken. It felt as though I suddenly came to, and abruptly stopped speaking. Very embarrassed, I quickly added that Peru is a beautiful country with fabulous food.

She describes this moment as a ‘leitmotif’, an experience shared by many people who have researched violence. Similarly, when people have asked me what my research is about, or what I think of Singapore, (often with them adding in a comment about how clean the city is), I too have often responded with details of abuse and violence, then noticing blank or troubled reactions. Hearing first-hand accounts and details of sexual violence, physical torture, suicidal ideations and spirit possessions all had their impacts on me, shaping my experience of the field and my writing subsequently (as I will reflect on further in section 3.5, p.86). It also caused me to shift the focus of my research quite dramatically and the ways I interpreted, and subsequently analysed and theorised, my ‘data’.

On occasion, people would ask me what the ‘worst’ case was that I had encountered, meaning the worst case of abuse or violence, or the most common reasons people would be in the shelter. While having a shortlist of the most common reasons people were in the HOME

shelter – being overworked, illegal deployment,³⁰ experiencing abuse (verbal, physical and/or sexual), or because they had been accused of something – I never felt comfortable answering what the ‘worst’ case was. While incidents of physical or sexual abuse seemed to be the ‘answer’ that people were looking for when asking this question – and while indeed these are horrific forms of inter-personal violence – I began to feel that ‘scaling’ experiences of violence in this way, was problematic. Indeed, there were residents who were themselves the ‘accused’ rather than the ‘accuser’ (accused for stealing or treating a family member badly, for example) who also suffered greatly in the shelter.

In November 2017, during my final few months of fieldwork, I was invited to a baby shower at another volunteer’s home. I arrived only knowing a few of the volunteers and so was introduced to several of the host’s friends. During the event, I spent about half an hour talking to a Brazilian woman who had been living in Singapore with her husband for several years. She had heard about the work of HOME and asked me about my PhD research and how I found the experience of volunteering. I told her about my research, confused at the time what it was exactly that I was researching myself, and the many cases of abuse I was becoming exposed to: abuse by employers, the state and others. The woman explained that her DW had told her many stories of mistreatment and violence too, and quickly started inquiring if it was mostly one ‘group’ of employers who were abusive – which, having been asked the question on numerous occasions, I knew to mean one ‘race’ of employers – and what I was going to do with my findings. After explaining that there was no particular racialised patterns to this kind of abuse,³¹ I said that I was planning to complete my thesis upon return to the UK, and that I would like to publish some of my work if possible. I explained that I had some reservations, however, because I did not feel that the Singaporean state would be receptive to my critiques of their involvement in this violence, and in the ongoing inequalities and injustices of this form

³⁰ This is the name given to cases where DWs have been required to work illegally, or in violation of their work permit, by their employer; performing domestic labour in houses other than their employer’s, for instance, or in commercial industries.

³¹ People often assumed that Western ‘expats’ did not abuse their employees, believing that a more ‘liberal’ positioning meant they were less likely to be violent and more likely to allow adequate time off, greater personal space/freedoms and provide higher wages. DWs themselves would often tell me about their preferred ‘type’ (or race) of employer, themselves having a hierarchy, with Westerners (or, as I would hear locally, ‘*Ang Moh*’) being seen as the best employers and local Singaporeans being ranked differently depending upon the nationality of the DW. Despite these stereotypes, and while many of the Western employers I knew were comparatively generous with the freedoms and pay that they would give their employees, I knew of residents in the HOME shelter that had fled the homes of Westerners who had been abusive.

of labour migration. I clarified that this might leave me feeling vulnerable and potentially unable to do future research in Singapore as a result. To this, the woman said, sternly and simply, “[Y]ou have to write about these women’s experiences, otherwise you’ll have blood on your hands too”.

At the time of the conversation, I was quite taken back by this response. It was a comment, however, that I could not get out of my head for the remainder of the day and that I ended up typing word for word in my field notes, both underlined and put into bold. As an employer of a DW herself, and as someone who was also privy to this kind of information, I wondered why she did not feel any responsibility to share the stories she had heard herself and why she did not feel that she had blood on her hands, but that I would. To her, it seemed that my positioning as a researcher and writer signalled an ethical, social and political responsibility to document these ‘truths’ and to hold the government to account for their role. Indeed, while these were actually sentiments that I had already been feeling, they led me to question what stories I should recount, and also which I should not. It also led me to think further about my responsibility as a researcher, and who it was primarily to. To the population of DWs broadly? To the shelter residents? To HOME as an organisation? To no one? While there is no fixed answer, or formula to follow, Jazeel and McFarlane (2010) interrogate the ‘limits of responsibility’ for researchers, and the ways in which they produce knowledge. Recognising that academic text does work itself – “like any text, it has a representational life and generativity that we need to consider carefully in our deliberations around responsible academic knowledge production and ethico-conceptual dimensions of critical intellectual work” (ibid., p.112-113) – they urge against particular kinds of abstraction in academic writing; “the distancing that results in a de-contextualising and sidestepping of place / constituencies / ideas” (ibid., p.122).

3.4 ‘Exiting’ the Field: Saying Goodbye

About four months after I left Singapore, while walking through the LSE campus, I received a WhatsApp call from a resident I knew from HOME, asking me about her case and if she would be able to return to Singapore to work. Not knowing the answer to this, I had to explain that I was now back in London and did not have any answers, albeit with the caveat that I would send the numbers of different people she could call. This resident was not the only person I spoke to after leaving Singapore, however, and I was even able to meet up with another

shelter resident in London as her employer (a new employer she transferred to after being in the HOME shelter) had moved to the UK. Despite thinking I had 'exited' the field, I started to question, over time, whether or not this was truly possible. While I was no longer physically present in Singapore or in the shelter, I had made real friendships, connections and relationships, which continued beyond my own movement to London; fieldwork provided me with experiences that have had lasting impacts on how I view the world, fundamentally changing me outside of Singapore too.

Deciding when it is right to leave the field is contentious, with practical and methodological, as well as ethical, questions. Gobo (2008) writes that leaving the field can be for 'institutional' reasons (such as funding ending), 'interpersonal' (such as familial ties/responsibilities), or 'intrapersonal' (such as researcher fatigue). Whether because of having 'enough data', no longer having a visa or needing to 'write up', when completing fieldwork abroad, or far from where you usually abide, there has to be a point at which an ethnographer leaves the lifeworld of the people they have been 'researching'. Indeed, being a researcher and living far away from my key research sites, my 'outsider' status became clear again when I left Singapore, as I returned to my 'usual' life after this period away from it. My relative freedom and bodily mobility, which was enabled by my departure from Singapore to the UK, to my family and friends, was made even more stark when saying goodbye to shelter residents who wanted to leave Singapore but could not, as the state did not allow their movement while their 'cases' continued. By completing my fieldwork in three phases, I actually said goodbye to some shelter residents on more than one occasion, hoping they would have left Singapore before my return. Finding them there again when I went back left me with mixed emotions; happiness at seeing them and both anger and sadness that they were yet to move on with their lives. With two people, I said goodbye, and then hello again, twice.³²

³² These were two residents that I grew very close to and became very important relationships to me. These residents were both very happy to see me each time I returned and would offer to fill me in on the happenings of the shelter in my absence, but it was clear that their prolonged waiting period had a negative impact on their mental health. I was able to see one of them leave Singapore eventually (to return to Myanmar), in my last visit, but knew that the other resident was still in Singapore for a further six months after I left.

3.5 Writing Violence: Data Analysis and Writing Ethnography

Upon my 'final' return to London, I started the process of transcribing my interviews and reading through my field notes. While I was aware that the process would be long and arduous, what I had not anticipated was how challenging it would be too. Having witnessed a great deal of suffering, which I documented each day in my field notes, and having spoken in interviews with shelter residents about their experiences of abuse, distress and violence, I had not considered how emotionally exhausting re-visiting this material would be. Listening to certain interviews in person had been difficult but re-listening through headphones in London challenged me in a different way. Hearing someone recount experiences of sexual violence, for instance, while awful in the first instance, was still harrowing but starker, despite the physical, temporal and emotional distance I had from the people I was listening to. While in person I was able to respond to the interviewee – to hug them, acknowledge their struggle, respond to them, or simply be there – this was, of course, not possible during transcription. After several attempts at typing out one interview, I decided that transcribing everything in full would be too painful, instead opting to listen to all interviews and write thorough notes about what was being said and to then transcribe in full the bits I felt necessary or most pertinent.

While much more challenging than I had imagined, then, what this process did bring to the fore was the importance of certain narratives to me personally. Some events, stories and experiences seemed to remain at the forefront of my mind and left me compelled to write about them. They were issues that continued to haunt me, that were prevalent again and again, or things that I heard/experienced only once but either felt exemplary of a bigger issue or were so unique I decided I had to put into words; anger, sadness, elation, confusion and certainty all playing a role in my analysis and writing. As well as feeling that I 'had to' write certain things for myself, I also felt accountable to certain individuals; people who I knew either wanted, or did not want, their stories heard. One of the people who I grew closest to in the shelter, and whose 'case' I knew the most about, quickly became someone who I knew I would not formally interview about their experiences nor write about, as they had expressed a dislike of recounting what happened in front of me on numerous occasions. Indeed, as Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, p.158) write, with reference to ethnographic research:

... the analysis of data is not a distinct stage of the research. In many ways, it begins in the pre-fieldwork phase, in the formulation and clarification of research problems, and continues through to the process of writing reports, articles, and books.

Formally, it starts to take shape in analytic notes and memoranda; informally, it is embodied in the ethnographer's ideas and hunches ... the analysis of data feeds into research design and data collection. This iterative process is central to the 'grounded theorizing' ... in which theory is developed out of data analysis, and subsequent data collection is guided strategically by emergent theory.

Ethnographers gain a unique awareness and understanding of the everyday realities of their research focus (Herbert, 2000), finding patterns, relationships and concepts in their data and day-to-day encounters in the field. In my own research process, data analysis was something I kept doing before, during and after my fieldwork, sometimes knowingly and other times not. Aside from examining archival documents and reading secondary accounts of DWs' experiences in Singapore, I also read through all of my fieldnotes and listened to my interview recordings once I finished my final period of fieldwork, manually taking notes, annotating them and creating my own system of codes. This process helped me to interpret and summarise my research data and ultimately helped me to decide what to write and what the focus of my thesis should be. My intuitions and inclinations were, however, inseparable from my own re-reading of fieldnotes, interview transcripts and photographs.

While compelled to write about certain experiences/cases/narratives, then, and compelled not to write others, another challenge I faced after 'exiting' the field was about how to (and if I should) 'write violence'. Many of the stories I had heard involved a lot of discussion of bodily violence, which left me feeling unsure how much to detail and how much to obscure. It seemed to me that there were (at least) two approaches to writing and theorising violence, with some feminists, on the one hand, believing in the importance of exposing truths and documenting violent realities (Ristock, 2002; Skinner, Hester, & Malos, 2005; Westmarland & Bows, 2019) and others, on the other hand, highlighting the ways in which violence and suffering (as well as the female body) have become consumptive and subject to voyeurism (Kasturi, 2007; Nnaemeka, 2005; Robbins, 2013; Sontag, 2004). This divergence in opinion left me questioning what the purpose of certain detail is and who my audience would be.³³ Recognising the importance of bringing attention to the violence that certain people (disproportionately) endure, I felt compelled to recount the experiences of those who shared their stories with me. I also felt uncomfortable about using these experiences to 'sell' my work,

³³ While making me question how it might affect me personally, being more abstracted and involving fewer details of personal and bodily suffering, writing about state and institutional violence did not leave this dilemma.

however, and was mindful about portraying anyone as a helpless victim or using anecdotes to claim that they are warriors of resistance. While providing all the detail people had given me felt uncomfortable, omitting or obscuring parts of a narrative felt insincere. The idea of simplifying narratives, while necessary practically, also highlighted the stark reality that it is the researcher, in this instance me, that ultimately constructs the final account and voice (Alexander, 2006; Waquant, 2003). Then, this portrayal or representation needs to be recognised as partial and subjective, as Visweswaran (1994, p.1) writes:

If we believe that one of the traditional ways of thinking about fiction is that it builds a believable world, but one that the reader rejects as factual, then we can say of ethnography that it, too, sets out to build a believable world, but one the reader will accept as factual. Yet even this distinction breaks down if we consider that ethnography, like fiction, constructs existing or possible worlds, all while retaining the idea of an alternate 'made' world. Ethnography, like fiction, no matter its pretence to present a self-contained narrative or cultural whole, remains incomplete and detached from the world to which it points.

Being 'researched', your life, body and voice become simplified and abstracted. While this might be necessary, as I felt it was, to maintain anonymity and confidentiality, it can also be a form of violence of its own. While acknowledging this – and while still imperfect, incomplete and dissatisfying in many respects – I ultimately tried to allow my data to ground and guide me where it could. Beyond, at a practical level, it being impossible to provide all of the details I was given, I chose not to have a one size fits all approach, and to provide more details of some cases/narratives, and less of others, taking cues from my conversations and knowledge of the individual research participants. With this, I attempted to not only provide a rich account of different people's opinions and experiences, but to also remain aware to the ways in which they were embedded in systems and structures of violence – their bodies managed and disciplined, by the Singaporean state, employers, agents and others – but also, the ways in which they were active agents and decision makers, able to shape their own lives.

3.6 Summary

This chapter has focused on the transformation and journey of my research from one focus to another. My acceptance and relationship within HOME provided me with a unique set of opportunities to visit places that have received far less academic attention, which, in many ways, I simply stumbled upon. By allowing the DWs I met to direct my research, after

cumbersomely attempting to discuss topics that they themselves had no interest in, I was able to use my positionality to gather information. As a white, foreign and relatively young woman, the residents saw me as unthreatening and, with some of the older residents, as a person they could care for too. A few of the residents would regularly make me tea, for example, or bring me drinks if they felt I looked tired. Indeed, because I was alone in Singapore, unaccompanied by my partner, family or friends, I spent nearly all my awake time either at the shelter, with the residents in other spaces or with the staff and volunteers. Other than Sundays, when I attempted to cast my research net wider, my solitude meant that I was readily available to support the shelter residents when they needed it and became someone that HOME could rely on. Being in the shelter also meant, however, that I saw and heard things that I felt compelled to write.

Being in the shelter for so much of my time shaped my research in a number of ways, then, as I saw the residents live through a wide range of emotions on a daily basis (as I will come to in Chapter 7). Witnessing suffering, and latterly the process of writing violence, fundamentally reshaped my focus and the ways in which I have theorised and analysed my data. It has also raised ethical and emotional issues and questions, some of which, as highlighted, remain somewhat unresolved. Having chosen to pursue an ethnographic and feminist methodological approach, I have demonstrated the ways in which I have been responsive to, and reflexive of, my positioning before, during and after leaving the field.

Situating Migration & Domestic Labour in Singapore

Rocketing demand propelled the construction industry to record levels last year ... Contracts totalling \$24.5 billion were awarded ... up 46 per cent from the \$16.8 billion in 2006 and just above the \$24 billion in the boom year of 1997 ... Mega projects like the Marina Bay Sands integrated resort (IR), Marina Bay Financial Centre and Somerset Central lifted private commercial contracts to a record \$5.1 billion, according to official figures announced at an industry seminar yesterday (The Straits Times (by Joyce Teo), 16th January 2008, online).

In the first workplace fatality this year, a construction worker died after a retaining wall collapsed on him yesterday morning at the construction site of the Marina Bay Sands ... Mr Xie Xu Han, a 39-year-old Chinese national, was passing by when the wall, built to hold up a bank of earth, suddenly caved in on him ... He died about an hour later at 11.25am. (The Straits Times (by Khushwant Singh), 17th January 2008, online).

The tale of Singapore's rise from 'third' to 'first-world' is both compelling and well-recited.³⁴ The city-state is now celebrated internationally as a global city and viewed as a model for development elsewhere (Chua, 2011; Willis & Yeoh, 1998).³⁵ In this readily told story, the island nation has managed to maintain economic growth and political stability, despite a complete lack of natural resources, to be identified as an 'Asian Tiger', or an economic 'miracle', and an essential trading space within the Asia-Pacific rim (Abshire, 2011; Chua, 2010; Haila, 2016; Huang, Teo & Mui, 1995; Oswin, 2019). It is a tale that is embraced by the People's Action Party (hereafter PAP)³⁶ to cement their political legitimacy and to harness social control, a rhetoric "more pertinent than others in that it directly addresses the need of the nation to 'survive' ... a tactical selection of facts: those that can be taken to support the

³⁴ Singapore's first Prime Minister, Lee Kwan Yew (2000), titled his memoirs '*From Third World to First. The Singapore Story: 1965-2000*'.

³⁵ Many other city development plans use Singapore, which is famed as a centre for business and knowledge exchange (Ong, 2005; Roy & Ong, 2011), as an exemplar of economic success and, as Ong (2011) explains, as a new model for urban futurity and normativity. Chua (2011, p.47) explains that the success of the 'Singaporean Model' has also allowed both government-run and private practitioners to market their "expertise in environmental and infrastructure planning, and implementation of urban industrial parks and residential estates, to the world".

³⁶ The ruling political party in Singapore, which has remained in power since independence.

party line are highlighted while others are either marginalized or silenced” (Loh, 1998, p.6). These transformations have meant that, in 2019, Singapore was ranked seventh globally for highest GDP per capita (Index Mundi, 2019) and 14th for GNI per capita (World Bank, 2019a), making it the most prosperous nation in Southeast Asia. Other accounts, however, despite being less widely told, demonstrate how Singapore’s colonial past and ‘post’-colonial present have created an unequal and unjust social, political, economic, and legal terrain (Chok, 2013; Davidson, 1997; Davidson & Drakakis-Smith, 1997; Haila, 2016; Koh, 2007; Oswin, 2010, 2012, 2019; Yeoh, 2006), that I argue is thoroughly embedded in violence.

While Marina Bay Sands (hereafter MBS), Sentosa and Changi Airport (in addition to Singapore’s clean streets, shiny cars and immaculate homes) are seen by many as signs of prosperity, progress and pride, the exploitative labour – the literal blood, sweat, tears and death – that build, maintain and clean it, are rendered much less visible. An activist from HOME made this starkly clear to me when she explained that she did not like to go to MBS because, for her, the development was a symbol of exploitation. This sentiment was powerful not only because of the social and economic challenges it raised but also because of how it reframed the notion of visibility, that it is what we choose to see and what we do not. While physically MBS is a huge resort with prominent architectural structures, symbolically, it is most often imagined, marketed and ‘sold’ (both locally and internationally) as an iconic destination. It is also, however, as highlighted, a physical representation of exploitation and labour inequality, and of the financialisation and privatisation of the public realm. The marketing of MBS and the kinds of visibility curated and publicised, are in many ways analogous with the development of Singapore as a global city more broadly. The city-state’s supposed success is brought to the fore, while the people who are, quite literally, responsible for its (re)production are not only rendered much less visible but often forgotten about entirely. As well as the migrant workers who brought spaces like MBS into being physically, who constructed the contemporary built environment of the country, the economic success of Singapore would not have been possible if it were not for the approximately 250,000 DWs currently living and working in the nation state, as well as all of those who worked before them, and whose reproductive labour enables the productivity of hundreds of thousands of Singaporean people.

While taking this into account, in this chapter, I shed light on the role of migration in Singapore, showing how the PAP have created a bifurcated system, which renders some

migrants more susceptible to exploitation than others. It begins to paint an alternative view of Singapore to that more often presented and demonstrates some of the comprehensive and draconian powers of the state. The chapter will detail how much of the nation's reproductive labour has been outsourced to migrant women through the development of the FDW scheme. Providing details of this scheme, and the legislation/policy that surrounds it, shows the levels of bodily control and discipline that DWs are susceptible to. I then highlight the role of activism and advocacy in Singapore, bringing visibility to the complex terrain of migrants' rights.

Rather than include a detailed historical discussion and recount the story of Stamford Raffles' arrival in Singapore, this chapter details the ways in which Singapore's colonial past and post-colonial present have created a system which unequally situates migrant labourers (particularly DWs) socially, spatially, politically and economically. In order to situate DWs within the Singaporean context, then, this chapter highlights the contemporary and historical gendered and racialised relations of power in which they are enmeshed and shows how they are impacted by a migratory system that simultaneously enables, encourages, restricts and prevents their presence.

4.1 Migration in Singapore: Building a nation

Since independence in 1965 (see Appendix B for a timeline of key events in Singapore's history), migration has always been a central part of the Singaporean state's economic and development strategy (Koh, 2003), a means by which the PAP built, and is building, the postcolonial nation. As Yeoh (2006, p.31) writes:

[G]iven the aspirations of the natural resource-scarce, labour-short city-state to become a major player in a globalised world, Singapore's main economic strategy is premised on the development of a highly skilled human resource base as the 'key success factor' in confirming a global future. Besides investing heavily in information technology and human capital to meet global competition, the state has emphasised the strategy of developing Singapore into a 'brains service node', 'an oasis of talent' and ultimately, the 'Talent Capital' of the New Economy.

As part of its economic strategy, the Singaporean state not only seeks to attract migrant workers, but also to extend its economic space by utilising its network of emigrants too (Yeoh & Willis, 2005). As Yeoh and Willis (2005, p.214) explain, Singapore's leaders view the nation

state as a “space of flows” or a “globapolis”,³⁷ where people, information and investment can remain connected to allow individual citizens and businesses to take advantage of markets overseas. Singaporean citizens’ experiences as emigrants are highly gendered, however, with women who move alongside their husbands experiencing a “re-domestication” in some circumstances (ibid., p.220).

Migration in Singapore has also, however, been a “politically divisive” issue (Chok, 2013, p.11), which has, for instance, resulted in the state’s refusal to accept any asylum seekers or refugees (Osada, 2015). While building the nation of Singapore, the PAP has treated migrant labourers, particularly those they deem to be lower or un-skilled, as necessary but undesirable. As Yea (2015, p.1084) explains, “Both the state and citizenry have adopted an attitude of begrudging tolerance of these workers as they are needed but not wanted”. Indeed, as aforementioned (in Chapter 2, section 2.2.1, p.41), the idea that some foreign workers are needed but not wanted is well established across global settings (Castles, 2013; Devasahayam, 2010; Piper, 2008a). Castles (2013, p.130) explains that lower-skilled migrants who, incidentally, already “face high levels of risk and exploitation”, are needed for different reasons in different places. He writes, “[i]t is often argued that labour migration from poor to rich countries meets mutual needs ... it is important to realise that the ‘need’ to export labour from the South is a result of historical processes of colonialization and expropriation of resources, while the ‘need’ for low-skilled labour in northern countries is socially constructed by the poor wages, conditions and social status in certain sectors” (ibid., p.128). In the Singaporean case, however, the nation has, arguably, relied on the importation of migrants in both of these ways (as a southern and northern country).³⁸ Historically, both the British colonial administration and the PAP (in their early years) relied upon migration in order to ‘develop’ Singapore³⁹ and it is used contemporarily to maintain and grow its competitive economy. Since independence, and during its economic transformation, Singapore has relied

³⁷ As described by Yeoh and Willis (2005), this was a term used by Goh Chok Tong, Singapore’s former Prime Minister, who, when stating his vision for Singapore, said that he wanted to see the nation as: “a ‘globapolis’, with people from all over the world and well connected to all parts of the globe - by air, sea, telecommunications and the Internet, in market access and investments, and in areas such as education, sports and the arts” (Goh Chok Tong, 2001, cited in Yeoh and Willis, 2005, p.214).

³⁸ Singapore can today be considered ‘developed’ or ‘northern’ nation which relies on ‘low-skilled’ labour and global wage and social inequalities. It did also, however, rely on the importation of migrants as a ‘developing’ or ‘southern’ nation, and not on the exportation of its population.

³⁹ By ‘develop’, I am referring to the “planned attempts to transform the standard of living of a poorer country or region, generally by outside forces” (Castree, Kitchen & Rogers, 2013, p.101).

heavily on migrant workers fulfilling particular roles and has a highly stratified migrant labour force as a result.

Labour migration is not new to Singapore then. In fact, it has been argued that nearly all Singaporeans have a personal history of migration, as the island nation only had a mercantile population of 1,000 residents when Stamford Raffles arrived in 1819 (Gillis, 2005). Indeed the rate of migration during the 1800s meant that Singapore had a disproportionately large male population (Saw, 1980). Even before the British arrived, however, Singapore had been a site of considerable turmoil and immigration. Lim (1991, pp.13-14) explains that:

The History of Singapore up to 1819 was largely a Malay history set in a Malay milieu into which there were Thai, Javanese, Portuguese, Dutch, and British intrusions. Moreover, for much of this period, Chinese, Arab, and Persian merchants, as well as traders from the Indian subcontinent, enter the regions surrounding Singapore in pursuit of commerce.

Today, Singapore is described as a multiracial society, a status embraced and declared upon independence in 1965. The Singaporean state actively, and often violently, intervenes in attempts to maintain a 'CMIO' (Chinese, Malay, Indian and Others) scheme, which categorises all citizens racially⁴⁰. While attempts are made to maintain equality across racial groups, by adopting multiple national religions and languages, for example, there are concerns about whether this is actually achieved (see Appendix C for more detail about Singapore as a multiracial society). Nonetheless, migration, settlement and colonialism have had long-standing implications for Singapore. Chua (2010, p.335) actually argues that, in many ways, Singapore should be viewed as a 'settler' country, writing:

Singapore is a settler country in which all its present citizens are either immigrants or the descendants of immigrants. As such, it is a multiethnic society. Unlike other settler countries, among which the US, Canada and Australia spring immediately to mind, the present majority ethnic population of Singapore is not of White colonizing-nation stock but is descended from colonial immigrant subjects: namely, the ethnic Chinese immigrants who came to Singapore after the East India Company

⁴⁰ Upon independence, 75% of the Singaporean population were ethnically Chinese, 17% ethnically Malay and 7% ethnically Indian (Chua, 2003). There was also a population described as 'Other', which accounted for the European and any other ethnically distinct residents or citizens. Lee Kwan Yew wanted to sustain this racial profile and so the PAP has always been careful about issuing citizenship and residency to new migrants, with white migrants often being a notable exception.

established a trading post and a free port on the island. Unlike the settling of the North American and Australian continents, where the aboriginal populations were massacred, there was only a very small settlement of seafaring people, indigenous to the Southeast Asian archipelago, on the island when the free port was established.

Today, of Singapore's population of 5.6 million people, just under 30% are categorised as 'non-residents'⁴¹ (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2018b). Of this total, 3.7 million people are considered to be participating in the productive labour force⁴², 38% of whom are in the 'non-resident' category, exemplifying the nation's heavy reliance on migrant labour. The experiences of this group of workers vary considerably, as the state's policies primarily (although not exclusively)⁴³ stratify them socially and economically into two categories: those considered locally as 'foreign talent'⁴⁴ and listed as 'Professionals' by the MOM, and others named 'foreign workers' and described as 'Skilled and semi-skilled workers' (MOM, 2020a).⁴⁵ In Singapore, there is a very clear bifurcation of these labourers, which is consistent with the polarisation of labour migrants who are compartmentalised as being either skilled or unskilled, and legal or illegal, across the world (Chok, 2013; Piper, 2008a; Yeoh, 2006; Yeoh & Huang, 2014). The polarity of the migrant labour force in Singapore is consistent with Sassen's (1991; 2012) writing about global cities, and the growing socio-economic inequalities they produce. The ways in which these populations are stratified – socially, economically, politically, legally and spatially – manifest in particular ways. Despite the realities of a particular labourer's status often being blurry, these axes of difference, as Chok (2013) explains, position migrant workers differently with regards to their entitlements in Singapore.

⁴¹ Non-residents can be Work Permit holders, Employment, Entre and/or S Pass holders, trainees or students, people on 'dependent' visas, or other work passes issued for 'exceptions' (MOM, 2020a). This excludes citizens and permanent residents, who are considered residents, and people who are on temporary visas that cannot work, such as tourists.

⁴² This, of course, does not include any unpaid reproductive or caring labour, or any illegal/illicit/informal labour.

⁴³ International students for example, are non-residents but have a completely different experience in Singapore to other migrants.

⁴⁴ 'Foreign Talent' is a name used in Singapore – by locals, the media, and state officials in speeches and press releases – to describe the immigrants who move to Singapore to take on higher income labour.

⁴⁵ Migrant sex workers are, notably, not included in either of these visa categories. While sex work in Singapore is not illegal *per se*, it is very heavily moderated and makes practicing it nearly impossible without breaking the law (for more details see: Project X, 2020).

4.1.1.1 Foreign 'Professionals' in Singapore

Of the 'professionals' in Singapore, the majority of labourers migrate on an 'Employment Pass' (hereafter EP) but there are also visas for foreign 'entrepreneurs' (the 'EntrePass') and for high-income existing EP holders wanting greater flexibility in their status (the 'Personalised Employment Pass') (MOM, 2020a). EP holders enjoy certain privileges in Singapore, such as being allowed to bring their families, or 'dependents', to live with them. They are individuals, disproportionately male and often from Western Europe or North America, but also increasingly people from India and China too (Yeoh & Khoo, 1998), who form the so-called 'transnational elite' and are more often referred to as 'expat(riate)s'. As Fechter and Walsh (2010, p.1199) note, however, despite the origin of this term holding a broader meaning, it is not equally applied to all contemporary migrants but instead "reserved for white Western migrants". These migrants move for differing amounts of time but usually with the prospects of higher wages and/or career progression. They also tend to move into roles in finance, information technology, the creative industries, hospitality and medical professions, often benefiting from packages that include medical and social insurances and securities (Beaverstock, 2011; Yeoh, 2006). Indeed, Hui (1997, p.116) notes that in 1990, a "company grant scheme was initiated to ease the cost of recruiting and relocating skilled labour". Various schemes/packages were put in place during the 1990s, some with simpler routes to permanent residency, with the aim of attracting migrants from Europe, the USA and Hong Kong (ibid.). Hui also notes, however, that during the 1990s, immigration criteria were also relaxed to enable more 'skilled' migrants from South Asia to migrate, and efforts were also made to increase the numbers of Malay workers in the nation, a demonstration of the PAP's desire to maintain the CMIO racial makeup of Singapore. Today, in some instances, these packages can include housing and educational support, and even a DW's salary. Yeoh and Khoo (1998, p.159) explain that upon migration, however, EP holders' spouses, historically at least, "often experience a devalorization of their productive functions and a relegation to the domestic sphere"; certain bodies benefit from these forms of mobility more than others.

EP holders are not eligible to buy 'Housing and Development Board' (hereafter, and known locally as, HDB) properties.⁴⁶ Most often, they buy or rent in the private housing market, with

⁴⁶ HDB properties are public housing in which over 80% of Singapore's resident population lives, with over 90% being homeowners (HDB, 2018). They are generally much more affordable than houses on the private market. EP holders can, under some conditions, rent HDB housing.

Western migrants usually living in particular urban enclaves (Beaverstock, 2002; Chang, 1995). Chang (1995, p.141) points to the “expatriatisation” of Holland Village as an example of an area in Singapore that has seen an influx of Western residents. The area now caters to the needs of this community and is even advertised in expatriate newsletters and handbooks. As Chang (ibid., p.149) writes, “*Living in Singapore ...* a handbook designed to acquaint the newly arrived expatriate to life in Singapore, frequently mentions Holland Village as the place to purchase oriental curios, exotica as well as familiar western products like imported meat, dairy products and wines”. As a group, migrant ‘professionals’ are only able to reside in Singapore temporarily, initially being given a two-year work permit which is then renewable every three years, but moving job roles is relatively easy. While their EP is linked to a particular employer, the MOM suggests that if you find a new job, you should just ask the new employer to apply for a new EP, without needing to cancel the current one until this is being processed (MOM, 2020b).

In many ways, then, the Singaporean government has sought out this form of migration and tried to make the country as appealing to international ‘talent’ as possible, shaping policy and the environment “in a city where cosmopolitanism is explicitly promulgated by a strongly interventionist state” (Ye & Kelly, 2011, p.693). This form of migration has been very actively pursued by the state since independence, with Lee Kwan Yew (hereafter LKY)⁴⁷ believing that the country’s economy could not grow without it. In a speech in 1982, titled *The Search for Talent*, LKY explains some of his rationales for increasing the foreign ‘talent’ pool in Singapore:

Singaporeans must realise and accept as desirable the need for more of the able and the talented to come to work in Singapore. We have to compete against the wealthy developed countries who now also recruit such talent. We have to make these people feel welcome and wanted, so that they will make Singapore their permanent home and contribute to the overall progress of all our people ... Instead of getting high quality men; we have imported over 150,000 unskilled workers as work permit holders. Instead of importing first-class brains, we have imported unskilled brawn. To continue this policy is to court disaster.

⁴⁷ As Singapore’s first Prime Minister after independence, between 1959 and 1990, LKY also became its longest serving one too. After he stepped down from office, Goh Chok Tong held this position until 2004, and was then followed by Lee Hsien Loong, LKY’s eldest son, who retains his role as Prime Minister today. LKY is often cited as being Singapore’s founding father, a revolutionary turned successful ruler (Haila, 2016), who managed to lead the PAP with little (party) political opposition.

This philosophy of free movement of goods and people, upon which Raffles founded Singapore, has made for our success. Singaporeans must recognise that without this input of high calibre talent over a wide range of specialties, our growth in the last 20 years would not have been possible ... We must redress the balance and recruit brains. If they are Asian brains, they are more likely to settle permanently. However, we shall also recruit non-Asian brains, and if they like our society, offer them life-long employment, not just short-term contracts ... We must double, nay, triple the number of able men and women we have, men and women trained in disciplines which can help us become a fully developed society (Ministry of Culture, 1982, online).

This form of labour migration is clearly seen by the PAP as an opportunity for economic growth and increasing the nation's ability to compete with Western economies. Large international multinational corporations have chosen Singapore as a site for investment, and often for their regional headquarters, because of Singapore's inclusive attitude towards Western migrant workers, but also because of its political stability and rule of law. More than this, however, LKY referred to "intelligence" and "brains" in his speech several times. Indeed, aside from speaking pejoratively about the migrant workers he classified as "unskilled brawn", he also demonstrated his belief that intelligence was inherited and of particular kinds of racial superiority (Heng & Devan, 1995) (this will be discussed further in Chapter 5, p.118). LKY and the PAP's belief that bodies need to be categorised and managed, is one way in which the post-colonial Singaporean state violently reproduced the logics of colonial domination and that the state (re)produces when putting this logic into practice (Fanon, 2004).

While the state actively sought this migration, it has still caused some local contestation. Singaporean citizens do have anxieties about the numbers of migrants and also the competition they face for work. Indeed, it is argued that the "backlash", seen at the 2011 election, was due to the concern surrounding "fierce competition for jobs, inadequate housing and transport infrastructure", issues which were seen as worsening due to the state's policy toward migrants (Teng, 2018, online). While there are clearly reservations among some Singaporeans toward the state's approach, the population of foreign talent is still significant. In 2019, there were 189,000 EP holders in Singapore, accounting for over 13% of the total 'foreign workforce' (MOM, 2020c) (the 'foreign workforce' accounted for roughly 40% of the total workforce in 2018, see Ministry of Statistics, 2020).

The state's desire to attract this pool of labourers has also, in some instances, led them to have some seemingly contradictory policies and approaches in their strategy of nation

building. Oswin (2012, p.1630) shows, for instance, that the state's desire to market Singapore as a 'creative city' or hub, has meant that homosexuality has become tolerated in certain spaces, with a "dramatic proliferation of bars, saunas and other commercial establishments catering to gay and lesbian clientele". Oswin is careful to show, however, that this acceptance is limited, and that the city project is ultimately still one of heteronormativity. This is exemplified in the state's continued promotion of the "heterosexual nuclear family" (ibid., p.1632), which is enshrined and promoted whenever possible by the PAP (some discussion of the importance of the family as an institution in Singapore is detailed in Appendix C). As Oswin (2010, p.257) explains, this is demonstrated in the policy surrounding the sale of HDB residencies, for which there are strict rules about the type of applicant that is accepted:

... the applicant must be 21 years of age and 'from a proper family nucleus', which is defined as: the applicant and fiancé, the applicant, spouse and children (if any), the applicant, the applicant's parents and siblings (if any); if widowed / divorced, the applicant and children under the applicant's legal custody; and, if orphaned, the applicant and unmarried siblings.

As gay marriage is not recognised in Singapore, these rules mean that gay couples are effectively excluded from becoming homeowners together. These regulations are highly influential and, as Oswin (ibid.) argues, "queers" people who do not conform to Singaporean society's normative and normalising structures. Despite this, certain concessions are made for the professionals that have migrated to work in Singapore, with some bodies' 'deviant' behaviour being tolerated as the benefits of their presence are seen as too valuable.

These mobile and foreign bodies are, then, both needed and (for the most part) wanted.⁴⁸ As explicitly stated by LKY, and the policy that enables their migration, they are seen as desirable to the economic success of globalising Singapore. There is a much greater level of anxiety, however, surrounding the presence of those migrants who are categorised as foreign 'workers' rather than 'professionals'.

⁴⁸ This being the opposite of the aforementioned conceptualisation of migrants being needed but not wanted.

4.1.2 Foreign ‘Workers’ in Singapore

Foreign ‘workers’ enter Singapore on a ‘Work Pass’ (hereafter WP), which includes the ‘S Pass’,⁴⁹ ‘Work Permit for Foreign Workers’, ‘Work Permit for Foreign Domestic Workers’, or a different specialised permit for confinement nannies⁵⁰ or ‘artistes’⁵¹. While each of these has their own criteria for eligibility, WP holders are, in general, involved in domestic, construction, manufacturing, shipyard and entertainment work, which are different forms of lower paid work that are considered menial by many Singaporeans. The kinds of work performed by these migrants are often described as the ‘3 Ds’ (Martin, 1996) (aforementioned in Chapter 2, section 2.1, p.25) and is no longer, for the most part, performed by Singaporean citizens. This means, however, that resentment towards these workers is different to that towards the migrant ‘professionals’, as Singaporeans are unlikely to feel that a job opportunity has been taken from them.

Nonetheless, these workers are ‘othered’ in Singaporean society in particular ways, both socially and spatially, with vast differences in the rights they receive. For instance, unlike ‘professionals’, WP holders are prohibited from bringing their families to Singapore (with the exception of S Pass holders) and are, for the most part, unable to choose exactly where they live.⁵² In addition, the labour is also highly racialised and gendered, with only certain people able to apply for these work permits. WP’s for DWs are only issued to female workers from

⁴⁹ The S Pass is for “[f]or mid-level skilled staff. Candidates need to earn at least \$2,400 a month” (MOM, 2020a, 2020n). S Pass holders do not have to be from particular ‘source’ countries and they can choose where they live (Chok, 2013), unlike, as will be detailed, other WP holders. They are eligible to bring their children and spouses to Singapore on a ‘Dependency Pass’ if they earn over S\$6,000 per month, or their parents on a Long Term Visit Pass if they earn over \$12,000 per month (MOM, 2020n). The MOM suggests that these conditions are for WP holders broadly, but, within this category, only S Pass holders are eligible for this. Their experiences differ considerably from the other foreign workers, then, as they enjoy more of the privileges that ‘professionals’ do and will, therefore, not be included in this discussion.

⁵⁰ Confinement nannies are employed to support people in the period after giving birth; usually for a month or two. Migrant confinement nannies in Singapore have to be Malaysian (MOM, 2020a).

⁵¹ ‘Artistes’ are classified as “foreign performers working in public entertainment outlets such as bars, hotels and nightclubs” (MOM, 2020a).

⁵² As with other sponsorship/kafala systems, employers are required to provide accommodation, medical insurance and food for their employees. For DWs, as I will return to later, this means living in the homes in which they work. For male workers, construction workers and marine workers particularly, large dormitories have been built, often at the edges of Singapore, to accommodate them. This accommodation, as Chok (2013) has shown, can be dirty, over-crowded and uncomfortable to live in. I also met one ‘Artiste’/entertainment-worker who was required to sleep on the living room floor of her employer’s home, with several other workers, and would travel from there each day to the nightclub where she danced.

particular “source countries” (while construction workers must be male) and from: Malaysia; China; India; Sri Lanka; Thailand; Bangladesh; Myanmar; the Philippines; Hong Kong; Macau; South Korea; Taiwan (MOM, 2020d). This is in stark contrast to EP holders, who are not restricted in where they move from. WP holders must be of particular age ranges and, importantly for the state, they are only able to enter the country temporarily as guest workers on fixed-term contracts, renewable for certain maximum periods of time – with no legal rights, or routes, to remain in the country thereafter. Additionally, they are required to be screened for infectious diseases within two weeks of entering Singapore – namely, tuberculosis, syphilis, HIV and malaria (MOM, 2020e) – with DWs being subjected to even greater medical inspection (as will be detailed later in section 4.1.3, p.109). This, again, differs from the experiences of EP holders who are not tested medically, whose age is not bounded and for whom routes to permanent residency are much more likely. A migrant’s bodily worth is, then, I argue, managed differently dependent upon their perceived skill level, having been violently categorised before they even arrive in Singapore.

Aside from the draconian and stringent ways in which the Singaporean state manages the ‘type’ of person that is able to enter Singapore as a foreign ‘worker’, they then provide them with minimal support and rights while in the country. As Piper (2010, p.399) writes, with reference to Asian countries more broadly, the introduction and reliance on temporary worker schemes has meant that governments have “avoided having to deal with the issue of integration by circumventing the formation of significant (new) ethnic minorities”. The macro-economic drivers of Singapore’s migration policy side-lines concerns surrounding the rights of workers in a number of ways. As with EP holders, the Singaporean state issues work permits to people who already have employment contracts in the country. With WP holders, however, employers have a greater level of control. While ‘professionals’ are able to apply for other jobs freely and to obtain new work permits with relative ease, ‘workers’ cannot. Instead, they have to get permission from their original employer to change employment, which is often not something that employers are willing to do; even then, they are usually required to leave Singapore for a period of time first (Chok, 2013).

In addition to these restrictions, employers are responsible for paying S\$5,000, as a one-off security bond, for every ‘worker’ they employ (MOM, 2020f). A proportion of this can then be kept by the state if a ‘worker’ was to abscond or if either party were to break their

employment contract (ibid.).⁵³ Employers are also required to pay a national levy for every WP holder they employ, a “pricing mechanism to regulate the number of foreign workers in Singapore” (MOM, 2020g, online). For employers of one DW, for example, the monthly levy is currently (as of November 2019) set at S\$300 (ibid.).⁵⁴ This of course elevates the costs of employment, which, it is argued, can result in a reduction of wages that employers are willing/able to pay their employees (Chok, 2013; Gee & Ho, 2006; Wong, 2010). Indeed, as an article published in 2019 by Channel News Asia (hereafter CNA) suggests, roughly half of Singaporeans believe that S\$600 per month⁵⁵ is too high a salary for DWs (Mahmud, 2019). This amount, even when including the total amount of the monthly levy (S\$900 a month), equates to less than one tenth of the median household income for Singaporean citizens.⁵⁶ As both families and the private sector are heavily reliant on the labour of foreign workers, ultimately, the levy does little to abate the number of foreign workers coming to Singapore, which is its stated aim. This taxation does, however, as Chok (2013, p.115) writes, mean that “[T]he state ... obtains a constant – and constantly increasing – revenue stream”. This amount – which is not necessarily spent on improving circumstances for ‘workers’, or even for their employers – equated to S\$2.5bn in 2011, having risen from S\$1.9bn in 2010 (Chok, 2013; TWC2, 2013). This is the equivalent to roughly 0.7% of Singapore’s GDP in 2011.⁵⁷ This figure is likely to have significantly escalated since then, given the increases in the levy and the number of WP holders in Singapore.

Not only do state requirements put financial pressure on employers, but they also contribute to a system which makes them responsible for their employees’ bodily maintenance and control. By creating an arrangement where there are financial repercussions for an employee’s behaviour, as there is with the security bond, the state has ultimately rendered

⁵³ While employers can also be liable to losing their security bond if they break the employment contract, particularly by not paying their employees, in practice this still regularly happens and does not seem to be a deterrent.

⁵⁴ This is equivalent to roughly £165 (in December 2019).

⁵⁵ This amount being roughly the average monthly salary of a DW in Singapore.

⁵⁶ The median monthly household income of Singaporean citizens was S\$9,293 in 2018 (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2018a).

⁵⁷ In 2011, Singapore’s GDP (when converted from USD with the exchange rate that year) was S\$350bn (The World Bank, 2020), making the income the state received from foreign worker levies equate to roughly 0.7% of this amount.

workers vulnerable to their employers' surveillance.⁵⁸ In an article written for the BBC, for instance, it was shown that in one dormitory for 16,800 male migrant 'workers', almost 250 CCTV cameras monitored their movements in, out and around the complex (Glennie, 2015). The workers were also required to use their fingerprints to mark their return from work (ibid.). It is suggested that fear over these workers' potential involvement in crime, violence and riots, and a desire to separate them from the Singaporean society, is one of the underlying reasons for this intense observation (ibid.), even though such concerns may be unjust stereotypes rather than based on facts.⁵⁹

As Pande (2013) argues, employer-led sponsorship/kafala systems ultimately privatises the bodily management of 'workers', ridding the state of certain responsibilities. This system is (as I will continue to show in the remainder of this thesis) a form of structural violence that unfairly situates WP holders. This system, as previously stated, and as I will come to show, renders certain migrants more vulnerable to further inter-personal violence. A WP holder's structural vulnerability is also further exacerbated by the ways in which they are recruited and embedded within the global migration industry. Most foreign 'workers' migrate with employment agencies and have to work to pay off their debt, either with a loans company, with a family member, or with the agency that helps them to move. This means that many people feel unable to leave their employer even if they do experience unfair working conditions, mistreatment, abuse or violence.

The Singaporean state ultimately relies on labour from neighbouring countries with fewer job prospects and significantly lower average salaries, labour which an unequal political-economy has rendered 'surplus' in the sending nations, to bolster certain parts of its workforce. These guest workers are viewed as disposable and replaceable; needed but, unlike EP holders, not wanted (Yea, 2015). Despite the uncertainty of this labour for individual migrants (who are only able to remain in the country if their employer enables them and for limited periods of time), as Piper (2010) explains, the notion that this form of migration is temporary is a myth. Following Wright's (2006) assertions that migrant workers' actual disposability is fictional,

⁵⁸ This has also resulted in a situation where employees are incredibly dependent on their employers, as they provide them with food and accommodation.

⁵⁹ It is argued that the fear of migrant workers and social 'disobedience' has grown since the 2013 'Little India Riots' (for more detail of these events see: Kaur, Tan, & Dutta, 2016; Kornatowski, 2016; Vasu, 2014).

both structurally and practically, the Singaporean nation would not function without these workers.

4.1.3 The Particularities of the Foreign Domestic Worker Scheme

It is not possible for just anyone to become a DW in Singapore. Instead, the government heavily regulates this form of labour migration through the FDW scheme, a system which – since its introduction in 1978 when it was originally named the Foreign Domestic Servant scheme (Ministry of Culture, 1978) – allows certain people to temporarily migrate to Singapore to live and work in the homes of employing families. It is important to note, however, that this form of labour migration was not new to Singapore in 1978. For instance, there were migrants working as domestic labourers, as servants and *amahs*, well before independence.⁶⁰ In its initial manifestation, the FDW scheme enabled migrant women from Thailand, the Philippines and Sri Lanka to move to Singapore temporarily (Cheng, 1984), to alleviate some of the ‘reproductive’ burdens of the home and to encourage greater participation of Singaporean women in the ‘productive’ labour force. In a press release in 1978, the Singaporean state (Ministry of Culture, 1978, online) introduced this new scheme, stating:

There is a good number of women in Singapore with special skills or training but who are not in gainful employment as they are being burdened with household duties. In order to encourage these women to take on gainful employment, hence contributing

⁶⁰ Between 1930 and 1945, wealthy households employed women called *amahs* to perform their reproductive labour. In very wealthy households, these women would often have a particular responsibility and work as one employee in a team of servants (Constable, 1997), generally all living in the home of their employer. *Amahs* were usually single Chinese women who migrated to Singapore, Hong Kong and Macau to take on paid employment, often in order to support their children. This movement was not only frowned upon but restricted by official decree in China, with social norms and practices preventing movement from ancestral sites. These social practices (particularly relating to Confucianism), alongside the imperial government’s anti-emigration stance, meant that movement abroad was not common. Furthermore, as Ooi (1992) explains, Chinese women actually faced an extra burden, as they were subjected to a huge amount of pressure to remain in the home and procreate. As a consequence, the Chinese community abroad was heavily male dominated. During economic and political unrest in the 1930s, however, more women began to move abroad to seek domestic work in order to support their families. A large amount of this migration came from the southern silk-producing regions, such as Guangdong. As Constable (1997) explains, *amahs* are today seen as the pinnacle domestic service role, as many people describe them in fond memory, and suggests that they were appropriately subservient and loyal. But *amahs* were not a homogenous group and their experiences varied hugely, with some being treated as part of the family by their employers, and others experiencing continued abuse (ibid).

to the economy, the Ministry of Labour has recently implemented a Foreign Domestic Servant Scheme in addition to the existing Domestic Servant Scheme. This new scheme will widen the sources and will therefore enable households in Singapore to employ female domestic help from other countries ... Limited by our size and lack of natural resources, Singapore cannot afford a big population, hence, the policy to encourage our citizens to have not more than two children. In the same way, foreign domestic help employed under the new scheme would not be allowed to settle in Singapore.

Aside from demonstrating the Singaporean state's belief that household labour does not contribute to the economy, a devaluation of this form of labour that is common worldwide, this press release shows some of the values and objectives of the PAP, that is, its prioritisation of economic growth and concerns around population increase and the demographics of the nation.⁶¹ Indeed, the denigration of domestic work is exemplified by it here being described as household 'duties' (rather than framed as labour), with Singaporean women's skills deemed worthy of other roles.

Prior to Singaporean independence, the country had maintained fairly traditional Western gendered norms, with women's roles being centred predominantly in the home and the family. While gendered norms have been maintained in many ways, the PAP's prioritisation of economic growth came to the fore in the 1970s and 1980s, leading them to introduce new policies to actively encourage women into waged employment (Oishi, 2005). As Oishi (*ibid.*, p.28) explains, "[t]he labour force participation rate among married women had barely grown between 1957 and 1970 ... This became a concern for the government which had been counting on further growth in the labour force". Despite the active encouragement of the PAP, and LKY in particular, women who did want to move into the productive labour force still faced challenges. Societal attitudes did not change as quickly as the policies which the PAP put in place, and women's role was still largely seen as being tied to the home and the family. Apprehensions over reproductive labour and, importantly, who would be filling this void, became a central concern for many Singaporeans. The FDW scheme was, therefore, seen as a way to combat these concerns (*ibid.*) and an example of the transnationalisation of domestic work and it being maintained as a highly gendered form of labour, with responsibility being passed from one woman to another (also see Chapter 2, section 2.1, p.30). Since its

⁶¹ As has already been detailed, the Singaporean state has been very concerned with ensuring that the CMIO scheme is maintained, and they have also been involved in controlling the class makeup of the population.

introduction, the scheme has been very successful in terms of fulfilling its immediate goal. As Oishi (2005, p.29) explains:

... the labor force participation rate among married women in Singapore increased from 29.3 percent in 1980 to 40.3 percent in 1989. By 1992, married women actually outnumbered single women in the labor force ... [and] In 1998, married women constituted 55.7 percent of the total female labor force.

Despite a simultaneous increase in governmental and private sector child-care centres in the 1980s and early 1990s, working families, for the most part, chose to employ DWs as they were seen as better value financially.⁶² Despite female participation in the 'productive' labour force continuing to increase, there have not been the same changes to gendered norms. Coe and Kelly (2002, p.344) suggest that the Singaporean state, in its active and severe control of the labour force, has engaged with gender roles directly:

... the government is explicit in its promotion of the male-headed household and the primacy of domestic responsibilities for women ... Power over labour is not, therefore, exercised solely through economic or legal compulsion, but is also asserted discursively through the creation of popular understandings of labour's place in the economy and society.

The state, therefore, seeks to control the population at every level, through the family, the home and the economy. Indeed, rather than an increase in masculine participation in the 'reproductive' labour force, Singapore, instead, chose to become reliant on migrant women fulfilling these needs.

Singapore – like many other high-income, (migrant) destination/receiving countries – faces certain demographic challenges, as birth rates are declining alongside an increase in people's average life-expectancy. This, together with changing societal norms and the expansion of the middle class, has meant that the number of DWs, or caregivers, has continued to increase (Piper, 2008b). While DWs were initially employed in many households to fulfil childcare responsibilities, elderly care has now become a major issue. As Koh et al. (2017, p.196) explain,

⁶² There was not a significant difference between the costs of day care for children and a DW's monthly salary. This meant that if a family had more than one child, or if they wanted extra household tasks completing, it would be better financially for them to employ a DW.

“[m]ost workers are paid about S\$500 a month, regardless of the number of household members requiring care. Even with the monthly S\$265 migrant domestic worker levy paid to the government and the worker’s other living expenditures, these expenses pale in comparison to the cost of respite care: the cost for just 2-weeks of respite care at nursing homes can easily exceed S\$1000 even after government subsidies”. DWs are now an integral part of the nation’s family structure which, as Yeoh, Huang and Gonzalez (1999) argue, are essential to their functioning. Today, many Singaporeans, who were themselves raised in households with/by DWs, are now employers. Ultimately, the PAP created a system which now sees one in five households employing at least one full time live-in employee (HOME, 2015), equating to just over 255,000 workers in Singapore in 2019 (MOM, 2020c). Despite the continued increase in the DW population size, and the labour they perform being essential to the functioning of the nation’s political, economic and social realms, they remain a largely under-valued and invisibilised work force.

Since the introduction of the FDW scheme, women from 13 different countries have become eligible to apply for employment⁶³, with the majority migrating from Indonesia, the Philippines and Myanmar (respectively). Despite some changes to this scheme since its introduction, there have been certain, and very important, continuing factors. The FDW scheme is only eligible to ‘foreign’ ‘women’⁶⁴ and only as a temporary contract (MOM, 2020d). They are allowed to enter the country on a two-year fixed term (but potentially renewable) contract and they must live with, and work for, only one employer, performing only the kind of work that is deemed to be ‘domestic’ (MOM, 2020h).⁶⁵ Recent changes state that these women must now be between the ages of 23 and 50, with 8 years of formal education (MOM, 2020d). If a DW is already working for an employer when they reach 50 years of age, however, they can have their contract renewed until they are 60 but cannot transfer to another employer during this time (ibid.). These rules were altered in 2005 with the aim of stopping the number

⁶³ While the MOM (2020d, online), suggests that DWs must be from approved “source” countries, in reality, most DWs are from Indonesia, the Philippines and Myanmar, with a smaller population from India and an even smaller number from Cambodia. While I did not meet any Sri Lankan nationals, I understand that the population was larger historically.

⁶⁴ I met several DWs in Singapore who did not self-identify as ‘women’, however, with some DWs feeling that their gender identity did not correspond with their biological sex. Nevertheless, this form of migration provided them with an opportunity to take on labour that provided a higher income and, for three DWs I met, to escape familial pressures to marry or conform to gendered and heteronormative stereotypes they felt unable to.

⁶⁵ Despite the state claiming that a DW’s role is clear (MOM, 2020m), there is still a huge amount of ambiguity about what labour can or cannot be performed. This will be addressed in more detail in Chapter’s 5 and 7.

of teenagers migrating to work as DWs and following some high profile cases of abuse and death in the country (Human Rights Watch, 2005). In practice, however, these credentials can still be evaded, as some people do not have accurate records of their age to begin with or they (the DW, their family or the agencies involved) may provide fake records.

However, the ambiguity surrounding DWs' responsibilities and bodies, extend much further than this. In addition to the six-monthly medical screening for infectious diseases that all foreign 'workers' face, DWs are also tested for pregnancy (MOM, 2020i). The results of these examinations are sent to the MOM and, if found to be pregnant, the state has the right to deport and blacklist⁶⁶ the DW. Indeed, because this would be a violation of a DW's work permit, it could make the employer liable to forfeiting their security bond. Practically, however, the MOM will not hold an employer liable for this if they report it and have informed their employee of their work permit conditions (MOM, 2020j). Nonetheless, this fear has led many employers to feel that they have to enforce a higher level of control over their DWs, believing they have a responsibility particularly on their days off (TWC2, 2011) (more detail about employers' feelings of anxiety over their DWs conduct will be provided in Chapter 5).

While maintaining these tight regulations, the state also negates much of its own responsibility towards DWs by excluding them from certain labour laws, both from the 'Employment Act' and 'Work Injury Compensation Act' (MOM, 2020k, 2020h), claiming this is due to the nature of domestic labour (Yeoh, Huang and Devasahayam, 2004). As Yeoh, Huang and Devasahayam (2004) explain, exclusion from these statutes means that DWs' working hours, wages and general conditions can vary hugely depending upon the employer. In addition to wages varying greatly, DWs most often migrate with the support of employment agencies to whom they then have to pay back the costs of moving, plus the profit such agencies make. While the state only allows agencies in Singapore to deduct two month's salary from DWs for this process (TWC2, 2016), they often take far more as they partner with agencies in the Philippines, Indonesia, Myanmar and elsewhere, who also, supposedly, incur costs for their role. During my fieldwork, I met several DWs who had incurred between six- and ten-months' salary deduction.

⁶⁶ This means that the DW will be unable to reapply to work in Singapore again.

Indeed, until 2012, there was no official regulation surrounding a DW's right to time off and rest. The post-2012 improvement was reached, to a large extent, as the state was impacted by the oppositional action of NGOs supporting DWs' rights. Today, as detailed in the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act (MOM, 2020h), which is the legal framework that governs the employment of DWs (Koh et al., 2017),⁶⁷ every employee is entitled to one day off per week and 'adequate' daily rest. This was ultimately not enshrined, however, and can be easily circumvented, as the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act also suggests that if there is written agreement by the employee and employer then a day off does not have to be given. In reality, the unequal power relations that exist between DWs and their employers, as well as a lack of knowledge of the law and limitations in English proficiency among DWs, means that even if a day of rest is wanted, it may not be given.

When a day off is permitted, most often on Sundays, DWs are forced to rest, socialise and complete their errands in the public spaces of Singapore. Despite many workers still not receiving this time off,⁶⁸ and having no other place to go to, the presence of migrant workers in public spaces on Sundays is a point of tension for some citizens. The Lucky Plaza shopping centre on Orchard Road, for example, has been nicknamed 'Little Manila', and there are other key sites where domestic workers spend time: City Plaza (typically where DWs from Indonesia gather to spend time); Peninsular Plaza (where DWs from Myanmar meet); Little India; and the Botanical Gardens, amongst others. In these sites, women sit, relax, eat, celebrate birthdays, call their families and discuss their weeks, but Singaporeans complain that their presence creates crowds and noise that is unacceptable (Yeoh & Huang, 1999). The large presence of other migrants, particularly male construction and marine workers, is also a point of concern for many employers who, as previously mentioned, are concerned with the moral and sexual conduct of DWs.

The concern over where these women rest can be witnessed clearly by walking down Orchard Road on Sundays, as the shopping centre next door to Lucky Plaza, a high-end mall, has security guards placed outside it ushering people on, with clearly placed signs discouraging

⁶⁷ This legislation is more limited than the Employment Act (which DWs are not covered by) in the protections it provides.

⁶⁸ Some workers receive no days off at all, while others might receive every weekend, every other weekend, or just one day per month. Some employers will not allow their employees to have a day off until they are no longer having their salary deducted by their employment agency.

loitering. This is not the case on other week days and is a direct consequence of the FDW scheme enabling DWs to have one day off a week but mandating that they live in the home of their employers.



Figure 11: 'No Resting & No Sitting'. This sign was placed by several planted areas outside a high-end shopping mall, next-door to Lucky Plaza. The space had been designed without benches and security guards would usher DWs away from the entrance on Sundays. When I loitered outside, or perched on these concrete edges, I was not asked to move (photo author's own, 2017).

The ambiguity surrounding DWs and their presence outside of the home space extends further again. While more exclusive condominium blocks have service elevators for employees, trade and maintenance staff to use, and can ban DWs from using facilities such as the swimming pool or gym, other sites enforce rules to ensure DWs do not enter spaces they are not allowed. In private members clubs, for example, DWs are often only allowed in the children's areas or the lobbies, and not permitted to enter the bar, lounge or restaurant spaces (Johnston, 2013). Johnston (2013, p.85) argues that this is a form of "spatial deference", an expected submissive status that is spatially practiced. Despite their presence in these spaces being required by the families who employ them, they are not treated equally within them. These are not, however, rules stipulated by the state or FDW scheme explicitly, but are in many ways encouraged by it as it tacitly endorses a bifurcated migrant labour system.

The FDW scheme also necessitates that, in addition to a worker's monthly salary, the employer is required to provide 'adequate' food and space for their employee to rest and sleep. What is understood as 'adequate' of course varies and can result in tensions between

DWs and their employers. If a DW is hungry, for example, one employer may allow food to be taken freely when another may not. The social and cultural boundaries that exist within the home, both the expressed/explicit and unexpressed/implicit spatial and social rules, can create vastly different working environments, which are difficult for the FDW scheme to regulate. The employer is also required to provide some kind of medical insurance, but this is not always comprehensive and can result in ambiguities surrounding the responsibility for payments if a DW needs more expensive forms of healthcare.

The FDW scheme has, then, allowed reproductive labour to remain a feminised concern; while unburdening many female citizens of caring and domestic responsibilities. It has seen women of a more 'superior' status be positioned in contrast to other women, raced and 'foreign', whose bodies are subordinated, with racialised-colonial hierarchies being violently perpetuated. Indeed, the change in the name of the FDW scheme, from Foreign Domestic Servant scheme, was done with no fundamental alterations to the scheme itself. Despite this, and in part due to the restrictive and often repressive nature of the various work permits issued to foreign 'workers' more broadly, there has been significant oppositional action in Singapore. Migrant labourers, citizens, NGOs and other societal groups have, at different times, come together to fight for the rights of 'workers'. The role of this activism and advocacy, despite often being ignored or hidden in Singapore, prevails and has concrete effects on the state's actions.

4.2 Activism, Oppositional Politics & the Role of NGOs in Singapore

While hard to imagine today, the PAP was, at its founding, a left-wing and, in many ways, resistant party, made up of a collection of trade unionists, communists, lawyers and others who opposed the British colonial regime and wanted to fight for the rights of workers. There had been consistent struggles throughout the colonial period over public space (Yeoh, 1996) and the country had also been experiencing further turbulence post-war. As Loh (2013, p.114) details:

British colonial attempts to contain or clear urban kampongs and relocate the residents in regulated housing were powerfully contested ... Kampong dwellers in Singapore ... challenged the demolition of their wooden houses and involuntary rehousing. They contributed significantly to the growth of an anti-colonial politics which challenged the work ... Leftwing rural activists, aligned with the People's Action

Party and working with politicians and the local old boys' associations, organised the residents ... to redefine the basis and premises of official controls.

Eventually led by LKY, the PAP was responsible for organising strikes and even accused of "trying to undermine rule by representative government in favour of mob rule" (Abshire, 2011, p.119). Despite this, there was a purge of the PAP and its more left-wing factions. With the more radical members of the party ultimately imprisoned or removed from the core positions of power, LKY then led the party to victory and independence, both from the British and in turn from the Malay Federation (ibid.).

Since coming into power, however, and in the 50+ years that it has maintained its rule, the PAP's reputation has changed considerably. It has been argued that the PAP,⁶⁹ is: corporatist; paternalist; developmental; patriarchal; strong; and hegemonic (Chong, 2006, also see: Chua, 1995; Low, 2001; Malhorta, 2002; Tan, 2001), a party that seeks "to usher in political authoritarianism, not to accommodate itself to democracy" (Rodan, 2006, p.231). While Chong (2006) contends that many of these perspectives are limited theoretically in particular ways, the party has proved itself to be draconian, severe and quick to respond to any 'threats' of social disobedience or contestation. It has been suggested, for instance, that the PAP is now intolerant to activism, having made public demonstration more or less illegal by only allowing some events to go ahead with specific approvals and legislation (Gwynne, 2013). It has also tried to suppress the powers of trade-unions and oppositional political parties, as well as any resistance from civil society, despite having relied on them heavily in their formation and ascendance to power (Chok, 2013; Rodan, 2006; Rosa, 2007). In 1982, for example, the PAP unleashed 'Operation Spectrum' (a concealed security operation), which, together with the 'Internal Security Act', enabled the government to 'detain without trial 22 people, accusing them of a "Marxist conspiracy" to overthrow the state' (Tan, 2016, p.238). The group at the heart of this alleged conspiracy was made up of people who were concerned with improving the welfare of the country's migrant worker population, including "... lawyers, members of the WP [Workers' Party], Catholic social workers, members of the recently formed civil society organisation Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE), and social conscious members of the theatre group The Third Stage" (ibid., p.238). These people were interrogated

⁶⁹ It is important to note, however, that Singapore is, *de facto*, a one-party state, with the PAP holding a monopoly of state power (Rodan, 1996).

and tortured, with most of the group signing confessions of their 'crimes', many of which have now been recanted (Barr, 2010; Chng, Low, & Teo, 2017). In a book commemorating the 30th anniversary of Operation Spectrum, Teo Soh Lung, a former detainee, (2017, p.10-11) writes:

Strangely, under continuous interrogations and torture, many of the detainees were ultimately forced to admit that they were unwittingly "made use of" by friends ... The prisoners were released in stages but not before they were forced to appear on television for rehearsed interviews ... On 18 April 1988, nine released prisoners issued a statement rebutting the government's allegations against them and confirming that they had suffered ill treatment. Eight of them were immediately re-arrested the next day. The ninth, Tang Fong Har who was in England, did not return to Singapore ... Today she is living in Hong Kong in political exile ... Left in the hope of indefinite detention, several prisoners turned to the Supreme Court for relief. The court failed them ... By June 1990 everyone ... was released. They were all subjected to severe restrictions on their freedom of movement, assembly, free speech and expression for many years.

While Operation Spectrum reveals a moment of extreme control taken by the PAP, and unlike the image of order often presented, civil society has not been entirely neutral, pacified, nor silent since the 1980s. The capacity in which groups can organise, however, is still heavily controlled by the PAP. As Lyons (2007, p.108-109) writes:

[W]hile the Singapore Constitution guarantees freedom of association (Article 14) in principle, organizations with more than ten members or committees with more than five members are required to register under the Societies Act or the Companies Act ... Groups whose activities are related to religious, ethnic, civil and political rights, or the governance of Singapore are carefully screened because, according to the government, they may potentially give rise to "law and order" problems and carry out activities that may be prejudicial to the national interest.

Within this context, NGOs and activists have had to manoeuvre very carefully within the regulations of the state. Indeed, only recently in May 2017, a prominent Singaporean activist, Jolovan Wham, was charged for organising a public assembly (a vigil) outside of a prison where a 29-year old man was to be hanged and murdered by the state for importing heroin into the country. Jolovan Wham was also charged for organising a 'public' assembly with a foreign speaker, an activist from Hong Kong, who spoke using video-call to a private gathering of people (The Straits Times, 2017), and with public vandalism after hanging two pieces of A4

paper on some public transport while trying to raise awareness of Operation Spectrum.⁷⁰ The state's fear of social disobedience and 'recalcitrance', as the police latterly described this behaviour, is demonstrated by their reaction to this form of protest, a form of oppositional action that would be considered insignificant and quite tame in many other places. This being said, activism is clearly still prevalent, and there are now a number of NGOs that work to advocate on behalf of different groups, including migrant workers.

HOME, TWC2, the Archdiocesan Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants & Itinerant People (ACMI), HealthServe, Aidha, Project X and AWARE are organisations that are all central to the fight for migrants' rights in Singapore. While these organisations have differing approaches and focuses, they provide migrant workers, and others (such as Singaporean women who have been subjected to domestic abuse), with legal/case support, helplines, counselling, training/educational courses, medical support and shelter, all free of charge. They also produce research and advocate on behalf of migrants, petitioning the state, and collaborating with them in some instances, to bring about positive policy changes. There are also community groups and networks that are founded by DWs – the Indonesian Family Network, for example – that organise social activities, pageants, sports activities and celebrations during religious and cultural holidays.

The changes in policy surrounding DWs' right to a day off, for example, was one such campaign that saw different organisations come together to appeal for new laws. TWC2 and HOME argued that a break each week should not only be a right for all workers generally, to provide them with necessary rest, but also as a strategy to reduce rates of abuse. They argued that it would provide workers with an opportunity to report incidents (or for any visible signs, such as bruises, to be noticed by others). As John Gee, who works for TWC2 (2007, online), explains:

[A] day off each week would be one of the surest deterrents to abuse: how many employers would dare to strike a worker, or worse, knowing that in a few days' time, their action could be reported to the police and exposed to the world?

As stated, there was a policy reform in this area and, despite the amendments being limited and not completely enshrined by law, there were improvements for many DWs: "in 2015, 41%

⁷⁰ He did this while sitting blindfolded with a group of activists, reading a book released about Operation Spectrum.

of migrant domestic workers surveyed received a weekly day off, as compared to just 12% in 2011” (Koh et al., 2017, p.191). This said, Koh et al. (ibid.) question whether the change in policy can be attributed to a single desire to better working conditions for DWs. They (ibid., p.197) argue instead that a need to remain competitive with other ‘migrant receiving’ countries, because of Singapore’s structural dependency on DWs, was at the centre of this change:

... [t]he day off policy was conditioned upon satisfying the interests of Singaporeans, which is to ensure a steady supply of migrant domestic workers in light of the structural dependence on these workers. While the policy on the surface was to become a tool to improve the working conditions of migrant domestic workers, it was more crucially at the structural level a means to compete for these workers in order to meet the needs of many resident households.

Whether or not the pressure from NGOs was a significant factor in this decision, there have been other occasions when the state’s position has not been malleable to international or local pressures. For instance, the (near) global ratification of the ILO Domestic Worker’s Convention (C189) in 2011 (ILO, 2017) did not seem to impact the Singaporean state, as they abstained from voting.⁷¹ The rights and protection that this would provide DWs in Singapore have not, therefore, been implemented. One noteworthy change in approach by the state has been in the introduction of the Migrant Workers’ Centre (hereafter MWC) in 2009, a ‘non-governmental organisation’ that is ultimately tied directly to the state and described by Chok (2013, p.148) as a ‘Gongo’, “a government-organized non-governmental organization”. Over the last few years, the MWC has opened its own shelter for DWs, which now means that many get directed there by the police and MOM, rather than directly to HOME or other NGOs. While the impact of this is not easy to determine, it is significant and could be seen as a new attempt by the state to more closely manage the cases of DWs whose relationships with their employers have broken down. It could also be seen, however, as a way in which the state can centralise their power and to destabilise NGOs and civil activism more broadly.

⁷¹ This convention “addresses the rights and circumstances of domestic workers, ensuring that domestic workers receive the same legal protections as other workers” (Varia, 2012, p.174).

4.3 Summary

The rise of Singapore from a so-called 'third' to 'first' world country was far from seamless or uncontested, and the nation was certainly not 'transformed' without deeply entrenched injustices. Instead, the PAP has reproduced colonial hierarchies which unequally position women and non-citizens, depreciating the importance of reproductive labour and the bodies who perform it. Indeed, the state has relied on draconian and patriarchal policies to actively import migrant 'workers', whose labour, despite being fundamental to the nation-state, is performed under exploitative and often oppressive conditions. While citizens are also not exempt from the state's attempts to manage their bodies – Singaporean women, for instance, have been encouraged to either produce more or less children dependent upon their educational attainment and class (and, therefore, race) (Ramdas, 2015), for instance, (see Appendix C for more detail) – migrant 'workers' are often subjected to much harsher and more invasive bodily controls and restrictions, particularly in comparison to their counterpart, i.e. migrant 'professionals'. As I will show in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, the Singaporean state's approach not only enables and maintains an unequal labour regime but also actively produces it, enacting violence that, in turn, makes further bodily suffering more likely for migrant 'workers'. The systems in which migrant and domestic labour is embedded – built on racist, patriarchal and colonial ideas and assumptions – create and perpetuate violence to which migrants and citizens are subjected. This chapter has provided details of the politics and policy which, both discursively and materially, produce a migrant labour regime that the PAP deems necessary for economic success and social order. The post-colonial and developmentalist Singaporean state, then, (re)produces itself in the policy which it controls and enforces. It is important to re-stress, however, that the state is neither entirely hegemonic or homogenous. Indeed, the PAP emerged as an oppositional political movement that challenged the British rule and fundamentally transformed the nation. Today, oppositional and political movements do still exist, at the grassroots particularly, with organisations such as HOME and TWC2 putting pressure on the state to improve the conditions for migrants. Whether or not it can be stated that their pressures directly resulted in a day off being mandated for DWs, for example, their presence does impact the state in its daily functioning (as I will come to show, particularly in Chapter 6, p.144).

Being 'Foreign', 'Domestic' & 'Worker' in Singapore

They [her employers] possess you. You cannot even use a phone, you cannot even talk to anyone ... But that experience made me more strong ... You should not become timid person ... I became very strong then
(Interview with Susan, February 2017).

But while states and capitalists want workers, what they get is people (Anderson, 2000, p.108).

I met Riza for the first time on a bus, both of us co-incidentally travelling back to the apartment block that I was staying in. At the time, Riza was caring for a small boy who was unwell, his head falling on to me to rest when the bus moved as he was too tired to stay propped up. While she kept apologising, trying to manoeuvre his body and embarrassedly saying “sorry ma’am” to me several times, I managed to reassure her that I was not bothered. After spending half an hour talking on the bus, and then walking the young boy back to the apartment block together, we exchanged numbers. I had told Riza that I was volunteering with HOME, and was doing some research about DWs, and she had excitedly told me that she could introduce me to some of her friends and show me around one Sunday. Riza and I ended up meeting up on several occasions, spending time together and her telling me some of the concerns she had about being positioned as a DW in Singapore:

Riza, Marisol [Riza’s friend] and I spent the day wondering around Boat Quay and near the famous Merlion statue, taking selfies (an essential activity for Riza on her day off) and eating McDonalds. As we walked past a large group of DWs sitting on a decked space near to the Anderson Bridge, the two ladies talked to me about how they felt they were perceived, as Filipina DWs in Singapore. They said that Singaporeans looked down on all DWs, but said that this was made worse by women who dressed “too sexy” and DWs with boyfriends. They both agreed that those women should cover themselves up more and dress more modestly. They said that either way though, Singaporeans would always see them as “a lower-class person” because of their job, adding that “they know we are helper because of our race” (Extract from my field notes, June 2017).

Across the period of time I spent volunteering at the HOME shelter, and spending time with people like Riza, I came to understand that before, during and even after their period of employment, DWs are actively, and violently, rendered subordinate in Singaporean society. While (re)produced and exacerbated by the DW population themselves (Riza here having internalised concerns over how Filipina women dress and behave), other actors also took part in situating DWs as (in Riza's words) "a lower-class person". Riza's initial concern over the boy she cared for leaning on me, and latterly her delight at the proposition of showing me around on her day off, was because of my positioning as a white woman *vis-à-vis* hers as a Filipina DW. Indeed, my whiteness unjustly marked me as 'superior', reproducing violent colonial hierarchies, and meaning my job status was not inscribed on my body in the same way as domesticity was for Riza.

In this chapter, I will demonstrate how employers, employment agencies and the state (amongst others) play a role in (re)producing Singapore as a space of unsafety and violence for DWs. By focusing on different stages of their migratory journeys, I will bring attention to the ways in which DWs are 'commodified' before even entering Singapore, then being positioned both as 'possession' and 'disposable' during their employment. I argue that through their migratory journey and while working, attempts are consistently being made to strip DWs of their personhood, objectifying and dehumanising them. While enacted by individual employers and employment agencies, I show that this process is (re)produced and maintained by the FDW scheme – and, therefore, by proxy, the Singaporean state – which positions employers as sponsors/*kafeel*. The control that employers have over their employee because of this disables DWs from changing employer (or employment position) and allows them to be deported at any point, leaving them vulnerable to abuse and violence. By utilising the state's official title for this population, I show how being⁷² 'foreign', 'domestic' and 'worker' is an intersectional identity that situates DWs subordinately in Singaporean society: 'foreign' connecting to a DW's migrant and non-citizen status; 'domestic' relating to the nature and spatiality of their labour, as well as to their race, gender and subordinated status (these features having been highlighted in the discussion of domestic labour and 'domestic bodies' in Chapter 2, section 2.1, p.25); and 'worker' referring to DWs as 'low-skilled' and commodified labourers (particularly in opposition to 'professionals'). These processes render

⁷² As with its use in the chapter's title, I use the term 'being' to describe a mode of existence, imposed by others but also (re)produced and then performed by one's-self.

DWs vulnerable to abuse; enmeshed in anatomies and apparatuses of violence at different times and in different sites.

Through these discussions, I demonstrate how violence is both spatialised and relational; as one violent act leads to others. Despite the state, employers' and employment agencies' attempts to objectify and discipline DWs' bodies, I argue that these are not always so successful. Indeed, tensions arise because, rather than being objects or machines, DWs are ultimately human; their recalcitrant behaviour and flesh become a point of anxiety in the home and the nation more broadly. I ultimately show how DWs are situated and (re)produced in Singapore society, building on the aforementioned context (Chapter 4) and providing a basis for subsequently understanding their positioning when they are rendered sponsorless (in Chapters 6 and 7).

5.1 Being Commodified

After visiting employment agencies on a number of occasions with HOME residents, sometimes to collect their belongings and other times to help them find an agent that could find them an employer, I became accustomed to the processes by which they would 'market' and then 'sell' DWs. I asked an agent that I knew (who had helped some of the shelter residents find employment), Elizabeth, if I could interview her, to which I received a reluctant agreement.

As I entered the agency, I saw that there were two DWs sitting by the door, ready to greet me. This was a sight I had become familiar with, as all agencies seemed to like having their candidates sitting in their shop fronts, smiling and offering refreshments to potential employers. After greeting Elizabeth, who was sitting at a desk behind a computer screen, I asked if I could record her speaking. She responded very quickly, almost shouting: "No you cannot, and if you try I will prosecute you later". I found the threat to be a little melodramatic, but I reassured her and said I would just write down her responses.

After asking just a few questions, and barely getting an answer, Elizabeth abruptly explained that she had helped some HOME residents to find new employers before, but said she wouldn't in future because they caused "too much trouble". She said that they had "too many friends" and that their demands were "too high". She said that HOME shouldn't be allowing the residents to use their phones or to leave the shelter, adding that they shouldn't be running classes and activities because this was creating DWs who were "too ambitious".

Elizabeth said that she had been introduced to a former HOME resident, Ei Phyu Soe, and had subsequently employed her for her mother. She said, “she was very cute you see, cute face and quiet”. Apparently Ei Phyu Soe’s employment had barely lasted a few days, however, because she had been on her phone during the day and “wasn’t working well”. Elizabeth went on to tell me that HOME should never have allowed Ei Phyu Soe to come to her mother’s house, as she later found out that she was only 17-years-old. She said that her mother was now expected to pay for Ei Phyu Soe’s air ticket home, as she didn’t want to employ her any longer, telling me sternly that this was unacceptable ...

As I went to leave, Elizabeth asked where the majority of the shelter residents were from, proudly adding, “I know where the shelter is you know?” I said that there were more or less equal number of Indonesian, Filipina and Burmese residents, with a smaller number of residents from India. She turned to me, looking somewhat offended, and said “Indians are dirty, not good” (Extract from my field notes, November 2017).

After leaving the agency, I reflected on what Elizabeth had said, having, admittedly (and shamefully), become slowly desensitised to these kinds of opinions. While being vehemently racist, Elizabeth had also exposed a concern about DWs becoming “too ambitious”, as though they were a population who should be submissive and docile. I also could not help but feel that Elizabeth’s anger toward HOME, over Ei Phyu Soe’s real age being revealed, was both misplaced and absurd. While it was clear to many of the HOME staff and volunteers that several residents were under the required age to work in Singapore, their real ages were not always revealed or known. Ei Phyu Soe had looked very young, her “cuteness” being stated as desirable, but Elizabeth was as able to discern this as anyone else that had met her. As I will come to show, it was often a DW’s appearance and bodily attributes that were used as a selling point by employment agents.

The ways in which employment agencies in Singapore (known locally as maid agencies) present themselves, marks them distinctly from other recruitment services. Indeed, as described, DWs are made to sit formally, smiling and greeting potential employers in their uniforms, while others profit from this performance, a process by which this form of labour migration has been commodified.




Figure 12: 'Waiting to be Picked'. DWs are made to sit in uniforms, in the entrances or windows of agencies while potential employers walk by. Some of these DWs will already have employers and will be waiting for their paperwork to be finalised, others will not (photo author's own, 2016).

Beyond this, both on their websites and in their shopfronts, employment agencies provide prospective employers with pages of photographs and key pieces of information about each of the hopeful candidates, in the form of their 'biodata'. The Singaporean state actually necessitates that agencies provide this information in order to help the purchaser, or employer, in their search for an employee (MOM, 2020). Alongside a photograph, an agency in Singapore will provide prospective employers (and often anyone who searches online) with some variance of, a candidate's: name; 'type'; nationality; date and place of birth; height; weight; religion; marital status; number and ages of children; home address; education attainment; 'off-day' requirements; language skills; and the airport they would need repatriating to.⁷³

⁷³ In addition to this, the agent will also provide a brief introduction to the worker, some of their key skills (assessed by the agency) and the answers to some key questions about the contested weekly day off, whether they are happy with handling and eating pork, and the kinds of tasks the worker is able or willing to take on. Some agencies also offer information from previous employers if they have any (and if it is in their interest to share it).

MAID PROFILE



SEND TO FRIEND

DOWNLOAD BIO-DATA FORM

PRINT BIO-DATA FORM

CONTACT MAID AGENCY

Ref. Code

Type of Maid

Nationality

Date of Birth

Age

Height

Weight

Religion

Marital Status

No. of Siblings

Place of Birth

Education

Language

Expected Salary

Fresh Maid

Myanmar

04/11/1990

29

162 cm

62 kg

Buddhist

Single

3

N/A

N/A

English,Burmese

N/A

Figure 13: 'Exemplar 'Maid' Profile'. This is an example of an advert taken from the 'EazyMaid' (an employment agency in Singapore) website. Prospective employers are provided with a photograph and 'key' pieces of 'biodata' (Image from, EazyMaid, 2020, online).

While some of this data would be asked for in many kinds of job application, an individual's educational attainment for example, others would not. The kinds of information given, and the ways in which this information is presented, is in itself an indication of the ways in which DWs are objectified.

When I managed to interview agents in Singapore, after finding many unwilling to speak to me, I asked for details on why prospective employers would want some of the data provided:

I asked why people had preferences for particular nationalities of DWs and the agent explained: "Maids from Myanmar are more obedient and, umm, not very smart *lah*". She laughed, "They are easier to control and cheaper as well". I wrote her comments manically, my hand hurting from how quickly I tried to get down her every word. She said that some employers preferred 'fresh' maids, while others liked someone with more experience. (Extract from my field notes, October 2017).

The word 'fresh', which is also often listed under a DWs 'type', was used repeatedly by agents to insinuate a new or first-time migrant worker. It seemed to denote youthfulness, despite this not necessarily being the case. When I spoke to another agent – a lady who, while

agreeing to be interviewed, seemed very suspicious of me – I again asked about the preferences employers seemed to have:

I asked her about why someone might want an older or younger worker. She began explaining that an older DW is more likely to have experience, which can be considered a pro or con. She said, “as an employer you might feel more comfortable leaving a very young child with an older helper”, while younger DWs tended to be ‘fresh’ which appealed to some employers as: “with a fresh one you can start from the beginning. They don’t come with old habits and so you can start from new. They won’t compare other employers with you too so, can be better’ (Extract from my field notes, October 2017).

Like my interaction with Elizabeth, it became clear through this conversation – and other conversations with DWs, employers and agents – that a DW having ‘too many’ friends⁷⁴ or ‘too much’ experience, was perceived to be a threat to some households. Indeed, a DW being too knowledgeable of her rights, or having other employment experiences, often became a source of concern rather than of value. For many employers, a DW exhibiting too much of her personality or personhood was undesirable. Instead, they desired a human capability for household and caring tasks, but with a machine/robot ‘inanimate-ness’.

Framing someone as experienced or new/fresh, appeared to have huge implications, denoting something more about a DW’s character and about their suitability for living and working in a household. Stereotypes like these were also attached to applicants in a number of other ways too. The labelling of a nationality, for example, supposedly bared influence on a person’s intelligence. In fact, all of the agencies I spoke to, without exception, stated that Filipina DWs were seen as the most intelligent DW. DWs from Myanmar (aforementioned as being said to be “more obedient and, umm, not very smart *lah*”) were described by different agents as being both easier to manipulate and requiring more ‘managing’.

I asked if there was a nationality of DWs that Singaporean employers preferred. She said that it was Indonesians, adding that Filipinas are “too smart” and that they have “too high demands”, mentioning that they wanted days off and their phones. She said that DWs from Myanmar were “not as good in communication” and said that

⁷⁴ I heard on multiple occasions of DWs who were banned from speaking to anyone about their employer’s home; unable to have days-off because their employer was concerned that their family secrets would be revealed, or because their DW might get “too demanding”.

agents and employers use the phrase “push button” to describe them. I must have looked puzzled by this, which I was, because she went on to explain “it means, if you were to ask them to do five tasks they will only remember to do one or two before you have to remind them again”. She continued, “they have less initiative and you have to tell her everything you want”... she continued to tell me that Indonesians were better and in highest demand because “they are in the middle” (Extract from my field notes, November 2017).

Nationality, then, for many agents and employers in Singapore, aligned with, and created, an imagined or real subject who was deemed more or less intelligent than another person. While agents and employers continued to assure me that nationality was tied to ‘cultural traits’, and on occasion suggesting that this is also related to the linguistic capabilities of a whole nation, the DWs who were either awaiting jobs or being given them, were represented and viewed in this light. This rhetoric, and these sorts of perspectives, do of course have very real implications. Employers who go to these agencies, who would prefer an employee that they feel is less intelligent and easier to control/manipulate (or that may not know their rights), may be advised to employ a ‘fresh’, and younger, DW from Myanmar. In the process of their bodily commodification, then, this places some DWs in more vulnerable positions than others.

I asked Anya, a volunteer at HOME, about how she felt these ‘cultural’ and ‘national’ traits become meaningful and impact the subject formation of DWs in Singapore. For Anya, she felt it all ultimately came down to money, that is, for employment agencies to ‘sell’ certain workers at a lower price in order to attract as many employers as possible. I explained that employment agencies had been telling me about Filipinas’ ‘demanding’ behaviour and it seemed this was something she had heard on many occasions too:

AN: She’s too demanding, exactly, or she will be on the phone all the time and she will know her way around, but isn’t that a positive thing?

LA: Yes. And now it seems to me that a lot more people would prefer to employ domestic workers from Myanmar?

AN: I think the Myanmar thing has mainly to do with them being cheaper and them being newest, so the employer can more easily exploit them. I really think so. I think in the end, most employers here, they don’t give a shit as long as they can exploit somebody as cheaply as possible (Interview with Anya, December 2017).

In all of the agencies I visited, the price advertised for a DW was determined by their nationality, with an individual’s experience then allowing them to request a higher salary in

some circumstances. Shelter residents that I met from Myanmar, India and Cambodia seemed to have the lowest salaries, with Filipinas' gaining the highest and Indonesians usually being in between. Agencies would also have 'offers' or agreements on how many 'replacements' are allowed dependent upon the nationality of the worker being employed.

	MYANMAR	FILIPINO	INDONESIA
AGENCY FEE	\$288.00	\$988.00	\$888.00
**Agency fee is depends on the helper's experienced			
Below are the standard documentation fees:			
MOM	\$60.00	\$60.00	\$60.00
Transportation/Medical/thumbprinting	\$120.00	\$120.00	\$120.00
Settling in Programme (SIP)	\$75.00	\$75.00	\$75.00
Insurance	\$246.10	\$246.10	\$246.10
Run-away bond (optional)	\$53.50	\$53.50	\$53.50
Employment Contract	-	-	\$50.00
Philippine processing (POEA & Embassy)	-	\$ 300	-
TOTAL	\$842.60	\$2,092.60	\$1,492.60
Basic Salary	\$450.00	\$550.00	\$550.00
Replacement	unlimited replacement within 1 year	2 replacement within 6 mons	2 replacement within 6 months

Figure 14: 'Pricing Domestic Workers'. This is a pricing list from an agency for prospective employers wanting to hire a DW. The cost of hiring a DW, and the rules around their replacement, is dependent upon their nationality (photo author's own, 2017).

As Figure 14 shows, an employer of a worker from the Philippines or Indonesia would be able to get a 'replacement' twice within six months, whereas workers from Myanmar can be replaced an unlimited number of times, these conditions further stratifying workers. The very language of the agencies, in offering 'replacements', also contributes to the objectification and dehumanisation of these workers. This ability, for an employer to very simply change their employee, and at no additional costs, is a demonstration of DWs' commodification and the perception that they are 'disposable' (as I will come to in more detail in section 5.3, p.133).

Practically, as Anderson (2000) has described, a DW's nationality needs to be understood as a code to indicate an individual's skin colour, with racialised hierarchies operating in different global settings and with racial distinctions marking some people as more 'appropriate' or 'desirable' for certain kinds of work and different wages (Bakan & Stasiulis, 1995). Indeed, as articulated earlier (in Chapter 2, section 2.1, p.25), domestic bodies are not only gendered but raced too. It is important to note, however, that these racist and racialised notions are

geographically and temporally specific. Filipina DWs in Singapore might now be seen as 'too smart' but were previously viewed as being submissive and 'kind-hearted', when compared to *amahs*, for instance (Constable, 1997). In other contexts, however, nationality and race come to mean different things. When writing about her research in Canada, for instance, Pratt (1997, p.163) demonstrates how Filipina DWs were considered to be loving, patient and passive but also "represented as uncivilised". Stereotypes being both temporally and spatially specific.

Beyond an individual's nationality, race, religion and level of experience, I also asked agents about some of the other data that were provided, such as a candidate's photo, height and weight. One agent explained how she felt that a DW's height or weight was an indication of their ability to perform certain forms of labour:

Well, if you had a house where you needed things cleaning up high, if you wanted the ceilings cleaning, or if clothes needed hanging outside, you would need to know someone's height. And if someone had to care for an elderly person you might need to know their weight and if they were capable of lifting them" ... I couldn't help but think these rationales were ridiculous, as no shelter resident I knew would be tall enough to clean a ceiling without a step ladder of some kind. I also couldn't help but wonder who actually required their ceiling cleaning regularly, or ever, but decided not to push the agent any further as she seemed to be getting a little frustrated by my presence ... I also asked why the photo was given on the website ... she said "ahh, yes, employers are worried for this. They want the right sort of person" (Extract from my fieldnotes, October 2017).

In addition to this rationale, I was told by more than one agent that a DW's height was also important because living spaces are generally quite small in Singapore, with it being explained that potential employers may need their DW to sleep in a small space that a taller or bigger person could not fit in to. Worryingly, another agent suggested to me that someone might choose a lighter DW so that they would need to feed them less. An individual's actual ability to perform these kinds of labour, to lift an elderly person safely, for example, were just assumed; based on an idea about an individual and their body, rather than any real test of their capabilities.

One of the most important 'selling' points appeared to be a DW's photograph, however, a point that many agents seemed uncomfortable discussing with me. Indeed, this agent, similar to others, was careful in their wording, alluding to a preference in someone's appearance

("the right sort of person") but not stating it outright. One agent, Mr Goh, was more direct, however, and told me that it would often be the female household member that would choose a DW. He explained that this was significant because they would want someone who appeared clean but that was not threatening to them and their marriage; saying more clearly: "they don't want someone too, umm, too attractive *lah*".

Anderson (2000) suggests that rather than being purchased for their labour power, it is a DW's personhood that is sold. She argues that the actual purchase made by an employer is the "power to command":

[I]n this respect the paid domestic worker is herself, in her very essence, a means of reproduction. It is not just her labour power that is being harnessed to the cause of her employer's physical and social reproduction, but it is the very fact that *she*, the domestic worker, and not her employers, is doing the work, much of which seems invented especially for her to do. The employer is buying the power to command, not the property in the person, but the whole person (ibid., p.113).

Having shown that domestic labour has been commodified (in Chapter 2, section 2.1, p.27), it is clear that in Singapore, the bodies that perform it ('domestic bodies') have been too. Ideas that certain bodily attributes are desirable for certain forms of labour are not new. Indeed, Vertinsky and Captain (1998, p.541) write about the ways in which certain body 'types' were thought to be more suitable for plantation labour, and enslavement, than others; black bodies in general believed to be more able to endure pain: "their supposedly 'natural' brute strength and endurance inherited from their African origin". Despite having transformed in certain ways, histories of slavery, colonialism and white supremacy perpetuate violently in the present, with racist stereotypes and racial-capitalism creating hierarchies of domination in Singapore and beyond. While Vertinsky and Captain's (ibid.) accounts may specifically refer to a completely different space and time, and while the relationship of domination may appear slightly differently, it is still one which positions certain anatomies in Singapore as commodity, with violent apparatuses of the global political economy and immigration industry supporting this.

Indeed, the commodification of DWs, and the ways in which they are rendered purchasable, situates them differently from others performing the same labour (Anderson, 2000; Tadiar, 1997, 2004). As Tadiar (2004, p.115) writes, DWs are:

... paid not for a specific skill but for their embodiment of a variety of functions and services which they are expected to provide at the beck and call of their employers ... Not free to sell their own labour-power but instead themselves sold 'as bearers of that labour power' by others (their family, their recruiters, their government, as well as their employers).

These arguments are particularly compelling given the ways in which biodata is used and interpreted, with DWs being presented as a photograph and key facts and figures. The entire process of 'being commodified', then, violently objectifies and dehumanises DWs, stripping them even of their personhood. Indeed, beyond their personhood, and as bearers of labour power which have been appropriated by capital (Lowe, 1995; Wolkowitz, 2006), I argue that DWs are commodified as bodies. These bodies are, however, perceived to require control and management, a concern which the FDW scheme facilitates and formalises. Well beyond the state mandated bodily controls, however, employment agencies also make their own suggestions of ways that employers should discipline their employees. As one agent admitted, "I tell some employers to take away the hand phone ... and no off day until salary deduction is finished is also better". As purchasable entities, then, DWs are also, and necessarily become, a possession. As Chok and Fordyce (New Naratif, 2018) argue, the process of recruitment in Singapore, and the financial debt that this creates,⁷⁵ become the conditions for future exploitation in many ways.

5.2 Being Possessed

Across the ten months Rosamie spent in the HOME shelter, she experienced a huge amount of emotional turbulence. She had moved to Singapore from the Philippines as a tourist initially, hoping to find work. She, unlike most of the DWs I met, had no intentions of working in someone else's home, however, but had moved to escape an abusive relationship and to get an income so that she could provide for her son. Having worked in large private companies, on a United Nations Development Programme initiative and in both nursing and teaching,

⁷⁵ This recruitment system requires DWs, when they first move to Singapore, to work for anywhere between 2 and 12 months without a salary, or with a very small allowance. Many employers do not allow their employee to have a day off until this period has passed as they are often required to cover the costs of the DW's debt upfront with the agency.

Rosamie had hoped (and expected) to find an administrative role in Singapore.⁷⁶ Unable to find work after several weeks of searching, however, and too scared to fly back to the Philippines, she sought the support of an employment agency who found her a position as a DW in the home of wealthy a Filipino family. The family's nationality, Rosamie had told me, was the only reason she took the position, as she had heard horror stories about the treatment of DWs and felt that she was less likely to encounter such issues if she worked for a family of, in her own words, her "fellow man". Unfortunately, however, Rosamie's fears became a reality, as, after months of verbal abuse and exhausting working conditions, her employer physically assaulted her. When I asked her one day about how she felt DWs were perceived in Singapore, she started to talk about the work permit:

The helper job is not my first preference of job, right, it just so happened that it's the only choice at that time. And I learned that, it's like a holy work permit, it's like a curse. There are lots of discrimination. If you are holding the work permit, like, even if you have the qualifications or whatever, you cannot upgrade, cannot upgrade to whatever career you want ... There's always a lot of discrimination ... It is still a work right, it's a decent kind of work, but still a work that people are looking down on ... its still, they consider the domestic help as under, very low (Interview with Rosamie, November 2017).

Rosamie describes the ways in which she feels she is looked down upon in Singapore, with her positioning as 'domestic' marking her as subordinate, the state only worsening this by tying restrictive policy to this kind of labour alone. As a Filipina woman, she went on later to discuss the ways in which she was immediately identifiable as a DW in public space, her physical appearance being an indicator of her job role, with domesticity being inscribed on her body even outside of the space in which this labour is performed. Beyond this, Rosamie also described the work permit as a curse, that is, a piece of paper that she felt trapped her, and other DWs, making it impossible for upward social mobility and career progression. The sponsorship/*kafala* system not only prevented DWs from moving between professions and tying their work permit to their employer in vastly unequal relations of power (O'Connell Davidson, 2013), but also created a dependency on their employer (Anderson, 2000). Indeed, the FDW scheme, and associated work permit, binds DWs to their employers as their property,

⁷⁶ Although she had said to me that wanted to get away from the pain of her life so much that, at that time, "even a street sweeper job I can accept" (Interview with Rosamie, February 2017).

with them being unable to change their living or working arrangements while remaining in Singapore without their proprietor's signed permission.

When I asked Anya about the sponsorship system, and the sense of ownership it seemed to create, she felt that a DW's inability to transfer between employers was one of the biggest issues that the population faced:

I remember one of our ladies [a shelter resident]; she worked in a household with seven or eight people and she had to wash everything by hand even though they had a washing machine, just to make her, because 'we have invested in you ... and the harder you work the more return I get on my investment.' That's how they think ... Like, I remember this one helper here, from Myanmar, and she was not allowed to sit. Not ever. Even when she had her lunch, she had to stand and the employer's mother would always check on her. And you think in the end, are they having their mothers stay at home just so they can just look at the helper all the time? ...

This transfer letter thing, it's the worst thing ever. This is like a voucher that says I [an employer] own you for two years and if you don't do what I want, then I just tear it in pieces and off you go ... For example, I am leaving [Singapore] now, I've told our helper that ... we will not bring you with us so you will need to find a new employer and I will help you of course, so here is a transfer letter which says that I agree that you can find a new employer. And it's not easy to find this letter on the MOM website. It drives you crazy looking for it, which I really feel is disgusting as it should be made so easily available. And then, with this letter, she can go to agencies, and some agencies are even evil enough to take this letter from her, so then it means that they then own the helper (Interview with Anya, December 2017).

Anya went on to explain that even when a two-year work contract finishes, a DW must still get a signed transfer letter from their employer in order to remain in the country and move to work in a different household. The 'voucher' that Anya describes, not only renders a DW dependent on their employer and/or employment agency (for their financial security and their rights to remain in the nation), but it also reinstates the ownership of DWs by these other actors. From her viewpoint, employers treated DWs as their property, explaining the unequal power relations that are entrenched in this relationship and in the home space. Indeed, Anya felt that DWs were seen as an investment which employers wanted to get returns from. For some employers, having their employee working harder made them feel they got more productivity for their money, rather than just aiming to get the tasks they wanted completed by more simple means: such as allowing the use of a washing machine.

Beyond the sense of ownership created by a DW's inability to move easily between employers, the FDW scheme states that employees must reside at the address stated on their work permit, that is, at the home of their employer. The employer is then also responsible for providing "acceptable accommodation", "adequate rest", and "the upkeep and maintenance of the foreign employee ... including the provision of adequate food and medical treatment" (ibid.), but the state then provides no further clarification of what these terms mean, thus leaving it up to individual employer's interpretations. The lack of knowledge that many individuals have of these rights and regulations, alongside the vague terminology used by the state, can, therefore, result in huge disparities of experience during migration, as a DW's entire living and working environment is dependent upon their employer. Many of the shelter residents that I spoke to were hungry each day, unsure whether or not they were even allowed to take food freely, and if so how much was acceptable. I also heard about people who were not provided with sanitary towels, toiletries or phone-credit, despite being given no day off to make these purchases. Indeed, several residents arrived at the shelter with injuries and illness which their employer had either ignored or refused to pay to treat. These experiences differed greatly from others, however, who were given weekly days off, personal/rest time each day, their own bedroom and adequate food. Due to the privatised, individualised and invisibilised nature of domestic labour, and a-symmetries of power created by the sponsorship system that situates employers as 'owners', a DW's precarity is largely hidden. Indeed, their experiences are reliant on the generosity (and humanity) of their employer, as the state neglects any responsibility for their wellbeing.

Susan, a DW who volunteered with HOME on Sundays, told me on many occasions about how fortunate she felt in Singapore, her experiences generally being very positive. Having worked for diplomats and several other wealthy families, she explained that on one occasion, she was told by a senior politician that she would be moving to work for an Ambassador who had visited their house and enjoyed her cooking, saying, "they give me to them". While here referring to herself as an object that could be given, or gifted, Susan told me about working for her first employer in great detail (more of which will be described in section 5.3, p.133), an experience of work that differed greatly from her others. Susan first moved to Singapore in 1984 and worked for her first employer until 1986. She cared for and slept with a two-month old baby, to whom she grew very close to, while cleaning the house, cooking and looking after six dogs. Susan explained that her relationship with the female employer was difficult, and that she was shouted at daily, adding that there were no NGOs or people she

could run to at that time and that her priority was to endure any suffering because she needed to support her family back home. At the time, just 19-years old, Susan said that she had a steep learning experience and had to adapt to life in Singapore quickly. After having her freedoms stripped from her and having experienced physical violence, she said of employers: "they possess you".

In creating and maintaining a DW's ownership, then, the state, and the migratory system more broadly, ultimately frames DWs as bodies in need of control and management. Whether this be broadly in line with the enforcement of the *kafala*/sponsorship system, or in the intimate setting of the household with a relative watching over an employee, DWs are viewed as a possession, both an investment and commodity. As 'possession', DWs are not only clearly subordinated in society and in a household, but they are also left dependent on their employers for their daily well-being. As temporary or guest workers, DWs in Singapore do face some similar issues to other 'foreign' 'workers'. Their positioning as 'domestic', however, with all of the spatialised implications of this term, also renders them an isolated labour force. With no centralised space of work or rest for all, no comprehensive unions or coalitions and little protection from the state (with DWs not being protected by the Employment Act, for instance), DWs' individualised experiences as 'property' leave them vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. In an interview for Deutsche Welle (Herbe, 2019, online), Sheena Kanwar, the former director to HOME, said that domestic labour in Singapore "is a form of modern slavery. We have had nasty conversations with employers when we came in to take their [maids] to one of our shelters because they think they own that person" Indeed, rather than it being a few 'bad' employers that are causing issues (a common belief), DWs are enmeshed in systems and structures which situate them as 'possession' and their employer as 'owner', rendering them vulnerable to bodily abuse and violence.

5.3 Being Disposable

Beyond their concern with the unequal relations that the FDW scheme and work permit create, and the ways in which DWs become positioned as 'possession' in Singaporean society, Rosamie, Susan and Anya, like many of the other DWs and HOME staff/volunteers I spoke to, were also concerned with an employer's ability to repatriate/deport an employee when they desired. Indeed, as previously explained (in Chapter 4, section 4.1.2, p.101), 'workers', unlike 'professionals', have no routes to permanent residency in Singapore and are required to either

leave the country after their work permits expire or when they reach 50 years old.⁷⁷ As their employer's property, DWs can also, as a result, be disposed of at any point (even if this is before their contract is complete). As Anya said (aforementioned in section 5.2, p.131), "if you [a DW] don't do what I [an employer] want, then ... off you go".

I discussed this issue with Susan after a few of months knowing her, as she announced that her most recent employer, a French family that she had worked for across a 10-year period, had decided that they no longer needed a DW now that their children were older. Despite being willing to provide her with a transfer letter, their decision ultimately meant that Susan would have to leave Singapore as she was over 50 years old. Knowing how much Susan enjoyed her life in Singapore, I asked her how she felt about having to leave:

S: That's my big problem now, going back home is really, really a big adjustment because I stayed here almost second time [double] my age from when I arrived.

L: Yes, 32-years, so longer than you were in the Philippines. So, I know that the work visa doesn't allow it, but if you could stay here, would you?

S: Yes, I would stay here. How I wish last time, when I heard that I can convert my work permit to an S Pass or apply for PR even [permanent resident status] but there are certain things that you need to meet ... and I think, if you are domestic worker, from the beginning its difficult for you ... Singapore is like my home now though (Interview with Susan, February 2017)

Despite contributing to Singaporean society for more than three decades, both economically and socially, and with little desire to return to the Philippines, there was no avenue that Susan could pursue to remain in the country; her status prevented any opportunity for this. The age restrictions that are embedded within the FDW scheme (restrictions which are not present in other permits and visas) marked Susan as undesirable, surplus and, therefore, disposable. Susan's status (in a somewhat perverse irony) would lead her back to the Philippines from where she had first migrated because of her bodily disposability there too in the first instance (as stated in Chapter 2, section 2.3.1, p.53, neoliberalism has led to 'surplus' populations); the violence of the global political economy and the Singaporean state's policy situated her precariously in both contexts.

⁷⁷ As previously stated, If a DW is already working for an employer when they reach 50 years of age, they can have their contract renewed until they are 60 (they just cannot transfer employers in this time).

While in Singapore, I consistently heard of DWs who wanted to remain in Singapore but were taken to the airport and repatriated/deported against their will. Indeed, some of the DWs who were in the HOME shelter had run away after being told that they would be taken to the airport, or for fear of this happening. Several shelter residents remained with their employers after having been physically or sexually assaulted, terrified that they would be unable to remain working in Singapore if they attempted to run away or tell anyone. The fear of deportation, and an individual's disposability, thus shapes behaviour.

However, I also met several shelter residents who had demonstrated that they were not as 'disposable' as their employers had hoped. Indeed, I met Miriam at the shelter after she had been picked up from Changi Airport by a HOME staff member. She had been taken there by her employer and was watched going through the check-in process and then through immigration control. What her employers had not anticipated, though, was that Miriam waited until she was out of their view before going to a member of staff and reporting criminal offences against her. After explaining that she was made to work outside of their home in a small business, and was beaten, she was ultimately allowed to leave the airport and re-enter Singapore, later going on to pursue a police case against her employer (much to their shock and dismay). Miriam was not the only DW I met who had pursued cases after their employer believed them to have left the country permanently. Khin Aye (whose case I will describe in detail in Chapter 6, section 6.1, p.147) had been sent back to Myanmar by her employers before returning at the advice of her employment agent in Yangon. In these circumstances, these DWs demonstrated their ability to circumvent deportation, aligned with Campesi's (2015) theorisations of migrants' 'undeportability' (described in Chapter 2, section 2.3, p.49).

While these cases were certainly not the norm, it is also important to acknowledge that DWs, as a population in Singapore, are far from disposable in other ways too. Building on the arguments of Wright (2006) and Piper (2010), it is important to acknowledge that the reproductive labour that these migrants perform is essential to the functioning of Singaporean society. Indeed, while an individual DW might be seen as a disposable/deportable body, the population more broadly are specifically targeted for this labour, as they are perceived to hold bodily and personal attributes that make them desirable workers (as I have shown in section 5.1 of this chapter). Their desirability and necessity to Singapore, and to the economy of their 'home' nations, are often at the cost of their individual "depreciation" and "destruction" (Wright, 2006, p.2).

Whether or not it is actually realised, a DW's disposability is, then, a form of structural violence that is created and maintained both by the Singaporean state, employment agencies, employers and Singaporean citizens, as well as by a globalised and unequal political economy. Quite simply, as bodies which are objectified and 'owned' by their employers, they can also be disposed of by them too; the FDW scheme and sponsorship system both enables and actively encourages this. As with Susan, even when an employer does not want a DW to leave the country, the state apparatus ensures they remain temporary workers. Indeed, being 'foreign' was not in itself the preventative factor for Susan, as this status does not stop all migrants from changing job role after 50 years old or from applying for permanent residency (in contrast, a European migrant working in financial management might not face these issues). Instead, her intersectional positioning as 'foreign', 'domestic' and 'worker' rendered her ineligible to stay in Singapore. As such, Singapore needs to be understood as a place of insecurity for DWs, as they are so readily removable.

5.4 Being Human

Having eventually worked in very favourable conditions in Singapore (as aforementioned in section 5.2, p.132), Susan told me about her experiences with her first employer in great detail. She not only explained that moving to a new country had been very intimidating, but that she was physically assaulted too, with nowhere to run to and no options to change employer:

I have an employer who has a bad mood, really a bad attitude. She slapped me on my face after one year eight months with them. She hit me. She hit my face. So that time I say "OK", because there's no HOME yet that time to run to. So, you need to understand the situation, why you are here in Singapore, and, last time my first priority is to have that job so I can help my siblings and my parents ... So, I tolerated all that experience ... But she [her employer] has the attitude of a screaming person ... and I was so young, only 19 then. So, already [I'm a] teenager, look a bit more attractive than my age now, so I think the [female employer was] jealous ... I was so timid, because we are afraid you know, we are a first timer in a new country, so you just say "yes", you just follow ...

And then, one time ... I was instructed to go to market to buy the fresh fish, the shrimp and the squid, so before I go there I'm cooking the baby porridge ... And then, when I came back she asked me to put in the sink and continue your cooking. So, I went ... then she ask me "Susan can you please come inside". So, as I stepped my leg

out of the kitchen door, she hits [she said while slapping the air violently to demonstrate the motion of a hand hitting her face]. For no reason! ... And that's the time I wake up. I was so angry and with a big knife that they are using to chop the mincemeat ... I took that and said "this is the time that you need to learn. I will chop you in the newspaper, chop into pieces and cook curry and put in the garbage ... Now you [her employer] cannot put me under your shoes" ... But that time, no transfer you know ... I even told her "you go and call police. I'm not afraid. I will sacrifice my life, I don't mind ... bullying me like this. I'm a human being you know" ... [but] there's another four months more to tolerate her ... They [employers] possess you. You cannot even use a phone, you cannot even talk to anyone ... But that experience made me more strong ... You should not become timid person ... I became very strong then (Interview with Susan, February 2017).

Susan speaks of the strength that she found while facing adversity and the ways in which she challenged her employer. Their feeling of ownership over her, their abuse and physical violence towards her, was something that she decided she would not tolerate. Her retaliation and threat with the knife demanded that her employer sees her as more than a commodity to be bought, owned and managed.

Of course, not all DWs feel that they are able to react to violence in this way. Unlike this clear act of defiance, many of the DWs I knew at the shelter spoke about being uncooperative, purposefully avoiding tasks that they did not feel they should be made to perform. One shelter resident, Marjory, for instance, told me that she would pretend to be asleep when her female employer came in late and asked for foot massages, or would pretend to be sick on occasion so that the family did not want to get too close to her. Other shelter residents described the ways in which they would avoid CCTV and hide their phones and/or snacks to make their days more bearable (as I have highlighted elsewhere, see Antona, 2019).

Indeed, while employment agents, employers and the state (re)produce systems which presuppose and demand a DW's submissive demeanour and machine-like qualities, treating them as though they are objects that can be disposed of, this is not what any individual can actually provide. Rather than actually being bodies that are easily managed, then, DWs are human beings who depart from expected and accepted behaviours that are both presupposed and desired. These departures not only demonstrate their deviance and recalcitrance, but also, as Susan claimed in her simple statement "I'm a human being", their humanity. As Anderson (2000, p.108) so pertinently writes, "while states and capitalists want workers, what they get is people". Indeed, while Susan exhibited a propensity to be directly defiant, none of

the DWs I spoke to ever stated that they were explicitly attempting to defy or resist their employers. Instead, they were finding ways to cope, reacting in the moment (Scott, 1985) and simply being human.

Aside from being 'unmanageable' in their behaviour and actions, DWs also demonstrated their humanity in their body and flesh. As previously highlighted, concern over a DW's appearance was built into the practices of employment agents who provide photographs of their candidate. For Susan, she felt that her youthful and attractive appearance caused her employer to feel jealousy, which she later suggested might have been the reason she was assaulted. At an academic conference in Singapore, I discussed jealousy amongst employers with two of the attendees, and why they felt that it was only women of certain nationalities who were able to apply to work as a DW (as stated in Chapter 4, section 4.1.3, p.108, there are certain criteria that people must fulfil to apply for the FDW scheme). One of the women felt that it was more likely that Chinese Singaporeans would not want the 'dirty' and 'degrading' nature of domestic labour to be performed by women who "looked like them". The other lady seemed to agree with this, nodding, but also added that she also felt that Chinese Singaporean women would feel threatened by another Chinese woman being present in the home space, saying: "maybe they are worried for infidelity or their husband's wandering eyes". These opinions interested me, as both of the women centred their discussion on what Chinese Singaporean women would prefer and why Chinese women were not eligible for the FDW scheme, discounting the opinions and preferences of other citizens entirely, or any discussion of why women of other nationalities might be exempt. The conversation also seemed somewhat ironic, given that many Singaporeans now reminisce about *amahs*, feeling they were superior to DWs now (as described in footnote 60, p.105). Nevertheless, the concerns expressed by these two women were centred on the potential threat of another woman being embedded within the home space, that is, their fleshly presence and what their bodies might symbolise or enact.

While these issues were raised as a threat that would be associated with Chinese women living within the home space of Singaporean families, I also heard DWs talking about their female employers' jealousy on numerous occasions. Shelter residents highlighted that their female employers were either concerned about them trying to 'charm' their husbands or that they were seen to be getting too close to their children; this is a concern for employers across different contexts with the potential of their role in the home being undermined (Constable,

1997; Rollins, 1985). The concern over DWs' conduct is actually inscribed in the Foreign Manpower Act, which states that, "[T]he foreign employee shall not be involved in any illegal, immoral or undesirable activities, including breaking up families in Singapore" (MOM, 2020h). The language used in this legislation legitimises employers' anxieties over the moral and social conduct of their employees both inside and outside of their working hours, "[h]inting at the sexual stereotypes that circulate about promiscuous domestic workers who seek to steal their female employers' husbands" (Paul, 2017, p.104), and rendering DWs even more vulnerable to increased surveillance and control.

As a result of employers' jealousy and concern over DWs' behaviour, many of the shelter residents told me about the ways in which their employers would police their bodies in various ways, including controlling the clothing they wore on their days off, for example. I spoke about this issue with Benilda, a resident at the HOME shelter who had been there several months because her employer's son had physically assaulted her. Benilda described this policing, and the way that the son of her final employer would concern himself with what she was wearing on her days off:

Because I really like to wear string vests and shorts but he don't like, so I just don't ... but I always bring [a change of clothes] in my bag ... I change in Lucky Plaza ... then when I come back I wear short and string vests ... that's why he's angry. That's why on Monday its 'blah blah blah' ... 'the vests not nice to [on] you, the shorts not nice to [on] you' ... he says like that. But because it happens longer and longer I become stubborn and just wear dress and skirt, then he, he have always a problem ... And then if it's my birthday or something, he gives a shirt (Interview with Benilda, April 2017).

Then, while employment agencies, the state and employers are all involved in the social and moral policing of DWs, it is important to note that the population themselves also take part in this, (re)producing these anxieties and fears. As stated at the opening of this chapter, Riza had also been uncomfortable with how other DWs dressed on their days off, feeling that they were being "too sexy".

Despite attempts being made by employers, employment agencies and the state to control and manage DWs' bodies and appearance, in ways that objectify them, tensions continued to materialise. Whether by behaving in unpredictable and recalcitrant ways, as with Susan's retaliation, or by dressing in ways deemed inappropriate and forming intimate connections

with others in the home space, DWs displayed their humanity to their employers' dismay and fury. Yeoh and Huang's (2010) assert that it is the politics of proximity in the home space that results in feelings of threat. Similarly, with reference to domestic labour in Brazil, Brites (2014, p.67) highlights tensions that arise because of the intimacy of the home space, writing that:

Another ambiguous dimension is the domestic worker's body. This woman can hold a baby in her arms, prepare the meals for the family, clean the house, and wash the clothes, and though it is not frequent, in some cases, she may even have to sexually satisfy her male boss. But it is out of place for her to sit on the living room sofa, lie on her employers' bed, dine at the table with them, or use their bathrooms. In these cases the domestic worker's body pollutes because it is not performing servile activities and could strain the hierarchical order of the home.

Rather than actually being inanimate objects or bodies as desired, then, I argue that it is simply being human that poses a risk to both households and the nation state more broadly. The controls that the state exerts over DWs' bodies, can be seen as an extension of its efforts to enforce a particular 'family ideology' more broadly (see Appendix C). Indeed, because of the ways in which reproductive labour is invisibilised and denigrated in Singapore, with it having been maintained as feminised but also transnationalised, a system has been created that makes interpersonal violence more likely.⁷⁸ Moreover, as women are often the main employers of DWs, and because of their positioning as 'owner', it is frequently women who are the ones in households disciplining (and enacting violence on) other women in these circumstances. While domestic violence is most often conceived of as male violence toward women, structures of patriarchy, heteronormativity and colonial dominance also create violent hierarchies and unequal power relations between women. In many ways, in these circumstances, female employers simply reproduce the societal injustices which they are subjected to. Female employers' bodies are perceived to be of lower worth than their male counterparts, but DWs, as 'foreign', 'domestic' and 'worker', are perceived to be deviant, inferior and of less worth still. The controls that are deemed necessary to enact over their bodies, both those that the state mandates and those that employment agencies suggest to employers, serve to further the idea that DWs are less than human. As such, daily frustrations, anger and jealousy can lead to abuse and violence (Martin, 1981), with DWs being both proximate and hidden within the home in the same way that women are to abusive male

⁷⁸ As has been argued (in Chapter 2, section 2.4, p.56), structural violence creates the conditions for, and often leads to, increased risks of interpersonal violence.

partners (Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Meth, 2003). A DW's flesh, humanity and intimate bodily presence positions them unjustly and at risk.

5.5 Summary

This chapter has shown how different actors – namely the state, employers, employment agencies and DWs themselves – situate DWs within, and in proximity to, anatomies and apparatuses of violence in Singapore. By highlighting how DWs' bodies are commodified, I demonstrate how employment agencies profit directly from their sale, a transaction that positions employer as purchaser and employee as possession before a DW even enters Singapore. In addition to this system of debt -financed migration, the state also actively encourages employers to manage DWs as their property by maintaining a sponsorship/*kafala* system, rendering DWs both dependent on their employer and also disposable. Indeed, as 'foreign' and 'worker' in Singapore, the state does not permit any routes to permanent residency and passes on the power to deport to employers. The processes by which DWs are made to be a commodity, a possession and disposable are, then, I argue, attempts to strip them of their personhood and render them bodies, processes that objectify and dehumanise. Indeed, these processes, actions and aims are themselves violent, but also position DWs as more vulnerable to further violence too, making Singapore a site of insecurity.

Despite being enmeshed in unequal relations of power and geographies of dehumanisation, DWs' humanity is ever present. Unable to actually be object-like as desired, tension arises when DWs are present in households because they are not wholly controllable, displaying both recalcitrance and deviance. Moreover, despite being selected with their biodata, DWs' bodily presence, their flesh, is often also a point of anxiety for employers and another presentation of them as human. In these home spaces, there is a rehumanisation whenever DWs act outside of the desires of their employer, whenever they build a relationship with a child, for instance, or do something as simple as wear shorts. Indeed, while actions such as Marjory's (pretence that she was ill) could be described as practices of resistance, she did not describe the actions in this way; and, for that matter, nor did any of the other DWs I spoke to. While the literature that does focus on DWs' resistance (Constable, 1997; Groves & Chang, 1999; Yeoh & Huang, 1998; 1999), and on everyday resistance more broadly (Abu-Lughod, 1990; Ong, 1987; Riessman, 2000; Scott, 1985), has incredibly important merits and impacts, these theoretical interventions did not seem applicable to all of the experiences I heard about

or witnessed. In some instances, resistance seemed an appropriate descriptive term – Susan’s threat with the knife, for instance – but in other circumstances, DWs’ actions seemed to imply something that was much less purposeful, that is, human reactions in situations of inequality and injustice.

The processes of dehumanisation and rehumanisation described, need to be understood as being more complex than simplistic structure/agency binaries, however, as DWs themselves do reproduce and participate in the structures of violence in which they are embedded, with the perpetrators of violence, often women, also being bound by these systems too. The struggle over the impossibility of fully dehumanising, and DWs’ consistent presentation of their humanity and flesh, often resulted in further violence being enacted. As I will come to show in Chapters 6 and 7, structural and inter-personal violence are relational and not so easily distinguishable (Tyner, 2012). While scholars have demonstrated (as stated in Chapter 2, section 2.2.1, p.40) that structures of violence (such as *kafala* systems) can lead to increased instances of inter-personal violence (Galtung, 1969; Gardner, 2010; Tyner, 2012), I will show that the inter-personal violence can also lead to the enactment of new anatomies and apparatuses of violence too. Indeed, having argued that it is often women who enact violence on other women in Singaporean homes, it is, I argue, often a reaction to the very structures of patriarchy that situate them unequally (and violently) in opposition to their male counterparts in the first instance. Violence has, then, a knock-on effect, persistently remaining ever present in DWs’ lives.

While control over workers’ bodies was put in to action because of the risks that a DW posed to their employer, with them being viewed as potentially deviant before they even entered Singapore, it is clear that they are also seen as a threat to the nation state. The Foreign Manpower Act’s stated concerns over a DW’s potential for “immoral or undesirable activities” (MOM, 2020h, online), or the mandatory pregnancy tests that DWs are subjected to, are a demonstration of the Singaporean state’s anxiety. While attempts are made to make DWs’ bodies ‘knowable’, by testing DWs medically and categorising them with their biodata, they are still not an entirely ‘controllable’ population. As a population of women, they are, however, still essential to the functioning of the post-colonial state (Ong & Peletz, 1995). As Ong and Peletz (ibid., p.7) argue, “[T]he female body ... with its softness and openings, has often been used to symbolize the endangered or dangerous social body in postcolonial

nationalist discourses". While still being vulnerable to deportation and abuse, however, I argue that they can be understood as bodies that are both 'of' and 'at' risk.

While contested, in flux, situational and variable, DWs are positioned intersectionally as 'foreign', 'domestic' and 'worker', that is, as a raced and gendered non-citizen, whose labour is considered menial. As such, this chapter has demonstrated that they are, ultimately, positioned subordinately in Singaporean society, emplaced in multi-scalar and multi-sited apparatuses and anatomies of violence.

Geographies of the State: Spaces of Safety & Unsafety

*The police interview me and then force me ... The police very very angry, talk so loud
... “your life in Singapore, today is the last”, he say like that ... I also not scared
(Interview with Siti, March 2017).*

*So, employer is employer and maid is just maid
(Conversation with Thin Thin Swe, 2017).*

As we entered through the double wooden doors my body became chilled almost immediately. The courtroom was icy cold and felt imposing. There were three rows of seats at the back of the room as we entered, either side of the double doors, facing ahead to an elevated platform at the front of the room where the judge would sit.

The lawyers were already standing in their places, both middle-aged men facing the front of the room, with younger female colleagues sitting by them. There was a set of tables and benches forming a semi-circle behind this, where Khin Aye’s former employers sat in the centre. A police officer sat to their right, next to Khin Aye’s police IO [investigating officer].⁷⁹

Sitting so near to the two people who had tortured someone I had grown so close to made me feel more emotional and angrier than I had anticipated. Ms Chng would occasionally turn her face towards us, often smiling, which infuriated us all. Anya explained that when I heard a loud knocking sound I would need to stand, as the judge would enter. She also clarified that we would all then need to bow, and do this again whenever we exited/re-entered the room. The idea of this frustrated me but I didn’t intend to test what would happen if I refused.

After a short time, we heard the knocking. We all stood as the judge walked in, before bowing. Khin Aye was brought into the court and was made to take an oath in Burmese. She then sat and the prosecutor began (Extract from my field notes, 2017).

When the relationship between a DW and their employer, their kafeel/sponsor, ‘breaks-down’,⁸⁰ their status becomes more complex and ambiguous. While human rights advocates

⁷⁹ IO, short for investigation officer, is the person responsible for overseeing Khin Aye’s police case.

⁸⁰ While acknowledging its inadequacy as a term, I use ‘breaks-down’ to refer to any reason that a DW or an employer would end their contract earlier than expected. This would encapsulate cases of physical and sexual assault, ‘illegal deployment’, over-work, and theft, among others – and which are perpetuated by either the employer, DW or both.

have long been arguing that these kinds of sponsorship systems create vast power inequalities between employee and employer (ILO, 2019), they also have created ambiguities for migrant workers when their sponsorship is no longer viable, that is, when they are sponsorless. In Singapore, as previously discussed, DWs' visas are tied to their employer and their employer's home. When there are issues of abuse, dispute, misconduct, or simply a mismatching of expectations – and whether they are caused by an employer, the DW, or both – the living and working arrangements can become unsustainable. Depending upon the situation between employee and employer, these issues can be resolved in a number of ways. While some DWs are taken straight to the airport and repatriated/deported directly by their employer, others may be sent back to their employment agency (either to then be repatriated/deported or to be allowed to look for a new employer if a transfer letter is signed). Other DWs run away from their employers and seek help from the police, the MOM, their embassy, NGOs or others.

There are ultimately two final outcomes that can be reached for a DW when they are sponsorless, regardless of whether or not they have a formal 'case'⁸¹ launched against their employer or against them with the MOM or the police. They can be granted permission to look for another job as a DW, or they are to be repatriated/deported. When sponsorless, DWs are given the ironically named 'Special Pass', which they must regularly stamp with the MOM or police.⁸² When sponsorless, their living arrangements must be formalised, with the Singaporean state necessitating that NGOs or embassies report who is residing in their premises to them, in addition to their reason for being there. This becomes a means by which the state can account for these DWs, to categorise them and provide them with a new status in the country. In these circumstances, the MOM, the police and/or the courts (as representatives of the state) become the main arbitrators and decision-makers, holding the power to decide on an individual's right to be in the country. They also have the power to send DWs to prison,⁸³ to make them wait within the country even if they want to leave,⁸⁴ to

⁸¹ These are not always active legal 'cases' that would be resolved in court but were lodged formal complaints either with the MOM or the police (by either an employer or an employee).

⁸² DWs need to effectively 'check-in' with the police or MOM, its regularity varying dependent upon the DW and their case.

⁸³ In the most severe of cases, as a country that authorises capital punishment, DWs can also be sentenced to death by the state. Indeed, in 1995, Flor Contemplacion (a Filipina DW) was hanged by the Singaporean state "for allegedly killing another Filipina domestic worker and the child in her charge" (Rodriguez, 2002, p.341).

⁸⁴ This detainment can take place in shelters (like the HOME shelter), embassies, deportation centres, their employment agencies or elsewhere.

repatriate/deport them (whether or not they want to stay in Singapore, and in some instances while awaiting resolutions to their cases), and/or to blacklist them so they are unable to re-enter the country to work/visit in the future. For some, there will only be a matter of days or weeks before they have a clear resolution; for others, years pass while they are stuck in a state of limbo, unsure of how their cases are progressing and of the outcome they can expect.

This chapter examines where and when the Singaporean state materialises within the urban fabric of the nation when the relationship between a DW and their employer breaks down. In focusing on these geographies of the state, I show how the courtroom, helpdesk, hospital and police station all become sites of violence, both interpersonal or directed, and forms of institutional/structural violence. Rather than being sites of care and justice, as a hospital and courtroom might otherwise be presumed to be, I will show that they are actually spaces of unsafety/insecurity for DWs. Indeed, the chapter also focuses on the ways in which the state uses its decision-making capacities to (re)produce itself in these spaces and interactions, violently assuming its dominant positioning. I will show how the state, sometimes simultaneously, uses its powers of visibility/invisibility, i.e., its ubiquitous presence, in ways that shape both the present and futures of the workers trapped within this system. Rather than presenting the state as a monolithic entity, however, attention is paid to the actions of different state officials,⁸⁵ the relationships and interactions they have, and to the particular temporalities of the state. Indeed, as a ‘developmental’ state, this chapter demonstrates the “the multifaceted ways in which state formation has interacted with social forces of various geographical scales that extend beyond the national territorial border and deep into local and urban scales”(Shin, 2019a, p.199).

Beyond simply mapping out these spaces and processes, this chapter will also pay particular attention to the lived realities of the DWs involved, in order to provide some understanding of the emotional and psychological repercussions for them, and the imbalances of power which they are required to navigate. The chapter ultimately focuses on understanding how DWs, both for those who are ‘accused’ of various violations and those who are ‘accusing’, are subjected to temporally and spatially specific forms of multi-layered and multi-sited anatomies and apparatuses of violence.

⁸⁵ This is not to imply that any one individual is entirely embedded inside or outside of the state, nor that the state has a clear inside or outside itself (Gupta, 1995).

6.1 The Courtroom

Khin Aye, a HOME shelter resident from Myanmar, had been employed by Mr Low and Ms Chng in 2012 to clean, cook and do the laundry in their HDB flat. She worked alongside another DW – Cahya, an Indonesian lady who I had also grown very close to in the shelter – who was responsible for caring for the couple’s children. At the point at which I started attending court, Khin Aye’s former employers had already received several charges following Cahya’s trial and were each facing several months in prison and significant fines. Despite being employed at the same time, and for the most part subjected to the same kinds of abuse, the cases were pursued separately by the state. During the period that Khin Aye and Cahya were employed, both women were subjected to physical, psychological and emotional violence, expected to perform humiliating tasks while given inadequate food and rest. They were hit, kicked, made to beat one another, forced to hop around rooms, made to pray and bow to a Buddhist altar (neither of them are Buddhist) and repeatedly punished and shouted at.

Khin Aye had been in the shelter during each of my visits to Singapore and had been waiting for 5 years since she first told the police of her abuse. While I knew that her case had been proceeding incredibly slowly, I had hoped that once we were in the courtroom it might be resolved with more haste. On my first day in court, however, it became clear that this would not be the case. The defence lawyer seemed intent on slowing down proceedings, asking for details of events that had occurred in 2012 in excruciating detail. The judge would not permit Khin Aye to speak in English, even when the translator was not accurately expressing her points,⁸⁶ and allowed the defence lawyer to continue repeating questions, which seemed, to those of us watching at least, to have been answered many times.

Across the first few hours of the trial, the defence attorney questioned Khin Aye about specific experiences of physical violence. She was repeatedly asked to recall the minutiae of events and looked increasingly drained as the morning went on. At some points, Khin Aye admitted that she could not remember certain details, such as the times and dates of particular

⁸⁶ Initially, Khin Aye had been made to choose whether or not she wanted to speak in English or Burmese throughout her case. She chose Burmese at the time, as her English was much more limited at that point, and because she had expected the translator to have some fluency. As her English had improved across these years while staying in the HOME shelter, however, she knew when her words were being altered and the meaning changed even slightly. In Cahya’s trial, the judge presiding had allowed her to speak in English when she wanted and would not allow the defence lawyer to ask the same question repeatedly.

beatings, which gave the defence lawyer an opportunity to belittle her further. Throughout the morning, Khin Aye never looked at her employers, just at her translator and occasionally the defence lawyer. At the lunch break, I told Khin Aye how angry I was at seeing her former employers smiling in court, and at being in their presence more generally. Her response was simply “How do you think that I feel?”.

Toward the end of the day, the defence lawyer told the court that he had five more charges to go through and this would likely take a few more days:

The lawyer confirmed that there would be another court appearance later that month but said he was unsure yet if he was available for the month after, as he was now building a new appeal case following Cahya’s trial and the conviction of his clients, a process that would mean Cahya would also have to stay in Singapore for a longer period.

While having been told by their police IO that they were technically able to leave the country (if they applied to get their passports from the police), I knew that both Cahya and Khin Aye didn’t want to leave until everything was resolved. They both had said that they wouldn’t have the financial means to return to Singapore if they did leave anyway.

The defence lawyer also asked for permission for his clients, the ‘accused’, to leave the country in the meantime, to which the judge agreed (Extract from my field notes, 2017).

To me, being in court felt like I was watching a performance, as though the court was a space in which a supposed system of justice was being enacted. Indeed, as Valverde (2014) argues, the spatiotemporality of/that-is ‘the courtroom’, can be understood as constitutive of justice itself. Despite the judge, lawyers and police all being present to ensure the case proceeded ‘fairly’ and that ‘justice’ was reached, I felt like there was very little progress for Khin Aye and a lot more suffering on her part. Having already lived through the inter-personal violence described, and then after being confined to a shelter for years before getting to court, she was now being asked to recall painstaking details of traumatic events. It was in these moments in the courtroom, which I started to feel the presence and power of the state, both in its capacity to make decisions and control the lives of the ‘accused’ and ‘accusing’, and in the on-going violence and suffering that they were enacting.

At the end of the day, after the judge left the courtroom, Khin Aye asked that we leave quickly. Kamala (another volunteer who had joined us) and I both said that we would accompany her

back to the shelter. We followed Khin Aye out of the State Court and walked towards the bus stop, although she was walking so quickly we could not keep up with her. She got to the bus stop, a five-minute walk away, and sat on a bench:

When we approached her, she looked up at us and then put her hands to her face and broke down in tears. She let out a high-pitched cry that cut through me. Other people stopped to stare at her vocal distress. Kamala and I both put our arms around her, tears streaming down our faces too. I got a tissue out of my bag for Khin Aye and passed it to her, as Kamala and I wiped our eyes discretely, trying to remain strong for her. Neither of us could say anything. While crying and completely distraught, Khin Aye continued to tell us that nothing was fair. On the bus ride back to the shelter, tears still streaming down her face, she said that she kept thinking of a time when Ms Chng had pushed her to the ground, knelt on the side of her body and pushed her thumb on to her face, rubbing it continuously with pressure until it burnt her skin and she bled. She pointed to a scar on her face and said, “this is what she did to me” (Extract from my field notes, 2017).

Having spent a lot of time with Khin Aye and other shelter residents who had experienced traumatic events while working, and having had them described to me in considerable detail, I had anticipated how upsetting it might be to sit in court and to hear details of this violence. What I had not anticipated, however, was how angry I would feel sitting near to Khin Aye’s former employers and how furious I would feel when their lawyer would question Khin Aye’s memory, sincerity and trustworthiness. I had also not anticipated how Khin Aye would be impacted. Indeed, I had spent a lot of time discussing the outcomes Khin Aye hoped to receive, desires which had changed over the course of time I knew her, but which were currently to leave Singapore as soon as possible. She had told me that she did not care what happened to her employers anymore, a statement I had found very difficult to believe when I first heard it. Khin Aye had explained that after being ‘repatriated’ to Myanmar, it was her employment agency that encouraged her to return to Singapore to file an abuse case with the police, having seen her covered in bruises and looking very unwell. Khin Aye told me that she only ever agreed to this because she wanted to get 3-months’ salary that she was owed and because she had not wanted her family to see her, concerned about how they would react to her appearance; she did not want to be viewed as a ‘victim’. She had also said that she then only stayed in Singapore afterwards to be there for Cahya:

I really feel that even they go jail I’m not happy ... I came here to Singapore only I just want to get my money and come back [to Myanmar]. Even they go jail, how many

years, how many months, it's nothing to do with me about that ... At that time also, I didn't think that it might be longest time ... My agency saying that "you only will be maybe one week or two week, it's very fast". So, I only [take] a small luggage ... If I know that [it would take so long], I wouldn't come back ... At that time, I just don't want to go back my home town also because my body condition, it's really very terrible (Interview with Khin Aye, 2017).

Legal justice was, then, not something that Khin Aye necessarily sought directly. While she made it clear she would not have wanted other DWs to be employed by the couple, she did not feel that knowing they were in jail would make her any happier.

After visiting the court on a number more occasions, Khin Aye told me how desperately she wanted to leave Singapore and to allow the case to continue without her. She knew that this would benefit her former employers, but she wanted to move on with her life. Khin Aye's IO had said to her that he would issue her passport and organise a ticket back to Myanmar for her if she wanted but added that he really hoped she would return if required. He was Khin Aye's third IO, as two others had left their jobs in this time, and he cared a lot about both her and Cahya. Khin Aye had also said to me, however, that her family would not let her come back to Singapore again if she did leave, even if she wanted to. Indeed, Khin Aye's desires and actions were impacted by a number of different people to whom she felt loyalty. While I understood her IO's hope that she would remain in Singapore for the entire case, I also knew that the trial was subjecting Khin Aye to more suffering.

Prior to the trial commencing, Khin Aye's mobility had been restricted as she had been confined to a shelter and to Singapore, for years with no news on her case, rendered an immobile and detained body. Feeling unable to move on with her life,⁸⁷ she often said that she felt trapped, temporally and spatially, as she had to watch others coming to and leaving the shelter. Other than when initially reporting the abuse that she experienced, and when renewing her special pass, she had barely any interaction with state officials before her trial. Indeed, the Singaporean state seemed to be absent/invisible when she wanted information, yet its presence was continually felt and imposed by the maintenance of her confinement.

⁸⁷ Khin Aye would likely have been allowed to work on the Temporary Job Scheme if she had wanted but felt unable to work in a household environment again. The Temporary Job Scheme (managed by the MOM) allowed some residents to take on temporary (but often renewable) contracts as DWs, while their cases were pending, dependent upon their circumstances (a decision that the state would make).

Her former employers' freedom to leave the country, and their financial ability to do so, was just one of the ways in which the power asymmetries in which Khin Aye was embedded were inscribed spatially. Through both their actions and in-actions, the state violently created an uncomfortable and distressing environment for Khin Aye.

The courtroom was just one space, then, where the temporality and spatiality of the state was exposed. The space of the court, of the judiciary, with its 'majesty' and monumental presence, is in itself a physical and architectural form and representation of a states' authority and power (Jeffrey, 2017; Valverde, 2014), a space where agents of the state became visible. It is also a space in which there is a specific temporality, with certain individuals being able to control the timing of court appearances and trials. Indeed, some people are able to control the speed and rate at which decisions are processed, where others are simply expected to comply. As Valverde (2014, p.69) writes:

[W]orking courtrooms are temporally specific, not only because, like other state institutions, they effect and perform state power only during certain times, but also ... because the space becomes a courtroom only at a highly particular time that is not the same as clock time. The court's time begins only when the judge enters the room.

The ability of the Singaporean state to control when Khin Aye appeared in court, to enforce her waiting, was an exercise of their power (for discussion of how power can be used to impose periods of waiting, see Auyero, 2011; Bourdieu, 2000; Comfort, 2007; Schwartz, 1974) and a demonstration of how they viewed her time as having little value: "To be kept waiting especially to be kept waiting an unusually long while-is to be the subject of an assertion that one's own time (and, therefore, one's social worth) is less valuable than the time and worth of the one who imposes the wait" (Schwartz, 1974, p.856). Auyero (2011) describes the anxiety and uncertainty that people faced in the waiting room of a welfare office in Buenos Aires, and their frustration at being made to 'endure' this. Being forced to 'endure', to suffer but persist, was something that both Khin Aye and Cahya had little decision over. They were both, at different times, willing to give up on their case so that they could move on with their lives, as the means did not seem worth the ends. Indeed, Bourdieu (2000, p.228) writes that "[A]bsolute power is the power to make oneself unpredictable and deny other people any reasonable anticipation, to place them in total uncertainty by offering no scope to their capacity to predict". He suggests that making people wait while not destroying all hope and

maintaining motivation without “driving to despair” (ibid., p.228)⁸⁸ is integral to the exercise of this power. Indeed, Khin Aye’s case did proceed with significant unpredictability and anticipation, with information and court dates simultaneously providing her with both hope and disappointment. The courts demonstrated a form of ‘absolute’ power in this sense and, I argue, created further suffering. The court has become an apparatus of violence.

Through this process, in the courtroom and during the period of waiting that Khin Aye endured, the state continued to produce and reproduce itself temporally and spatially. Of course, no state is a monolithic entity, nor an entirely unnavigable one. Khin Aye and Cahya’s IO, for instance, while being a representative of the Singaporean state, cared for both women. His hopes that they would continue to ‘endure’ in order for them to receive ‘justice’ did, however, also reproduce the state’s aims and made them feel accountable to another individual.

As has been highlighted, then, rather than actually being a site where Khin Aye felt justice was being enacted on her behalf, the court became another space of unsafety. While she did not seek punishment when she reported her employer’s abuse, Khin Aye did not expect to be made to endure an agonising waiting period and a trial that made her feel humiliated. Far from traditional ideas about spaces of safety/unsafety and security/insecurity, the alternative geography of the state brought Khin Aye face to face with the people who had tortured her during her employment with them. Indeed, beyond the structural violence that led to this abuse in the first instance, and that confined her to Singapore with no financial means to leave as she might have wanted, the courtroom also became a site of inter-personal (or direct) violence too. While physical force was not used on her, borrowing from the WHO’s definition of violence (see Chapter 2, section 2.4, p.54), power was used against her in a way that harmed her; it impacted her psychologically. Her employer’s presence in the courtroom, the defence lawyer’s assaults on her integrity and the state’s control of her bodily mobility and time all ensured Khin Aye’s continued anguish.

⁸⁸ While this argument is compelling, there are shelter residents that I knew who were driven to despair, to the point of considering suicide. The feeling of being trapped and scared, and a lack of hope for the future, making their period of ‘waiting’ hugely traumatic (see Chapter 7, section 7.2 and 7.3 for further details).

6.2 The Helpdesk

The helpdesk at HOME's main office was always an incredibly busy space. Between new residents entering the shelter, older residents wanting updates on the progression of their cases, and other DWs who were still in employment requesting advice, the space could be very hectic and loud at times, with volunteers and staff trying to keep on top of an endless workload. It was a place where I spent considerable time, sometimes observing and at other times, checking-in new residents or helping with existing cases. Despite being a relatively small room, and with barely any privacy, this was the space where DWs would come before being admitted to the shelter (unless they arrived at night) and 'checked-in'.⁸⁹ Whether they were sent by the police, a friend or by finding HOME independently,⁹⁰ a new resident would need to explain the reasons that they had left their employers so that notice could be given to the MOM of their presence at the shelter.⁹¹ While there were devastating days at the helpdesk, there were also days that were filled with joy. Days when I would walk in to the office and be greeted by smiling faces holding plane tickets, or by people telling me that they had found a new employer and could leave the shelter. It was a place where, for some, their confinement and waiting was over and where clarity was provided. It was a place imbued with emotion, where the mood could transform almost instantly from one of anxiety, frustration, sadness and anger to a place of joy and laughter, sometimes managing to contain all of these emotions at once.

Through my time in the shelter and at the helpdesk, it often appeared as if the decisions that were made by state officials, and the outcomes residents received in their cases, were fairly random. This was a frustration that many volunteers expressed to me and something I was made aware of in the first few weeks of fieldwork: "[W]e could send someone to the MOM one day and get one result and then send a different person the next day, with the exact same case, and get an entirely different outcome" (Conversation with Katie, June 2016). Becoming habituated to this did not, however, make the outcomes of cases or the process of waiting any easier to hear and deal with.

⁸⁹ HOME never turned anyone away in the entire time I was in Singapore. On occasion, residents would choose to move from the shelter, sometimes to an employment agency or to their embassy, but in general space was always made for those who needed it.

⁹⁰ Many DWs would go to one of HOME's smaller offices in the city initially. These are strategically placed in the areas where DWs congregate on their days off.

⁹¹ This is a requirement imposed on HOME by the MOM.

After walking in to the helpdesk office on one occasion, and speaking with a volunteer, I turned around to the noise of a stool being moved quickly and a person running out of the room. I only caught sight of her back but could see that it was Thin Thin Swe. I looked over at the desk she had moved quickly from and saw that Lucy, a staff member, was upset. Thin Thin Swe was only 17 and had been working in Singapore for 2-years when she entered the shelter. She was kind and full of energy, often joking around with the other residents. I had been shocked when I first met her, amazed that anyone had possibly believed that she was 23 since she looked incredibly young to me.⁹²

Thin Thin Swe was sexually assaulted and raped on multiple occasions during the period of her employment by her male employer. She had not run away before the end of her contract because she was the eldest of her siblings and her family needed her income; she felt that her need to send remittances was greater than her own safety and wellbeing. When I had first heard about this, I felt more sadness than I had with many other residents' cases. I was not sure whether it was because I got on so well with her, or if it was because I knew how old she was, but I found that her story stayed with me and was difficult to process.

When I saw Thin Thin Swe rush away from the helpdesk, I asked Lucy, a member of staff, what had happened, only to find out that the police called and revealed that they had chosen not to take her case forward to trial. Charlotte, Lucy and I went to find Thin Thin Swe. She had gone to the shelter, to a small room on the top floor, most often used for medical checks and counselling. She was sitting in the corner of the room on the floor, her body curled in a ball and her hands covering her face.

The three of us sat silently on the floor, tears streaming down all of our faces while Thin Thin Swe cried uncontrollably. Between the silence and loud cries, it seemed like her heart was breaking ... She glanced up at us all and quietly said, "so employer is employer and maid is just maid". My heart broke (Extract from my fieldnotes, 2017).

⁹² I later learnt that Thin Thin Swe's employers had known her real age. I asked Thin Thin Swe if her agency had known too, or if the doctor who performed her mandatory medical examinations had double checked this (as she had only been 15 when she arrived in Singapore), but she said no one else questioned it. This left me wondering if other people had actively decided not to ask.

The help desk became a space, then, where the impact of the state's decision-making powers would be felt by the residents. The officers at the police and MOM would call the shelter to give news and then could hang up and disappear again. While of course there were times when the shelter's staff and volunteers could ask questions and plead for different decisions to be made, the power ultimately remained on the other end of a phone. Lucy explained to me at a later point, that the police IO who called had made it clear that he did not think that Thin Thin Swe was lying about the events she reported but said that it had been the Attorney General's Chambers (hereafter AGC) who had made the decision not to take the case forward. This most likely meant, as was explained to me, that there was too little evidence. This news was, of course, little solace for Thin Thin Swe, who had wanted to have her story heard, believed and acted upon. She later told me that she hoped to become a lawyer so that she could fight on behalf of others in her position. The state's decision was final, however, and there was no room for negotiation. The only other interaction that Thin Thin Swe had was when she was issued the necessary documents to leave Singapore; her bodily 'disposability' was put in to practice because her 'foreign' status allowed it. Documents, phone calls and emails ended up being the only traces of interaction that Thin Thin Swe had with the state, other than the Special Pass she had been getting stamped regularly at a police station. The state, here, enforced Thin Thin Swe's physical presence when they demanded it, through their own ominous presence, while maintaining the opacity of their decision-making processes.

Indeed, the lack of economic opportunity in Myanmar had meant that she needed to move to support her family, a violent political economy driving a 15-year old to migrate overseas, leaving her education. The Singaporean state and migration industries, then, positioned her in a way that left her vulnerable to further interpersonal violence. Thin Thin Swe's suffering only continued when she heard news that her case would not be tried, as further structural and psychological violence was enacted. These apparatuses and anatomies of violence were inseparable from the suffering caused at the hands of her employer.

Despite not having a physical presence at the helpdesk, then, the state was always present. While not there physically, the space still acted as an alternative geography of the state, a site of violent interactions. It was also a place where both safety and unsafety were felt, sometimes simultaneously. Upon their arrival at the helpdesk, for instance, residents would regularly express gratitude, comfort and relief, having often just run away from their employers and from sites of unsafety; this was sometimes the first space they were able to

relax and feel bodily security. As demonstrated, however, the helpdesk was also a space where distressing news was shared, and where news of deportation/repatriation may be given, a place where insecurity was felt too. Unlike the court, then, where the state apparatus was made visible in a grand and domineering way, the helpdesk had a different atmosphere. While still a space where violence continued to be enacted and felt, and where ongoing suffering was embodied, the state's presence was more rhythmic, as small decisions were being made every day. Of course, HOME's interactions with the state, as a grass-roots organisation, impacted the outcomes of their decisions. Indeed, the reason why the outcomes of the residents' cases were so unpredictable was because of the heterogeneity of the state and because of the different people embedded within its structure and the relationships they formed with HOME and the DWs. The Singaporean state (re)produced itself while intimately embedded within society at very localised scales; the helpdesk was a temporally and spatially specific manifestation of this.

6.3 The Hospital

Each year in Singapore, there are news reports of deaths and injuries that result from DWs falling from tall buildings. Many more of these incidents, as I learnt while at HOME, remain outside of public knowledge, however, and are not reported on at all. Despite the Singaporean state urging employers to consider their employees' safety, and specifically restricting employers from making DWs clean exterior windows of buildings (MOM, 2020n), I still heard of DWs who were told to do this. Not all DWs who fell from buildings did this while cleaning, however; there were DWs who were trying to escape their employers' homes, those attempting suicide, and those for whom there are allegations were pushed. Of course, not all injuries and illnesses that DWs get while employed are related to falling from buildings. Receiving treatment for any illness or injury is, however, still mediated by their employer, their employer's insurance provider, and, if they are no longer working, by the state, embassies and/or NGOs. Indeed, if a DW wants treatment without her employer or the state knowing, as was the case for two DWs I knew who wanted to get abortions, the process can be incredibly difficult and expensive.

Across the period I spent in Singapore, I met three women who had fallen from buildings and been seriously injured as a result. Two of these women resided in the shelter for several months, at different times, with their mobility restricted as (in both cases) they had broken

their spine and hips. One of these ladies, Aye Aye Swe, was unable to speak after her fall. During hospital and doctors' appointments with both of these residents, I would regularly come up against administrative difficulties, as there were always questions about how payment would be made and concern over treating patients who were on special passes; their sponsorless status being of confusion as they fell outside of normal protocols. As both of these residents' employers had medical insurance, however, it was left for the state and hospitals to coordinate and manage the costs associated with their injuries, both residents otherwise only requiring intervention from the state when they were well enough to travel.⁹³

On one occasion, however, along with another volunteer, Kamala, I was asked to go to a hospital to meet with a DW that had no association with HOME and see if she needed support after falling from a building, having heard that other DWs who knew her were suggesting she was pushed by her employer:

Kamala and I arrived at the hospital with no idea of what to expect ... When we reached the ward, we found that Mitali's bed was hidden from view as a nurse was tending to her. Kamala and I stood away from the space, next to two ladies who were speaking quietly together. They asked us very quickly if we were there to see Mitali, saying they were her friends, so we explained who we were and why we were there. After stating that we were coming from an NGO that supported DWs, the two women seemed to warm to us. We explained that we were just coming to see if Mitali needed somewhere to stay when she was able to leave hospital, and if she needed support with her case. As we were explaining this, a nurse drew back the curtain around Mitali's bed and her two friends approached her (Extract from my fieldnotes, 2017).

At the time that Kamala and I arrived at the hospital, we were under the impression that Mitali had only been admitted a number of days before. It transpired, however, that she had been in hospital for a number of weeks and had already undergone surgery several times. After trying to talk with Mitali, it became clear very quickly that she did not have full cognitive function. Her injuries were visibly very severe and neither Kamala nor I had prepared ourselves adequately for this encounter. We left Mitali with her friends and went to ask a nurse where she would stay when she was well enough to leave the hospital and how extensive her injuries

⁹³ The state, at this point, was responsible for getting the flight tickets from the residents' former employers and issuing them an 'exit' pass, enabling them to leave the country.

were, after explaining who we were. To our surprise, the nurse was angered by our question, stating that Mitali's employers were her legal guardians in Singapore and saying that they were the only ones eligible for this information. We asked how this could be the case, given the nature of her injuries and the uncertainty about what had happened to her. The nurse, while letting slip that it was likely Mitali's cognitive state would never get better, said that Mitali would be leaving Singapore as she was now "fit to travel".

It transpired that the MOM had already pursued Mitali's case, which had been resolved by the AGC, and they were planning to send her back to India within a matter of days. I was shocked by this news, particularly at the idea that anyone could think Mitali was "fit to travel". She would have been unable to walk to the bathroom alone, or eat unassisted, and was unaware of where she was. Her body appeared very frail, so being "fit" for an international journey seemed beyond farfetched. I was also shocked that a case could have been resolved so quickly, and with no statement from Mitali, given that many of the HOME shelter residents awaited decisions for months and years. In the days after this visit, having kept in touch with Mitali's two friends, I learnt that there had been a great deal of media attention about her case in her province of India and that there were protests outside of consulate buildings demanding justice for Mitali. Her husband, with whom her friends were in touch, also had voice recordings of Mitali stating that she was raped by her employer and that she was threatened regularly. None of this, of course, was reported in Singapore.

While there was a huge degree of uncertainty about how Mitali fell, the experience of being in the hospital stayed with me. What was clear was the state's desire to remove her from Singapore as soon as they could, closing her case almost immediately and making decisions while she was still recovering in hospital. The state became a violent presence for Mitali in the hospital, exercising its decision-making powers over her body and deciding that her 'disposability' would be acted upon while she did not have the ability to even ask otherwise. Its decision to leave her employers as her 'guardian' not only reinstated her 'dependency' on them but allowed the state to negate any further care for her. While entirely unaware of these interactions and decisions, Mitali was ultimately sent to a hospital in India where her employers, and their medical insurance providers, would no longer be responsible for her care, care that she would require to live. Despite protests in India about the case, the Singaporean state's speed with the process meant that very few people even learned about Mitali, absolving itself from any ongoing public discussion about DWs' ill-treatment

While hospitals can be associated with anxiety, fear, illness and death, they are also sites where care and healing are centred. For Mitali, however, the hospital became a space of insecurity and violence. Indeed, the state rendered the hospital unsafe by maintaining her employer's 'guardianship' over her, to the upset of her husband and friends, and by ensuring that her deportation/repatriation be carried out directly from there. Violence was perpetrated at multiple scales and normalised in many respects (with the nurse, for instance, who did not question the state's decision to move Mitali while she was so unwell). Indeed, Mitali's husband specifically requested that she not be moved, expressing a desire to come to Singapore himself and seek out justice for her. When he received an email to say that his wife would need meeting at the airport (which was not even near their home) he said that he would not agree to meet her and would be contacting the media instead.

Bearing some continuances with Foucault's (1963) writing, then, the hospital became a site where the state's presence was felt and its disciplinary powers enacted. As Mitali did not have the capacity to make decisions, the state and her employers made them for her. While not directly endangering her further, her best interests, according to her husband, were not considered. Instead, as she was no longer able to perform the labour that her work visa necessitated for her presence in Singapore to be enabled, her body was rendered disposable and she was, therefore, disposed of. While filled with people who provided her with care, the hospital also became the site from which she was removed from Singapore. In her husband and friends' eyes, the hospital became a space of insecurity for Mitali; her incapacities, I would argue, were taken advantage of to remove her from the nation state with haste.

6.4 The Police Station

Siti was given the role of shelter leader after a few months residing at HOME, much to her dismay. She was a very quiet lady and well-liked and respected by many of the other residents. She did not always enjoy her role, however, as she was required to maintain peace and prevent too much 'drama' unfolding, an almost impossible task (for more details of daily life in the HOME shelter, see Chapter 7). I grew very close to Siti across the time I spent volunteering at HOME, meeting up with her regularly even after she left the shelter. Siti had worked for two employers in Singapore, both for 4 years, so had been in Singapore for nearly a decade (although not consecutively) when I met her.

At her second employer's home, Siti slept on a mattress that was moved between the living room and the study. She was given the same food most days, *tua kwa* (a type of bean curd) or sausage, and was not given a day off. She was required to wake up at 5am daily to prepare breakfast, then clean a two-storey condo and wash two cars. She was not allowed to rest and was monitored on CCTV. She told me on one occasion about the day that her employers announced they were getting a dog, and how upset she had been at the news. She explained that, as a Muslim, she felt uncomfortable with the idea of living with a dog and considered leaving her job. She told the family about her discomfort but decided to stay working until her contract ended. Until this point, Siti maintained that she was treated like 'part of the family', an expression that I heard many DWs say but that I felt a deep discomfort with.⁹⁴ After the family got their dog, however, Siti realised this was not the case:

I not happy [about the dog] but also no choice *lah* ... Before the dog come they are preparing a room for the dog ... the food also, must eat drumstick and beef. Drumstick and beef! [she said with a raised voice and sounding exacerbated] That's why I'm thinking, I'm your maid, stay for four-years ... You say you treat me like family but how come you treat the dog better than me? So, when she [her employer] talk about that, when I say the beef so special, she say 'the beef is very expensive, you want to eat you can share'. (Interview with Siti, March 2017).

After seeing that the dog was given its own room, something she had never been given, and having been told she could share the dog's food that contained more expensive ingredients than her own meals did, Siti felt disappointed and hurt by her employer. Indeed, when I heard Siti recount this experience for the first time, her voice broke as she spoke, her body visibly and physically showing her pain. Siti told me that she verbalised her anger to her employer and said that she wanted to leave their employment. Nonetheless, Siti decided she would renew her contract for another two years with her employer, after having it agreed that she could return to Indonesia for a two-week holiday to see her children first.

⁹⁴ I regularly heard this expression but, and as others have documented (Anderson, 2000), the very notion is an impossibility, given that a DW is a paid employee. Even when a DW is treated well, they are still not viewed or treated in the same way family members are. Indeed, it is argued that this rhetoric is also a disciplining technique (Constable, 1997).

A few weeks later, on the evening before Siti was set to fly back to Singapore, she called her employer to explain that she was sick, and so would need to have her ticket changed. Her employer did not believe this, however, accusing Siti of trying to run away from their contract. After a few days and a number of angry texts, Siti's employer told her to make her own way back to Singapore, something she took seriously and did. She called a friend who helped her get transport to Batam,⁹⁵ where she was then given a ticket to Singapore through familial contacts. Upon her arrival in Singapore, Siti was immediately detained:

SI: Only me they keep [detain] ... "you know you cannot work" they keep saying, "I don't know" I say. Then I heard them calling the IO ... they come to me and want me to go to the police station. I feel so scared. From that moment, I cannot think already ... One woman, very fierce, ask me again "Why you come here?", "I don't know, I'm sorry ma'am", I say like that ... I start to get more scared, "what am I doing?" I ask ... the woman saying you're stealing you ma'am's ring ... They made me go to the police station ... And then the police, umm, bring to me the room, the room it's very very cold ... I try to keep praying, praying, praying ... the police put me in the room, then ask me to take out everything ... Got one police who is very very angry and fierce, but I'm not scared ... They bang the table, they bang my phone, they scold me and tell me "you're fucking lying, your lying" [she said shouting in an aggressive tone] ... "You're really lying, how can you make your children go to school if you're not stealing like that?" ... "Just tell me what I'm doing" I say. "Your ma'am lost the ring, the cost is S\$41,000.00 you know. Where you steal? Where you sell?" ... Everything I say, the police don't believe me. They believe what my ma'am say ... Then I tell the police that, before I, before I go home, my ma'am already talk to me and said she's very sad, so I ask my ma'am why, "because the maid before you steal my rings" ... because my ma'am always thinking people are stealing. Always. Even in the restaurant or what, always thinking all the people are stealing.

LA: They think you stole thousands of dollars' worth of jewellery?

SI: Yes. And then the police every night they wake me up, two o'clock, three o'clock ... how to sleep in the police station? Drink, also want drink, have to drink the toilet water.

LA: You have to drink the toilet water?

SI: Yeah, the room is very big ... and not got water ... No, got one hole in the wall, just press it and water come out. I drink from that water, I, everything from this water. Then the toilet is only here [she indicated that the toilet is next to the water source, which she seemed to imply came from a hole in the wall and was used to flush the toilet too] ... They use for punishment and think you will tell the truth. The

⁹⁵ This is an Indonesian island just south of Singapore with a direct ferry connection. The island attracts a lot of Singaporean tourists because the quickest crossing only takes 50 minutes.

police very angry, “you want to go home” they say “you want to go out?” “Of course I want.” “Then you want me to help you?” “Yes, please” I say like that. “So, you tell the truth.” “But how? Even I tell you so many times” ... because the police don’t believe me ... three police really very angry. Ask same question and [I give the] same answer *lah* ... and the police interview me and then force me. Really ask me to say yes ... I cannot say yes if I’m really never stealing ... The police very very angry, talk so loud ... Then until the police say, “if you never take”, I say “yes”, “your life in Singapore, today is the last”, he say like that ... I also not scared ... I never eat ... From the morning, they ask me the same questions ... “You must pay S\$20,000 and spend your life in jail”, they say like that (Interview with Siti, March 2017).

After a few days in prison, and with Siti not changing her answers, the police told her she could leave but said that she would need to come back the next day at 8am to check in, otherwise she would be fined. She told the police that she did not know where to go, or how to use public transport, but the police did not believe her. They told her to stay in a hotel, but she felt afraid to do this, as she explained that she associated hotels with people using it as a space to engage in sex work. In the end, she found a cheap hotel in Little India, where she stayed until the next morning. By this point, she had not eaten in over two days. The next morning, after checking in with the police, a different officer advised her to go to Lucky Plaza and to visit the HOME helpdesk where she could get support.

While staying in the shelter, Siti was unable to contact her family regularly as she was not given back her mobile phone. She was desperate to start working again because she felt she needed to send her son money and maintained that she had never stolen a ring, let alone a ring of that value. Indeed, I did wonder why Siti would have ever returned to Singapore if she had done this, and why her employer would leave such a valuable item lying around if she were so paranoid about people stealing her possessions. Siti also told me that several of her employer’s neighbours and friends had been amazed that she had remained with her employer for such a long period, as they had previously had twelve different DWs in just over the period of a year.

After more than 6 months living in the shelter without a salary, Siti was found to be innocent and was allowed to remain in Singapore to find employment. Throughout this period, unlike some of the other residents I knew who were accused of stealing, I never once doubted Siti’s innocence. Nonetheless, having been accused, the state needed to thoroughly investigate the case, especially given the value that the ‘stolen’ item was claimed to be worth. What the state did not need to do, however, was hold Siti in prison for several days, without food, questioning

her aggressively and treating her as though her guilt were already determined. Indeed, from my interview and other conversations with Siti, it became clear that she felt the police officers were trying to force her into submission and to declare guilt despite this not being the case.

Siti's story, and those of other shelter residents who had spent time in custody, demonstrated to me how the state would enact punishment and violence when the 'accused' was a DW, but not with employers who were facing charges for physical and sexual assault. Both Khin Aye and Thin Thin Swe's employers (as discussed in section 6.1 and 6.2) were not questioned in prison for days without food when cases were raised against them. Even once prison sentences had been issued to Khin Aye's employers, they were able to continue with their lives until all of their appeals had been resolved. It seemed that Siti's positioning as 'foreign', 'domestic' and 'worker' allowed the state to treat her in an entirely different, and much more violent, manner. Her employer, however, to the best of my knowledge, received no repercussions from the state for her accusations.

Police stations, prisons, jails, detention centres and other spaces of custody, unlike the helpdesk and hospitals, are felt to be spaces of insecurity/unsafety and one of the hard-lines of the state, places where the state is able to use its powers to restrict mobility and detain bodies. While often embedded within the fabric of the urban, and where the state's presence and visibility is expected and felt, they obscure the practices of the officers within them, while remaining closed to public observation and scrutiny in many ways. Although it is argued that prison systems do not always meet their stated aims, they do still discipline society in certain ways (Foucault, 1977; Garland, 1990). As Wacquant (2011) argues, prisons, like the court, are an instrument used to control certain people in society, a function that is punitive and violent but also economic, in that it houses 'surplus' populations (Gilmore, 2007). Unlike the state materialising in documents, emails and phone calls at the helpdesk, Siti felt the presence of the state in the people she encountered. After this period, however, she, like many of the other residents, never visited the court and heard very little about her case. Instead, in the months that followed her detainment, she remained trapped, bound to Singapore and the shelter, expected to simply wait and 'endure' (this will be discussed further in Chapter 7, section 7.1), a form of violence in itself.

6.5 Summary

By highlighting the experiences of DWs in four different spaces – the courtroom, the helpdesk, the hospital and the police station – this chapter has demonstrated how the Singaporean state materialised in the urban and local fabric of the island-nation. Indeed, this post-colonial and developmental state (re)produced itself in these spatialities and temporalities, bringing itself into being in various ways. In these unexpected geographies, the state demonstrated its ongoing culpability in the violence that DWs experience in Singapore. Having demonstrated how the policy that enables DWs' migration to Singapore renders them vulnerable to inter-personal violence, this chapter has shown how state violence is then enacted again when the relationship between a DW and their employer 'breaks-down'. In these circumstances, the state ensures that DWs, as sponsorless, are accounted for by issuing 'special passes' and then maintains its ominous presence by requiring DWs to regularly check-in with the MOM or police. It, however, is seemingly absent/invisible when information is requested from it.

As DWs in Singapore are 'foreign' women who are viewed as racially and nationally inferior, the state clearly prioritises the desires and welfare of its citizens even when they are the ones who are being tried/accused of inter-personal violence and abuse. Indeed, in the courtroom, Khin Aye's employers were granted permission to travel freely and go on with their lives as usual while facing charges of brutal physical and psychological violence (and having even been convicted of some charges already), even though Siti was locked up, detained and then intimidated, having been accused of stealing a highly valuable item of jewellery. Siti's gendered, racialised and foreign body (as 'foreign', 'domestic' and 'worker'), I argue, is clearly deemed as of low worth as it was shown no compassion or care in this site and encounter of violence. For Mitali and Thin Thin Swe, their cases were not even considered worthy of a trial and were instead both deported/repatriated, despite their (or in Mitali's case, her husband and friends') desires for justice and accountability.

Of course, the state is not a monolithic and all-encompassing unit, but heterogenous and fractured. As an entity that is made up of different actors, whose relationships and personhood have huge impacts on their actions and interpretations of processes, it is still impacted by societal engagement (Shin, 2019b, 2019a). While not themselves specifically

agents of the state,⁹⁶ the approaches of the two judges that presided over Khin Aye and Cahya's cases differed greatly, ultimately leading to Khin Aye going to court on many more occasions and to recount minute details over and over in a humiliating, harmful and violent way. The different IOs, and their relationships with the HOME residents, again, meant that their encounters with these systems and outcomes varied considerably. Indeed, HOME's own role in all of these cases, as a grassroots organisation, and my presence in these sites, shaped the ways in which the state acted.

In paying particular attention to their lived experiences, I have attempted to demonstrate the complexity of Khin Aye, Thin Thin Swe, Mitali and Siti's characters in this chapter. While thoroughly enmeshed in multi-scalar and multi-sited structures and systems of violence, none of these women are entirely passive victims, nor agents of resistance. All of these women – their encounters, stories and words – demonstrated the messiness of their positioning with unequal and unjust relations of power: Khin Aye's decision to stay and suffer for Cahya, her despair after being bullied in court and her fierce persona within the shelter; Thin Thin Swe's decision to remain in work to support her family, her anguish at the news of her case not being taken forward and conviction that she should become a lawyer; Mitali's injured body but fierce voice messages, her friends gathering at her bedside and her husband's refusal to comply with her deportation plans; and Siti's acknowledgment of her upset at her treatment, her fear while detained but refusing to admit to stealing. These accounts disturb simplistic binaries of structure/agency.

While academic literature has stressed how structural violence can lead to inter-personal violence (Galtung, 1969; Gardner, 2010; Tyner, 2012), this chapter, and the thesis more broadly, contributes to academic theory by demonstrating how the reverse is also true, showing violence to be relational and not so easily categorised. Khin Aye, for example, was subjected to inter-personal violence that was facilitated by her isolated and subordinated positioning within the household of her employers. Her employers' ability to then send her back to Myanmar, where no one might have ever heard about their abusive behaviour,

⁹⁶ While they are required to uphold the rule of law by state, judges are not employed by the state *per se*. Of course, there were other people in the room who could be counted as employees/agents of the state in more straightforward ways. Needless to say, the lines around what and who is and is not the state are blurry and changeable.

enabled by a violent sponsorship/kafala system. Then, even after this violence, she was required to remain in a shelter for years, with no means of getting a salary, as she was too fearful to work in domestic labour again and with no other options provided by her status in Singapore, only to be subjected to more suffering in court; to yet more structural violence. Indeed, when taking into account the WHO definition of violence (Krug et al., 2002), I argue that the state actually enacted inter-personal violence in the courtroom; by causing her prolonged psychological harm. Khin Aye, on one occasion, was even followed in to the bathroom in the State Courts by her former female employer, luckily in eye-sight of another HOME volunteer who stood in the bathroom until Ms. Chng left. After leaving the bathroom shaking with fear, I wondered how this could even be allowed in this space.

The courtroom, then, became a site of unsafety for Khin Aye, rather than a place of justice. Similarly, the hospital, the police station and the helpdesk were also spaces of insecurity, fear, upset, suffering and violence for these DWs. Following from feminist scholars who have demonstrated how the home can be a site of violence and fear for women (Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Brickell, 2012; Warrington, 2001), I have shown not only how these spaces manifest themselves as alternative and localised geographies of the state, but how their function and form make them unsafe for certain bodies. The corporeal geographies of migrant DWs, mapping uniquely on to geographies of violence and safety/unsafety. Khin Aye, Thin Thin Swe, Mitali and Siti, all being impacted by multi-scalar and multi-sited anatomies and apparatuses of violence.

Everyday Life in Refuge or Detainment?

Lots of the domestic workers in Singapore are actually the problem. It's very hard for employers to manage them, their expectations are really too high. I don't mean all of the girls here [in the shelter] though. I know they are actually victims who have suffered (Conversation with a donor/patron to HOME, June 2017).

Walking up to the shelter for the first time, I was filled with nerves and anticipation. I had left the room I was renting quite early in order to arrive promptly for a meeting I had arranged, which I understood was an opportunity for me to be introduced to the residents of HOME's shelter and told about how I might be able to support the organisation as a volunteer. Despite leaving extra time, not yet used to the Singaporean heat and with no local SIM card or functional knowledge of the local transport system, I ended up arriving at the address I was given a few minutes late, both sweating and flustered.

On my approach and entrance to the shelter, I was surprised by both its size and location. I had imagined it to be larger with more space for the 60-70 residents it regularly housed, and to somehow look more obviously like a place where people lived. Instead, it consisted of four small dormitory rooms tightly packed with bunk beds, and a dining area close to a compact kitchen. The 'administrative area', managed by a resident who I learned was given the role of 'Shelter Leader', was just a small desk in a corridor. The dimly lit and utilitarian concrete rooms – which were all rather chaotic, with fans blowing around hot air from the street through the open windows – were spread across two floors, up a staircase from street level. The building itself was set among others in a way that would make it very difficult to identify as a dorm building of any kind. I was also surprised by how forthcoming the residents were with me that day, how quickly they would open up about the experiences that led them to be staying in a shelter, and how rapidly I learned about the violence embedded within the home-spaces in which they had been living and working. I also quickly came to know about the social and organisational structures in place within the shelter – the rules, the leadership structures and the dynamics between the residents – although my understanding of the micro-politics of the space took much longer to uncover. While I had initially only come to Singapore for two

months, I was told that the shelter was going to be renovated, and so I was eager to see its transformation when I returned.

After landing in Singapore for a much longer period of fieldwork, and having not been in the shelter for 5 months, I was feeling apprehensive, somewhat prepared for what to expect but also aware that a lot might have changed in the time I was away. My anxieties were, again, fairly short-lived, as there were still some familiar faces greeting me when I arrived, with the everyday chaos of the shelter quickly pulling me into its rhythm. The shelter had remained functional and simple with this conversion but now felt more organised and spacious. The sleeping spaces had moved to the top floor, transformed to two much larger, but still tightly packed, dorm rooms. On the first floor, there was a kitchen, a small dorm room for residents who were unwell (or unable to use stairs) and two flexible, open-plan activity spaces. The new layout provided more social space for the residents and felt brighter and airier, with the shelter's function remaining inconspicuous from the outside. The activity rooms would regularly be filled with residents who were relaxing in groups, eating and calling their families, as well as with volunteers running classes, such as: baking; yoga; English language; and various others.

In this chapter, by highlighting the everyday lives and emotions of the residents, I demonstrate how the HOME shelter simultaneously functioned as both a site of 'refuge' and as a site of 'detainment', thus becoming a place of security and insecurity. As already stated in Chapter 6, the occupants of the HOME shelter, as sponsorless (having either fled, or been removed, from the homes in which they had been living and working), are awaiting either repatriation/deportation or for the state to allow them to find a new job as a DW and to continue working in Singapore. While living in this state of limbo, then, the residents often, paradoxically, felt both safe and trapped. While at a safe distance from their former employers, they were left unable to work and facing uncertainty as they awaited decisions about their future, having been rendered deportable by their status as 'foreign' and 'worker'. This chapter focuses on what it is like to live as a 'detained' and 'disposable' body. Indeed, while migrant disposability has been theorised in academic literature, there is a lack of writing about the actual lived experiences of those who occupy this positioning, to which this chapter (and the thesis as a whole) contributes.

With this in mind, I focus specifically on the emotional geography of the shelter space.⁹⁷ By taking seriously the importance of emotions, this chapter will demonstrate how the shelter became a space where the aims of the residents, and of HOME more broadly (as an organisation and group of activists, staff, volunteers, etc. with their own agendas and positioning), collided with those of the Singaporean state, employment agencies and employers among others. Despite being a small and seemingly insignificant space within Singapore, I show how the HOME shelter is a place in which many wider systemic and social issues play out and where the everyday lives of the residents demonstrated their entanglement with international migration flows, deportation regimes and global inequalities at a much broader scale. Indeed, the chapter ultimately demonstrates how, despite feelings of security and belonging in the shelter, anatomies and apparatuses of violence still plagued the site. Indeed, despite feeling like a microcosm, it was a space where the systems that render DWs unequal to others still penetrate. While the sub-sections that follow were selected with purpose, the ethnographic vignettes, interviews and analysis presented also reveal a much wider set of emotions that were experienced daily, feelings of excitement, joy, gratitude and elation which were juxtaposed against feelings of dismay, helplessness, shame, embarrassment and others.

7.1 Feeling Trapped

In the shelter, Rosamie's (who was introduced in Chapter 5, section 5.5) differing class status was clear to the other residents and would often cause friction. Residents would comment on her clothing and demeanour, with Cahya trying to get her assigned to the other dormitory because, in Rosamie's understanding, "maybe she feels intimidated by me". In her first month in the shelter, Rosamie told me that she had not been sleeping well and it was clear her mood was incredibly low. She was struggling to come to terms with what had happened to her,⁹⁸ saying things like "my parents gave me everything and this is still where I ended up".

⁹⁷ Anderson and Smith (2001) argue that "[e]motions are an intensely political issue, and a highly gendered one too", suggesting that the marginalisation and side-lining of emotion from academic literature, due to the masculinised nature of the production of knowledge, has resulted in particular social and emotional relations being subordinated.

⁹⁸ That is, having been physically assaulted by her former employer, even after (as aforementioned in Chapter 5, section 5.2, p.130) selecting them because they were Philippine nationals.

Over the period of her stay, and as she settled in more, Rosamie would regularly fill me in on shelter gossip and was always very open, telling me how she felt and even when she broke rules of various kinds.⁹⁹ When I asked her about what it felt like waiting in the shelter, over the (then) seven months she had resided there, she immediately said:

RO: We need to go out, to get out of this situation, because Singapore's became like our prison. We are like a prisoner.

LA: You feel trapped?

RO: Yes, we cannot work, we cannot go home ... We feel more, umm ... unfortunate. Because we are just like, we survive in our everyday lives because of the donation and everything, when if you are in your home countries, like, you can survive because you are working, or you have your own. But here, we are dependent on the alms. You know, it's hard, it's hard to accept that you're depending on the alms of the good Samaritans ... We feel more in need because you know, yeah, there's a saying that it's better to give than to receive and it applies to us. Everybody who gives, they feel more blessed ... It's hard ... receiving and receiving and receiving ... And on the other way around, you know, we are lonely, it's insulting on our part, and we feel we are like, umm, invalid.

LA: Because you're dependent on other people's support?

RO: Yeah, yeah. Because we cannot work right, and here in Singapore ... it's illegal to have a part time job. You're not allowed like in other country. It's like they're really don't want us to survive ... Even if we are single we have the parents to support, the sibling to support and everything, and then the government don't want us to find our own means to survive. So, it's very hard for me, and not only for me, for us; for all of us. Even if you go to the under-age girls, of course they don't have a child, but you think they're happy? No. Of course, the reason why they're under-age, the reason why they came to Singapore is to work. It's to provide for the financial situation of their family. And now they're stuck here.

LA: Yeah, and so do you feel somehow stuck in the shelter?

RO: Yeah and not only in the shelter, even if I'm staying outside I can still feel that I'm trapped. Because in Singapore, it's like a big prison for us. It's like we're a prisoner of one big prison (Interview with Rosamie, November 2017).

⁹⁹ The residents were only allowed to leave the shelter unaccompanied at certain times of the day and were expected to perform various duties/roles, as assigned by the HOME staff/volunteers and shelter leaders.

Rosamie would often refer to the ways in which she felt trapped and confined within the shelter space and to Singapore, not just physically but also materially. She described how her circumstances left her in a position where she was unable to provide for herself or her son. This, and receiving the 'charity' of others, leaving her with a feeling of shame.

For Rosamie, the period she spent in the HOME shelter was very much a form of physical, economic and social detainment. She was unable to leave the country or live independently, unable to work and provide an income for her family, and unable to build and maintain relationships in the ways she wanted. She was also, in many ways, worsening the feeling that she was trapped by refusing to disclose to her family where she was, or saying that she was unable to work, meaning that financial demands were still being made of her.¹⁰⁰ Rosamie was also very critical of the Singaporean state and their practices of detainment:

LA: I know with Ilene [another resident], the government were planning to send her to the ICA [the Immigration and Checkpoint Authority of Singapore], to their detention centre, so do you feel like the government uses HOME like that? Them just keeping you here until they deport you or you find a place of work?

RO: In the Philippines, if you are apprehended for some, whatever case, you are going to be put directly into jail. And the jail is so a scary place. Here at least, the government give you the chances to live a decent life, to stay in a decent place, more decent than the prison. And it's because they don't want the responsibility. Of course, if they were going to put us into their own prison, their own jail, then they are going to spend money [I laughed out loud at her reading of the state's motives].

LA: Yeah, OK! But here they can keep you for free?

RO: Yeah, lesser responsibilities for them, lesser costs for them ... Here it's too slow. Here even, you know what happened to Khin Aye and Cahya right, all the evidence, and then why they need to go to trial? ... Here, the perpetrator can still injure your life.

LA: Yeah. And while you feel that your life is on hold, do you feel like you could get justice for what happened to you?

RO: No, there's no justice here. There's no justice in Singapore for the helper. Why? Because I think the only decision that the MOM knows is send back. Send back. Whatever case, send back.

¹⁰⁰ This was very common. Many of the shelter residents did not want to tell their family where they were or the reasons they had ended up there; not wanting to be perceived as a victim or, if they were accused of theft/abuse, as criminals.

LA: So you feel like no matter what the outcome of the case, you get deported?

RO: Yeah, and so I feel like they have no brains ... They don't want to use their brains. They don't want to be compassionate. I'm just always going back to Khin Aye and Cahya's case, the judge actually allowed outright the employer to have a holiday ... It's like you are holding our passport because you don't want us to go out or to leave Singapore because you need us for the investigation. But you let the perpetrators to just go in and out of Singapore. What if they didn't come back? (Interview with Rosamie, November 2017).

For Rosamie, as for others, the knowledge that their employers were able to move freely in and out of Singapore, and their financial ability to do so, was a source of frustration which only exacerbated their feeling of confinement and injustice. Residents would report their experiences of violence to the police or MOM, but would then have their mobility restricted for unknown periods of time. While they were able to come and go from the shelter, if in compliance with HOME's rules, the residents would often reiterate the feelings that Rosamie expressed, feelings of helplessness and dependence, and of being trapped.

Through conversations with Rosamie and others, I came to understand the shelter as a site in which insecurity is experienced. The state's power to confine the residents to Singapore, and to control how long they are able to stay in the shelter, demonstrated the ways in which the space functioned as an extension of their detainment regime. While not the ICA detention centre physically, the shelter functioned in many of the same ways for the state, and, as Rosamie so aptly acknowledged, for free.¹⁰¹ Like a detention centre or prison, as with other carceral spaces, the shelter residents were unable to choose when they were able to stop residing in the shelter, with their actions within it controlled to differing degrees. The state extended its own powers and spatial control to the shelter space, confining and controlling the residents. This confinement, a form of continued state violence which prevented the residents from earning a salary (the very reason that most of the DWs I met migrated) or feeling that they were progressing with their lives.

Indeed, Rosamie was not the only resident that felt they were trapped in the shelter as their cases proceeded. Other residents regularly expressed their desire to move on, whether that

¹⁰¹ HOME did/does not receive any kind of regular income from the state for housing the residents. Instead it is funded by private donations. It did receive a one-off donation by the state during 2015, in-line with the celebrations for Singapore's 50th anniversary as an independent nation.

be to find new work or to go home, frustrated that they were unable to leave once they had filed their case (especially for those who did not even want to go to trial). For many residents, the confinement that they experienced at the shelter mirrored that experienced while in employment. Indeed, the home spaces in which they had been confined were imbued with power asymmetries, which (for the most part) remained opaque to those outside of them (Yeoh & Huang, 2009); domesticity being invisibilised and invisibilising the bodies that perform domestic labour. Similarly, the unequal and violent positioning of the residents, as disposable and detainable bodies (within the immigration-industrial-complex and migratory system in Singapore), is spatially inscribed and embedded within the shelter. Again, they remain obscured by the privatised and hidden nature of the space, and because such a space does not conform to narratives of Singapore's 'success' story (as described in Chapter 4). While physically the shelter provided some residents with a much greater sense of freedom than they had been provided in their employers' homes, especially for those residents who had been physically locked inside them,¹⁰² their bodies were still restricted, and their mobility delimited. Their 'stuckness', which is described by Hage (2009, p.7) as a "sense of existential immobility", ultimately ensnared them temporally, spatially and materially in a state of limbo. Feeling trapped becomes an embodiment of this for the residents.

For other residents, this period of confinement also meant that they missed key events as their families' lives continued without them present or able to travel, exacerbating the feeling of being 'stuck'. Jayna, a lady from India, waited in the shelter for months after telling the police about the sexual abuse she had experienced while working for her employer. She has been required to remain in the country to provide evidence but was desperate to leave because her mother was very unwell. Jayna suffered from depression while residing in the shelter, often saying that she wished that she could give up on her case. Her desire to leave strengthened over the time I knew her, as her daughter also suffered a miscarriage, which Jayna felt unable to adequately support her through. Her employer meanwhile, remained overseas, having left the country after the case was filed against them, making the police unable to proceed.

¹⁰² This was the case for several DWs I spoke to, many of whom stressed how fearful they had been when their employers were out of the house (particularly those in high-rise apartment blocks), in case there was an accident (a fire, injury, etc.) and they were unable to escape.

One afternoon, one of HOME's volunteer lawyers called me over to speak with her in the shelter. She said that she had received an email stating that Jayna's case had been closed. She said that the state was not going to charge anyone¹⁰³ and that Jayna was free to leave Singapore once her employers issued her flight ticket:

Despite the news about her employer not being charged, I couldn't help but feel pure joy. I knew how much Jayna wanted to go home and how much she was suffering in Singapore. I called Jayna to pass on the news, as she was out of the shelter visiting the temple ... At first, she couldn't work out who I was, our phone calls always starting with confusion because of language barriers,¹⁰⁴ but after saying loudly "It's sister Laura from HOME" a few times in a row, she seemed to get it, saying "Ahh yes sister, yes". I gave her the good news, giving the information slowly so I was sure she understood what I was saying. After saying "it means you can go home sister", I heard a loud scream/cry. Jayna squealed at the top of her voice, shouting "yeees ... yeees". Before long, I could hear the excitement turn into tears. I could hear her crying loudly, clearly with joy, relief and sadness. My eyes filled with tears too (Extract from my field notes, November 2017).

Several days passed, however, with no sign of her tickets. Having contacted her IO on several more occasions, it became clear that her employer was in no rush to purchase her ticket, even though this is mandated by the state. Eighteen days after Jayna had received the good news about her case, she received word that her mother had passed away. Her grief and despair was felt by everyone in the shelter. Jayna did not eat for three days to mark a period of her grieving. Many of us offered to take her to the temple, but she said that she would not pray or wear the bhindi for a month and would not wear flowers in her hair or visit the temple for a year as a mark of her grief and to pay her respects.

¹⁰³ While Jayna had reported her employers for sexual assault, they had then, subsequently, reported her for theft. Having left Singapore, her employers made it virtually impossible for the police to investigate the case. Jayna, however, was unable to leave the country; her body marked differently and receiving less freedom than her employers. In these circumstances, then, and given Jayna's desire to leave Singapore as soon as possible, the news of there being no charges was positive. Of course, as stated (in Chapter 6, section 6.2), for Thin Thin Swe, a lack of charges was deeply upsetting news (despite this also meaning she could leave Singapore); a demonstration of the differences between the shelter residents' desires and positioning.

Incidentally, employers reporting theft or other crimes after their employee had fled (and especially after they themselves were accused of mistreatment) was all too common.

¹⁰⁴ As I stated in Chapter 3 (section 3.2, p.75), Jayna and I developed our own way on communicating over time, but she was not very proficient in speaking English.

Despite wanting to give up on her case so that she could be there for her family, and despite her employer having been allowed to leave the country for the entire period of her confinement, Jayna had been unable to leave Singapore. She had not only felt trapped during the period of her employment, and trapped in the shelter by her case, but she also felt trapped even after this, by the regulations which meant that the police would simply wait for her employer to buy her ticket home. Having known for some time of her mother's illness, the systems in place were inflexible and meant she was unable to see her mother before she passed away. She also did not make it back in time for her funeral. While her IO did not intend to cause Jayna this prolonged misery, and was always deeply sympathetic on the phone, the violence of state apparatuses led to her suffering anyway. Her employers' disregard for her wellbeing, and their violence toward her, extended beyond their employment and into a state of purgatory, violence that was facilitated by the state. Ultimately, Jayna's flight ticket was paid for by HOME to accelerate her return.

7.2 Feeling Secure

During informal conversation and interviews with many of the residents, one of the points that was always reiterated to me was how happy and safe people felt in the shelter. Initially, I wondered if my position as a volunteer made residents feel that they had to express feelings of gratitude and safety, perhaps feeling that I would be offended if they said otherwise, but over time I also heard about many of the residents' grievances with the shelter so trusted their sincerity.

Unlike most of the shelter residents, Khin Aye (whose court case and experiences in Singapore were discussed in Chapter 6, section 6.1) had resided in another refuge for a short period prior to her arrival at HOME. I asked her about the differences between the two spaces on one occasion, interested as the other shelter was not exclusively for migrant workers, but instead predominantly for Singaporean women who had needed to flee from abusive relationships. She explained:

First time I step in [to the HOME shelter], quite really different ... When I see the girls, sometimes they are wearing ... whatever is the clothes that are comfortable for them, they can wear any clothes. So that's the first thing that I saw, it's like for me, really your free ... then also ... when I stepped in the room, I saw so many plugs, you know, so many plugs I saw. Even an extension wire ... You know it means, free to

charge the phone ... It means they don't control you. Even the same thing in your personal life, it's quite different with the [other shelter] before ... Here, your personal life ... you can do whatever you want ... just don't bring any problems in the shelter ... So, it's like, actually the freedom here is not limited like there.

Also, first time, I doesn't know if this is HOME, I doesn't know, and then, when I slowly, I stayed here long time, I then know this is the meaning of HOME, HOME is like a family. And then also the staff ... they say "don't call me ma'am, call me sister". That thing also made me really like, wow, they doesn't like calling that ... so it's like really different, oh, I can call you my sister, brother, they don't like us to call them ma'am and sir ... I feel like, really, it's family, even, even not my family, but it's a family ... Even in meeting, they are not sat on a chair if we are on the floor. If we all sitting on the floor, even volunteer, staff also sit on the floor. So, it's like, that's how they show us, I am same as you ... That's how we feel they are not face with us, they are side with us. That's the things that I can feel. I feel safe (Interview with Khin Aye, 2017).

Residents who had stayed in their embassies shelters for periods would also comment on how much better they felt residing at HOME, describing these other spaces as small, crowded and controlling. The feelings of safety, freedom and family that the residents described, and that HOME actively tries to foster, are central to many conceptualisations of a 'home' more broadly. HOME, as a shelter space and refuge, sees itself as a temporary home space in many ways, allowing its residents freedoms that other spaces within Singapore appear not to grant, such as access to mobile phones, to charging facilities and to emotional, medical and legal support.

Cahya, who was the 'kitchen leader'¹⁰⁵ across the entire period that I spent time in the shelter, was often frustrated with the behaviour of the residents, who she felt lacked respect. I had been quite surprised then, in her response, when I asked her in an interview how she felt about living at HOME, as I had been expecting her to speak about her grievances:

LA: I know you've now been here a long time, in what should have been a temporary living arrangement, but how do you now feel about HOME and the shelter?

¹⁰⁵ Cahya was responsible for ordering the shelter's food and then appointing people to help her cook each meal. Cleaning, cooking, organising meetings and managing the shelter space more generally were responsibilities shared among the residents, with longer-term residents assigned to different leadership roles.

CA: Before, the first time ... because I don't know the girls, that time I'm not very comfortable. But long time I stay here ... I know some girls, then they talk to me, so I have the good thing here. That time I remember we still have the dream class, some class I do, being a runner¹⁰⁶ ... I do sewing also, so I learn a lot in here ... HOME is for me, it's like, the safe place ... HOME also, like when the girl have problem, when they [a DW] call MOM or agency they sometimes don't care right ... but HOME says you need help? ... HOME just goes OK you come here and we will accept you (Interview with Cahya, 2017).

While no resident would be able to live in the shelter indefinitely, many saw it as a space in which they could come for support whenever it was needed, a safe space and refuge. The organisational structure and ethos of HOME, as well as the classes that were organised and responsibilities that the residents were given, made many of them feel a significant emotional attachment to the space. Indeed, the support structures that were embedded within the shelter space created an atmosphere of security. The shelter space was also experienced in stark contrast to the home spaces from which the residents had just moved, spaces that were, as described by many, imbued with feelings of insecurity, fear and anxiety.

The shelter, as a temporary home space, needs also to be thought of as a highly political site that is tied to wider global and national systems. It is a place where experiences of homeliness, safety and belonging exist alongside those of oppression and marginalization. It is also a site which the residents hold in comparison to other home spaces that they inhabited: spaces that they grew up in; that they migrated from; and that they had been working and living in while in Singapore. The feelings of security and safety that the shelter offered, being set against spaces where many of the residents had experienced inter-personal violence.

Indeed, for many of the residents, the shelter was the first place they were able to stay after fleeing, or being told to leave, the home spaces in which they had been living and working. While some residents were brought to the shelter by the police, some having spent time in a prison, the vast majority of residents arrived directly after escaping their employer's home. For some then, this was the first time in weeks, months or even years that they had slept on a bed, that they could rest knowing that they would not have to work the following day, that

¹⁰⁶ 'Runner' was a role assigned to certain residents. Runners would accompany shelter residents to their appointments with the MOM or police, or to their employment agencies or former employers' homes if necessary. This would ensure that all residents felt (and were) safe when moving around Singapore and would prevent them getting lost too.

they were able to eat a full meal, that they were given certain freedoms, and/or that they could sleep at a safe distance from people who had enacted abuse in a multitude of different ways. Simple things like being able to call their families freely or eating when they were hungry, were significant material improvements for many of the residents which made the shelter space feel like an idealised notion of home; home as sanctuary and refuge.

7.3 Feeling Scared

Within a few weeks of spending time in the shelter, I learned that many of the residents had either felt the presence of ghosts or seen them in the building. I also had been told that some residents had felt their bodies being inhabited by them from time to time. On my second visit to Singapore, and as a more familiar presence in the shelter, I was told that there had been issues in the shelter at night and that several residents had been seeing ghosts again. I decided to ask Siti, the shelter leader at the time, how she felt everything was.

Siti told me that Jayna had been possessed by a ghost two nights before, and that everything had been getting worse since then. She explained that she had walked in to the dorm room when others were shouting, to see Jayna throwing her body around the room and lashing her arms about. Siti enacted this movement as she spoke, shaking her arms quickly in front of her and then punching downwards while walking in random directions. She said that Jayna had then stopped suddenly and felt the ghost leave her body. Others also claimed to have seen the ghost at that time. This event caused a huge amount of anxiety and led most of the residents to run out of their room. Siti actually then started laughing, saying that she had to run after everyone and reassure them, not wanting a mass of people out on the street. She told me that she personally didn't believe there was actually a ghost but admitted that she was still scared by the situation (Extract from my field notes, April 2017).

As I arrived at the shelter the following day, there was a huge amount of commotion. Siti came over to me as I arrived saying "sister, quick, there are more problems with Kartika and Taman" (conversation with Siti, April 2017). I learned that two more residents had felt that their bodies were inhabited by ghosts, one of whom had been walking down a staircase from the roof space, where the laundry was dried daily, when it happened and said she felt she needed to jump. Luckily, others had been around and stopped this from happening, but the event had clearly shaken a lot of people. I went to see Kartika in one of the dorm rooms:

Kartika did not speak. She appeared pale and expressionless, unwilling or unable to make eye contact with anyone. Her face was blank and her body still. Her eyes seemed to be glazed over and she remained unresponsive ... When I asked what had happened, her friends told me that Kartika had felt a spirit enter her body. Her body had apparently become bloated with her stomach visibly expanding. She then screamed and punched out, fighting the spirit. They said that they couldn't calm her down. She had vomited several times since then and was struggling to keep food down. They insisted she was now fine, because she was calmer, and that she didn't need to go to the doctors (Extract from my field notes, April 2017).

Over the days that followed, it was decided that we should try to get spiritual and religious leaders/advisors to help with the escalating problem. In the first instance, a group of Buddhist monks agreed to visit the shelter, leading the Burmese residents to diligently scrub one of the activity rooms clean, and prepare a table with offerings of bottled water and orange juice. The monks arrived with a Burmese lady, Khin Lay, who volunteered with HOME. Before the monks began their blessings, Khin Lay collected some string from the office and then tied it across the doorway to the activity room. She said that we could come in to the room prior to this, but no one should pass the string when the monks began their ritual.



Figure 15: 'Buddhist Monks Leading Prayers in the Shelter'. Here, shelter residents were praying with monks after the several residents had experiences spirit possessions. Many of the residents present were not Buddhist themselves (photo author's own, 2017).

I stayed near to the door initially when the monks began chanting, and then moved to sit with Siti and some of the other residents in the small shelter office:

The rhythmic chanting went on for a few minutes undisturbed before we suddenly heard a high-pitched scream coming from the room next door. Siti and I looked at each other, both moving quickly to the door. The screaming continued. I stepped through the doorway and looked across the string line, to see Kartika lying flat on the floor, on her front, wailing loudly. Her body was stretched out as if she were in pain. The monks continued chanting. Not wanting to cross the string, I stood frozen by the door, standing next to Siti who grabbed my hand and squeezed it tightly. Several other residents had rushed to the door and were peering into the room. Others sitting in the room had turned to look at us, clearly concerned. The screaming continued as Kartika then moved on to her knees, scratching the floor with her fingernails; shrieking at a painfully high pitch. She moved on to her back and her body appeared to convulse on the ground ... The ceremony continued for what felt like forever (but was probably just a few more minutes). In this time, Taman also started to have bodily convulsions in the room (Extract from my field notes, April 2017).

By the end of the week, a Catholic Catechist had also visited the shelter having responded to my initial phone call with some confusion, saying “well this is a very strange request”. The residents also received several chains of healing beads from a person who described themselves as a spiritual healer, which hung around the dorm rooms in strategic places.



Figure 16: 'A Catechist Preaching at the Shelter'. Here, the residents sat and listened to a catechist preach before he led prayers and then blessed the space with holy water (photo author's own, 2017).

Despite the catechist having run out of enough holy water to bless both dorm rooms, the shelter residents seemed much calmer over the following days, and Siti reassured me that most residents were now able to sleep without fear. This was not, however, the last time that the spirit possessions and ghostly sightings disturbed the shelter while I was in Singapore. For some residents, however, the ghosts were a constant presence in the shelter; but not necessarily one to be feared:

I know that's a real. I know it's not making drama or make funny ... For me not really scared. But, sometimes if the girls happen like that [if another resident is possessed], I never go see them ... I never go and touch them ... Even I'm already on a bed or I'm in the office and someone say "this girl, like that", I just ignore them ... Not because I don't believe them or think they're making drama, no, I just don't want to see them (Interview with Khin Aye, 2017).

I'm not scared ... Many times I saw the ghost as a kid, so that's why I believe in ghosts ... Sometimes I get waken up at 4.30am but I go downstairs [in the shelter], and no one is there ... When I was a kid I saw many things. I play with this one (Interview with Eve, May 2017).

The residents were, then, impacted by these hauntings in a variety of different ways. While fear was not universal or a permanent state, many of the residents felt scared during the night or when the shelter had a tense atmosphere, often created when residents were not getting on very well with each other. Ong (2010) describes the ways in which spirit possessions, explained as mass 'hysteria' in the local media at the time, would halt production in factories in Malaysia. In these spaces, the female factory workers spoke of the uncleanness of certain spaces, like the toilets, and the "harassment by spirits on the factory floor" (ibid., p.209). Indeed, there are some characteristics of the events described that resonated with those that I witnessed in the shelter. Uncleanness in general, and particularly apprehension over the disposal of menstrual blood, for instance, were key concerns:

I also see one time [the ghost] ... but mostly I feel it ... but I just keep praying ... I never disturb her, of course she never disturbs me. I clean the house ... that's why when I talk with the girls, I tell them to keep the shelter clean and it [the hauntings] will never happen. Keep the shelter clean, the toilet clean, it's not come. Because, we cannot tell them to go out because maybe this one is their house before, right? We're just guests here, but they are like the owner here ... You know, the Myanmar girl ... I'm warning them, after breakfast they never clean the room ... of course they [the ghosts] angry ... So, I keep cleaning, all my hairs stand up [pointing to her arm]

but I just pray “please, please” I say, “I’m sorry I just want to clean, please don’t disturb me” and then it’s OK (Interview with Cahya, 2017).

LU: Actually have so many ghost here ... The staircase, that one [pointing to the central staircase in the shelter], that’s why so many people want to fall down ... Some people can feel, some people can see. Last time, she [a ghost] always disturb me ... Sometimes I feel very scared, but sometimes, I’m not scared.

LA: So you feel like it’s a problem when the shelter is dirty?

LU: Yes, actually now it’s very dirty because all the people is very stubborn.

LA: Right. And some people have mentioned that they think it’s worse because of menstruation, the sanitary pads and the blood? So, do you think that this can bring the ghost too?

LU: Muslims they believe that. For Muslims, the menstruation in the sanitary [pads], this is much worse, because you throw it in the dust-bin ... For Muslims, must wash ... Actually, Muslim and Buddhist it can be the same (Interview with Ludia, December 2017).

Ludia, herself an Indonesian Muslim woman, felt that the ghosts would be less likely to appear if the residents all used washable sanitary-pads, believing that menstrual blood was tied to the appearance of ghosts; with the residents’ sex, their bodily anatomy, attracting spirits. Cahya also agreed that menstrual blood was one of the core issues, explicitly mentioning the necessity of the toilet’s cleanliness. They both felt that they were responsible for keeping the space clean and calm on behalf of its original occupants, the ghosts, with their behaviour in the shelter, and emotions while residing there, being shaped by this presence.

While some similarities emerged with Ong’s (2010) accounts, there were some key disparities. While Ong suggests that spirit possessions in Malay factories were a form of protest and attack on the masculinised management, the presence of ghosts in the shelter, and the spirit possessions I witnessed, did not appear to be a form of resistance in the same way. To me, while in the shelter, the presence of ghosts and the fear they brought appeared to reflect the wider emotions of the residents more generally, with people of different nationalities and religions interpreting the events in slightly different ways.¹⁰⁷ Upon reflection, it was fairly

¹⁰⁷ While I was not acutely attuned to the different ways that the residents’ nationality and religion/belief-systems impacted their perceptions of the ghosts, Ludia, Cahya and others had explained to me that the Muslim and Buddhist residents were more concerned with the disposal of menstrual blood and its association with upsetting

unsurprising that hauntings, spirit possessions and sightings of ghosts were prevalent in the shelter environment. Many of the residents had arrived after having experienced violence, trauma and frightful living/working situations. While the shelter did, as argued, provide a sanctuary from this, and was perceived as a place of refuge and safety first and foremost, it was also a space where anguish and uncertainty continued. Indeed, for residents suffering with depression, anxiety and PTSD, the fear made this refuge a site of distress too. Even for those, like Siti, who did not believe in the ghosts themselves, they were still impacted by the situation and left fearful. While not locked in to the shelter physically, the residents' inability to move from it (often with no financial means to do so and with the state deciding when and where they are able move) also meant that they were unable to 'escape' the hauntings. The shelter's role as detention facility, and as a carceral space, uncomfortably co-existed with its role as refuge, or a temporary 'home'.

While effectively detained in the shelter, then, the residents lived with a great deal of uncertainty; not knowing how long they would have to reside in the shelter or, in some cases, whether or not they were going to be eligible to remain in Singapore afterwards. This impacted the ways in which the residents associated themselves with the shelter, as they knew their stay was necessarily temporary. Cahya's belief that the ghosts are the shelter's "owners", and that the residents are simply "guests", reflects her association with the shelter and also with Singapore more broadly. Despite being one of its longest standing residents, having resided in the shelter for several years, she knew that her stay was limited as she would be forced to leave Singapore at the closing of her trial, when the state no longer deemed her presence necessary. In Singapore, as in the shelter, she was temporary. The liminality of the shelter space, and her uncertainty during her stay, became central to her emotions within it. While Cahya's stay at the HOME shelter was transitory, that of the ghosts was not. The ghosts' permanence became analogous with that of Singaporean citizens, their rights to remain being something that she could not attain. Indeed, fear had, at times, shaped the living and working environment in the homes where the residents had been employed;¹⁰⁸ their employer being 'owner' in this context (of both the space and of them, as their sponsored-

the spirits that co-habited the shelter. Two of the Filipina residents, on another occasion, told me that they knew the shelter's ghosts were unsettled when they saw crows, but did not seem concerned about the shelter's cleanliness.

¹⁰⁸ The fear felt in these home spaces was expressed by many of the DWs I interviewed, even if they did not experience inter-personal violence specifically.

employee). In the shelter space, however, fear still shaped the residents' living environment, but rather than being directed toward their employer, it was absorbed by the spirits that came to haunt them. Being 'possessed' took on a new form in the shelter but was not new to the residents' positioning in Singapore more broadly.

7.4 Feeling Sick and Tired

While the shelter was a space where it often felt like there was a huge amount of flux and turmoil due, in part, to the number of residents that would move in and out of the space each week, the daily lives of those who had resided in the shelter for longer periods were much more repetitive and filled with boredom. The choice of the sub-title, 'Feeling sick and tired', was used to articulate a number of different emotional states. Indeed, the expression suggests a feeling of boredom and exasperation with a situation but can also be read as two separate feelings which also materialised in the shelter space and were embodied by the residents: sickness and tiredness.

During the time I volunteered at the shelter, the micro-politics of the space became ever clearer to me. I learned who were close friends and who had more contentious relationships. I also came to understand that boredom would often result in disputes, furthering feelings of anxiety and frustration too. Upon entering the shelter in the morning, I would often find the residents laying on the concrete floors (sometimes avoiding volunteer-led activities), sending messages to their families, watching videos online or talking with other residents. Food became a particularly contentious issue in the shelter and would regularly be the subject of arguments between residents. While most food was cooked by the 'kitchen leader'¹⁰⁹ and a different team each day, the Indian residents (a much smaller population within the shelter) would generally cook separately as many of them were vegetarian. Accusations that "their

¹⁰⁹ The shelter residents had their own system for managing the shelter; aided by the HOME staff and volunteers. The cleaning, laundry and cooking responsibilities were rotated between all residents, with assigned leaders and deputy leaders for each of these three areas. The main shelter leader and deputy leader were responsible for making sure the residents complied with the shelter rules and for managing the day-to-day schedule (the residents' appointments with the police, MOM, etc. and the classes/activities schedule, run by volunteers).

food smells bad”, a comment which was of course laden with racist implications¹¹⁰, were often made when someone was bored, frustrated or angry.

Indeed, it is argued that food is often an important symbol and currency in prison spaces, something that can create a feeling of home as much as it can further the feeling of distance from it (Crewe et al., 2014; Martin & Mitchelson, 2009b; Valentine & Longstaff, 1998). Similarly, in the shelter, food was very important to the residents, lifting moods when celebratory meals were prepared, during Eid and Christmas for instance, and creating harmony.



Figure 17: 'Residents Relaxing After Cooking Breakfast'. After cooking, and throughout the day, the shelter residents would often sit in groups or alone, using their phones to watch videos or call their family/friends (photo author's own, 2017).

¹¹⁰ There was, at times, a lot of strain between certain groups of residents, with nationality, language, religion, and cultural practices being points of intrigue as much as they were tension. There were hierarchies between the residents and times when people had things stolen and fights between people (nearly always verbal but on one or two occasions becoming physical).

On one occasion, I was asked to sit in a meeting with the shelter's different leaders to discuss the disputes that had been arising, which were related to unhappiness with the food and accusations of theft:

I went in to the activity room with Siti and found that the other leaders were already pulling some tables together and getting some stools. After a few minutes, Cahya started speaking. She started by talking about the shelter residents who didn't know how to use the microwave properly and continued to break it. I knew this was an ongoing issue, as the residents had managed to break three microwaves in a six-week period. It was suggested that more signs be added to the space above the microwave, in every language spoken in the shelter, explaining clearly that metal should not be placed inside it. Cahya felt that this wasn't enough, however, and didn't understand why anyone needed one at all, saying that she never used one when cooking the main meals.

Cahya then went on to explain that she was having to order increasing quantities of chillies, because they went missing so often. She said that she knew it was the "Myanmar girls" because "the Filipinos can't handle spicy food and the Indonesian people don't need extra" [herself Indonesian]. The conversation about what should be done went on for much longer than I expected, as many of the leaders felt this was unacceptable behaviour (Extract from my field notes, 2017).

The dispute about the chillies and the microwave, or other equally mundane issues, became the centre of regular discussions and sometimes took up a significant period of my day. While it was important, practically,¹¹¹ to try and ensure that things were not broken regularly, and that food was not stolen, Cahya's impatience with the residents seemed heightened when she had bad news about her case or when she was most frustrated/sad about being 'trapped' in the shelter. Her frustrations were also exacerbated when she was bored, admitting that being in the shelter "such a long time makes you feel crazy sometimes" (conversation with Cahya, 2017). At times when there were fewer activities and more mundane routines, and when the residents' moods were lower, the feuds and tensions over more minor issues seemed to be more prevalent.

In his ethnographic writing about homelessness in Romania, O'Neill (2017, p.x-xi) reflects on the gendered dimensions of feelings of boredom. He explains, with reference to his observations in a homeless shelter, that:

¹¹¹ Every time the microwave broke, the staff and volunteers would look for donations to replace these objects.

... the gendered dimensions of boredom became clear. Homeless women, both young and old, felt bored with the kind of life homelessness afforded ... [as] [T]he proper functioning of shelters depended on women's unpaid domestic labor without providing any of the creative craft or pleasure of homemaking. Boredom reverberated throughout women's daily repetition of thankless laundering, scrubbing, and child rearing ... In contrast to the boredom of the repetitive and thankless labor experienced by women, the boredom of unemployed men had an inert character. Unable to serve as breadwinners, men were bored not because their labor was repetitive and underpaid but rather because they could no longer find consistent work.

While child rearing was not a task the HOME shelter residents had to engage in, the shelter did rely on the reproductive labour of the residents. In some instances, this provided the residents with satisfaction, and a sense of purpose, but the mundaneness of cleaning and cooking routines also stilled time-space further (Anderson, 2004). Desjarlais (1997, p.92) also reflects on the temporalities of boredom in a homeless shelter in the USA, showing how the residents' experiences of the space transformed over time:

Getting "settled in" was ... double edged. The process helped some adapt to a sane and quiet existence ... it could also make "doing nothing" the general state of things. The worrisome idea that, the longer the person stayed in the shelter, the more he or she "settled in" and grew accustomed to "doing nothing" was a common one.

Similarly, in the HOME shelter, the length of a resident's stay would determine the degree to which they felt stability, but also the level of boredom they felt. Indeed, Cahya and the other leaders (all long-standing residents) rarely took part in any of the organised activities because they had done them all too many times. The monotony and frustration that the residents embodied, then, affected their temporal experience of the shelter space. As Anderson (2004, p.739) argues, "boredom takes place as a suspension of a body's capacities to affect and be affected forged through an incapacity in habit", with joy, excitement, anger and other emotions often providing themselves as a rupture, a disturbance in this time-space. Feelings of boredom within the shelter were, however, still always held in comparison to the experiences associated with the home spaces they had most recently moved from; boredom and monotony often embedded in those home spaces and routines too.

As well as the feelings of boredom and frustration that were experienced daily for most residents, sickness and injury also impacted the shelter space. Some residents arrived at the shelter with serious injuries, having had major surgery or treatments in hospital (as was discussed in chapter 6, section 6.3, p.156), but others became ill after they had arrived. While HOME's staff and volunteers tried to ensure that illness did not spread through the shelter, this was a never-ending issue and near impossibility. With so many residents living and sleeping in tight confines, coughs, colds and fevers spread easily. Despite daily cleaning routines and a weekly airing of all mattresses on the hot rooftop, the residents were also always trying to rid the shelter of bed bugs, a hopeless task given the transient nature of the space. Indeed, staff and volunteers would also be impacted by the illness that spread through the shelter, with my own anxiety being tested on one occasion when it was found out that a resident had TB and there was fear it had spread.

While feeling ill was hard to deal with in the shelter environment, as comfort was limited, and the temperature was difficult to control, the residents would care for one another in these circumstances. The shelter's volunteer doctor and nurses would provide the medical care that they could, but then often it was other residents that would administer painkillers, food and emotional support. This caring labour fostered strong relationships between residents, beyond nationalities and languages. Aye Aye Swe – who was unable to walk when she first came to the shelter following a complex spinal and hip surgery, having fallen from the window of a housing block – required a great deal of care when she arrived at the shelter. She not only suffered from physical injuries but also had been unable to speak since the incident, communicating with signs and by writing in a notebook. While the care that Aye Aye Swe received from other residents was very clearly appreciated, the space was not designed to support her entirely; her pain sometimes exacerbated when she needed to get up and down the stairs. Her feelings of confinement also furthered as a result.

HOME's ethos of care and the shelter residents' support of one another, in this instance and others, allowed the state, the residents' former employers and the medical insurance providers, to negate much of their own responsibility (while still testing for the medical 'conditions' they deemed unacceptable¹¹²). As well as the physical well-being of the residents,

¹¹² The residents were still required to attend medical examinations every six months, in order to rule out pregnancy and STIs.

the state was also culpable in various ways for the strains put on their mental health, that is, the depression and anxiety that many experienced being exacerbated by the feelings of boredom and frustration associated with waiting and confinement. These feelings often transformed themselves into those of lethargy and tiredness, embodied by the residents and both reproduced and embedded within the shelter space itself.

Of course (as previously explained in Chapter 2, section 2.1, pp.30-31), feminists have shown that the home space cannot be considered a sanctuary for all people (Blunt & Varley, 2004; Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Brickell, 2012; Porteous & Smith, 2001; Warrington, 2001), and is often a space where boredom is experienced, largely by women who are themselves confined to the household in different ways. It can also be a site of sickness and ill-health or a space of caring and restoration. For hooks (1990), as a site of familial care, the home became a site where healing also transformed into communities of resistance for black women in the US during periods of enslavement. Indeed, practices of care and healing among the residents did help to maintain and strengthen their mental health and well-being. Even when there were feuds over food, or arguments about other petty issues, the shelter residents did feel a great deal of solidarity with one another. While communities of care and unity did emerge in the shelter, then, the transitory nature of the space and the bodies within it meant that this was dynamic, changing and often ruptured.

The emotions experienced by the shelter residents may not be so different to those in other home spaces then. In this context, however, this particular spatio-temporal experience of waiting and boredom (as well as the experience of camaraderie), when the residents' priority during their migration was (for the most part) to earn an income, can be seen as a form of state violence, enabled by the residents' status as 'foreign', 'domestic' and 'worker'.

7.5 Summary

Through bringing the emotional geography of the shelter to light, this chapter has demonstrated, how the space, seemingly paradoxically, functions as both a site of refuge and detainment. Having described feelings of confinement, fear, homeliness, belonging, boredom, sickness and solidarity, which are only a few of the emotions present at any one time, I have shown that the shelter is both a place of security and insecurity, with the residents sometimes feeling both at the same time. Rosamie, for instance, describes feeling "stuck" in the shelter

and in Singapore more broadly; the shelter being the site of 'holding' within the wider territory governed by the Singaporean state. As she says, "[I]t's like we're a prisoner of one big prison". While identifying the state as the cause of her prolonged suffering, then, and as someone who was physically assaulted during employment, she felt it to be unjust that she had to wait in the shelter, not allowed to work and with no income to send back to her son. She also described feeling uneasy and embarrassed to be in the position of requiring charity; leaving her with complex emotions as she felt she had somehow failed her parents. Her discomfort was, however, somewhat tempered, because she felt that being in the shelter (as opposed to a detention centre) allowed her to live a "decent life".

While affectively very different from a state-led detention centre, then, in the months that followed my initial interview with Rosamie, she was given much greater responsibilities in the shelter and within HOME more broadly. I interviewed her again nine months after she first arrived at HOME, and asked her what it was like to live in a shelter to such a long time. She responded:

Aside from, you know, the drama, it's still happy you know. Because before, when I came here at first ... I don't know so much people, but staying here, I make my network. I have a lot of network, even in other countries, but of course you build a friendship here. Whatever you have your differences but at the end of the day you still face things together. The friendship is still there, even if you always fight. You know you can still depend on that person in any small way and vice versa, them to you. And it's also lonely because, you know that's why we are always seizing the moment. Sometimes we sneak out, to at least, to create a memory, because if we leave the shelter already we don't know what's going to happen in the future. Even if we have the plan, "oh we are going to meet", of course we live in different places. It's hard (Interview with Rosamie, November 2017).

Rosamie's feelings towards the HOME shelter were complicated and changeable, then, as she built friendships there unlike those she had elsewhere. She felt comfortable and valued at HOME, telling me on a number of occasions that she wished she could get a job as a member of staff.

In general, it seemed to me that the longer a resident was forced to stay in the shelter, the more internally polarising their experiences became. They would feel even more 'at home' and growing closer to the other residents, while simultaneously feeling more 'trapped', anxious and more desperate to leave. The longer-term residents, like Rosamie, also knew how

to successfully (without being caught) break the shelter's rules, by "sneaking out" for instance; something that was confided in me after my relationships with the residents grew into established friendships.

With it being well established that space is both relational and imbued with power (Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 1994, 2005), the security/insecurity felt by the residents needs to be considered alongside the other spaces in which they have dwelled. Feelings of entrapment, for example, being felt in a similar way to that which they experienced in their employer's home, but in opposition to the relative freedom they might have felt in their 'home' countries. For Rosamie, a victim of domestic violence, the HOME shelter was actually the first place that she lived where she had not experienced direct inter-personal violence in many years. This is not to say, however, that she (and the other residents) did not experience violence. Indeed, the shelter was itself a product of structures of violence that unequally position DWs as vulnerable to abuse in the first place. As Martin and Mitchelson (2009) explain, practices of immobilisation, such as forced confinement, are spatial tactics that enable the bodily control of certain people, practices which are often built upon historical legacies of colonial violence. As embedded within colonial histories, then, migrant DWs (as 'foreign', 'domestic' and 'worker') are impacted by patriarchal, racist and xenophobic apparatuses and anatomies of violence at multiple scales; the shelter, and the residents' feelings of insecurity and 'stuckness' within it, a product of this context. Indeed, it could be argued that the shelter's status as a refuge and site of belonging for the residents, is only created because of the oppositional politics of HOME as an organisation. Indeed, as a grassroots organisation, HOME's presence, while perhaps convenient and free as Rosamie described, impacts the practices of the developmental Singaporean state, with individual agents of the state (police officers, for example) taking DWs to HOME for support when they are in distress or have run away. The state is, then, culpable for the ongoing violence, in both apparatuses (its policy, procedures, rhetoric, etc.) and its anatomies (in the agents the operationalise this), but in a fractured and inconsistent manner.

As I have argued, the emotions that residents had in the shelter are not entirely dissimilar to others described by feminists who highlight women's entrapment within the home space; the notion of home containing within it connotations of haven and prison (see Chapter 2, section 2.1, pp.30-31 for more detailed discussions of 'home'). Similarly to other home spaces, the shelter was not entirely closed off or isolated as a space. While its location was not public

knowledge, the shelter was thoroughly embedded within the urban fabric of Singapore, its residents still a part of wider society. As described, the shelter was visited by monks, priests, volunteers, donors and many others, all of whom impacted the space. Likewise, the residents were not locked in and did not lead an entirely enclosed life, visiting the MOM, the police station, the court and other alternative geographies of the state regularly, as well as attending corporate events, pageants, and more mundane spaces such as shops and parks.

There are of course some distinct differences between the shelter and other home spaces, however, in terms of the number of people dwelling in the space, for instance, and the uncertainty their futures hold. While the architecture of the shelter, and the environment within it, is very different from those of other carceral sites – prisons and asylums, for instance – the state’s relationship with it¹¹³ still enables a form of surveillance (Moran, 2015), which in turn impacts the residents’ behaviours and feelings within it. It functions as more than just a container, but is both the medium and consequence of broader political and social relations and practices (Lefebvre, 1991; Moran, 2015). In many ways, the hauntings and the spread of illness at the shelter, and the residents’ feelings of fear and sickness as a result, can be seen as a product of the space itself. Indeed, with so many transient bodies living in tight confines, in a space managed by an organisation with very limited budgets, and with so many of the residents having experienced trauma and interpersonal violence in the period before their arrival, the residents’ continued ‘suffering’ within the shelter was sadly almost inevitable.

What was not inevitable or necessary, however, was the ways in which the state managed the residents’ cases, the uncertainty leading residents to feel that they were in limbo. Even when appealing to individual IOs, the processes and policy in place meant that they were often unable to expedite cases, leading to prolonged suffering (and, in Jayna’s case, complete despair). The liminality of the shelter, then, was created by both uncertainty and transience. Woof and Skinns (2018, p.566) write, with reference to individuals’ experiences of police custody, that it is:

... not only temporally disruptive, but is emotional, embodied and can end up having a transformative impact on the lives of detainees. Deprivation of certainty is linked to the way that temporality and liminality are experienced ... The transient and temporary nature of police custody, where detainees are uncertain but are bridging

¹¹³ Particularly with the necessity placed upon residents to check in every few weeks to renew their Special Passes.

the gap between policing on the streets and courts and then prison, meant that detainees felt that they were in 'limbo'. This was both in terms of the realities of being between, but also because the outcome of their spell in custody may throw their life into further liminal uncertainty, awaiting trial or fearful of the outcome of conviction.

The shelter shares many similarities to this description, as a space with its own spatio-temporality that accounts of the residents' emotions helped to reveal. Indeed, by paying particular attention to the residents' corporeal geographies (in the shelter and in other spaces throughout the city state) and the emotional geography of the shelter, this chapter has contributed to the limited scholarship on migrants' lived experiences of detainment and bodily disposability. Highlighting the residents' 'feelings' has not only demonstrated how emotions are dynamically related to place, but has also shown that however (to borrow Rosamie's expression) "decent" a life can be led in the shelter, it was still a site where ongoing violence was enacted and felt.

Finally, by paying attention to the affective dimensions of the seemingly mundane, this chapter has continued to disrupt the structure/agency binary that academic writing on domestic work has often perpetuated. Yes, Rosamie was a victim of structural violence, and she was defiant in her 'rule-breaking', but her positioning cannot be simply described as one of resistance or victimhood. Even Jayna, for whom life in the shelter was exceptionally challenging, could be found dancing at celebrations, supporting other residents and building lasting friendships. Indeed, Jayna, Rosamie and all of the other residents I met across the periods of my fieldwork were all producing, reproducing, resisting and simply reacting to the unequal, unjust and violent relations of power in which they were situated as 'foreign' 'domestic' and 'worker'.

Conclusion

In his book 'The Elephant in the Room: Silence and Denial in Everyday Life', Eviatar Zerubavel contemplates situations where everyone refuses to acknowledge obvious truths—the elephant in the room ... Despite (or because of) its pervasiveness, violence is a very well-fed, if ignored, elephant. And Geography's basic avoidance of direct, interpersonal violence can thus be seen as a microcosm for society in general (Tyner, 2012, p.163).

On the 3rd October 2019, CNA in Singapore reported that 53% of DWs do not last a year with the same employer (using statistics produced by the MOM), despite nearly all work contracts being issued for a two-year period.¹¹⁴ The reporters suggested that a mismatch between a DWs' expectations and the reality of the work required could be part of the reason for this. They suggested, upon interviewing a representative from the Association of Employment Agencies, that if compromises in a household cannot be reached, conflict can follow, as can abuse. Abuse, and violence, is seen as an 'understandable' outcome of this situation. This was an assumption I had heard on numerous occasions in Singapore from DWs, employers, HOME staff/volunteers amongst others. While there certainly did seem to be an incompatibility between assumptions and the actuality of the labour, this rationale is inadequate. Beyond homogenising experiences of domesticity in Singapore, this reasoning also obscures the anatomies and apparatuses of violence in which DWs are enmeshed.

In this final concluding chapter, I provide a final summary of how this research – centred around domesticity, migration and violence – was grounded in my experiences in the field. I then summarise the key arguments of this thesis and demonstrate how and why inconsistencies in DWs' expectations (as suggested by the CNA article above) are only one part of the reason why so many employment relationships end unhappily. With this, I demonstrate how I answered the research questions posed in Chapter One, which were:

¹¹⁴ The MOM had, however, released a report in 2015, suggesting that 92.7% of DWs were highly satisfied with their employment in Singapore (MOM, 2016).

1. How are migrant DWs positioned within Singaporean society?
2. How and where does the Singaporean state intervene when migrant DWs are no longer willing/able to work-for/live-with their employers?
3. What are the lived experiences of those residing in the HOME shelter (as sponsorless and 'disposable')?

Following this, I will summarise the main theoretical contributions of this thesis, before finally pointing towards directions for future research and making some concluding remarks.

8.1 Domesticity, Migration and Violence: The Shelter and Beyond

At the opening of this thesis, I provided an extract from my fieldnotes from the morning when I first attended court with Khin Aye. I not only described the anger I personally had when seeing her employers and the anxiety that the space had induced in me, but I also highlighted some of the idiosyncrasies of the shelter too. Indeed, I described how the residents went about their daily routines, Siti watching videos, telling another resident that she should not wear makeup for a job interview, and Khin Aye preparing herself for court. It was also a morning when the residents' fears of the shelter's ghosts began to surface and where volunteers had arrived early to check on an individual, Kartika, who had been unwell the previous day.

Mornings like this were not unusual for me during my time conducting fieldwork. Every day I spent in the HOME shelter, even quiet days, would be filled with residents coming and going for interviews or meetings with the MOM or police, and filling their time in different ways. These daily interactions – seeing the residents supporting one another, policing their appearance to help them find an employer, or becoming terrified of spirits – not only provided me with an insight into what it was like to live in a shelter as 'disposable' and in detainment/refuge, but also helped me to understand how DWs are positioned in Singapore more broadly. Indeed, as with the morning described, I also went well beyond the four walls of the shelter to see how the state materialised within the urban fabric of Singapore, that is, in spaces where one might expect them to be (such as the courtroom) but also in places where they might not (such as the hospital).

While taking an unexpected turn (see Chapter 3), my own fieldwork journey took me to employment agencies, the MOM and the police as well as places that I had not even considered I would interact with: embassies; pageants; and corporate events. By casting my attention to these unexpected spaces, I was ultimately able to bear witness to (and hear about) anatomies and apparatuses of violence that DWs were subjected to, which, I argue, are multi-scalar and multi-sited. These experiences led me to position my thesis conceptually at the intersection of academic writing on domesticity, labour migration and violence, centring the body throughout.

8.2 Summary of Key Arguments and Findings

When considering how migrant DWs are positioned within Singaporean society, and in answering my first research question, it is important to note that before even accepting employment, the women who choose to migrate and take on these roles are already embedded within a violent global political economy that leaves them with few opportunities. Supporting other accounts of migration, the majority of the DWs I met initially migrated to Singapore because of economic necessity, while some, like Rosamie, had moved to escape abusive partners and domestic violence. The inequalities between nation states within Southeast Asia does, however, mean that these women formed part of a readily available 'solution' to Singapore's labour shortages (Oishi, 2005), as a 'disposable' and 'temporary' reserve army of surplus workers (Li, 2010; Tadiar, 2013; Wright, 2006).

As work that has been feminised and invisibilised, the transnationalisation of domestic work has allowed some women (more affluent Singaporean citizens in this instance) to enter more highly remunerated and revered work (Hochschild, 2000; Parreñas, 2001a; Yeates, 2005a). As a result, other women are left to do the 'dirtier' household tasks, which are viewed as menial and requiring low skill (Glenn, 1992; Roberts, 1997), with the bodies that perform these tasks unjustly denigrated and devalued. Not only did I never meet anyone who told me that they wanted to move to Singapore because their ideal profession was in domestic service, but I knew of people who were warned about taking these roles because of the negative perceptions and associations they had. Often not wanting to take on this work then, and potentially not wanting to migrate at all, domesticity and labour migration are embedded within a global political economy that sees some people and nations thrive at the expense of others. As I argued in Chapter 4, Singapore's success is predicated on the exploitation of

migrant workers, with certain bodies – gendered, racialised and foreign – necessarily being viewed as of lower worth. The post-colonial state, in its interactions and practices, (re)produces itself by violently maintaining systems of racial domination and subordination.

As discussed in Chapters 2, 4 and 5, beyond labour migration and domesticity being structured by violent inequalities, the legal and physical apparatuses and infrastructures that facilitate the mobility of DWs are also entrenched in violence. The Foreign Domestic Worker scheme (see Chapter 4, section 4.1.3, p.105), which introduced and now facilitates this form of migration to Singapore, necessitates that DWs' visas are tied to their employer. In addition to the draconian and punitive parameters that DWs are obliged to comply with, I have argued that this sponsorship/kafala system furthers the unequal relations of power between employee and employer (also see Gardner, 2010; ILO, 2019; Pande, 2013; The Online Citizen, 2014).

I have further contended that, while providing no routes to citizenship, the state views DWs (as migrant 'workers', and unlike their counterpart, 'professionals') as a threat to the Singaporean 'family'. While De Genova (2002) suggests that it is the threat of deportation, rather than deportation itself, that renders migrants a disposable commodity, this thesis has shown that deportation/'repatriation' was widely practiced in the Singaporean case and, as such, is a real threat too. While not always enforced by the state only, an employer's position as a DW's 'owner' also allowed them to 'remove' migrants from the nation state when they deemed appropriate; a demonstration of the subordinated positioning of these workers and their 'disposability'. This system, then, enables, and in many ways encourages, citizens to perform migrant removal, rather than allowing DWs opportunities to find new employers; these are harmful and violent practices that see some people forced back to untenable livelihoods or abusive relationships. The state, employers and employment agencies all played a role in inflicting violence on DWs, situating them unequally in Singaporean society.

In addition to the state's legislation, the fear and risk of these foreign workers is, I suggest, more deeply rooted in the immigration-industrial-complex and migration industries. As I show in Chapter 5, different actors (including DWs themselves often) are involved in framing DWs as commodity and possession. With their bodies being rendered purchasable, they are bought and sold in derogatory ways; their photographs and bodily statistics used to determine their capability to perform the tasks an employer requires. While objectifying these women and

rendering them bodies, or commodity, employment agents and employers attempt to strip DWs of their personhood, profiting from an economy of violence. In so doing, they create the conditions and justification for mistreatment and abusive working conditions, in many cases resulting in any daily rest being seen as laziness and poor value for money. Importantly, however, being 'foreign', 'domestic' and 'worker', as I have demonstrated, did not mean that this violence was enacted with no reaction/retaliation. Indeed, by simply being human, inhabiting flesh and not being entirely manageable (as a machine might be), the DWs I met spoke of circumstances when their presence was the cause of anxiety and friction within the homes in which they had been living and working.

Chapter 5 further demonstrates how DWs are positioned unjustly in the political economy that renders them vulnerable to interpersonal violence. In the Singaporean context particularly, DWs are seen as a threat to the citizenry and national 'family', subjected to bodily management by the state, their employers and employment agents. This control is enshrined in the Foreign Domestic Worker Scheme, a legislation that situates DWs uniquely in this context and ensuring that only the appropriate bodies are given work visas. The Singaporean government, as a post-colonial state, violently preserves racialised and gendered hierarchies, which place 'foreigners', and especially foreign women (whose presence they require to function), in subordinated roles and positions. Women's bodies prove themselves to be essential to the functioning of the state, while also being both 'of' and 'at' risk (Ong & Peletz, 1995).

To answer my second research question, Chapter 6 examined how the Singaporean state materialised in the urban fabric of Singapore when DWs were rendered sponsorless. As stated previously, my fieldwork led me to some unexpected spaces where I was able to reconceptualise notions of security/insecurity and to understand how the state intervened when its sponsorship/kafala system did not function. Rather than being spaces of safety, care and humility, the courtroom, hospital and helpdesk, for instance, all became spaces where violence was performed and enacted. These geographies, where the state unpredictably materialised in the urban fabric of Singapore, altered my perceptions of where DWs encountered danger. For example, instead of being a site of justice, the courtroom was a place of pain and humiliation for Khin Aye. It became an arena where the people who enacted bodily and emotional harm on her were brought back into her proximity and where the state utilised its decision-making powers to further Khin Aye's suffering. The Singaporean state, in its

fractured and heterogenous form, built itself and legitimised its presence in these places and moments, a presence that was not always physical. In so doing, it also demonstrated its powers to deport and control the population, to manage DWs' bodies while they were 'out-of-place' (or 'unsponsored') and to enforce their temporariness. It not only determined who was deserving of justice but also who had any future in Singapore.

Indeed, despite DWs continuously telling me that they chose to migrate to Singapore over other destinations because it was "safe" – and, in many ways, this initially having impacted my decisions to carry out my fieldwork there too – by the time I left I could only see it as a deeply violent and unequal country. While for citizens and migrant 'professionals' (and for me) rates of crime are very low, for migrant workers it was not the haven that had been described to me. Safety is, however, like violence, something that is embodied and experienced differently, dependent upon an individual's perceived and lived identity.

Academic writing has long focused on how structures of violence can lead to cases of interpersonal violence. While my research also supports this, I have shown that in Singapore the converse is also true. I argue that following instances of interpersonal violence – whether it be in abusive employment practices, or with cases of verbal, physical and/or sexual assault – the DWs I met were often then subjected to further violence. While the HOME staff and volunteers tried to support the shelter residents in reaching their hopes/aims – whether that be helping them to get home, to get further employment in Singapore, or to get legal/financial justice – they were often unable to reach the desired outcome. Even when they were 'successful', the period of waiting had often taken its toll and desires had also sometimes changed. Indeed, as I demonstrated in Chapter 7, initial desires for justice and change were often weakened after months (or years) spent with no salary, outcome or news.

In my final empirical chapter, Chapter 7, and while answering my third research question, I bring the emotional geographies of the shelter to light. Indeed, the shelter residents' emotional turbulence brings light to experiences of living as 'detained' or 'disposable' bodies (states which have been widely theorised but less well understood as an experience that is embodied), as the residents were made to wait there for unknown periods. By shedding light on the emotional geographies of the shelter, and of living in limbo, this thesis has complicated the notions of home and refuge. As a place that welcomes DWs at moments of need – and as an entity that exists separately from the state, their employers and their employment agents

– the HOME shelter provided a sanctuary for some residents, and a place where security and care was found. As a heterogeneous entity, the Singaporean state's unpredictability with decision making (both in terms of the time that is taken to make decisions and with the outcomes that might be expected), however, contributed to it being a place of anxiety, boredom and turmoil. While existing separately from the state, it was configured and controlled by its hidden presence. The pressures from children and family members who were relying on remittances that had been halted on the one hand, and the struggles with depression following periods of mistreatment on the other, were just two of the issues that plagued many of the residents. The HOME shelter needs to be understood, then, simultaneously as a space of home/refuge (or safety) and a space of detention/carcerality (unsafety/fear).

This thesis has, also, demonstrated that the shelter residents used this space, as well as the friendships and community they built there, to support one another and share knowledge they had to improve their circumstances. Indeed, while they experienced life as 'disposable', I also met DWs who demonstrated that, in certain circumstances, their deportation was avoidable. By appealing to immigration officers and calling activists/NGO-workers, some individuals were allowed back into Singapore to take a case forward against their employer and to then go on to find a new employer. While these instances were rare, they demonstrated that there were ways in which these systems of violence could be avoided/defied, even if only temporarily or by accident.

8.3 Thesis Contributions

In this thesis, I have ultimately demonstrated how violence is embedded in different sites throughout the city state of Singapore and enacted on/by/through different anatomies and apparatuses, which were both multi-scalar and multi-sited. I have shown that the post-colonial Singaporean state – having been shaped by the violence of colonialism in an island-nation with scarce resources – has justified and legitimised its violent treatment of migrant workers by maintaining and reproducing racial and gendered hierarchies. Looking beyond the state, however, this thesis has considered the immigration-industrial-complex more broadly, and the role of employment agents particularly, in producing and sustaining an economy of violence that extracts profits from bodies, which are already unfairly situated in an unjust global political economy. Indeed, it would be overly simplistic to look at one set of actors, such

as employers or the state, and to solely lay blame on them for the mistreatment of a population. With such high rates of dissatisfaction, abuse and mistreatment towards DWs, it is necessary to take a much wider stance and perspective.

I have also focused my attention on sites and spaces that have received less academic attention (the shelter and courtroom, for instance), in order to show how violence is enmeshed in DWs' experiences in Singapore, performed by multiple actors in diverse and intersecting ways. While claims that structural violence would lead to interpersonal or direct forms of violence hold merit (Farmer, 2004; Galtung, 1969; Holmes, 2013; Tyner, 2012), I have shown that the ways in which violence is enacted are not linear or performed in a straightforward, top-down manner. Rather, violence is relational and spatial, produced in complex and multidimensional ways with human and bodily suffering always being the result. Indeed, for that reason, while the state can be placed as responsible for the suffering experienced by migrant 'workers' in Singapore, it also needs to be understood as a heterogenous form that does not just exert its influence in unilateral ways. The state is discursive and embodied too, presenting itself in and through space.

While mindful of the danger of painting DWs as vulnerable victims who are entirely 'trapped' by violence, I have also been conscious of responding to this by simply looking for examples (and archetypes) of resistance. Indeed, much academic focus on DWs has, often for important reasons, reproduced the structure/agency binary. In seeking to move beyond this, this thesis has tried to show moments of defiance or reaction, whether with 'resistant' intention or not. Rather than using examples as counterpoints, I have demonstrated the messiness of the unjust and unequal relations of power in which DWs are embedded. As an ethnographer, and while still drawing on DWs' experiences in the homes of their employers, I ultimately focussed my narrative on the spaces where I was embedded as an ethnographic researcher. This process allowed me to paint a more complex picture of the DWs I met, rather than just presenting them as one-dimensional. By casting my attention to alternative geographies, I was able to look beyond the period of 'work', which academic writing on domestic labour so often restricts itself to, and to think about the lived experiences of detainment and deportation practices, which are often obscured or missing in geographic writing.

While highlighting the anatomies and apparatuses of violence, I have also, and importantly, centred my discussion on the body and on DWs' corporeal geographies. By emphasising how

the residents felt in the HOME shelter space, and discussing what it was like for DWs 'being' 'foreign', 'domestic' and 'worker', I have added to the existing literature on embodiment and intersectionality. Indeed, rather than simply listing their intersecting identities, I have shown how the complex and myriad ways in which a DW's race, gender, migrant status and nationality (as well as their age, class and religion) come to mean different things in Singapore for them as people. Rather than assuming it is a mismatch in expectations (as the CNA article suggested) which becomes a point of tension in the home space, I have shown that it is often simply a DW's humanity and fleshly presence that causes anxiety. Indeed, as a population which poses risk to their employers and the nation state, but who are also enmeshed unjustly in apparatuses and anatomies of violence, DWs are a demonstration of a population who are both 'of' and 'at' risk.

Feminist writing has addressed the role of security/fear, with it having been widely argued, and also accepted, that men and women experience space differently (Fenster, 2010; Koskela, 1997, 1999; Pain, 1997, 2001; Tyner, 2012; Valentine, 1989). Moreover, feminist writers were, as I have argued, responsible for demonstrating how domestic and gender-based violence makes the home a space of unsafety for some women (Blunt, Alison & Varley, 2004; Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Brickell, 2012; Warrington, 2001). The role of female perpetrators in violence towards other women has, however, received much less attention. Rather than male household members performing violence, the narratives I have exposed demonstrated that it was often female employers that enacted harm towards DWs. With domestic labour having been invisibilised in many respects, and remaining a feminised activity, I argue that structures of patriarchy, heteronormativity and colonial dominance create hierarchies that result in the mistreatment of DWs by Singaporean women. This supports Yeoh and Huang's (2010) assertion that it is the politics of proximity in the home space that results in feelings of threat, which, I argue, produces violence. It is not just men, then, that create unsafety in the home, as some accounts would suggest; nor can safety necessarily be tied to places that are often associated with care and healing (such as the hospital). This thesis has determined, however, how the corporeal geographies of migrant DWs map uniquely on to geographies of violence and safety/unsafety.

Finally, in addressing my own experiences in the field and the reasons why my thesis transformed in its focus, I have drawn attention to the difficulties of researching violence and suffering. I have presented the ethical challenges that I faced when writing about my

experiences in Singapore and considered how my own positioning shaped the encounters I had and the stories I heard. While wanting to bring these narratives of suffering to light, I did not want to solely paint a picture of victimhood and encourage voyeurism. While academic writing is itself embedded within colonial elitism, I have highlighted why it is still important to consider the broader impact of this form of writing. By using ethnographic data and insights from research participants, and acknowledging their role as co-producers of knowledge, I have argued that it is important to honour their desires, whether that means writing about their experiences or not.

8.4 Limitations of this Study and Directions for Future Research

While my research had presented a discussion of the everyday encounters of migrant DWs in Singapore, it is by no means an all-encompassing account. As highlighted in Chapter 3, my fieldwork experience was primarily shaped by HOME and embedded within the shelter, which allowed me to access certain spaces but, of course, also limited the perspective I gleaned. My positioning, for example, meant that I never able to interview any representatives of the Singaporean state. As I remained in Singapore throughout the period of my fieldwork, I was unable to see how the DWs, who were deported or who left Singapore by choice, were shaped by this process. I was also only able to ask the shelter residents, and DWs I knew, about their experiences contemporaneously. While this provided me with an account of the lived emotions as they happened, it also meant that there was no space for anyone to reflect on this after gaining any distance from it.

Having kept in contact, albeit in limited ways, I know of one resident who is now working as a teacher in Thailand, another who is in Costa Rica and one person who is now married to a man in the US South. The vast majority of the residents have, however, either returned to their 'home' countries or migrated again to work as a DW elsewhere (in the Middle East and Hong Kong predominantly), in many ways still trapped by the same plights that led them to migrate in the first instance. Despite all having been trapped together in Singapore, then, their lives have now diverged. As such and given that there is a lack of academic writing that takes a longitudinal approach, I would suggest that future research might 'follow' these women to understand the myriad ways in which their lives continue to be shaped by a violent political economy. Speaking to these same women would not only allow for a greater reflection on their experiences in Singapore, but also bring visibility to their positioning as disposable, and

'disposed-of', bodies. Indeed, it is important to do more than just say that migrants have been deported, but to understand the lived and embodied consequences of these actions. As such, and with so many of these DWs having migrated again, it would also be productive to consider their experiences by connecting the literature on transnationalism (see Barber, 1997; Beaverstock, 2002, 2011; Gardner, 2008; Walsh, 2006, 2014, 2018; Willis, Yeoh, & Fakhri, 2004; Yeoh & Willis, 2005) with that on detainment and deportation (see Bal, 2015; Belcher & Martin, 2013; Campesi, 2015; De Genova, 2007, 2018). This would allow for greater reflection on how experiences of detainment/deportation impact future migratory decisions and the relationships that people maintain with and across different spaces.

While I have reflected on the everyday emotional geography of the HOME shelter, there are many other attributes of shelter life that warrant further academic attention. Indeed, in the discipline of geography there is not a great deal of writing which pays close attention to shelter spaces (of different kinds) and particularly on their liminal qualities (for some existing geographic writing on shelter spaces, see Daya & Wilkins, 2013; Graham & Brickell, 2019). While there is a breadth of literature on home/belonging (see Baxter & Brickell, 2014; Blunt, 2007; Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Page, Evans & Mercer, 2010; Porteous & Smith, 2001; Walsh, 2006), the literature on carcerality and carceral institutions (see Gill, 2016; Gill, et al., 2018; Moran, 2015; Moran, Turner, & Schliehe, 2018) tends to remain isolated from this. My experiences in the HOME shelter demonstrates that there is a need to bring these bodies of academic theory together, as the confluences could bring fruitful and more progressive ways of understanding the daily lives of people dwelling in a variety of settings. Future research might also look across shelter spaces, particularly shelters for women and/or migrants, hostels, spaces of detainment and other carceral institutions, to consider the ways in which the residents are situated.

Beyond this, it is important to note that my connections to HOME as an organisation, and my respect for their work, also limits this thesis in particular ways. With a precarious relationship with the state, I have chosen not to write about certain cases and events at HOME, in case this could possibly make the conditions within which they work more difficult.

In order to think about the relationship between violence, domesticity and migration at a more global scale, future research might also look to other geographic settings to theorise comparatively. While this research is contextually and temporally specific, it also connects to

wider structures, systems and spaces. Shedding light on other geographies could, then, help to bring light to continuities and divergences. A broader perspective might bring about a deeper understanding of the ways in which anatomies and apparatuses of violence penetrate systems, practices and experiences of domesticity and labour migration, which could bring about policy change and more progressive politics in future.

8.5 Final Remarks

As was highlighted in the initial statement at the opening of this chapter, violence is pervasive in society and yet, (particularly inter-personal violence) is rarely theorised directly in the discipline of Geography. As a discipline that seeks an understanding of people and their relation to space, place and the earth more broadly, both violence and the body need re-centring. Indeed, while the social sciences more broadly are adept at identifying forms of structural violence as the root cause for much human suffering, the apparatuses and anatomies of these systems need further theorisation. Rather than seeing directed forms of violence as exceptional, its relationship to wider systems and structures need uncovering if change is to be possible.

For the DWs and shelter residents that I met and got to know, more awareness of their struggles needs to be a first step in making real change, but their voices, rather than mine, should be ones heard most loudly. While I was struck by the pervasiveness of violence in these people's lives, I was also uplifted by their joy, compassion and ability to forgive. Rather than viewing the shelter as just a place of sorrow and suffering, my lasting memory will be one of hopefulness and sisterhood. Despite language barriers and the differences between us, the residents' willingness to welcome me into their lives, and the determination with which the HOME staff and volunteers work every day, makes me believe that a more just and equitable world is possible.

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Appendices

Appendix A: List of (Formal) Interviewees

Interviewee name (anonymised)	No. of interviews	Date of Interview(s)	Their role or affiliation
Susan	1	Feb 2017	DW and HOME Academy volunteer
Farah	1	Feb 2017	DW who I met on their day off
Canessa	1	Feb 2017	Shelter resident
Sarah	1	Feb 2017	Shelter resident
Rara	1	Feb 2017	Shelter resident
Rosamie	3	Feb, April and November 2017	Shelter resident
Aye Mya Phyu	1	Mar 2017	Shelter resident
Heidi	1	Mar 2017	DW who was employed by a HOME volunteer
Merilyn	1	Mar 2017	Shelter resident
Mary-Jane	1	Mar 2017	DW of Sheetal, a lady who lived opposite me
Riza	2	Mar & June 2017	DW who I met on a bus while caring for a child
Margielyn	1	Mar 2017	DW and HOME Academy volunteer
Lyn Anne	1	Mar 2017	DW who was employed by a HOME volunteer
Siti	2	Mar & June 2017	Shelter resident
Venus	1	Apr 2017	Shelter resident
Maya	1	Apr 2017	DW I met through an Indonesian DW network
Rose	1	Apr 2017	Shelter resident
Jaya	1	Apr 2017	Shelter resident
Christina	1	Apr 2017	Shelter resident
Benilda	2	Apr & Jun 2017	Shelter resident

Loly, MJ and Vilma (group interview)	1	Apr 2017	DWs and HOME Academy volunteers
Taman	1	May 2017	Shelter resident
Eve	1	May 2017	Shelter resident
Sana	1	May 2017	Shelter resident
Mirasol	1	May 2017	Shelter resident
Mela	1	May 2017	DW and HOME Academy volunteer
Meri	1	May 2017	Shelter resident
Kartika	1	May 2017	Shelter resident
Aileen	1	May 2017	DW and HOME Academy volunteer
Florence	1	May 2017	Shelter resident
Litha	1	May 2017	Shelter resident
Angelynn	1	Jun 2017	Shelter resident
Carol	1	Jun 2017	Shelter resident
Ida	1	Jun 2017	DW and HOME Academy volunteer
Raquel	1	Jun 2017	Shelter resident
May	1	Jun 2017	DW and HOME Academy volunteer
Estrella	1	Jun 2017	DW and HOME Academy volunteer
Coleen	1	Jun 2017	Employment Agent
Nicole	1	Jun 2017	Shelter resident
Rosita	1	Jun 2017	Shelter resident
Charlotte	1	Oct 2017	HOME volunteer
Aye Aye Soe	1	Oct 2017	HOME volunteer
Ms Zhang	1	Oct 2017	Employment Agent
Ei Ei Phyu	1	Oct 2017	Shelter resident
Katie	1	Oct 2017	HOME volunteer
Elizabeth	1	Nov 2017	Employment Agent
Lucy	1	Nov 2017	HOME staff
Jerome	1	Nov 2017	Employment Agent
Kamala	1	Nov 2017	HOME volunteer
Anyia	1	Dec 2017	HOME volunteer

Vincent	1	Dec 2017	HOME staff
Ludia	1	Dec 2017	Shelter resident
Sri	1	Dec 2017	HOME staff
Mr Goh	1	Dec 2017	Employment Agent
Suzanne	1	Dec 2017	Employment Agent
Khin Aye	1	2017	Shelter resident
Cahya	1	2017	Shelter resident

Appendix B: Timeline of Key Events in Singapore

<i>Pre-Colonial Singapore</i>	<p>In the 14th century, Singapore was known by the Javanese name of 'Temasek'. At this time, the island was a central point of contention between Thai powers to the north and Srivijayan (a Sumatran empire) powers to the south.</p> <p>The island at this point was inhabited with a small mercantile population of roughly 1,000 people: "living under the protection of the Temenggong (or Chief Minister) of Johor" (Johor referring to a region that is today a part of neighbouring Malaysia) (Gillis, 2005, p.15) and the population consisting predominantly of indigenous orang luat ("sea peoples") and smaller groups of Chinese and Malay immigrants.</p>
1819	Singapore was established as a port by the British East India Company as part of their global trade network. As a member of the political entity known as the Straits Settlements (consisting of Penang, Dinding, Malacca and Singapore), Singapore was governed by the British East India Company which was headed by Stanford Raffles.
1867	Governance of Singapore was transferred to direct British rule under the 'Crown Colonies'. By the turn of the 1900's Singapore's population had increased to about 225,000.
1915	Soldiers from the 5th Indian Light military revolted against the British and killed a number of civilians (see Abshire, 2011).
1942	Invasion by Japan following the defeat of the British forces in the Battle of Singapore.
1945	British Colonial rule is restored after the surrender of the Japanese forces.
1948	Singapore's first general election was held to elect six members of a Legislative Council. Only registered adults (over the age of 21) who had been British subjects for at least a year prior to the election were able to vote. The election had very low turnouts.
1954	The People's Action Party was founded (the only party to ever have held power in Singapore), led by Lee Kwan Yew.
1959	Singapore gained some autonomy from the British and attained internal self-governance (Gillis, 2005). The PAP became the ruling party with Lee Kwan Yew as Prime Minister.

1963	After a referendum, Singapore joined Malaya, Sabah and Serawak to form the Malaysia Federation.
1965	Singapore separated from Malaysia to become an independent nation.
1978	The Foreign Domestic Servant (now FDW) scheme was introduced by the Singaporean government.
1987	Operation Spectrum sees 22 people arrested and detained without trial for alleged involvement in a Marxist plot to subvert the Singaporean government.
1990	Goh Chok Tong becomes Singapore's second Prime Minister since independence.
2004	Lee Hsien Loong, Lee Kwan Yew's eldest son, becomes Prime Minister of Singapore (and remains in power today).
2012	After lobbying by NGOs and workers' organisations, domestic workers gain the right to one day off a week.
2013	A pilot scheme was launched to introduce 400 Cambodian DWs to Singapore.
2015	Lee Kwan Yew died, and Singapore also celebrated 50 years since independence. In the national election, the PAP won with a 69.9% majority vote. This was an increase from 60.1% in the 2011 election.

Appendix C: Controlling a Nation: Race and the Family in Singapore

At independence, Singapore was constitutionally founded on the adoption of multiracialism and, as such, race and nationality all play an incredibly important role in Singapore today. Siddique (1990) discusses the importance of the '4Ms' to the ideology of the PAP: multiracialism; multilingualism; multiculturalism; and multireligiosity. These were seen as particularly important for creating a cohesive society, particularly as Singapore's population was made up of people who identified with different 'homelands'. Kong and Yeoh (2003, p.36) suggest that a fifth 'M', meritocracy, also needs to be considered; arguing that "[M]eritocracy and the 4Ms are firm bedfellows because meritocracy facilitates social mobility purely on the basis of hard work and achievement. It gives no special advantage to any single community".

As discussed, the population of Singapore is now largely constituted by citizens from Chinese, Malay and Indian immigrant backgrounds, which are still incredibly important as all citizens are subjected to racial categorising at birth. As Chua (2003, p.60) explains, "[a] child is automatically assigned the father's race and all possible ambiguities of racial identities are summarily dismissed. The state thus insists that everyone is a hyphenated citizen". In the eventuality of an 'inter-racial' partnership – which is still fairly uncommon as citizens are actively encouraged through education and racial/ethnic policy to engage in distinct cultural practices and festivals – a child still adopts their father's race. Unlike other nations that seek to flatten racial difference, even if only on birth certificates, Singaporean citizens' racial differences are integral to their national identity. Despite being given a fixed racial identity at birth, Singaporeans are also expected to engage in multilingualism (the second of the 4Ms) and are required to learn their 'native' language as well as English (Chua, 2003).

However, the importance of racial distinction and identity started well before independence. When Raffles arrived in Singapore he introduced a new local government system in 1822, where representatives of different ethnic/racial classifications were enabled to contribute to decision making on behalf of their community: "three European gentlemen and one Representative from each of the principal classes of Arabs, Malays, Bugis, Javanese and Chinese" (Stanford Raffles, cited in Buckley, 1902, p.80). The British assumed distinction between these supposed communities on the grounds of race, ethnicity and religion, homogenising these groups internally at the same time. Not only did the British also subsequently encourage mass migration from key trading sites to Singapore, but, in the same year, Raffles also introduced a new spatial separation policy and town plan, promoting the

social stratification and segregation of people to different kampong (quarters or districts) on the basis of race, dialect and trade (Yeoh, 1996). Akin to practices in many other colonial cities, the European 'elite' separated themselves spatially from those that they colonised, citing concerns about disease and sanitation. As Yeoh (1996) explains, colonial authorities had ideals that they manifested in the built environment, reflecting the power and elitism of the colonialists and the control imposed on those colonised. This is not to say that those subjected to British rule were completely passive in the creation of this new landscape however. Instead, Goss (1988, p.398) suggests that the built environment should be seen as a dynamic and complex "multicoded space", a site that absorbs tensions, contestation, negotiation and the everyday practices of different people. While the extent to which this spatial separation plan was carried out varies, it demonstrates how colonialism and racial identity became inscribed in space. This was an important moment in Singapore, as racial identity became inscribed in policy. These forms of segregation are also argued to have been important in many colonial cities as a means of disciplining and ruling through the logic of creating societal divisions (Fanon, 2004).

While these urban policies are not still in place today, the state does still rely on race as a way of ordering and controlling the population and fostering a cohesive, multiracial society. The PAP has done (and still does) this in a number of ways, through education, housing and other social policy. Today for example, the state seeks to maintain harmony in its population by discouraging segregation and the creation of minority enclaves (Chua, 1991). As the majority of Singaporeans live in a form of municipal run housing, the HDB tries to maintain racial diversity amongst the residents of individual buildings or districts (HDB, 2020). This became particularly important to the PAP in the 1970s, following a period of racial unrest in the 1960s. Originally, the HDB allocated new flats on a first come first served basis while actively trying to maintain racial mixing, but this was not seen as an adequate strategy. In order to prevent ethnic enclaves from developing, the 'Neighbourhood Racial Limits' policy was introduced in 1989, which controlled the proportions of different racial groups living in any one area (ibid.). While this is in many ways entirely oppositional to the stance of the British colonialists, it is still a form of racial control. Likewise, the educational system was nationalised in 1974, seeing English become the primary language used across schools. English was, rather ironically, seen as a neutral language, despite its rather obvious association with a more privileged local population and their use of the language during British colonial rule. As Chua (2003, p.71) highlights, this "ideological illusion" ignored intersections of class and allowed the state to

distance itself from any one particular racial group. While these policies sought to treat different racial groups 'equally', the state has at other times seen it as necessary to treat its population differently on the grounds of race. For example, Malay-Singaporeans' conscription into the army was only enforced a decade after the rest of the population; today they are not found in all ranks (Chua, 2003). This is because of concern that they would not be able to fight against Indonesian or Malay 'brethren'.

As well as specifically targeting certain racial groups with distinct policies, Lee Kwan Yew also wanted to maintain the same racial diversity in Singapore as was present at the time of independence. In order to achieve this, however, as Malay and Indian populations tended to have more children than the Chinese majority, the PAP had to actively encourage Chinese migration to Singapore and provide simple routes to citizenship, while discouraging others. In many respects, this cannot be seen as a multi-racial policy, not only because it actively reinforced a Chinese hegemony, but also because of its contradictory nature. Race, then, is incredibly important in Singapore both socially and politically, for those who count as 'formal' citizens but also new migrants and their racial 'otherness'.

The family has always been an important social construct and institution in Singapore, and is argued to be the core intermediary between the state and the individual, and a paramount institution since WWII (Kuo & Wong, 1979). The PAP has utilised the family as a tool to attain certain economic and social goals and to maintain certain values (Hill & Lian, 1995), but it had, and still has, very particular ideas about what kind of family Singaporean's should be creating. In 2007 Lee Hsien Loong (Singapore's second Prime Minister) stated:

The family is the basic building block of our society. It has been so and, by policy, we have reinforced this and we want to keep it so. And by 'family' in Singapore, we mean one man one woman, marrying, having children and bringing up children within that framework of a stable family unit (Lee Hsien Loong, cited in Oswin, 2010, p.257).

As such, the ideal Singaporean citizen is therefore heterosexual, reproductive and in (or soon to be in) a monogamous marriage. As Ramdas (2015, p.832) explains, this puts a huge amount of pressure and expectation on young Singaporeans, especially women, who live with the pressure of marriage and procreation: "[J]uxtaposed against marriage, familism, and 'compulsory heterosexuality', 'single-hood' is more often than not seen as a lack which plagues women more than men". More than just this, however, LKY had always wanted to ensure that the 'right types' of Singaporean citizens were procreating. Hill and Lian (1995)

explain that in the 1980s, LKY was concerned by the fact that women with higher educational attainment were having fewer children than those with lower educational attainment as he believed that intelligence was inherited and determined by nature. Because of this, LKY publicly encouraged certain women to get sterilised. This stance not only made an explicit and problematic judgement about people's intelligence, but it also placed higher class Chinese Singaporeans in an elite position, juxtaposed against lower class Indian and Malay citizens. This stance was based on a Social Darwinist ideal and ultimately was a way that the PAP sought to identify and control the population, particularly those they deemed genetically inferior. This aim was not received well by many Singaporeans, who identified as hard-working migrants and who believed that upward mobility should be possible. While the PAP has, in more recent years, not mentioned the idea of sterilization explicitly again, they have continued to use the family as a site from which to control the population. LKY introduced the 'Two is Enough' policy for example, and subsequently Goh Chok Tong (Singapore's second Prime Minister following independence) introduced the 'Small Families Improvement Scheme', both of which heavily incentivized poorer families (financially) to have no more than two children (ibid.).

While the aim of the policies discussed sought to prevent certain pregnancies, it could be argued that the PAP's aims have backfired, as Singapore now has a 'below-replacement fertility rate' and is seeing its population get married much later (Ramdas, 2015). Between 1970 and 2016 for example, average household sizes have shrunk from 5.35 to 3.35 (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2017). There is also concern surrounding the country's aging population. Singapore has also introduced 'Family Matters Committee' and the 'Romancing Singapore Campaign', among others (Ramdas, 2015), both aiming to encourage population growth and the consolidation of the 'Singaporean Family'. While these policies may seem to be conflicting, they are in fact two sides of the exact same coin. The Singaporean state has shown in all of these instances a need to maintain and sustain its population through the creation of a certain type of family, referred to as "the right type of family" by Ramdas (ibid.). Not only should the Singaporean family be heterosexual and reproductive, but racially specific and able to contribute to the labour force and national economy. These biopolitical endeavours by the state have produced a society that, largely, maintains and reproduces hegemonic social norms; casting those who do not conform as deviant. Indeed, the biopolitical control that the Singaporean state exerts over DWs' bodies is, then, also enforced over its citizen population too.